

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Title: Tuesday, July 25, 1989 8:00 p.m.

Date: 89/07/25

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

## head: COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Members of the committee, it appears to be at or near 8 o'clock.

## head: Main Estimates 1989-90

## Education

MR. CHAIRMAN: We are here this evening to deal with the estimates of the Department of Education, which are to be found commencing at page 115 of the large book, with the elements commencing at page 45 of the elements book.

I would like to invite the minister to introduce this rather important bit of government spending.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Chairman, I stand before the committee this evening, and it is an honour for me to do so, to present the 85th annual estimates of expenditures for the Department of Education in this fiscal year, 1989-90. It is an honour because I come to this post as Minister of Education and here in this Assembly for the first time as an MLA for Calgary-Shaw, as a father of three young daughters, two of whom are in the Alberta school system, and as a very proud Albertan in presenting these estimates.

Mr. Chairman, I can say without reservation that I'm proud to be associated with the government and with the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta that makes education its number one priority, not just in terms of spending but in terms of the substance of what we are attempting to achieve and what we're achieving within the Department of Education and throughout all of our schools and our school systems across the province. Because I want to share with the committee this evening not just the fact that education is our number one priority but why.

Why is it our number one priority, and why should it be our number one priority? Mr. Chairman, in this government's view and in this minister's view there is no greater responsibility a society has than to educate its young citizens, and we are taking a leadership role and a partnership role in linking up with students, with parents, with teachers and principals, with administrators and trustees, and with all of the constituents beyond the school community to develop the abilities of the individual student so that he might fulfill his or her personal aspirations while making a positive contribution to our society. In considering my remarks for tonight and in addressing the whole area of education and why it is so important, I went back to our March 1988 social policy statement, Caring & Responsibility. I want to share with members of the committee three important passages that really embody why education is such an important part of our societal responsibilities.

First of all, in the introductory section of the paper it talks about economic and social policy. It says:

There must be a consistency between social and economic policies. Social policy -- to be effective -- should not be de-

veloped independently of the economic environment. Similarly, economic policy -- to be effective -- must take into account the nature, goals, values and aspirations of people. Together, they blend to create a society in which people can grow and prosper.

The actual policy statement itself, Mr. Chairman, says this:

The Government of Alberta recognizes that social and economic development are inseparable. It is committed to building on our tradition of caring for each other and ensuring a quality of life in which all Albertans can participate democratically and share fully on equal terms in the rich cultural, economic, and social diversity of their province and in its future [economic] development. . . .

This statement of policy offers a direction for the province to follow in addressing both the social and economic needs of Albertans. The future economic growth of the province depends on the development of capable and productive individuals. Indeed, social policy must lead if Albertans are to fulfill their expectations . . . it must form the supporting factor in the development of a strong economic environment.

Mr. Chairman, "strong economic environment" begs the question: why is that so important for each and every one of us and each and every one of the constituents which we represent? Why? Why have we as a government worked so hard for the last three and half years, indeed the last 18 years, to expand and diversify our economy, to reduce our reliance on agriculture and oil and gas -- yes, to make them strong and to sustain themselves but to turn our attention and to broaden that economic base by creating jobs and encouraging and nurturing development in the forestry industry, in high technology, and in tourism and the hospitality industry? Why, Mr. Chairman?

Well, surely it's not for the sake of our gross domestic product statistical numbers. Surely it's not just so we can say that we're the strongest and the fastest growing economy in the Dominion of Canada. And surely it's not wealth creation solely for the sake of creating wealth, because what satisfaction is there in simply being an economic force? What good is there in that wealth unless it is devoted to enhancing the quality of our individual and collective lives, enhancing the quality of our education system so that our children can do better than we did, so they live in a society which is better than the one we live in, a society in which people can grow and prosper more than their parents and their grandparents did? The same can be said and is true for health, for culture, for our social services, for our recreation, for our individual and our societal well-being, the quality of our lives.

Mr. Chairman, that is why education is and must be our number one priority, because we have a responsibility to enhance the quality of opportunity for young Albertans, to enhance the quality of their lives, and to enhance the quality of their futures. And we're doing that. We're doing that by giving them the opportunity to acquire the skills, the knowledge, the attitudes, the confidence, and all the tools that they need to be successful, to be successful in their own eyes, to be successful, yes, in comparison to others, but just as importantly to be successful in comparison with the standards of excellence and achievement that we as a society must establish. We must inspire our young citizens to meet or exceed those standards.

So, Mr. Chairman, let me repeat: we as a government take our obligations and responsibilities very seriously. We have a leadership role and also a partnership role to play in ensuring that our Alberta education system develops the knowledge, the skills, the positive and realistic attitudes of individuals so that they will be self-confident, capable, and committed to setting

goals, making informed choices, and acting in ways that will improve their own lives and the life of their community. Our efforts are focused first, last, and always on what's best for our children, on what's best for the young citizens of Alberta for now and for their future.

Mr. Chairman, in turning to the votes and in turning to the actual estimates themselves, I want to do a quick summary and touch on a few highlights and then take questions and hear the comments of my fellow members of the Assembly. The budget estimates that are before you this evening, estimates of \$1.387 billion, as well as the levy on commercial and industrial property of \$162.8 million: these two provide a total of \$1.55 billion to fund the province's contribution to education spending in the 1989-90 fiscal year. Of the total of \$1.55 billion about \$1.49 billion, or 96.5 percent, is paid directly to school authorities for the ongoing operation of schools. Another \$14.5 million, or a little less than 1 percent, is provided for the response centres; for the Learning Resources Distributing Centre; for the Alberta Correspondence School, which provides a direct service to students; and to community and international education, which includes educational exchanges, our community schools, and the school food services.

The remaining \$41 million, or 2.7 percent, of total funding is required to administer education through votes 1 and 3. Mr. Chairman, I'm proud to be associated with an organization and with a department that has as its administrative overhead a figure of less than 3 percent. Precisely 2.7 percent of our total budget goes to administrative overhead. Vote 1 provides the key administrative support to the department, including funding for the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, our finance and support services, including our human resource services, our legal and information and communication and planning services.

Under vote 2 I'd like to highlight a few key areas, especially that relating to the School Foundation Program Fund, this year an increase of \$44.3 million or 5.7 percent to a total of \$955.5 million. Funding for pupil instruction, Mr. Chairman, is up by 6.7 percent, as well as our funding to contribute to the building and equipment capital support program as well as our transportation and boarding. Under Special Assistance to School Boards members will note a 13.3 percent increase in our fiscal equity grants. As a result of discussions over the past few years about equity in education funding, our government made a commitment to provide greater equity, using the general revenues of the province. This budget fulfills that commitment in two major ways. First of all, changes have been made to the fiscal equity grants to improve the financial base of the poorer school jurisdictions, those which have a low assessment base and which face higher costs as a result of distance from a major centre or sparse and widely dispersed populations of students. An additional \$6.2 million has been included in our budget for fiscal equity grants in order to put poorer school jurisdictions on a firmer, stronger, sounder financial basis. This brings the budget for equity funding in 1989-90 to almost \$70 million, a rise of 13.3 percent over the last year.

But, Mr. Chairman, we recognize that improving the fiscal equity grants is not good enough. Our goal isn't just to improve equity for school boards; it is to improve equity for students. In order to reach that goal, we had to find a way of making courses and programs more accessible, more available to students in their own communities in rural Alberta. Building on the success of two distance learning projects, one in the south and one in the

north, we're moving ahead to use distance learning to achieve our goal of equity, real educational equity, for our students. It's exciting how schools and students and trustees and teachers and parents and, yes, many of our colleagues here in the Assembly -- all of us are seeing the potential for distance learning. In this budget our support for distance learning initiatives will increase to \$11 million, and we'll be able to extend distance learning opportunities for students to about 130 small schools across the province. The majority of that funding, \$8 million, under vote 2.2.3, Special Pupil Need Grants, will go directly to school boards to assist them in buying the necessary equipment and learning packages and also to hire the necessary teachers and support staff to make this new approach work and work effectively for students.

About \$3 million of this funding under vote 3 will be used to develop distance learning packages that are essential to the success of distance learning. Most of this work is being done through the Alberta Correspondence School, using the best expertise of teachers and curriculum developers from different parts of the province -- throughout the entire province teachers and principals and administrators coming together and working with us to build the best quality, the best possible curriculum.

I'm excited, Mr. Chairman, about distance learning. It has the potential for giving students in small rural communities access to the range of courses that they need to complete their high school programs, the same range of courses as we might find in Calgary, Edmonton, or Lethbridge high schools. In the longer term distance learning will not be restricted just to small rural schools. Already the interest is growing in schools in our urban centres. They want to be involved, and they want to see what they can do in their schools to capitalize on distance learning opportunities. The direct benefit to students of distance learning is what is most important. Again, this is another example of this government's commitment to education.

Also under vote 2, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make note of two important initiatives in this fiscal year: community schools and high-needs schools. I'm sure that most members of the Legislature welcome the news that we have restored full funding to community schools. These schools are strongly supported by their communities, and with an improved financial picture for the province I'm pleased that we are able to increase funding by \$1.4 million this year for our community schools.

And while we recognize the important role these schools play, we also know that there are a number of schools, in Edmonton and Calgary specifically, which face special challenges. These schools are located in inner-city neighbourhoods or poorer areas of the cities. Children attending these schools do have special needs. Many don't speak English. They are highly transient. Some come to school improperly fed. We are providing special support to address these and other kinds of needs. The budget estimates include a new commitment of \$1.7 million new dollars for what we've called the high-needs schools program in Calgary and Edmonton. I'm sure that members who represent the parts of the cities where these schools are located will understand the unique challenges they face. By working closely with the four school boards involved, we've developed a plan which will place the onus on how the funds are spent on the schools and school boards involved.

We're not going to dictate from Edmonton how the funds must be spent. People involved with those schools -- the teachers, the parents, and the students -- know what the needs are and how they best can be addressed. What we do expect is

that the funds will be directed to the programs that work and to programs which will make a positive difference to the success and achievement of these kids. Therefore, we're asking each of the school boards involved to focus on making improvements in the following areas: language skill development, self-esteem, behaviour and attendance, nutrition and health, and frequency of dropouts and repetition of grades. The bottom line is that we want these special funds to improve the education of these young children and to improve their chances of success. Again, this is an important new initiative and one which reflects the fact that education for all children, no matter what their individual circumstances may be, is our number one priority.

Mr. Chairman, just briefly turning to vote 3, we're here addressing a number of programs, including student evaluation; achievement testing in grades 3, 6, and 9, as well as diploma exams in grade 12; the records, the transcript keeping, of the Department of Education; curriculum design and support; language services, including our two official languages as well as a number of other languages that are of importance and are in demand by Alberta families and their children; as well as the Alberta Correspondence School. Let me say one note about that, Mr. Chairman. In Barrhead we have housed the Alberta Correspondence School now for a number of years, a budget of just under \$7.5 million to provide for the education of over 40,000 students. This truly is a true Alberta success story, one which I know my colleague the MLA for Barrhead and I are very proud to boast about. It also includes the important funding for curriculum development, under the Distance Education Project, of just short of \$3 million this year.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I want to comment about some travel that I have had the good fortune to make in the last 10 and a half months throughout this province. I've had the good fortune to meet with students and teachers and parents and administrators and trustees and school custodians and support people as well as a number of other people beyond the education community and over 45, nearly 50, schools throughout the province over the last 10 and a half months. I want to tell you how immensely impressed I am with all of their hard work and their dedication, the dedication to providing the best possible education for young Albertans.

I want to also say how impressed I am with the commitment of the Department of Education, especially the Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. Reno Bosetti, who has been a friend, a colleague, and an adviser for the last 10 and a half months. To Dr. Bosetti and to all of the Alberta Education team in the Department of Education who are working so hard and so diligently to provide the best possible education for all of our students, we all owe a debt of gratitude. As well, to my staff in my own ministerial office, I want to say thank you for the support and for the commitment and for the hard work that they have undertaken for the last year. Finally, Mr. Chairman, to my colleague the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey, who serves as the chairman of our education caucus, and to all of the members of the education caucus of our government I want to express an appreciation for their guidance and their support. I look forward to working with all of them in the days and weeks ahead.

Mr. Chairman, we've got some very exciting things happening in Alberta today, happening in education, and I repeat: there is no greater responsibility that we as a society, that we as a government taking a leadership and a partnership role can play than to provide for the best possible education for all of our citizens, especially our young citizens, and it's something that I

as Minister of Education am excited about and look forward to working with all of my colleagues in the Assembly and outside in making sure that we are providing the best possible education for our young citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For a while there, for the first 10 minutes, I was just about going to concede calling the question because I wasn't too sure whether the hon. minister was ever going to get to the estimates. But I do have to commend him on his eloquent praise of the province, which I happen to share, since I've grown here and my children have also attended the same schools, probably the better schools, since we are a little further north.

However, I would like to congratulate the minister on his, I think the proper term would be reappointment to Education. Although this is his first budget, he did start off some 10 months ago in it. I would also like to extend an offer to the minister to assist him in improving the education system in Alberta, and I believe if he takes the offer, he will find assistance from this side of the House quite invaluable.

Along with that offer goes the request that the gesture is returned from that side of the House. What I'm alluding to more specifically is that some -- and I stress some -- of the members of the cabinet on the government side do not extend the courtesy of sending the MLAs on this side such things as news releases, other documents that are normally carbon-copied to all other MLAs. I found it rather distasteful in one particular situation where there was a grant announcement which included four or five MLAs, and my hon. colleague from Westlock-Sturgeon and myself should have been included, and we were not. So I would request that the minister change that particular approach and also encourage his colleagues to do likewise so that we as MLAs can best fulfill our role to serve all Albertans. That is our mandate here as MLAs.

We have heard today how education is the number one priority. I also heard that health is the number one priority. I heard social services is the number one priority. I think environment and agriculture if not number one are number 1(a).

AN HON. MEMBER: Number one.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Number one, so I'll settle for number one.

I would suggest to the minister that perhaps if education is number one, he instruct his people to approach the department with that kind of diligence and accuracy. I'm referring more specifically and quite specifically to the tax notices that were sent out with respect to the commercial levies for the school foundation program grants. In April local jurisdictions were told to use last year's numbers, and in June, after tax notices were out, they were given the new numbers, which left them with the untenable position of either trying to do a retroactive tax notice or eat the difference. Unfortunately, quite a few of the municipalities have chosen to absorb the difference, thereby putting an extra burden on the local taxpayer.

I'm also referring to what I feel is the inadequate transition grant that was awarded to the county of Parkland, which could have and should have been announced in January, but unfortunately the announcement was withheld until the end of May and early June, again until after tax notices were out. In addi-

tion, I believe the minister took the liberty, which is his prerogative, to specify how those particular grants were to be used this particular year, which again added to the hardship.

I would also expect that the minister should be prepared to intervene and, likely with the help of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, to sort out the financial problems that are occurring and will likely continue to occur between the newly formed school districts of Twin Rivers and Yellowhead because of the revenue sharing which was imposed until some sort of assessment formula is derived some years down the way. I would suggest very strongly to the minister that he address that because that, to me, is of high urgency to those particular people.

The lack of planning also appears to have had some bit of a spillover into the area of curriculum development. One specific example is the science curriculum. It appears now that the minister has decided to delay the implementation for one year. I don't know if this delay is because of the outcries against the curriculum or whether in fact the curriculum is ready to be piloted this year. With respect to the science curriculum specifically, I'd like the following questions answered. What resources, Mr. Chairman, have been developed and are actually available for use this fall, if in fact the curriculum were going to proceed? Number two, how much time and money, if any, has been expended on in-service to implement the program, again this fall, because until very recently it was supposed to be piloted this fall? Given that the decision to delay is one that the government is not ready to implement the program in September, is the minister simply buying time with the committee, or does the committee have a true mandate to review the curriculum? I would hope that the committee has a mandate to review.

I would ask the minister that if the committee decides to recommend a parallel, improved science program consisting of the existing high school biology, physics, and chemistry, will the minister concur with a true science stream? It does have a lot of merit, which I won't go into at the moment, although I would suggest that two science programs at the high school could meet both the minister's goals and implement some of the fine portions of the new proposed curriculum. It also would give the universities the opportunity to have the requirements which they impose fulfilled in the science field.

Again in the area of curriculum development I would like the minister to expand on a direction that's going to be taken with respect to articulation in the K to 6 area. It's relatively new; although it's been around for a long time, the public exposure is relatively new. I feel that a lot has to be done to identify the goals, to inform parents, boards, and educators of what, in fact, articulation of K to 6 really means and implies.

I would like the minister to elaborate on what can be done and what the directions are for the 1990s. Curriculum changes are expensive and have to be approached with a great deal of caution and concern by all players. I think that's something that in this day and age, with the vast number of changes that have occurred in the last few years, we should be paying some attention to. Are we perhaps changing too much curriculum too quickly to be implemented properly?

Distance education is another innovation which on the surface seems to meet some of the needs of students in areas that are not blessed with schools that have a broad range of programs. I must commend the department on that initiative, some two or three years old. However, I had the privilege of personally being involved in a review quite recently, and I

would recommend to the minister that he pay attention to some of the following concerns which were identified. Number one, the teacher/tutor/marker: who is that person responsible to? The hiring board, the school principal, the students, whoever? There is a lot of confusion in that particular area of accountability. The other one: who, if anybody, monitors the load of the tutor/marker and, in fact, if the material that the tutor/marker does take on to process is not actually sublet to other people for processing.

With respect to capital expenditure support to the participating boards, I'm of the understanding that that may be reduced. I would encourage the department to continue that support because the boards that are into it currently, or considering it, are generally small boards and usually eligible for equity financing in the first instance.

The other concern that I have with respect to distance education is: are the examinations going to be administered at one time for the convenience of the tutor/marker, or will the students be permitted to progress at their own pace and exams given to them on an ongoing basis? Last year, unfortunately, students who completed the courses early through hard work and initiative had to wait for a common exam writing time. That's another area that I would like to see the minister's department address. As we all know, distance education was started by using Alberta Correspondence School materials. Will this continue to be a subletting of the correspondence materials, or is distance education going to develop material on their own?

The other thing that I would like to request the minister to clarify is the role that the extra teacher aides have that have been hired with the schools participating in distance education. What role do they have now, in the future what role will they have, and again, will there be continued special assistance for their remuneration?

One weakness with respect to distance education -- and I don't know how it can be addressed -- is in the area of courses requiring laboratory work, whether it be the vocational courses or science courses. This becomes very difficult, and in my experience there were some small efforts, but that particular area has to be addressed because if you're going to offer lab-oriented courses or vocational courses via distance education, a large, significant portion is being deprived by, in fact, the facility not being available in many cases for the students to use.

Mr. Chairman, the minister alluded to the Correspondence School. I would have to concur with his statements made with respect to the school. My understanding is that they are currently in about the second year of a three-year program of revitalization. The problem of updating the courses I hope will be addressed. There are some serious shortcomings in the currency of the courses -- in some of the courses, not all. The school does have a monumental task to meet with respect to the new requirements that are being set up by the high school course changes and by the new direction that appears to be coming with respect to elementary articulation and the somewhat frequent changes to curricula in general. I would suggest that the Alberta Correspondence School, project north, and distance education, if they are not already, should certainly be placed in a co-operative mode under the direction of one single portion of Alberta Education.

Mr. Chairman, speaking of the high school requirements, I'm becoming quite concerned with the direction that Alberta seems to be taking with respect to diploma requirements. For whatever reasons, advanced diploma requirements now have 76 credits

specified. That's up considerably over the past two years, and these 76, incidentally, would have included the uncertain science program. The same trend is also appearing in the general and vocational diploma areas. The question that I would ask is: are we headed for a four-year high school program? If that's the case, it should be identified as such. Or are we going to make sure that academic students do not have the general vocational kinds of experiences available to them?

Unfortunately, the time to properly scrutinize a budget that's in excess of \$1.4 billion is somewhat lacking and inadequate. However, a couple of areas which the minister hasn't alluded to have prompted a question in my mind. The 12 percent increase in vote 2.4.1, the private schools funding: I would like to know if that's due to an increased level of funding or an increased participation in private school enrollment.

Mr. Chairman, the previous minister on May 7, 1987, defined special needs as vocational education, extension grants, and EOF, which were decreased by 22 percent in 1987. The EOF remedial portion -- the EOF was decreased a total of \$15 million: for the enrichment, \$10 million; for the remedial, \$5 million. I believe the minister in 1987 stated that these \$5 million were to be redirected to native education projects. Are the special pupil need grants defined in the same way? I believe you added a couple extra, Mr. Minister, as we went along. I would like to know where the bulk of the 32.9 percent increase in vote 2.2.3 is being directed, and I'd also like to know what General Education Grants cover in 2.2.4, which is again an increase.

The Ghitter commission in December of '84 had six rather serious conclusions in the field of native education. I'll read out three of them which I think are quite striking and quite indicative of the problem that appears to be present with respect to native education in Alberta. The first conclusion is:

The Native people of Alberta are still suffering from a legacy of intolerance and a lack of dignity and respect.

Number 4 conclusion, I believe, which is the second I'm using here, is:

Public education is failing Native students in its most basic mission, the instilling of self esteem.

I find it most noteworthy that Mr. Minister alluded to self-esteem in one of the areas that he was trying to cure in the inner school problems. The sixth conclusion that was drawn by the Ghitter commission is:

There is a danger that the increasing involvement by Natives in their own education may result in a growing isolationism of Native people.

I would ask the minister if there is, in fact, a policy, a proposal, a direction to approach the native communities in Alberta which are not currently under Alberta Education's jurisdiction, if there has been a process to set up a dialogue to see if they, in fact, want to in some way buy into public education in Alberta. I'm speaking more specifically, Mr. Minister, to reserves and Metis settlements and so on. Along with that particular observation I would like the minister to clarify who, in fact, is responsible for treaty Indian education in the provinces. Is it the federal government, is it the provincial government, is it the local school boards, or does anybody really know for sure?

The Ghitter commission made quite a few recommendations with respect to the recommendations on native education. Some resulted in positive action by the previous two ministers. Apparently we have 23,000 native students who attend provincial schools. The native education project applies only to these;

that's my understanding. The question that I have is: how effective will \$506,000, or basically \$23,000 per native student, be in meeting objectives of the native education policy as spelled out in 1987? The other question that I would have is: where has the rest of the \$5 million of EOF saved money in 1987 been directed? Because it was indicated in May of 1987 that the \$5 million would go towards native education.

I would also like to continue now and commend the minister again for taking a first small step, as if he was on the moon, in the area of community schools. He has re-established a 1986 funding level, both in amount and in the number of schools. Mr. Chairman, when the previous minister cut the funds, she made the following statement:

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 am not convinced, however, that the educational environment is enhanced, and I think we should do some important review of that as a main function of schools, which is to ensure that students learn.

She went on to say that Dr. Ann Harvey made some recommendations regarding funding, with special references to schools operating full community programs without any compensation. She also indicated that a pilot funding project could be implemented. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask the minister to table any relevant information on this particular topic. I'd also like to ask the minister if he is willing to add schools to the program. There are over 100 schools that are qualified and waiting in the wings. I would suggest that perhaps the time has come for a more rational approach to the distribution of educational dollars.

Mr. Chairman, the minister announced again some programs to help poverty-stricken schools in the inner cities of Edmonton and Calgary. As I recollect, Edmonton was supposed to get more help because they needed the help more. This was a statement made some time ago. The minister has identified the number of dollars as being, I believe, \$1.7 million for both programs. I would like to know the number of schools that are going to be served, the criteria for selection of the schools, and I believe the question I had is: where in the budget is money allocated for this program? I understand from your comments, Mr. Minister, that they were coming out of the special needs section. But I do feel that the needs that you identified in your talk, compared to the goals that you outlined that you expected the local boards to meet, are somewhat inconsistent. We should have perhaps stronger criteria as to how these moneys are going to be spent.

I would also like, Mr. Chairman, for the minister to make a very definitive statement that resources for this program will not in any way result in a reduction of funds for the community school program or for any other educational instructional program that is currently going on. The other question that I think should be answered here -- and if the answer is no, I would like it to be reconsidered, because I think it's extremely important that the Department of Family and Social Services be involved in the program in some way. The needs of these children go well beyond what can be identified in the classroom.

Mr. Chairman, during this session there have been two rather serious problems surrounding private schools. Section 22 of the School Act clearly assigns a power and responsibility to monitor private schools to the minister, more specifically, section 22(1)(c). And drastic action can be taken under section 22(3). Since Alberta funds private schools, Alberta Education is ulti-

mately responsible for all children of school age in Alberta, and in the minister's chats today he did indicate the importance that he assigns to school children -- which I concur in -- I would like to know: when is Alberta Education, through the minister's direction, going to embark on a regular program of evaluating private schools and to ensure that the programming as prescribed is being delivered and also to ensure the safety of the students, if applicable? And I stress "if applicable."

I would like to take the opportunity to examine the estimates clause by clause, but I believe the questions that I have raised, if taken in proper context to this point, would be of great value to the government. I notice the areas, however, of greatest cuts in 1987 now reflect the areas of greatest increase this year. I'd like to point out that it seems one minister takes away and the other minister gives back. That does not suggest to me a very well planned out program that is consistent with an area that is deemed to be number one in the province. Special needs were important in 1987, special needs are important in 1989, and special needs should be important in 1999. I would hope that future ministers and this minister do not arbitrarily cut programs for the sake of saving a dollar.

With respect to the issue of where education dollars come from, I feel that the government still has to come to grips with a proper cost-sharing program. We have equity grants. We have school foundation program levies. We have all sorts of things that come and go, but some method of resource gathering and distribution must be found to keep local taxes from bearing an increasing burden of the overall cost of education and also to keep these taxes from fluctuating wildly to the degree that they have done, specifically this year, in quite a few jurisdictions. I would recommend an effort to somehow return to the 80 percent or 90 percent level of funding that was consistent back in the early '70s.

Before I close, I would like to tie into the issue of articulation and achievement testing. The basic premise behind articulation, as I understand it, is that students are permitted to grow and learn at basically the best rate determined by educators and parents for these children. By grade 6 they should somehow or other be somewhat at a level ready to enter a new step in school, namely the junior high school. An achievement test at that level makes some degree of sense. However, I find it very, very hard to accept the validity of achievement testing at the grade 3 level, even with the assurances that it should not be used to monitor an individual student's growth; it should not be used for a whole variety of things. I would suggest to the minister that the implementation of the achievement test was for a purpose some years ago. That purpose has been served. We are now embarking on a new, probably more progressive direction with respect to articulation, and given that, there should be some very, very serious consideration given to eliminating the grade 3 level of achievement testing.

I would like to close by extending an invitation to the minister to provide me with an opportunity in the future to elaborate on some of the areas that I may not have made myself clear in, because I believe that if the minister takes the trouble, he will find the comments that this side of the House can give him to be most enlightening and helpful to his department.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also would like

to say to the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw that I was very pleased that he was reappointed to this most important portfolio. It is important to the students of Alberta that there be some consistency in the portfolio. As someone who devoted 11 years of my life to school trusteeship, I also am convinced that the system which we have in Alberta is certainly one of the best in Canada. I would also like to say that I believe that the education being offered by the Calgary Catholic school system is obviously the very best in Alberta. Also, as someone who worked very hard to refine and make sure that the School Act would be one which would serve the pluralism and the needs of all of the parents and students in Alberta, I see that we are now in this area of education being regulated by a very good Act. Although there are some flaws and some problems here and there, by and large I think the health of the education system is extremely good.

Overall I am quite pleased with the increase in funding for this budget. However, this should not overshadow the fact that this government imposed very harmful cuts and restrictions on education in recent years. The increase announced in this budget does not yet serve to bring provincial expenditures on education back to the levels of 1986 in real terms. Boards have accepted an expanded mandate and must receive the necessary funding to carry this expanded mandate out.

I would like to turn to some of the specific issues which I believe need to be addressed. Some have been addressed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain. I have mentioned some of these myself during question period or during my maiden speech; however, I would like to reiterate some of the comments that were made earlier.

In the area of distance education, I think all of us must welcome this initiative, and we must welcome the fact that funding for distance education has increased to over \$11 million. The minister also should be congratulated for successfully recruiting over 130 schools throughout rural Alberta to participate in this program. There are, however, some concerns being expressed about the program. It appears that the program will be costing more to deliver than originally estimated. A careful review of the actual costs and the amounts allocated will be necessary. Boards have indicated that money for software, money for electrical work, and so on was not part of the original estimate and therefore is costing more than they had planned to spend. There are also concerns about long-term funding. Will the boards get on stream just to find out in three or four years that they are on their own with this program? I have mentioned before the danger of depersonalization. The government must closely monitor the progress of this initiative to ensure that such problems are identified if they exist and solutions are found.

In the area of community schools I, also, welcome the decision to increase funding in this budget. However, again this increase does no more than bring back the funding to the 1986-87 level and thus does not recognize the reality of increased costs due to inflation. Further, there appears to be no commitment to expanding the availability of this very positive program, which is not only cost-effective but also serves to strengthen the sense of community at the local level and addresses many needs. The minister has indicated that the funding for the inner schools project will take on some of the original intent, I believe, of the community schools program. But I would hope that the two would not be merged in any way nor that he would use the inner schools funding to account for the lack of expansion in the community schools program, which do, after all, occur all over the

province and not just in the two large cities.

In the matter of equity, I note that funding for fiscal equity grants has increased by 13.3 percent for 1989-90. Certainly, we applaud this initiative to assure at least a minimum level of revenue for the less wealthy areas of the province. However, the current approach is really only a band-aid approach to cover up the damage caused by the provincial government's decreasing commitment to the funding of education. Prior to 1971 the Alberta government funded over 80 percent of the cost of education, leaving the local boards to pick up the remaining 20 percent. However, since the Conservative government was first elected, the province's share of education costs has steadily declined until, today, the Alberta government funds about 65 percent.

The real solution to fiscal equity problems is to rededicate the province to funding education by returning the province's share of the cost to the 80 percent range. This would serve to lessen the reliance on local assessments, which currently vary widely throughout the province, and would enhance fiscal equity throughout the province. This would also alleviate some of the current hostility between boards, hostility being created over local assessment revenues. I believe this should not be taken lightly. In speaking to a number of trustees sitting on a number of different boards, I do detect a hostility which was not there before, and something certainly must be done to address this emerging attitude.

There is more to equity in education than simply talking about funding. We must also look at the issue of structural equity. The current proliferation of small boards, many with very small resident student populations, is not necessarily in the interests of either educational quality or cost effectiveness. I believe that it is vital that Alberta Education set up some sort of boundary review commission to examine and oversee any structural changes regarding Alberta school districts. Such a review panel could consider the possibility of amalgamation of smaller boards into larger units, where such a step would be of benefit on educational, administrative, and cost-efficiency grounds. This, of course, would have to take into consideration the constitutional rights of separate school boards, both Catholic and protestant. The success of just such a move creating the Lakeland school district is testimony to the potential of such moves and points to the need for a formal system of boundary review.

In the area of curriculum design, the increase announced was only 1.5 percent, something very hard to understand in light of the furor caused by the high school science curriculum and the other announcements for a new curriculum. While I commend the minister for his announcement of a new blue-ribbon panel to review the science curriculum and I applaud the selection of so many eminent and knowledgeable Albertans for this panel, I am still uneasy about his commitment to really listening to the concerns being voiced by the education community and adopting the necessary changes to his program. I would like to ask the minister: will this panel hold public hearings? Will they accept written presentations? How will they be able to do their work in the six-month period announced? Does this now mean that the new curriculum will be pushed back one year further, to 1991?

Specifically, also, the minister has mentioned on many occasions in this House his openness to consideration of necessary changes but has also told education stakeholders that he's committed to the principles and basic structure of the new science curriculum. I would like the minister's assurance that in review-

ing the report of his new committee and the recommendations of the science education community, he will consider the possibility of changes not only to course content but also to the basic structure of the science program. In particular, I urge the minister to give grade 10 students the option of choosing either the general science 10 course or the more specific chemistry, physics, and biology courses. I fail to understand why the minister or his department feel it is necessary to limit the options of grade 10 students by deleting the specialty courses from the grade 10 curriculum.

The situation surrounding high school science points out the danger which exists when the Department of Education seeks to impose its will on the education system with little or no consultation with stakeholders. It is true that there was a survey done a number of years ago, but I believe that the information from that survey is now dated.

I have raised this matter on a number of previous occasions, but I would like to reiterate for the minister the need for the recreation of the old Curriculum Policies Board or an updated version of this board to provide some kind of over-arching guidance to the process of curriculum design and, very importantly, to ensure that trustees, teachers, and the general public have a formalized role in the process. Partnerships must be real if they are to have impact. Similarly, I would urge the minister to give serious consideration to the reinstituting of the biannual Curriculum Decision-Making in Alberta conference, co-sponsored by Alberta Education, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Alberta School Trustees' Association to further strengthen the consultative process. It should be noted that there are some 43 major changes to curricula planned for the next five years. The cost of all these changes at once, in terms of retooling our education system, is staggering. Frankly, I believe that there are too many changes being made too quickly. Trustees, teachers, and parents are crying out for input into these decisions, and I urge the minister to heed the call.

I would now like to talk about the quality of education. Recently, former Premier Peter Lougheed was widely quoted as suggesting that in order to ensure quality education for our young people, Alberta must consider extending school hours, either by lengthening the school day, the school week, or the school year. I would like to put that theory to rest before it can do any damage. The way to assure quality education is not to increase the amount of time spent in school. The way to assure quality education is to have smaller, more manageable classes and excellent, well-prepared teachers. As the demand for teachers will grow in the near future, I hope that the minister will be very careful in assuring that there is a supply of well-trained teachers and that we won't be forced into hiring poorly-trained teachers because of this increase in demand.

I would like to suggest that the teacher internship program must be reinstituted and, in fact, that a decision should be made making this program mandatory training for all new teachers. This would assure that teachers are well prepared when they enter the system. Similarly, requiring the two-year bachelor of arts program before entrance into the Faculty of Education, as is currently done at the University of Lethbridge, would enhance teacher preparedness. The minister should ask the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards to review teacher preparation programs and should review the recommendation of his own advisory committee on teacher education on the need for an internship plan and how such a program should be set up.

I would also like to ask the minister to outline the status of

the Teaching Profession Act. This proposal has been in limbo for quite some time, and I wonder if it is any closer to reality. We should not forget that the teacher is the hidden curriculum. A master teacher at work with a child is marvelous.

I have a lot of concern about the expansion in the home schooling program. There are now some 800 students whose parents have opted to educate their children at home outside of public systems. We must ask ourselves what is wrong with our public schools that so many parents are rejecting them. In my view, there is very little wrong with public schools. Despite the restraints this government has placed on them, they do an excellent job of educating our young people. One problem seems to be the lack of communication to the public in regard to the wonderful things that are happening in our public schools. Another problem -- and I see this as a problem which is created by boards -- is that they are not responsive enough to the requests of parents for some alternatives in programming. Nevertheless, these students are at home, and something must be done to deal with the minimal levels of education which they are receiving. I am concerned that school boards are asked to assign very scarce staff to monitor home schooling situations, but they have no power to take any decisions affecting home schooling. I would urge the minister to put in place a more rigid system of monitoring and quality control to guarantee that these young Albertans being educated at home indeed receive access to the level of instruction which they deserve.

I would like to touch briefly on a number of other areas. In the articulation of the elementary programs it is necessary for Alberta Education to define terms such as learning experience, cultural literacy, program continuity, individualizations. It seems as though schools will have to interpret these terms on their own and that there may be a discrepancy in what individual schools and individual systems mean when they talk about these specific terms.

I am deeply disappointed that the minister has reneged on the promise of his government made just last December to provide \$1 million in funding to support French-instruction programs. One can only question the government's sincerity regarding its much touted new language education policy given the minister's decision to abandon this centrepiece of last fall's announcement. Why was this decision made? Immersion and French first-language programs are growing in demand, and funding should not be used to play games with Ottawa over language rights.

The minister has given details over the funding for the inner schools project, and I would just like to reiterate the Member for Stony Plain's question and ask that he outline the criteria being used to assure that the four urban school boards will use the money as outlined in the goals of the program.

I am concerned that fine arts and the practical arts are being gradually squeezed out of the curriculum in our schools. Both of these subjects contribute greatly in different ways to the provision of a more complete education for our children. I appreciate that there are a great number of subjects which must be taught in a very limited time period, but we must not lose the importance of either the fine arts or the practical arts. We must ensure that our children receive a well-rounded education with a diversity of knowledge and experiences. Many students learn best through the arts. Schools must not become a dry, lifeless place in which young students memorize times tables and grammatical rules. As I've said before, I believe there's a connection between the high dropout rate and the de-emphasis on the practical arts.

I would just again like to reiterate my suggestion about funding for English as a Second Language programs and ask if the minister would consider the establishment of two funding dates. These programs are absolutely crucial to a number of young students who arrive during the school year, and at the present the program has funding based only on a September 30 enrollment date.

I would ask that the department review the issue of funding for students served versus resident students, especially in the area of special education students.

Earlier today I talked about the need for the department to establish a policy to deal with cheating. It is something that the universities have established, and it seems to me that now that Alberta Education is so heavily into testing, it must complete its testing program by establishing a policy on how to deal with cheating. I would suggest that a small, short-term ad hoc committee be set up to establish such a policy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. These are my remarks. I also would like to offer any assistance that I might be able to provide to the minister. Education is my big passion, and I feel that I would be able to assist him in a number of areas not only because of my vital interest but because of my experience.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. JONSON: Good evening, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to commence my remarks this evening by adding to the congratulations that have been extended to the minister on his reappointment. Certainly he is making every effort to be in contact with the system that he leads. There are a number of important initiatives that are put forward in this budget and in this particular year: the 5.5 percent general increase in grants to school boards, distance education, the various initiatives in curriculum development, and the overall general commitment to the involvement of the community and the family in the schools of this province.

I'd also like to commend the department. I was looking over the estimates, and I note under vote 1 that they have exactly a 5.5 percent increase over last year in Departmental Support Services and there is exactly the same number of staff in the Department of Education over the previous year. One might be cynical and say that's almost too neat, Mr. Minister, but given the very great demands that are continually being placed upon the department to implement the various directions and initiatives coming from government, I do mean to be very, very sincere in the compliments that I extend to the leadership of the department and the overall department staff. I do have in my remarks one or two references where, Mr. Minister, you might question whether I meant that, but I do in the very overall sense.

I'd like to make some comments under vote 2 concerning finances to school boards. First of all, I'm certainly glad to see the very significant 6.8 percent increase in per pupil grants, under instruction, and the equity program of funding is certainly a welcome one across the province. But, of course, we cannot always stop with a funding formula at one particular point in time. I have noted that despite the fact that school boards have generally welcomed this initiative, there are a number of suggestions coming forth and reservations being made about the nature of the formula. Some feel that funding is going to school jurisdictions that do not really need it; they're not really have-not areas. On the other hand, there are some locations in the province that are getting equity funding but need a great deal more.



My question would be: do you have a procedure in place to fine-tune, to further improve, the equity formula and its application?

Secondly under education finance, for some time -- and I see by the remarks of the previous speakers that I have some support in this -- I have felt that we should make an effort to grapple with the issue of raising the overall support for education from the province to a greater proportion of the total amount of funding needed; ideally, of course, to 75 or 85 percent. Now, I realize that this may not be the time in the fiscal history of the province for making this move, but I know that every time this topic has come up over the past decade or so, it has foundered on the objection that the 15 percent that is left over to be spent by school boards will somehow drive the 85 percent that might be contributed by the province. I know there are two or three suggestions that have been made whereby the stakeholders in education should sit down and talk about what constitutes the basic education program, or the core education program, of this province that should be funded 85 percent by the province. At least I would like to recommend that this is as good a time as any for some of those discussions to take place to see if this is at all feasible as far as government and the stakeholders in education are concerned.

Under vote 3 I have a number of comments with respect to curriculum change. Some of them have already been covered, but I would like to commend the minister for his action with respect to what is obviously a need to have a second look at the science curriculum. I think that the opportunity is there for this committee to have a thorough, overall look at the situation. I look forward with optimism to the deliberations of this committee, because I do not think it will do any harm and we may get some additional perspectives on this particular program. Although I would have to say that I think a great deal of good work has gone into the general science program, it's just that it may not be the one that should apply to the academic or top academic students who may want to stay with the specialized courses that were there before. Mind you, those need to be improved.

I do have a concern about another curriculum-related initiative from the department, and this is what is probably incorrectly labeled in some of the publications of the province as the return to the continuous progress program. We who are in education a number of years ago visited that approach at one time and found it lacking. I think the problem here, though, is that although it is certainly not the intention of the statements from the department and the minister that we return to this particular "in thing" in education of a decade or more ago, I do think we have to be very careful in the way that both at the departmental level and at the political level we talk about what is exactly intended in what is otherwise a very good and well-thought-out approach to the early years of grade-school education. But I think it can easily be interpreted, not just by the general public but by school boards and school staffs, as being a return to the full-blown continuous progress approach.

The implementation of curriculum has been an area of concern. My concern with respect to the budget related to this is, as was previously mentioned by the Member for Calgary-McKnight, that under Curriculum Support, vote 3.1.6, the increase is only 1.1 percent. And under Curriculum Design there is a reduction of 2.6 percent; that's vote 3.1.3. There is probably some very logical explanation for that, Mr. Chairman, but I would like to know what it is. I would also like to emphasize

that I find that there is a continuing need to assure that the materials and the in-service instruction for the implementation of new programs are available and precede the actual deadline for mandatory implementation of new curriculum changes. I know there's a great effort being made to accomplish that, but that has to be emphasized over and over again.

In the field of the review of the practical arts in technical and vocational education, I understand that a review of that whole area of the secondary school program is under way. There are some very good initiatives coming forward in terms of modernizing it, updating to the modern situation in the business world. But I would like to express the caution that, in the drive to do an overall rewriting of this program, we do not lose sight of what was the greatest value of our vocational education program and our industrial arts program, and that is that what is taken in those programs has practical application. It is a hands-on type of experience, and there has to be a direct relationship to the world of work, to the areas of employment, and hopefully articulation with apprenticeship and other programs that follow after high school.

I'd like to pose one other question with respect to curriculum development, and that is in the structure that is in operation for the actual design of courses. Now, it has been suggested, Mr. Chairman, that perhaps we should return to the old Curriculum Policies Board. I have my reservations about that, having been rather directly involved in that institution at one time. I do think, though, that there might be merit in looking at a curriculum conference. But the most important factor here is that it was my understanding the intention was to involve appropriate people from the business and professional areas and from the community, along with classroom teachers, in the actual design of courses. And I would like to be assured or at least to know that there is a significant component of outside expertise being brought in to assist with the development of the actual courses. I'd like to know what the status of that is.

There are a number of miscellaneous items that I guess come under vote 3, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to comment on. First of all, we have the distance education initiatives. I think those were very well covered in the minister's opening remarks. I would like the minister to comment, though, on the availability of these programs to the schools of the province and the general school population, because we know that, in a sense, distance education is only as long as the telephone line. What availability is there to the total educational program?

I also note, and I think it could be brought into the discussion of the estimates of three or four different departments, that there is a great deal of discussion in the province right now surrounding a suggestion for a series of science centres across the province. Certainly the planning of such centres should involve Tourism and Economic Development and Trade, but I would hope that Education would have some role in this initiative should it ever go forward. I wonder if the minister would care to comment on that particular proposal. I also would make the comment that I think if we do go forward with such an initiative in the future, we should do it well in one spot rather than trying to have one in Edmonton and Calgary and somewhere else, possibly, although it's an excellent location, Medicine Hat or Grande Prairie or Red Deer or Ponoka or so forth. I think we should do it well and do it in one place, to start off with at least.

Mr. Chairman, and to the minister, I certainly respect the local autonomy that we should extend as much as possible to school boards in terms of utilizing money. But despite what I

think is a rather good reinstatement of funding this year, I still have my concern about the school libraries of the province and the amount of attention that is paid to the quality of staffing and to the resources put into what is becoming a more and more important part of the schools across this province in terms of the information explosion, the extent to which that is used for individualized study and instruction and so forth. So I would like to put in a suggestion that perhaps just to re-establish the priority that should be there on school libraries, we might look at some specifically targeted library grants.

The question was raised about the native education policy and initiative. My question would be, Mr. Chairman, to the minister: is there a follow-up process in place? Is there going to be an evaluation, and are we at the point to get some results from those many and what seem to be very good programs that are in place across the province?

Finally, in terms of these miscellaneous or specific things with respect to the program, and this may be a rather surprising one to bring up, I think that the many teachers, coaches, volunteers, parents, and so on that support our very excellent school sports program across this province are beginning to feel very, very pinched, shall we say, in terms of the funding available to them. Perhaps through the Department of Education and the initiative of the minister, some discussion could be taking place across this province and within the department about where there might be a constant source of funds to help. I'm not talking about the ongoing school program, but with provincial competitions. This is a very costly area. It is not particularly -- I shouldn't say well funded, but it does not get adequate funding at the school board level where they have so many other challenges facing them, and yet it is an excellent program across this province. Perhaps through the Sport Council, lotteries, or some other source of funds, we could give some better and more constant support so that the people who spend so many hours in these programs could plan.

Under the topic of student evaluation, Mr. Chairman, I have four or five quick items that I would like to comment on. First of all, the matter of diploma examinations. I think they are now well established and well received across the province, but I am concerned that there is a fixation, in my view, developing over the whole business of being above or below the average. We know that by definition 50 percent of the students in this province each time these examinations are written are going to be below the average and 50 above. And I know that we do not have 50 percent of our students or 50 percent of our schools that are below average. I would suggest that some serious consideration be given to establishing a benchmark or a level of acceptable achievement on those examinations -- call it a minimum competency, if you will -- so that when students meet that level, they do not have this cloud hanging over them just because they happen to be below that magic 50 percent, or mean, on the examinations for a particular year. In the whole area of achievement testing I think that, yes, there is some need for caution about the application of achievement testing to too far down in the grades, and some care has to be taken in the utilization of the results of those tests.

I have, Mr. Chairman, a couple of questions with respect to items on a national level. It's my understanding that Alberta Education is involved in what is called a program of establishing national indicators of student achievement. I wonder if that program is going forward. I also wonder if the government is paying for it all here in Alberta, or whether this is going to be a

cost-shared effort carried on by Alberta for the rest of Canada. Certainly the department is to be commended for the quality of their overall testing program and for the fact that they've been chosen for this particular initiative. The other question on a national basis -- it was my understanding a year ago that there was a national science test under consideration, and I'm wondering if there is any definite plan to put that particular initiative into effect.

With respect to the teaching force in the province I note that the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards has finally finished deliberating on its policies and administrative rules and has now handled its first much-publicized case. I think the work of COATS -- the potential for very worthwhile effort in the field of teacher evaluation and follow-up and so forth -- needs to be publicized. It's been some time since COATS was a pretty common acronym across the province. It's faded into the background, and perhaps there's some need to make school boards and the general public aware of this particular body. Hopefully out of the work of COATS may come a more complete approach to teacher evaluation and monitoring, and hopefully it will evolve into renewed negotiations and eventually a new Teaching Profession Act, or at least, Mr. Chairman, to the minister, some amendments that are desired to the existing Teaching Profession Act which would help them with their self-disciplining as a profession.

Mr. Chairman, a short time ago -- I guess a few months now -- the teaching excellence awards were proposed. I understand that the Alberta Teachers' Association has some reservations or objections to this particular initiative. It would seem to me that it has merit. I don't know, quite honestly, what those objections are; I did not have the opportunity to attend the conference at which this was discussed. But perhaps those objections should be ascertained and some discussions held to see if there couldn't be overall support by the stakeholders in education for what seems to be an initiative with some merit. Perhaps it needs to be altered somewhat.

In the whole area of teacher supply, Mr. Chairman, I have two or three questions. I understand that there are shortages projected for the teacher supply in four or five years. I would ask the minister to comment on whether or not that is his information and in what particular areas the shortages appear to be becoming most severe and whether any discussions are being initiated on this topic with Advanced Education, the universities, the school boards, and the Alberta Teachers' Association with respect to coping with it. Under the comments on the teaching force I would finally like to say that I certainly would support the reinstatement of the teacher internship program.

Under the topic of school buildings, Mr. Chairman, we have in place in the province some excellent programs with respect to re-equipping schools with modern equipment for school modernization, and I think the province is doing well in the construction of new schools. I understand that in this particular year, however, the demand for funds from these programs far exceeds the supply, even though the supply is quite substantial. I would like to just make three comments on this. Although I'm fully supportive of the school modernization program, perhaps I should repeat a comment I made last year, and that is that one way of stretching the money a little bit further might be to have the school boards pay a little more in terms of their percentage share of the costs of this program. Secondly, in the setting of priorities for the use of the money that is available, certainly safety and health requirements have to come first. But I note

that among the schools of this province there is certainly a need for modernization and upgrading of those schools that were constructed during the 1950s. I guess school building standards were not quite then what they are today. Perhaps the design and so forth wasn't the same either. But many of those schools are in rather poor condition, and I'd like to put the comment here, Mr. Chairman, that in my area I think there are only one or two more schools left to do, so I'm commenting here for many other jurisdictions which have not been able to progress quite so well. Mind you, those schools are in desperate need of modernization.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I think that occasionally when we are applying the BQRP and particularly the school modernization moneys, a new school is ultimately more economic and more sensible to construct than doing massive renovations, because even with the best of renovations to certain types of structures, you still have an old school which is going to be needing massive repair again in short order.

Under the topic of school governance, I have noted that the Alberta School Trustees' Association has, among its many constructive proposals, a recommendation that there should be a boundaries commission for school jurisdictions in the province, and they cite many reasons for this. I'm wondering, Mr. Chairman, to the minister, if he has given any consideration to requesting the Alberta School Trustees' Association to undertake a boundaries review, perhaps with some departmental support and observation. Also in the area of school governance I note that there is a desire from some sources in the province for the long-awaited guidelines for school councils, which is a follow-up to the School Act, and I wonder when those will be available.

Certainly, Mr. Chairman, the major increase in funds for special education is welcomed. I do want to ask a couple of questions there. First of all, what measures beyond block funding are being put in place for those jurisdictions that have a high concentration of students with special needs? Secondly, what is the mechanism for accessing additional support for those students who have particularly serious physical or mental handicaps? I still receive concerns being expressed -- not that the department does not come through, so to speak, ultimately -- that many students in many school jurisdictions are left in limbo for too long a period of time as the school year approaches, and sometimes the school year gets under way.

The major funding initiative in the field of speech therapy is one that is certainly to be commended. Although it is under the Department of Health, it certainly bears upon the operation of schools and the delivery of education. I would, however, Mr. Chairman, like to ask what measures are being taken to provide co-ordination between the Department of Health, the health units, Alberta Education, and the school jurisdictions so that this money is delivered effectively to the students and the preschool students and young children that need this support.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to make one general comment about the Education budget and education in the year ahead, and that is that certainly we have a fine education system in this province with people in many roles doing a good job and working hard, but I think we have to realize that more and more tasks are being loaded upon the school system. As I've indicated on other occasions, I've counted up nine different initiatives during the past year where it has had some overlap or some application to something that has to be done in the schools. Increasingly, the school cannot avoid taking on dealing with social, environmental, and health care issues, with providing a custodial function as well as carrying on with the priority item

of providing a formal education. I would ask the minister if any consideration has been given by himself and other ministers to getting together to see how various departmental programs can be better co-ordinated, how funding perhaps that is needed in the schools for some of these co-curricular and extra-curricular and custodial functions can be brought to bear in the schools in the most effective way.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude and wish the minister well in the year ahead.

MR. WRIGHT: Mr. Chairman, I'm neither Roman Catholic nor a Francophone nor a scientist, but tonight I make a short plea to the minister on behalf of all three. The first, Roman Catholics, based on section 17 of the Alberta Act; the second, the Francophones, based on the Charter of Rights, section 23; and the third based on common sense.

As to the Roman Catholic citizens -- I say Roman Catholic rather than separate school supporters bearing in mind that there are some municipalities where Roman Catholics are in the majority and therefore have the public schools. But I remind you, Mr. Chairman, or remind the minister -- I think we all know this -- that by the Alberta Act there is enshrined in the Constitution of the province, chapters 28 and 29 I think it is of the ordinances of the Northwest Territories of 1901, the thrust of which is to attempt equality between the two systems. I pass these three pleas on as a constituency representative, not as an expert in the area of education, because they have come up to me from my constituents.

How the inequality comes about, of course, is in the tax base, in that the school tax is levied in accordance with the religion of the taxpayers. There are many, and I'm one of them, who believe it has been something of a tragedy in Canada that we have a school system across most of the provinces -- in fact in all of the provinces, but by law in most of the provinces -- split by religion. It's contrary to the Charter of Rights, as we now know, on the face of it, but of course the Charter of Rights, being of equal rank with the Constitution, does not govern the Constitution. So that being the case, we make the best of it, and we make the best of it by asking for equality in the two school systems. The inequality results from the unequal tax base between the two systems. That was corrected last year in Bill 27 that made a new School Act. It was corrected, though, only within each municipality, and that was a good step forward. That's to say that now within each municipality there is equality in the tax base because the corporate assessment, which was not spoken of in sophisticated terms in the ordinances of the Northwest Territories in 1901, is now split according to the ratio of pupils in each system to all the pupils in both systems. That has achieved a measure of fairness which never existed before.

But, Mr. Chairman, there is still the great inequality between municipalities having school systems in different parts of the province. That the Department of Education sought to remedy in the previous year, in Bill 59 in 1987, and at that time produced a paper called equity in school financing, which I believe to be the fairest and most reasonable and argued paper I've ever seen from a civil service department. It was beautifully argued and very fairly argued as a method of achieving equity, but it involved taking away money from the richer municipalities and giving it to the poorer municipalities, municipal districts, or counties, and that the government could not stomach. I'm not sure that if we were government, we would have stomached it either, although I feel it was right. But the compromise

achieved by Bill 27 last year was a lot better than the previous situation.

But still, Mr. Chairman, I ask the minister to realize -- and I'm sure he knows it anyway, but to strive to correct the imperfections and unfairnesses that exist between municipalities when it comes to the funding of the two systems in the province. There is something of an equalization, a formula, I realize, but it still means that in different parts of the province -- I see the minister's looking puzzled, but I'm glad that I'm making these remarks then -- the pupils bring unequal tax dollars for the schools with them into the systems as between different areas of the province. And that is wrong, because surely the aim should be that no child in this province should be handicapped by being born of a particular religion in a particular part of the province, nor privileged by being born in a particular part of the province or of a particular religion compared to others. But that is the case, and I believe we have to keep on working at it.

Turning to the situation of the Francophone minority in this province, section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms says that "Citizens of Canada . . ." Well, I'll paraphrase it rather than read it. If you yourself received your primary education in the minority language . . .

MR. DINNING: Read the Constitution.

MR. WRIGHT: Eh?

MR. DINNING: It's clearer if you read the Constitution.

MR. WRIGHT: I am reading the Constitution. I'm paraphrasing the Constitution.

MR. DINNING: It's clearer if you'd read it.

MR. WRIGHT: I think not.

MR. DINNING: I think so.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, it's my speech, so I'll do it my way.

AN HON. MEMBER: You and Frank Sinatra.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah.

If you received your education in a minority language in the province, you're entitled to have your children educated in the same manner, where numbers warrant. And that's the key thing in Alberta. Now, there are some areas of the province where one can clearly say that's the case, places like McLennan and Donnelly and so on up north -- St. Paul, I suppose. Used to be in St. Albert, but no longer perhaps; but certainly in Edmonton. So the question then is whether this duty under the Constitution is sufficiently discharged by having immersion schools.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not

MR. WRIGHT: It is not so discharged? Yes. So we are glad that that has been recognized as a fact, and I just want to reinforce it with some research that shows that in a rather remarkable way. I'm just reading a few lines here, Mr. Chairman.

When instruction is through the medium of a second language . . . and the school makes no concessions to either the language or culture of the minority-language child, the

result is frequently low levels of competence in both [the First] and [the second languages] and academic failure.

Curiously enough, for the immersion child whose language is that of the majority, their competence in both the second language and the first language is often increased.

So the principle has been recognized, and that's a commendable step forward. I trust it will be extended to those areas where numbers warrant and that the controversy is settled so far as Edmonton is concerned and that the department fully understands the implications. I'm sure the department is fully aware of the assistance in this respect that is obtainable from the federal government.

The third area is one that's been covered by other hon. members, but I put in my plea coming from my constituency, which of course includes the largest university in the province, where they are indeed very concerned about the proposed abolition, which has now been postponed for a year at least, of physics 10, chemistry 10, and biology 10 in grade 10. I think I'm probably treading on ground that's been trodden before in this, and perhaps I needn't say more. The matter has been postponed for a year. I hope that this postponement is a grace period for a decent burial of the proposal, Mr. Chairman. Otherwise, I see no option but to have a grade 13 in Alberta so that would-be scientists can catch up to entering university level in that extra year. We don't need that. I'm not sure we push our children hard enough in school in general in Alberta, and this was a retrograde step in the opposite direction. I'm glad it's been recognized pro tem. I hope it's permanently recognized, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

MRS. MIROSH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to congratulate the minister upon his appointment to this portfolio. I've had the opportunity of working with our minister since the initial appointment and have found him to be very approachable, open, and a man of action.

As MLA for Calgary-Glenmore I feel it's very important and my duty to visit the schools, the teachers, parent advisory groups, students, and all those who are associated with the schools on a regular basis, and education is definitely a priority with this government. Our children are our future. You, Mr. Minister, along with your department, have outlined this priority in a spending plan associated with the estimates before us this evening. The basic operating grants in vote 2 of a 5.5 percent increase to school boards have been wholeheartedly welcomed. You've identified special educational needs and thus an 11 percent increase to fund children with these special needs.

The additional \$2.9 million committed to restoration of full funding of community schools is most commendable. Calgary-Glenmore does not have a community school, nor do we need one, but there are areas in the city of Calgary that have these community schools and they've been most worth while. These schools have offered programs that have been unique in this province. They have shown they are a school of family and family content. There are programs available to seniors. There are programs available to single parents, helping them in developing their careers. There are programs available to young teens who require counseling and who are involved in sports activities. But the most important part of the community schools is that they are utilized practically 16 hours a day and even on weekends. The programs are quality programs, and students attending these schools are very proud.

The curriculum design program is always a topic of concern. Most of us are always reluctant to change. However, we know we have to keep up with these changing times. But the implementation of these program changes is continuous from 1989 through to 1995 almost yearly. This is indeed substantial, and a lot of the teachers are having some difficulty with this. The cost of new texts, of course, hopefully will be picked up by the department. Some teachers expressed reluctance to some of the changes, and they feel that the in-service education program is of utmost importance. I trust that this issue is being addressed through your department.

I would like to commend the minister on his recent establishment of a committee to advise him on policy issues related to the development and implementation of high school science programs from grade 7 to grade 12. This is indeed a highly controversial issue causing parents unrest, and perhaps this committee can restore that confidence.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

The language education policy also addresses the issues for Alberta's students to achieve high proficiency in the English language and further develop programs to fulfill the rights of Francophones in Alberta. But most important, this province is a province of multicultural heritage and diversity, and this language policy program provides opportunity for students to learn a variety of languages. Language is essential to the intellectual development and socialization of children and their basic learning. Given the importance of language in our society, a language education policy is very essential. So many of my constituents are so proud to have their children in our education system and to have not only access to learning our official language but also have freedom and access to total immersion French schools. My constituents and people in the city of Calgary particularly want their children to be proficient in both languages. It is available not only to Francophones but to all Albertans.

The speech therapy service has already been touched on by other members, but I think it is also commendable that there is additional funding for these children, targeted for school-age children, showing again the commitment this government has to our children. The co-ordination of this program between the Department of Health and the Education department is forthright in their thinking. The children's hospital in Calgary has provided many of the speech therapist programs, and I feel once they are no longer a part of the children's hospital, the Department of Education should take over these programs.

The excellence in teaching awards program has also provided pride and has profiled those excellent teachers in our system who are so often taken for granted. This is such a positive initiative, it is about time the public recognizes the dedication and support our children receive from our teachers.

The capital projects I just want to touch on briefly. Indeed, again many capital projects are important, and there is always upgrading needed in the schools, especially the aging schools. My concern in some of the major funding of a new high school, particularly in the city of Calgary, at the expense of the possible closure of other schools, is indeed an issue that should be addressed. High school students normally attend schools according to the curriculum they desire or the curriculum of special programs that are not necessarily in the neighbourhood schools. Having three children myself in high schools, I feel that they can easily transport themselves to other major schools anywhere

in the city. If parents desire a high school so the students don't have to travel or be bused, then I don't believe this is a substantial reason to build a high school. The older inner cities are always facing an up and down enrolment as the community ages, but busing is done in the rural areas successfully and I think urban areas can do the same. Perhaps a more thorough review of building new schools must be examined.

In closing, Mr. Minister and Mr. Chairman, I believe that when our children graduate from high school, they can compete anywhere in the world. Many of my constituents' children, as well as my own, have continued in their postsecondary education in other provinces and even in other countries with excellent results. We can be proud of our educational system. A high percentage of our children graduating out of high schools do enter postsecondary education. We have a record to be proud of. We are in a competitive world, and our children are recognizing the opportunities out there for them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Chairman, if I could respond to a number of the comments that have been made in the Assembly and in committee, I'd like to try and do so, at least touch on a few of them right now. Then perhaps there'll be time after I'm finished to hear some more comments. I want to first of all thank all hon. members who have risen tonight for their laudatory comments and their congratulatory comments. [interjection] Congratulatory and laudatory. Perhaps the hon. Member for Vegreville would like those spelled out for him, but as a fellow graduate from Western Canada high school, I don't expect he would require that.

Mr. Chairman, a number of excellent comments. First, in the area of science curriculum . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Pardon me, Mr. Minister. Order, please, in the back row so the minister can make his remarks. [interjections]

MR. DINNING: The buffalo from Chumir is . . . I'm sorry, the hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Chairman, the first one was on science. We have discussed this matter in question period before, and I'm pleased to have a chance to respond to it again: the general concern that somehow we are going to water down or dilute science education in Alberta. That's exactly what we're not going to do. We are committed to putting in place in our high schools and our junior high schools frankly a more solid, more structured, and more substantive science education program for grades 7 through 9. Because we know that our young citizens, as they graduate from school, in order to live in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing society have to be more comfortable, more conversant with science and technology and how the two relate to society and vice versa.

So I have to ask the basic question that has been driving our changes all along: is what we're doing now the best possible science program we can provide for Alberta's young people? Frankly, the answer is no, it is not. That's not to say our current biology or physics or chemistry programs are no good, because they are, but most definitely they can be strengthened. More importantly, we should be able to go beyond the independent disciplines of physics, chemistry, and biology and begin to weave them together better and, once we've woven them together, then apply them to everyday life in Alberta whether

it's important environmental issues that my colleague from Calgary-Elbow is addressing for our government, whether it's telecommunications that the MLA for Calgary-North Hill and the Minister of Technology, Research and Telecommunications are addressing, whether it's space technology. We have to be able to go beyond the strict disciplinary nature of science and apply that to everyday life whether the student is going on to engineering, whether he's going to become a journeyman mechanic or electrician, or whether that person's going to become a nurse or just be a responsible, scientifically literate citizen. So that's the objective of our change. It is in no way meant to water down or dilute what we have. Instead, it's to take the basic scientific concepts, make sure students understand them, have learned them, and do a better job of applying them to issues of today and tomorrow.

The committee that we have put in place -- I'm delighted with the comments I've heard tonight -- is going to review the basic objective. It's going to review what we've done to date in the curriculum, in the design of the structure of general science -- biology, chemistry, and physics -- and what our plans are for the next six or eight months, by which time we must make a go/no-go decision for implementation of the new curriculum and the new structure for September of 1990. Yes, the members of the committee and the committee will receive written presentations. I see us having an introductory meeting in the next couple of weeks, followed by a second session, which would then hopefully be followed by some kind of public symposium, inviting people from across the province to participate in addressing this very important issue, such that the committee would have a final meeting early in 1990 and finalize its report and its recommendations to the Minister of Education, to the government, by the end of February 1990.

I want to stress, too, Mr. Chairman, that we're not just talking about high school science here. We're talking about science through grades 1 to 12, a focus right now on grades 7 through 12. But remember that grades 7 through 10 will become the formative learning years, the prerequisites for special streaming in grades 11 and 12. There's much debate, but a number of our citizens would say forcing them to choose physics, chemistry, and biology as early as grade 10 is perhaps too early and a general science program prepares those students well for the decisions they must make for grades 11 and 12 and subsequently for university or other postsecondary education pursuits.

[Mr. Moore in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Stony Plain spoke of program continuity. I believe all members did. Program continuity is not a new notion; by no means is it new. It is something that all good teachers -- possibly the MLA for Stony Plain in his previous incarnation would know what good teaching is all about. Good teaching focuses on individual children and the needs of children. We have to recognize that learning is a continuous experience and that children learn in different ways at different times, even though they may be in the same age group or may even be in the same grade. But what we're asking school boards to do -- and many have already done it -- is to sit down and review their own policies and their programs so "good teaching, focussed on individual children" is the first and foremost and primary concern of those policies of that board. We're not saying that a board must turn its policies upside down or reverse them or change them beyond recognition. We're sim-

ply asking school boards, as has been written in the *Infocus* edition of May 19, 1989, to review their own policies and practices to ensure that they are consistent with the concept of good teaching focused on individual children. We're not providing any direction that they must change policies or how they ought to change those policies, but we're asking them to review them and identify what practices are consistent with good teaching focused on individual children. That, Mr. Chairman, is my guideline for directing school boards on the implementation of program continuity.

The notion of private schools: a few members have raised that subject. Private schools are identified at 2.4.1 in the elements, and as the budget identifies, we have increased our funding to private schools from \$14.5 million in '88-89 to \$16.26 million in 1989-90. Mr. Chairman, this primarily relates to growth in enrolment in those private schools but also is a recognition that, to go back to our original commitment to these private schools, we would fund them to the tune of 75 percent of the School Foundation Program Fund grants.

AN HON. MEMBER: Shame

MR. DINNING: That 75 percent had become watered down, had become diluted in previous years such that we reinstated our commitment to 75 percent funding, which recognizes our responsibility to those children of families who make that choice.

To any hon. member in this Assembly -- as the hon. Member for Calgary-Forest Lawn has said "shame" -- suggesting somehow that we shouldn't be funding schools, all I can say to that hon. member and others who may be opposed to it is that that hon. member is antichoice. That hon. member is suggesting that we are not allowing parents to make important choices about their children's education. We on the government side of this Legislature are fully supportive of parents making those important choices for their children, and we in the Department of Education will ensure . . . And one hon. member raised the question about regular evaluation of private schools. I would put to you, Mr. Chairman, that those schools are visited and evaluated and observed more often by Department of Education officials than public schools, whether they are Protestant schools or separate Catholic schools. So we exercise plenty of due diligence in overseeing the activities of those private schools. But we on this side of the Assembly, on the government side, are strongly supportive of helping and allowing and enabling parents to make those important choices for their children's education.

Native education project. Mr. Chairman, I'm not familiar with all the history, but I should point out to the hon. member from Stony Plain that the actual funding for native education that's made available to school boards is in fact found under the special pupil needs grants, and that native education funding, \$4 million in '88-89, has increased to \$4.3 million in '89-90. The actual administration of those dollars is found in vote 3 at 3.1.5, a total of \$506,000. So we make a separation between the granting of those dollars to those school boards and the administration of native education for the entire province.

Community schools. I was delighted to hear the supportive comments from around the Assembly on the restoration of community school funding. Yes, community schools play an important and valuable role and make a valuable contribution to the communities in which designated community schools are operating. But, Mr. Chairman, I would put to members of the

committee that the day of the community school and funding -- we are now approaching the high-needs funding beginning the next generation of community schools. Perhaps we should call it another name. But I believe that where community schools are best using the dollars we provide to them is in the areas of our cities or our communities across the province where there are high needs and where there may be a high incidence of mobility, of immigration in and out of those communities, a high incidence of low-income. It's in those areas where we must address some of the high needs, the special needs, of students and families where there may be inordinately high levels of unemployment, where there is a high incidence of family breakdown, where the mother tongue may not be English, and where the education of those families and the parents in those families may be considerably lower than the average. It's there where the government believes we should be focusing more and more of our efforts.

In the new high-needs funding for Calgary and Edmonton in year one -- hopefully in other communities throughout the province in subsequent years -- we are going to address those high needs, and we are going to make demands. We have done so in working with the four school boards in Calgary and Edmonton in coming up with the criteria. I went through the criteria: education, mobility, incidence of low income, unemployment, lone parent, and mother tongue. We are going to make demands on those school boards: yes, you put them to use as you the school board, working with students, parents, and teachers, feel the needs are the highest and where the needs can be best met by locally developed initiatives, local to the school or local to the community or to the city.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

We're going to be assessing the development of those students in those high-needs schools. We'll be looking at their performance in language arts or in mathematics. We'll be asking them to measure, if that's possible, the student satisfaction, student self-esteem, certainly being able to measure better student attendance and the dropout rate. We would want to see attendance strengthening and would want to see the dropout rate declining, along with all the other standards which we would measure the program by to make sure the trends are right in those areas.

Mr. Chairman, there are a variety of other issues I would want to address. Fine arts and practical arts: we have begun a major review of the entire practical arts program, including business education, home economics, industrial education, and work experience programs. This began in September of 1988, and the department has recently published three documents: one on trends and issues, which provides an overview of the research relating to education trends and issues; the status of the practical arts program, which describes the current program as well as enrollment patterns and some curriculum initiatives we've taken over the years; and directions for change discusses some of the foundations for change and proposes the beginning of a vision for the next decade. That is a start, and it has been shared with and is being shared with educators, teachers, principals, and superintendents. We're also sharing it with the business community, the industrial community, the manufacturing and the labour community, so we're getting feedback, real feedback, on what students need in the practical arts.

You, Mr. Chairman, have made the point that there's got to

be application, that these have got to be applicable, that they're hands-on and we've got to be able to enable a student, if he or she makes that choice, to take practical arts programs and find that once they've graduated, they may be further along in their apprenticeship training, whatever that may be, whether it's mechanics, whether it's as an electrician, or maybe, as the hon. Member for Red Deer-North is working on now, in the tourism and the hospitality industry. We've got to be looking at practical arts in the 1990s and the year 2000, and the hospitality industry is very much a part of that future.

Somehow a suggestion by the hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight that the fine arts and the practical arts are being squeezed out -- well, even in the advanced diploma requirements we are requiring, it's no option here, that students take a minimum of 10 credits in business arts, in practical arts, in language arts, or in the fine arts. We have made an alteration in the requirement, Mr. Chairman, such that we are no longer requiring students to complete that stream at the 30 level, at the grade 12 level. If a student chooses to take drama 10 and 20 and French 10 or French 20, that student may do so. We're introducing some greater flexibility to enable students to do just that.

I would refer the hon. member, with respect to her question in the Assembly this afternoon and to her comments tonight with respect to students who are cheating, to Alberta Regulation 40/89 under the School Act. It is the student evaluation regulation, and that regulation spells out the consequences that students may face should they find themselves having interfered with the security of the evaluation materials, if they have falsified evaluation results, or committed any other act that may result in a student's performance being inaccurately represented in an examination.

Mr. Chairman, you as the hon. Member for Ponoka-Rimby raised the subject of the fiscal equity formula. Is there a procedure to fine-tune the formula? Well, let's be clear about this. We have injected 6.2 million new dollars into the fiscal equity program for 1989-90, and we have done our best through a formula to estimate the incremental costs that relate to sparsity, a sparse distribution of students in a school district, and their distance from a major centre. Instead of compensating that to the tune of about 50 percent, we're now compensating that to the tune of about 70 percent. As a result, our program sees an injection of 6.2 million new dollars in 1989-90. Is there a procedure to fine-tune the formula? Yes, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to discussing that with you and our other colleagues in the Assembly, particularly my colleagues on the education caucus committee. But be mindful of how we have fine-tuned that formula in the past. We've simply given more money; we've provided more dollars. That begs the question: is that an effective way? Is that the proper way to be funding education? We've got some serious, serious work to do there.

I have to come back to the comments made by members of the opposition, and they relate to the old notion of 85-15 or 80-20. I will not be unduly harsh, Mr. Chairman, because you, too, made those comments. But fortunately you were pondering, Mr. Chairman; you were wondering. You were not so categorical in your statements, if I may be so bold as to temper your remarks for you. But the bottom line is that it's a typical NDP ploy, and I'm surprised to see my colleague from Calgary-McKnight making this comment. The bottom line is that by going to an 80-20 or a fixed formula, 85-15 or 80-20, we are basically telling school boards how much money they can spend and on what programs they may spend it. We are effec-

tively taking away the authority, the responsibility, the accountability that those locally elected school boards have to their constituents in how they spend those dollars.

Mr. Chairman, I find that and I know my colleagues on this side of the Assembly find that unacceptable, because we have faith in and we respect that local autonomy of those locally elected school boards. What they're saying is that school boards don't have a chance to even sit down with their teachers in an honest, straightforward set of labour negotiations, and we're taking away that authority, that flexibility, that responsibility that properly rests in the hands of those school boards. Failing that -- it could be a typical NDP ploy again -- simply give them a blank cheque.

Now, I know, Mr. Chairman, that you addressed this in your remarks, and what we have to perhaps do is sit down and say what constitutes a basic education which we as government must fund. I look forward to that kind of discussion in this Assembly and in the education caucus committee. But I believe that Albertans would look very, very unfavourably upon simply handing school boards a blank cheque, which the provincial taxpayers would have to pick up.

Mr. Chairman, you mentioned something about science centres. There's tremendous support in this province for the development of science centres, and it is totally consistent with what we are trying to accomplish in science education and to give children, give Albertans hands-on understanding of science and technology in society.

Distance learning: I appreciate the comments by all hon. members of the importance of distance learning and the contribution it makes.

Mr. Chairman, I have a number of other comments that I know I could make to my colleagues in the Assembly, but I will ask for adjournment of my estimates at this time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

MR. McINNIS: Mr. Chairman, as I was saying before the minister interjected, my constituents in Edmonton-Jasper Place face a double whammy, courtesy of the education system presided over by the hon. minister. They sent me here to ask some questions about it: why, on the one hand, in the established areas of my constituency schools are closing -- the third one has closed effective at the end of this current school year -- and why, on the other hand, the government fails to build schools in the new areas which aren't so much established.

On the question of school closures, there's no question at all that the closure of a school has a very harmful effect on an established neighbourhood. It's the beginning of a pattern which amounts to the depopulation of school-age children within areas. We had a school in McQueen, which I went to as a youth, closed several years back. The St. Gregory school closed in the same area and now Our Lady of Fatima.

I have a particular concern about the way this minister handled that particular school closure which I would like to ask him about today. There's no question that the initial decision to close the school was made by the Catholic school board in Edmonton. However, the parents appealed to this minister. They asked that he review the situation to determine whether or not this thing had been done properly. In the course of making their

appeal, my constituents contacted me to try to find out, since they couldn't get this information out of the minister's office, who in the department was conducting the review. I did make some telephone calls, and I did determine that the Edmonton regional office was allegedly looking into this matter. I spoke to an education consultant by the name of Eunice Eastman, who said that she was conducting the review together with her immediate supervisor, a gentleman named Lynn Edwards. This information I obtained on Friday, April 7, 1989, which I immediately relayed to my constituents. The following Tuesday we all learned that the minister had authorized the school closure, even though I specifically told the Edmonton regional office that the parents in Edmonton-Jasper Place wanted to put in a brief on the subject. Now, the result of that phone call was evidently that somebody contacted the minister's office, and they shoved the paper through the minister's office before my constituents could make their brief known. I think certain elements of that brief should be on the record because of the shabby manner in which they were treated by this particular minister.

The first is that the Edmonton Catholic school board policy does not define critical terms; i.e., what constitutes enrollment. The school district has a guideline of about 100 students. This school has more than a hundred students. What happened after the fact: the department decided to change the definition of enrollment from group pupils to pupils who are not part of district administered programs. They took all of the special education kids and didn't count them for the purpose of this policy.

Secondly, the parents in Edmonton-Jasper Place attempted to argue to the minister that the policy does not treat like cases alike, that there are schools that are clearly under the limit without any fiddling of the definition of enrollment, which have been withheld from any consideration under the policy. There are others also below the level which were considered and left open. Ours, which had merely the problem that the parents did not indulge in some of the guerrilla tactics at school board meetings that some of the other did, faced closure.

The third point they tried to make is that the enrollment in that school is increasing rather than decreasing. It's not a case of declining enrollment in a school but rather one that's growing in enrollment. The fourth point is that there is an increase in the school-age population within the area that is considered.

Now, I think that if the parents go to the trouble to prepare a brief that makes four points such as those that are clearly germane to the question of whether the school district has a policy and whether it's been followed in the school closure, somebody in the department, if it's not the minister, should be prepared to hear the brief. But they didn't. Instead, they alerted the minister's office, and the school closure order went through the following Tuesday. They were told on Friday that the parents had a brief to be submitted. On Monday the order was whistled over to the minister's office, on Tuesday he signed it, and they never got a chance to have their brief heard. Now, I submit that that's a denial of natural justice in the case of this thing being dealt with. I note in passing that there is no policy or procedure in the department for dealing with these appeals.

Then to top matters off, I got a letter from the minister, and I assume a lot of others did, admitting that there is some confusion with respect to the stated policy in the Edmonton Catholic school board. He says in his letter dealing with the fact that the school district is reviewing its policy:

If upon its review, the board amends its closure policy in such a way that the criteria used in the decision to close our Lady of



Fatima School would change, I have asked that the board reconsider the closure of the school.

So it seems to me that the minister somehow became aware of the fact that there was an ambiguity in the policy and the policy is being reconsidered, but he wasn't prepared to look at the decision and I think to meet his obligations under section 42 of the School Act, which is to satisfy himself that the rules had been followed. The rules weren't clear in this case, and I don't think they were followed.

Then on the other side we have large areas of our district that have no schools at all. The entire area west of 170th Street has no junior high school. I note the concern expressed by the superintendent of schools in Edmonton that the city of Edmonton receives approximately 9.2 percent of provincial capital funds for buildings, but they're teaching 16 percent of the province's population. I notice Mr. Strembitsky, in another brief which was considered by the school board on November 29, '88, wrote:

The district is concerned about the degree of apparent political involvement in the decision-making process as reflected in the manner in which approvals were communicated. The Chairman of the Edmonton Government Caucus wrote to inform the district of projects receiving provincial support including such relatively minor projects as the modernization of a photography lab in Hardisty School (total provincial support of \$5,600).

It goes on to say:

This creates the impression that capital projects are being used for political mileage and casts some doubts on the criteria being used for project approval.

Now, that was the approach prior to this last election. I think the government thought that if it got political with all of the capital projects, that somehow they would be able to win the city of Edmonton back. Well, it didn't work that way. What happened was the government lost even more seats after they tried this particular approach to school funding. I submit that if they continue to do the same thing, they're going to suffer an even worse fate not only here but perhaps in the city of Calgary as well. We have overcrowding in elementary schools in the west end. We have a shortage of junior high schools, and in the established areas they're closing schools. I submit that people in that area aren't terribly well served. I'd hope the minister would address especially the question of school closures, given the experience of Our Lady of Fatima.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Chairman, I want to just respond briefly to some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place. First of all, he simply doesn't have his facts right I met with the parent group along with the former MLA for Edmonton-Jasper Place, Mr. Les Young, and I don't accept the hon. member's submission that those parents weren't heard.

Their brief was heard. It was looked at. The responsibility of the Minister of Education is to ensure that school boards have in place a school closure policy, one that is fair, one that is open, one that provides for thorough community consultation. I did that. This Minister of Education did make sure that that policy was in place and that it was followed.

We went one step further, and given that the school board was reviewing its school closure policy as it related to the circumstances around the closure of Our Lady of Fatima, given that they were going to review those subsequent to their decision to close, I asked the board to reconsider their decision to close that school if in any way they altered the factors or the process or those things that they would consider or that they did consider in the closure of Fatima. So I would say to the hon. member that this Minister of Education, in meeting with those parents, in encouraging the school board and the chairman to meet with those parents and ensuring that the school board reviewed its closure following the review of its closure policy, went the extra mile to assist those parents and that school.

As for a school west of 170th Street, Mr. Chairman, we have to look at the entire province. We are looking at schools from Fort Chip to Cardston and from Zama City to Manyberries, Edmonton and Calgary in between. We look at schools on the basis of need and what modernization projects, what building quality restoration program projects, and what new construction projects are required: what need there is. I would challenge the hon. member to come close to questioning the objectiveness, the objectivity, the honesty, the sincerity of that process. I challenge the hon. member to put his facts and put his money where his mouth is.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those members who concur in the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[At 10:34 p.m. the House adjourned to Wednesday at 2:30 p.m.]

