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Tuesday 15 November 2016

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Mardi 15 novembre 2016

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Education

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

Chair: Cheri DiNovo
Clerk: Eric Rennie

Présidente : Cheri DiNovo
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 15 November 2016

Mardi 15 novembre 2016

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Education for a total of seven hours and 30 minutes.

As we have some new members, a new ministry and a new minister before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of the services intended.

I would also like to remind everyone that the estimates process has always worked well with a give-and-take approach. On one hand, members of the committee take care to keep their questions relevant to the estimates of the ministry, and the ministry, for its part, demonstrates openness in providing information requested by the committee.

As Chair, I tend to allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee, to ensure they are confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately. In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or to service delivery, or about the competence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the member asking the question to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may at the end of your appearance verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer.

Any questions before we start?

I will note that Mr. Coe has asked that people speak into their microphones. He has a slight hearing disability and would prefer that you do that. So again, just be cognizant of your microphones.

I am now required to call vote 1001 of the estimates, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement of not more than 30 minutes by the minister, followed by statements of up to 30 minutes by the official opposition and 30 minutes by the third party. Then the minister will have 30 minutes for a reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally among the three parties.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be here today to discuss the 2016-17 estimates for the Ministry of Education.

I'd like to introduce some members of my senior team and ministry officials who are accompanying me today: the Deputy Minister of Education, Bruce Rodrigues; Bohodar Rubashewsky, assistant deputy minister, corporate management and services division; Shannon Fuller, assistant deputy minister, early years division; Andrew Davis, assistant deputy minister, education and labour relations; Joshua Paul, executive director, fiscal and financial planning, financial policy and business division; Janine Griffore, assistant deputy minister, French language, aboriginal learning and research division; Denise Dwyer, assistant deputy minister, leadership and learning environment division; Martyn Beckett, assistant deputy minister, learning and curriculum division; Cathy Montreuil, who is the assistant deputy minister for our student achievement division; and Grant Osborn, director of capital policy and programs branch.

It's my privilege as well to be joined by our Associate Minister of Education, Indira Naidoo-Harris.

It's a privilege to work with these incredible individuals and with a ministry that is focused on education and focused on student outcomes, student achievement and student well-being. I want to thank all of our team for their hard work and their commitment.

Ontario is a leader in education. Since 2003, our province has made great progress in helping more students to succeed and reach their full potential. Together with our many stakeholders, we have transformed Ontario's education system into one of the best in the world. This success has garnered our province a reputation for innovation and excellence. Time and again, international studies have shown this, and scholars from around the world have visited Ontario to learn from our success.

It's important to celebrate our progress, and I'm proud to say that our government's investments in education

have delivered tremendous results. Ontario high school students are now graduating in record numbers with the skills and the knowledge that they need to succeed and compete in the global economy.

In 2015, 85.5% of high school students earned their secondary school diploma, an increase of 17.5 percentage points since 2004. This means that an additional 190,000 students have graduated who would not have done so had the rate remained at the 2003-04 level. That is more than the population of Greater Sudbury.

In 2003, only 54% of grades 3 and 6 students were achieving at or above the provincial standard in EQAO province-wide assessments. In 2016, overall results showed that 71% of grades 3 and 6 students are achieving at or above that standard. This represents a 17-percentage-point increase since 2003. That means over 150,000 more students are performing at or above the provincial standard than were in 2003.

The 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, found that Ontario's 15-year-old students are continuing to perform above the OECD average in every category. In fact, Ontario performed significantly higher than 52 other jurisdictions on the paper-based math assessment.

The results of the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program in 2013 show that Ontario's grade 8 students were the second-highest-performing jurisdiction in science, were the only group to perform at or above the Canadian average in all three areas of math, reading and science, and were first when it came to reading—the only students to perform above the national average in that area.

Results of the 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study show that Ontario's grade 4 students performed near the top in the world in reading achievement.

Ontario's students have sustained their high level of performance in reading since 2001 and have narrowed the gender achievement gap.

The reason for much of this success is because our government has, since 2003, focused on innovation. On a broad level, we have pursued an agenda of whole-system reform, including establishing clear educational goals, setting ambitious targets, and providing support and resources to the leadership in the system. Throughout most of the last decade, we have focused on three goals for education: improved levels of student achievement, reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence in publicly funded education.

Not content to rest on our laurels, as the Premier often says, in April 2014 the ministry launched its renewed vision for education, entitled *Achieving Excellence*. Those four key goals are: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence. These goals will continue to guide and focus our efforts to improve Ontario's education system for the next decade.

I'll speak more about our vision later, but now I'd like to talk about some of the work that we've done to support our youngest Ontarians.

We have worked extremely hard to transform early years education in Ontario to put children on a firm path

to lifelong success. Full-day kindergarten is now available to every four- and five-year-old in publicly funded schools across Ontario. The rollout of this innovative program was the single most significant investment we've made in education in a generation, and it has positioned Ontario as a leader in North America.

0910

Child care modernization is also one of our top priorities. In December 2014 we passed Bill 10, the Child Care Modernization Act, which enacted the Child Care and Early Years Act. This replaced the Day Nurseries Act and the outdated legislation that previously governed child care in Ontario. This strengthened government oversight of the child care sector and increased access to safe and high-quality child care.

Since then, new regulations under the Child Care and Early Years Act have been filed under a three-phased approach. In August 2016, we filed a regulation to end fees for child care wait-lists, to make life easier for families. The ban took effect on September 1, 2016, and prevents licensed child care centres and home child care agencies from charging fees or requiring deposits to join child care wait-lists.

As part of our innovative approach to education, we've also focused on better ways of teaching our students the basics of literacy and numeracy, and we've worked to develop their higher-order skills and competencies. As a result, creativity and critical thinking skills are encouraged in all aspects of our curriculum.

This summer I was visiting a girls camp. It's called Ladies Learning Code. I remember meeting a 12-year-old young woman. She lives in the Regent Park community and she was so excited. She said to me, "I can't wait to get started." I said, "Start what?" She said, "Coding for the first time. I've wanted to do this for so long." That's the kind of excitement and engagement that we're seeing in Ontario students.

This means that rather than just teaching students to remember information, we've been teaching them how to use the information to solve problems.

Ontario has also been a trailblazer in offering students opportunities to gain real-life, hands-on experience in the workplace. Our co-op program was one of the first out there. It allows high school students to combine classroom and workplace learning. Students gain valuable work experience while earning credits towards their high school diploma.

The groundbreaking Specialist High Skills Major program lets students focus on a career path that matches their interests and skills while they work towards their diploma. When we launched the Specialist High Skills Major back in 2006, 600 students enrolled in the program. This year, more than 48,000 students are enrolled. High school students can major in one of 19 economic sectors like aviation, information and communications technology, hospitality, energy, the environment and more.

As well, dual credits keep students engaged by allowing them to earn credits that count towards their diploma

and towards apprenticeship training and college. Starting this year, about 22,800 high school students are participating in Dual Credit Programs at school boards and colleges of applied arts and technology.

All of these innovations have made a clear and positive impact on our education system and our students.

But while we have much to be proud of, now is time to build on those experiences and successes.

Education is one of the cornerstones of Ontario's prosperity, and we are committed to supporting the education system with increased funding for this school year. That means an investment of about \$22.9 billion for the 2016-17 Grants for Student Needs—an increase of approximately \$300 million since last year. School boards are still benefiting from a strong GSN that has increased by \$8.5 billion—or 59%—since 2003.

Even though enrolment has declined across the province, students are still benefiting from per pupil funding of \$11,709, an increase of \$4,508—or almost 63%—since 2003.

Since 2013, we have held extensive consultations with school boards and other education stakeholders to seek advice on education funding issues and school board efficiencies and modernization. These consultations resulted in significant changes to GSN funding.

An important part of education funding is capital investments. Since 2003, we've invested more than \$15 billion in school infrastructure, including nearly 760 new schools and more than 735 additions and renovations.

It's really wonderful for me, as Minister of Education, to go into schools. I try to get into schools at least once a week. Whenever I go to a school and there's an addition or it's a new school, you can really see the excitement and anticipation on the faces of the administration, the school board leadership and, of course, our students.

I remember being in Barrie to talk about a major extension we were doing to that high school, and a couple of things struck me with the location. The principal, as they were walking me through the school, said that with the additional funding we were providing for school renewal, they were not only building the addition, but they were also able to connect the addition to the older portions of the school so it's one unified whole. In essence, they were able to paint the hallways so that all students felt they were in an environment of well-being.

I also talked to the school facilities workers, and they were telling me that the open glass looking out on to the construction was inspiring students to inquire about engineering and trades and types of employment. So it was actually a form of experiential learning as they were seeing their new school addition come to life right in front of their eyes.

Over the next 10 years, the province plans to provide school boards with more than \$12 billion to help build new schools in areas of high growth, invest in projects to reduce surplus spaces through school consolidations and improve the condition of existing schools.

Wise capital investments are key to a strong, vibrant and sustainable education sector. So are the employees

who work in our schools and the contract negotiations we have with them. In 2015, we reached negotiated central agreements under the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act with all nine teacher and education worker tables. To build on the success of this first round of bargaining under the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, we committed to a consultation with our partners to review the act to see if there were future improvements that could be made to the process. The results of that consultation were released in July 2016, and we committed to review all of the input provided through this process.

I know that all the parties involved are committed to meaningful and collaborative collective bargaining and to continue to work together to be the world's best education system.

Funding for child care modernization also remains a priority for our government. In 2016, the ministry is providing over \$1 billion to 47 municipalities. This is an increase in overall funding of \$16.3 million, or approximately 1.5% over last year. The ministry has also allocated \$27.7 million in 2016-17 for child care in First Nations communities.

Since 2003, we've doubled child care funding to more than \$1 billion per year.

Since 2003, our government has supported the creation of nearly 351,000 licensed child care spaces, an increase of 87% over that same period. In the recent throne speech, we made a historic commitment to create an additional 100,000 licensed child care spaces within five years.

Ontario is also investing \$269 million over three years to increase wages for child care professionals in licensed settings.

We also banned the unfair practice of charging parents for child care wait-list fees. I know the Associate Minister of Education is going to have more to say on this very important initiative.

0920

Our government also wants to make sure that Ontario families have access to the services they need where they need them. That's why we're integrating and transforming Ontario's child and family programs into a suite of services and supports known as the Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres. I hope you've all visited the early years centres in your communities, because they are wonderful, welcoming places for children and for families. These centres will support children and families across the province in accessing local, high-quality, early years programs and services. We're engaging with our early years partners to inform this transition process, to enhance services and to minimize service disruption for families.

We're committed to improving indigenous education in Ontario, improving student achievement and well-being, and closing the achievement gap between indigenous students and all students. We're also working with indigenous partners to enhance the curriculum in order to support mandatory learning on residential schools, the legacy of colonialism and the rights and responsibilities we all have to each other as treaty people.

We know that we've just wrapped up Treaties Recognition Week in Ontario. It was such an incredible experience going into classrooms and seeing children engaged in their knowledge around treaties, doing research, talking to each other and having this deep learning and conversation around our indigenous partners. I remember speaking to a young boy in a classroom. He said to me, "I've learned more in three weeks than I have in three months," because he was so engaged in the learning. These are the types of improvements that we need to make by working together with our indigenous partners.

In 2016-17, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit education supplement of the Grants for Student Needs is projected to be \$64 million. This is an increase of nearly 430% since the grant was introduced in 2007-08. Investments will also help to ensure there is a dedicated aboriginal education lead position in every school board.

It was wonderful, MPP for Kingston and the Islands—we visited one of the aboriginal learning centres in Kingston. It was a moving experience to really see how the students were engaged. Every day they showed up to that learning centre. They had built what is called a medicine wheel on the compound and every morning they would do smudging. It was such a wonderful space. They told us that they felt safe, they felt included and that they felt they belonged. It's really wonderful to see that type of engagement in a space that's dedicated to our indigenous students.

Our government is committed to maintaining and expanding a dynamic, accessible and high-quality French-language education system. Enrolment at French-language school boards for the 2016-17 school year is projected to be more than 104,000 students, including full-day kindergarten. French-language school boards are projected to receive \$1.58 billion in 2016-17. Since 2002-03, annual funding for French-language school boards through the Grants for Student Needs has increased by \$820 million, or 109%. In July 2016, the government announced an additional \$62 million for French-language school boards across Ontario over the next two years to repair and renew schools, to ensure that they will continue to be safe and modern places for students to learn.

Since 2004, our government has invested more than \$550 million to support school boards and communities to create safe and inclusive schools by funding programs such as bullying prevention and intervention programs, as well as adding staff to schools, including child and youth workers, social workers and psychologists. In 2016-17, Ontario will invest an additional projected \$65 million to help create safe and inclusive schools.

On September 1, 2012, the Accepting Schools Act, Bill 13, came into force and created legal obligations for school boards to take measures to prevent and address inappropriate student behaviour, including bullying. The Accepting Schools Act is part of the ministry's Comprehensive Action Plan for Accepting Schools. When introduced, it was the first legislation of its kind in Canada.

Our government is committed to providing the right supports to children, youth and their families when they need them to enable positive mental health and well-being. We continue to build on the first three years of Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, expanding it to include improved transition between youth and adult services, people with addictions and adults. As part of this strategy, we continue to fund mental health leaders in all 72 district school boards, and one shared resource for the four school authorities.

As part of the strategy, the Ministry of Education is also working with district school boards and school authorities to equip educators with the tools and knowledge they need to identify potential child and youth mental health and addictions issues and intervene effectively.

Our government's investments started in 2011-12 and totaled \$257 million over a three-year period. More than 50,000 Ontario children, youth and their families will have quicker and easier access to the right mental health and addictions supports as part of the strategy. The expanded strategy included additional investments growing to approximately \$83 million annually by 2016-17.

Our government is also committed to ensuring that school boards have the resources they need to deliver high-quality programs and services for students with special education needs. The Special Education Grant in 2016-17 is projected to be approximately \$2.7 billion. This is an increase of almost \$1.14 billion, or 70%, since 2002-03.

We continue to work with our stakeholders on the development of effective and efficient measures for special education funding that reflect the variability of students' needs among boards.

I visited one of our schools for the deaf over the last few months, and it was really incredible, first of all, to see the students and how engaged they were in learning and in their learning environment. But one student really stood out for me, a kindergarten student; her name is Zoe. Zoe was learning to communicate in multiple languages. She was so engaged in her learning. Her kindergarten teacher had used an inquiry method, and the students had gone on a field trip. Zoe was learning to communicate about her own life, and she was so engaged. She was literally jumping out of her skin and so excited to share information about her own life in multiple languages. I was very, very proud to see the commitment of our dedicated teachers, but also to see that engagement in learning from our students.

As I mentioned earlier, we have made tremendous progress in education since 2003. But one of the most significant challenges and opportunities before us is how best to prepare our students for this new technology-driven, globalized world. That's why our government released *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, in April 2014. Working with our many partners in education, we are transforming our system to deliver responsive, high-quality and accessible services and programs that are integrated from early learning and child care through to adult education.

0930

As I also mentioned earlier, for the last 13 years we have focused on three core goals, and as part of our renewed vision for education, we've added a fourth goal: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence.

I'd like to take a moment to share with you some of the key examples of where we've made progress in implementing our renewed vision.

To help us achieve excellence, we continue to keep our focus on math supports for teachers and students through our renewed math strategy. We're investing more than \$60 million to implement the strategy. Starting this school year, teachers in grades 1 to 8 are spending protected blocks of time every day to focus on effective instruction in math. Other key elements of the strategy include up to three math lead teachers in all elementary schools and more opportunities for educators to deepen their knowledge in math learning, teaching and leading, including a dedicated math professional development day.

In today's new global economy, in this fast-paced, technology-driven world, students must have a wide range of skills and knowledge to succeed, and a strong foundation in math is needed for each of them to reach their potential.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Minister, you have just about two minutes left.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. And this is also why, as part of Ontario's Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy, the Ministry of Education will be leading the implementation of a number of recommendations, such as expanding the Specialist High Skills Major programs and increasing experiential learning and career opportunities.

Of course, developing tomorrow's workforce requires the partnership of government, school boards, communities, business, industry and more. It is by working in partnership with our many stakeholders that Ontario will continue to help people gain the skills they need to get a good job and help ensure our province remains competitive.

Thanks to our collective efforts, Ontario is also a world leader in ensuring equity, which I'd like to remind you is one of the key goals of our renewed vision.

We continue to focus on increasing graduation rates and closing achievement gaps for under-represented groups such as indigenous students, teen and young single parents, and students in the care of children's aid societies, among others, through innovative pilot programs that address the needs of these vulnerable learners. To better support our adult learners, we are moving forward with a new Adult Education Strategy.

To help promote well-being, we released a current, relevant and age-appropriate health and physical education curriculum. Earlier this year, we released Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education: Discussion Document. This strategy builds on the outstanding work that we know happens every day across the province. Through this strategy, we will continue to align and

integrate existing work in education, including the four key areas of: mental health, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools, and equity and inclusive education.

We are further enhancing public confidence by securing the fiscal sustainability of our publicly funded education system.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): And I'm afraid that is it, Minister.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to say, Madam Chair, that education is one of the most valued—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm sorry. Your time is up. You will have another opportunity.

We now move to the official opposition. Mr. Smith.

Mr. Todd Smith: Welcome to estimates committee, Minister, Associate Minister and all of the staff from the Ministry of Education. Good morning, and thanks for your 30 minutes. You paint a rosy picture in education. However, I can tell you that, being one of our education critics, along with my colleague from Whitby-Oshawa and the leader of our party, Patrick Brown, we certainly are hearing a different story than the rosy picture you're painting this morning. You talked about the wall in that school that's been painted to brighten up the school. That's kind of like, I think, what you're doing here this morning: painting a rosy picture when maybe there are some deep, deep problems in our education system in Ontario.

I know that when I speak to those who are working in our education system, morale is extremely low for teachers. I had the opportunity last week to meet with the president of my Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario local, Dave Henderson. We talked about a lot of the issues facing our elementary teachers, the hardships they're facing in their classrooms and the lack of support that they believe exists in the system right now as well.

Parents are extremely frustrated. Their children are coming home with work that they just simply can't help them with. Their children are falling further and further behind, and there just seems to be a lack of accountability on the Ministry of Education's part.

Communities are concerned. We've been hearing of numerous communities—particularly in rural Ontario, but there are many urban communities as well—that are seeing schools close, and they have serious concerns about the impact that those school closures are going to have on their communities.

The students are failing. My colleague from Whitby-Oshawa, Mr. Coe, has talked to many of our post-secondary institutions, and the students who are arriving at college and university are ill-prepared for the challenges they're facing at post-secondary institutions. That's causing problems, of course, for the students, and it's also causing problems for the post-secondary institutions.

So while you paint a pretty picture of education, there are certainly a lot of issues there.

We just have to look at the recent EQAO grade 3 math results, which clearly shine a light on the fact that there are huge failings when it comes to the math curriculum

for our elementary school students. I'm sure you would agree. You've talked about some programs that you're bringing forward to try to correct this. Our students are failing when it comes to math, and I think we need to highlight that fact. They are failing, not meeting the provincial standards, when it comes to math.

Our teachers are less safe in their classrooms. That's what they feel. In my meeting last week with the Elementary Teachers' Federation president, he told me about how unsafe teachers are feeling in their classrooms because they don't have the support.

This government continues to talk about the millions and millions of dollars that they're spending in education, but those who are working in the system aren't seeing the fruits of that money. They're not seeing the money making it to where it needs to make it to to make the school experience better. So while you continue to talk about the fact that there is money continuing to be put into the system, it's not resulting in a positive outcome for the students or the teachers who are working in the system.

We have a lot of questions when it comes to the math tests, but the one thing that really bothers me—and I know there was a release that came out from your office last week, Minister. It is Financial Literacy Month, and there was a press release that came out about the fact that financial literacy is important. I think it's one of the areas where we're really seeing kids being pushed through the school system without learning their math properly. They have no comprehension of financial literacy. They have no comprehension of how to balance a budget.

Let me just tell you a brief story. This is the story of my daughter who is in grade 11. Last year, in grade 10—she's attending Bayside Secondary School in the Belleville area. She had no idea about financial literacy until she decided to take a French program, which was a business program. It wasn't a mandatory program; it was an elective. That's where she learned about financial literacy. She says that was the best course she has ever taken in her 11-year school career, because it actually taught her financial literacy.

How do you feel the government is meeting, or not meeting, those financial literacy requirements that our kids really need when they enter the real world?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much for that question. I will turn to the deputy to provide details, but first I want to say that we recognize that our Ontario curriculum must meet the needs of our 21st-century learners. We introduced financial literacy across the curriculum. This is a standard of OECD countries: to ensure that it shows up across the curriculum. So from grade 4 to grade 12, we have financial literacy. It could appear in a variety of different ways. It could appear in a history course, in a math course, in a social studies course.

0940

We also recognize that more needs to be done—exactly as the experience that your daughter had—where there's more of a concentrated, mandatory way to teach financial literacy. That's exactly why our grade 10

careers course will be revised to have a mandatory component for financial literacy.

I do want to turn to the deputy to talk about—

Mr. Todd Smith: Before you turn to Mr. Rodrigues, that program will be a mandatory program?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: That's correct.

Mr. Todd Smith: So you feel that it's mandatory, then, that our children have financial literacy? Because right now it's not mandatory.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Right now it's integrated across the curriculum in grades 4 to 12, which is exactly the OECD standard in terms of delivering that program. We will be adding to that in Ontario by creating a mandatory component.

Mr. Todd Smith: So just before we get to Mr. Rodrigues—again, I'd like to just continue with you for a moment, and then we'll allow Mr. Rodrigues to talk about the new program that's available.

It's extremely important, and there are cynics out there who would say, "Hey, listen, the Liberal government doesn't want the kids to understand how finances work." I know that in my daughter's case and in many other students' cases, it was in that French program, that business program, that they learned about a deficit. It's where they learned about balancing a budget. It's where they learned about debt. It's where they learned about the difference between a credit card and a debit card: A credit card is spending money you don't have; a debit card is spending the money you do have. All of these types of programs are so important for children—even how to make change.

I just want to ask you if you would agree: Do you feel right now that our kids that are graduating—and I'm sure there are some great kids. You talked about some great kids out there who understand the math curriculum. But there are obviously many, many who don't, given the EQAO testing that exists. Do you feel that our kids that are graduating from high school are better prepared now than they were?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Madam Chair, I would like Mr. Rodrigues to address the question—

Mr. Todd Smith: I would just like you to answer that.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Because we've been asked a series of questions and I want to make sure we—

Mr. Todd Smith: I just want you, Minister, to answer that question. Mr. Rodrigues is fine, but I'm asking you the question. Do you feel that our kids right now are better prepared to enter the workforce?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to make sure we address the questions, and I would like to—

Mr. Todd Smith: Yes, and the question is for you. I'm not asking Mr. Rodrigues; I'm asking you as the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: His mike isn't working.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): It's the minister's prerogative here.

Mr. Rodrigues, could you state your name and your position as you answer?

Mr. Todd Smith: I just want to say clearly that it doesn't seem like the minister is ready to say that our

kids are better prepared to enter the workforce or to enter college or university than they were, because she's not prepared to answer that question.

Mr. Rodrigues, let's hear from you. Do you believe they are?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Bruce Rodrigues, deputy minister.

MPP Smith, the straightforward answer to your question is yes. I am a former math teacher. I came through the system and taught financial literacy and math courses. I would unequivocally suggest to you that, yes, students are better prepared today than they were, I would say, even 10 years ago, around the whole issue of financial literacy. It is in the curriculum and, as your daughter has experienced, certainly in terms of the business side for the French school, there is a business course in the French-language-speaking schools that do teach that. There are also courses in—

Mr. Todd Smith: Can I stop you? Is that a mandatory course or an elective course?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: In the French school?

Mr. Todd Smith: Yes.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Not mandatory. Same with the English schools. Well, financial literacy is included in the program in the grade 9 curriculum, in the grade 10 curriculum and in the grade 11 curriculum as well. It is specifically included for students that study both at the applied level and at what we call the C courses or the M courses in grade 11 at the college level. There are also accounting courses that are non-mandatory courses that can be taken both in grade 11 and in grade 12. Also included in that are economics courses that can be taken both in grade 11 and in grade 12. So there are a series of courses that can be taken.

The “mandatory” part to your question are units of study that exist both in the grade 9 curriculum and in the grade 10 curriculum that speak to financial literacy. But more specifically in terms of what we're attempting to do with the mandatory piece in the careers course that will be forthcoming is to be more focused in terms of being strategic in terms of what needs to be taught.

What you'll find often is that students get deep, complex thinking around financial literacy—things like amortization and so on and so forth—that might not be necessary for all students to understand broadly. But those issues that you have already addressed in terms of credit cards or understanding of debt or deficit, or even planning around buying a car, for example—those particular pieces that currently exist in the curriculum will be mandatory for students to sort of understand as we move forward.

Mr. Todd Smith: That's very important. It's just too bad that it's taken this long to make those mandatory.

Mr. Coe has some questions about the math as well.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Yes, just through you, Chair—and for full disclosure, my daughter is a teacher with the Durham Catholic District School Board, for the record.

On the math strategy—welcome, Minister, and Associate Minister and Deputy Minister—what is the govern-

ment doing? What approach is it using to measure the strategy, to determine the effects of it? Minister?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Sorry, I thought you were going to ask a specific part of that question.

Math and numeracy skills—we see that as very important. The Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel reported out in the summer—they really looked at the importance of focus on those types of skills, in terms of math and numeracy skills. We recognize that we want Ontario students to be well prepared for the 21st century. What we're looking to do, in terms of the renewed math strategy, is really replicate the success that we had in focusing on the literacy strategy, where all students will receive the supports that they need.

In our elementary curriculum, we would have protected minutes each day for math. That will allow teachers to be able to get through that curriculum. They will be able to get through all aspects of the curriculum by having that protected time each day.

We also want to ensure that teachers receive the professional development that they need. We have a dedicated PD day for math. We also are ensuring that elementary schools have math leads, so that the entire school community is working together to boost their outcomes in math.

We also want to ensure that parents—and that's an important part of this, because as our students come home we want parents to have resources. We have resources online for parents. Also, through our partnership with TVO and TFO, we have Homework Help, where we have certified instructors who are available online to assist students and their parents. We also have SOS Devoirs for TFO.

We are ensuring that at all points students are receiving the supports that they need. We also want to create a bit of excitement around math education, because—

Mr. Lorne Coe: Minister, I'm going to stop you there. Through you, Chair, I want you to speak specifically, please, Minister, to how you are evaluating the strategy. Could you speak to the methodology, please? I'd like you to speak to that, please.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Sure, and I have the Deputy Minister of Education here, whom I will ask to speak to the specifics about that.

But I want to make a point that's really important. We hear about our math scores and we're concerned about the decline in our EQAO math scores. We've stepped in with \$60 million in our renewed math strategy. We're very confident in that strategy. There's a lot of excitement across the education system about math. I go into schools each week. I see students learning math, from kindergarten all the way up through to grade 12. We want to see those outcomes boosted. But when we look at our PISA scores and our international comparators—Ontario's math scores against our peer jurisdictions—we are holding very strong. So I want to let you know that that is something that is happening. But we see a general decline.

Deputy, if you could talk about the measures?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Deputy, before you answer, can you speak please—and through you, Chair—to the specifics of how you evaluate the strategy? Also, in the context of answering that, provide me with some details of the framework of the strategy.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Sure. One of the key measures, MPP, is around the EQAO scores, to begin with. That's a key measure. The reason that I cite that initially is because it is a curriculum measure. If the strategy is specifically around financial literacy, for example, if that's what you're referring to, or math in general—

Mr. Lorne Coe: The math strategy.

0950

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: The math strategy in general—

Mr. Lorne Coe: Yes.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: —not financial literacy. Okay. So let me just speak to the math strategy in general.

In terms of the math strategy, one of the pieces we've noticed and the reason we've gone there is because EQAO assessments are 100% curriculum-based. What we try to attempt to do from that particular vantage point is to try and determine those strands of cognitive skills that students are having difficulties with and, in doing so, really address that through the strategy.

What we found is that contrary to popular belief, the public discourse is around “back to the basics,” and it's not about “back to the basics” that we're really evaluating, because when we try to understand what's meant by “back to the basics,” people are really illuminating us with this notion that it's computational analysis of times tables, generally 1 times 1 to 12 times 12, which is what you and I probably kind of—so when students are asked, “What's 13 times 14?” they struggle to provide a response to that.

What we're trying to do is, working through the EQAO scores to try and determine what exactly those areas are that need to be addressed. Specifically, what we've determined is that it isn't about computational analysis; students are very good at computational analysis generally. What they struggle with is two things: one is context, and the other one is application. What we're trying to do within the math strategy is to address those two particular things: the understanding for students to understand context, and the understanding that students will have in terms of application.

What I mean specifically by that is that if a student is given two numbers, they will do anything with those two numbers—what's more important is that when they arrive at a solution or a particular answer, so to speak, they need to understand what that says or does. For example, if you ask a student about the height of a human being, they might end up coming up with an answer of 15 metres, and they have no understanding that the context of that would be incorrect.

So in terms of the evaluation of the strategy specifically, what we're trying to do is, we're trying to get to those areas that students struggle with most and then really target the strategy to address those particular areas.

It will be an ongoing piece because it will be dynamic. We know where we stand right now, but as we unfold the strategy and get better at it, we'll be able to address that more specifically and be more focused in terms of what that will do.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for that answer. Through you, Chair, what's clear in your answer is that an evaluative process is in place. It's been ongoing for quite some time. Would you be able to share the reports from that evaluative process with this committee?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: It is in the public domain already. It's posted on the EQAO website.

Mr. Lorne Coe: So, through you, Chair, if we could please have those evaluative reports on the math strategy shared within the committee and have that reflected in the record.

A supplementary question through you, Chair, to the deputy minister: Deputy, who within the ministry, what branch is responsible for differentiating that the accountability within the civil service in education is with you—who is responsible? What department is responsible for the implementation of the math strategy and the implementation of the framework of that math strategy and the evaluation of it?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: It would be the student achievement division under ADM Cathy Montreuil.

Mr. Lorne Coe: And that's carried out 100% within the civil service? It's not been contracted out?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: That is correct.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You still have 10 minutes left.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Chair, I would just like to also say, in response to MPP Coe's question of responsibility, that the work we do in the Ministry of Education very much is in partnership with all of our education partners. Our 72 school boards across the province are responsible for the implementation and delivery of those strategies and that curriculum. Of course, that flows through to our directors of education and all of our principals, vice-principals and teachers in the classroom. That partnership and that relationship is incredibly important.

I know that MPP Smith had talked about teachers and how they are feeling. I think it's important that we talk about that, because the relationship we have with our education partners is critical. It's important that they feel supported, that they're getting that training, that support to deliver education programs in this province, and to make sure that there's a sense of well-being in the schools.

Just last week, I was with over 500 of our education partners right across this province, and we were focused on the area of equity and well-being, because we recognize that in order for student well-being to be focused on, the whole school environment has to have that concept of well-being and supports for our teachers and our educators and all of the education partners. The whole school community is involved in the delivery of education.

Mr. Todd Smith: Let me ask you a question, Minister, about the PD days, the professional development

days. How many of them now exist in Ontario school boards?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Deputy?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: I believe there are six.

Mr. Todd Smith: Six PD days?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: That's correct.

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is, who is determining—seven, I guess. I'm getting the nod there are seven—

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Yes, seven, because there's a new one that was just added.

Mr. Todd Smith: Okay. It was a fog day in much of Quinte today—so who knew?

A PD day is very important in helping to build morale with our teachers and our educators. However, from what I've been able to ascertain from those who work in education, the PD days vary greatly from school to school and school board to school board. What role does the ministry have to play in determining what is taking place on these PD days?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Go ahead, Deputy.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Again, MPP, to your earlier point where you spoke about having a conversation with the ETFO representative and the difficulty that they sometimes experience—in order to address that, one of the things that we've provided them with is an opportunity for elementary teachers to do their report cards. So the reporting piece of achievement was also provided, and they really wanted that and accepted that. So that's one of the things. That's universal across the province, in all of the elementary schools—72 boards have an opportunity to do that particular piece. In other cases, the ministry has identified those areas that are specific to our mandate, in order to have schools address that particular piece. For example, concretely, there will be a day dedicated to the math strategy. In the past, we had a day that was dedicated—

Mr. Todd Smith: For all teachers?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: For all teachers, yes.

Mr. Todd Smith: So even teachers who aren't teaching math are required to go to the PD day for math?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Numeracy would be across the curriculum, and we would see that as being advantageous for all teachers. When we implemented the literacy strategy, we had that, as well, as part of that. We found it to be very helpful in moving the needle forward in the literacy piece. We hope to mimic some of those good strategies, the promising practices that were part of those strategies, in order to do that in numeracy as well.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say that these investments that we're making in professional development for our teachers—it's extremely important that we attract the best people to education, and I believe that we do. I believe we have some of the most outstanding education professionals in the world.

Thousands of people come to Ontario each and every year to visit our schools, our school boards, our ministry, to find out how we're teaching education in Ontario and to learn from us. A big part of that is the great quality of

our teachers and the investments that we make in our teachers and the collaborative way in which we deliver education here in Ontario.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's very anecdotal, but I hear from teachers all the time who say that morale is at an all-time low in the classroom right now. In the school, they don't feel there's that support from administration. And the administration would say, "We don't feel we're getting that support from the school board." And the school board would probably say, "We don't feel like we're getting the support from the ministry." Is that something that you've been hearing, as the Minister of Education: that there is an all-time low when it comes to morale?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I visit schools. I try to do that each and every week. I've visited many, many communities. I hear how hard everyone is working on behalf of students and that learning outcome for each individual student.

1000

I spoke to a kindergarten teacher just this week at the People for Education conference that was happening on Saturday at Rotman. She was so appreciative of the changes we've made to the kindergarten curriculum. What she said was that it was a recognition of the work that they were doing, and it was now recognized through the changes that we've made to strengthen that curriculum. We have 260,000 full-day-kindergarten children coming each school year. Having the early childhood educator as a team approach in that classroom—how important that is, and using inquiry-based learning and play-based learning and how that is boosting the skills and making sure that those young learners are ready and prepared for grade 1.

MPP Smith, I know that we oftentimes look for areas of disagreement, and I think that this is one area that Ontario leads pretty much the world in terms of our investments in education and always setting that bar of how we can improve, how we can make it better, how we make those investments in our educators.

Mr. Todd Smith: Yes, and I'm channelling the concerns that are being raised by educators in my riding and educators across the province. They're bringing these issues to me and they want me to ask you these questions at estimates committee. That's why we're here doing that.

If I could just go back to the PD days again, there are seven PD days—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Smith, you have just over two minutes.

Mr. Todd Smith: I thank you for that.

There are seven PD days. How many of them would be mandated from the ministry: "This is what you're doing on this particular PD day"? You mentioned that some days you are permitted to do your report cards, but what are the mandatory—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to look to the deputy to answer, but the one thing I want to also say is that we work in partnership with our education partners—the teachers' federation, for instance. We work collaborative-

ly on those professional development days for teachers. I just want the deputy to—

Mr. Todd Smith: In 90 seconds.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Let me just say it in two ways. One is that, generally speaking, in terms of being directive, we often will provide directive to one of those days, but on all of those days the teachers are responsible for the PD around what our priorities are. So, for example, if teachers are working on assessment in general, that would be one of our priorities as well. They wouldn't be working outside of the ministry priorities on any of those days. All of those days would be directed in some way from our priorities, but in terms of providing a very specific direction—for example, whether it be mental health or math or whatever the case might be—generally one of those days is very specific in terms of what needs to be addressed, and sometimes two.

Mr. Todd Smith: We won't have time to discuss this, but I'll just prepare you for it for the next time we come around: One of the issues that I'm hearing from particularly elementary schools is the fact that teachers are continuously being pulled out of the classroom for PD, that teachers are being pulled away from their classrooms and they are finding it very difficult. The students are finding it difficult, the supply teachers are finding it difficult and the administration is finding it difficult because teachers are currently being pulled out. Is that something that you've heard is an issue in our elementary schools?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: One thing I want to—because I see your interest in this area and the investments that we're making in the quality of our teaching, because that's what touches children—

Mr. Todd Smith: But it's happening during school hours, which is making the learning experience difficult, because a supply teacher—clearly nothing against the supply teacher, but a supply teacher clearly doesn't have the knowledge of the students that the full-time—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid, Mr. Smith, your time is up.

We now move to the third party. Ms. Gretzky.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Chair. Unlike my Conservative counterparts, I don't think our education system is all doom and gloom. I have two children. One has made it through the system and the other one is still currently in the system, and I see the incredible work that the front-line staff, the education workers, are doing. I think it's rather unfortunate that, although the minister has kind of touched on it a little bit at the end, in her opening remarks not once did she actually give credit to the people who are working with the students. She gave credit to herself and to the government for increased graduation rates and some of the initiatives that are going on in our schools, when really, they just hand that down to the education workers and the education workers have to juggle it all and actually make it work for our students.

So I want to start off by saying that I certainly appreciate the work that they do, what they've done for my children and so many others, and recognize that, as the member from the PC Party, MPP Smith, had pointed

out, morale is at an all-time low. If the minister is not aware of that, then she is completely out of touch with the people on the front lines of our education system.

She talked about meeting an FDK teacher who was happy and who was so excited about the curriculum—and many of them are excited about the curriculum—but, Minister, I had six kindergarten teachers in my office in tears.

I'm wondering if you are aware that there are kindergarten classrooms with 30-plus students in them. Many of them have special education needs that will not be identified in kindergarten; they'll get identified later on. Quite often, although the government likes to say that there is an ECE—so two adults in the classroom—quite frequently there are not two adults in a classroom of 30-plus kindergarten students. I'm wondering if you are aware of the fact that there are, in many kindergarten classrooms, 30-plus students. What is the ministry doing to actually cap the number of students and also support the teachers by making sure that the ECEs can spend the time in the classroom that they need to, that they have time to collaborate amongst the two professionals and share information about the students that they're both trying to serve? What are you doing to monitor the effectiveness of the kindergarten program and do the checks and balances and rejig it as necessary so that we're not finding classrooms of 30-plus kids?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Let me start by saying that I, as the minister, and our government, value the commitment and the hard work of all of our education workers, and that includes our teachers. It's something that I say all the time; I said that today in my comments. We know that in order to provide our students with one of the best education systems in the world, we must invest in our teachers. That's something that we remain committed to doing, we have done, and we will continue to do.

When we look at the full-day kindergarten and the over \$1 billion that we've invested in full-day kindergarten—over a million children have gone through that; 260,000 each September—this is an investment that we're very committed to making. Including the early childhood educator as part of that team is an important aspect of that, and it's one in which we collaborated with our education partners to realize.

I will speak to the issue of class sizes. I'd like the deputy to do that as well because I do think that it's important that we understand what that looks like.

What I will say is that we have made our commitments and investments to education a core part of our focus. I've talked about the graduation rates. I've talked about the achievements and the increases we've made to those investments, including in special education, where we're investing \$2.7 billion each and every year in special education. We know that more work needs to be done in that area so we're continuing to look at ways that we can innovate, that we can provide those additional supports to our teachers and our educators.

I want everyone to recognize that we see education as a key priority in this government, and the work that we do each and every day with teachers.

Whenever I visit a school, even if I'm there to see the grade 8s, I always drop in on the kindergarten class because it's really where we can see that commitment to learning from the teachers, from the ECE, and really from each and every child who is there. It's a great joy to see that.

I recognize that some teachers might want to see aspects changed. We're listening to that, but at the same time the broad-based investment that we're making right across this province is having an impact.

So, Deputy, if you could just talk specifically about the—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Minister, you mentioned that you're looking at changes to FDK, that you've been talking to teachers and you're looking at changes. When would we see those changes in FDK classrooms? When can teachers—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to ask the deputy to speak to the question.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —actually count on having a dedicated ECE in the classroom where they can stay in the classroom with the students? When are they going to see those class sizes shrink? When are they going to see the students that they know have special education needs actually begin to become identified and get the supports so that when they're officially identified, formally identified, later in their school career, they've already begun to get supports? When are we going to see those come to fruition, I guess, is what I'm asking.

1010

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: We'll give you the specific details to your questions, MPP Gretzky, through ADM Fuller. She has some details in terms of what the class sizes are currently.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Can you state your name please, and your position? Thank you.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Good morning. Shannon Fuller, assistant deputy minister, early years division.

Last school year, our overall school-board-wide averages remained stable at approximately 24.8 kindergarten students per class, which is below the permitted maximum average of 26 children.

In terms of your question with regard to the impact that full-day kindergarten is having for students, we have conducted an evaluation of full-day kindergarten during the first two years of implementation. Our objectives were really to look at identifying early indicators of effective practices related to the full impact of full-day kindergarten and also, as you've raised, to inform program delivery in moving forward as we move to continue implementation.

We looked at both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, from data collection to case studies to phone interviews, online surveys and classroom observation, as well as focus groups across the province over that two-year period of time. We used the Early Development Instrument to measure student development. It looks at five key areas: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognition, and communication skills and general knowledge.

The good news is that, overall, students that participated in full-day kindergarten are better prepared to enter into grade 1 and to be more successful in school. After one year of the traditional kindergarten program, approximately 16% of students were at risk in language and cognitive development, and after one year of full-day kindergarten, approximately 4% of junior kindergarten students were identified as vulnerable. After the two years in full-day kindergarten, students were showing reduced risks in communication skills and general knowledge, physical health and well-being, social competence and emotional maturity.

We have continued to look at research in evaluating the impact of full-day kindergarten and we do know, based on grade 1 and grade 2 report cards, students participating in full-day kindergarten are seeing results in language, reading, and math as well.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. I appreciate the answer, but the fact is there are kindergarten classrooms, many kindergarten classrooms, with 30-plus students in them and not an ECE specifically dedicated to that classroom. They're often off having to do something else.

My other question would then be, because you talked about the average classroom—the average is 24 or less—are you aware of the fact that there are senior kindergarten/grade 1 splits, and often boards may move to that model in order to be able to keep the kindergarten class sizes within your average and also, in that process, eliminate the requirement to have an ECE in the classroom with the kindergarten students? So when—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Ms. Gretzky, you have under two minutes left.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you. With an SK/grade 1 split, they're not required to have an ECE, so many boards are moving that way as a cost savings because they're crunched for money. So although your average may be 24, there are many classrooms that fall above that, and many boards, in order to meet that average, are actually moving kindergarten students into a grade 1 split.

Maybe someone from the ministry can speak to how you effectively deliver. We talk about how wonderful FDK is, and the curriculum for FDK, the program. Can you maybe get into the pedagogy and the delivery of the FDK program when you're looking at an SK/grade 1 split, because they are very, very different programs, very different pedagogy and very different ways of reaching the students? Can you explain to me how that works or how it's expected to work? In most cases, it's not really working because the SK students are not getting the programming they would if they were with their FDK counterparts.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Sure, and I would like the deputy and the ADM to answer that question.

I think that it's important that as we've implemented this very historic commitment of full-day kindergarten, we've also provided school boards with the necessary capital so that the kindergarten space can be accommodated for our youngest learners and—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Minister, there's a difference between having the space for the children and the crunch in funding where boards are—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid that ends the morning session. We're in recess now until this afternoon at 3:45—and we will be back in this room, committee room 1. See you then.

The committee recessed from 1015 to 1605.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Good afternoon. We are now going to resume consideration of vote 1001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. There is a total of six hours and 15 minutes remaining.

When the committee recessed this morning, the third party had 19 minutes left in their round of questions. Once the third party's rotation is complete, the minister will have 30 minutes for a reply. Are there any questions?

Ms. Gretzky, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Chair. I'm going to pick up where I left off this morning. I have a question around the SK/grade 1 splits. I'd like to know how many SK/grade 1 splits there are in the province and then if there's a breakdown board by board.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you. Deputy, I'll ask that you address that.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Thanks, Minister.

Interjection.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Hello. The number of—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Excuse me, could you introduce yourself? Thank you.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: I'm sorry. Shannon Fuller, assistant deputy minister, early years division.

In 2015-16, there were 455 classes with at least one full-day kindergarten student and at least one grade 1 student. This represents 4.3% of all of our 10,627 FDK classes across the province.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. Do you have a breakdown board by board for SK/grade 1 splits?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: I don't have that with me right now, but we can endeavour to provide you with that information.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to know how many FDK classrooms are over the average of, I believe it was, 24.8 students in a classroom. How many are over that number?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: So we have the numbers—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I recall the average being 24 students.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: It's 24.8.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. So then how many FDK classrooms are over the average of 24 students?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: We have information on the percentage of full-day kindergarten classes with 30 or more students. In 2015-16, there were 823 FDK classes in the province with over 30 students, and this represents 7.8% of all FDK classes. This is something that we are working on. We have seen a decrease in the number of classes, for example, of children with more than 31

students per class down to 2% of all of our FDK classes, which is a reduction from the year before.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. When you say that you're looking at the 823 FDK classrooms over 30—when you say that you're looking at that, are you then looking at allowing more SK/grade 1 splits, or is that actually implementing more FDK classrooms in order to be able to actually have a full FDK program rather than having kindergarten students in a grade 1 classroom?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: In terms of our approach to that, we do work very closely with our colleagues in the school boards and we do have regular conversations based on the data where we are seeing larger class sizes than we might anticipate. In terms of the approach, really, the structure of the classes is a local decision by principals. We do want to ensure that we are leaving flexibility in place for that in terms of what works for the school context as well as the teacher and the students.

1610

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. So then my question is to the minister, and I would like it specifically answered by the minister: There is very different pedagogy and curriculum between a FDK program and a grade 1 program, so I would like your personal thoughts on what it means to have children who should be in an FDK program actually in an SK/grade 1 split, and what that looks like as far as delivery of the curriculum, as well as the fact that when you have an SK/grade 1 split, you no longer are required to have an ECE in that classroom. It is actually going against what FDK was meant to be, which was to have a teacher and a full-time ECE in the classroom.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I think Assistant Deputy Minister Fuller has identified the fact that we certainly see the need that our school boards and our school principals are able to design the best classroom composition that fulfills the needs of their school and the students who attend. I expect that they will be making decisions that are in the best interests of those students in their learning.

As a ministry and a government, we have certainly provided a historic commitment to children in this province and their families with the introduction of full-day kindergarten. A million children have gone through full-day kindergarten—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I understand the benefit of developing FDK—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: —and 260,000 children are benefiting from that—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —but my question was specifically: How do you feel about having split classes?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): One at a time, please.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: —are benefiting from that program each and every year, and the program is working. I think we discussed that earlier today, that children are better prepared for grade 1.

As it relates to the specific design of those classrooms and the children in those classrooms, that is the role of the school principal and the school boards. I know that

they are making the best decisions in the interests of the well-being of the children.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay, but I asked you specifically what you think of the fact that, because of constraints on funding, school boards are being basically forced to make the decision to take students out of the FDK program and put them into an SK/1 split where there is different pedagogy and a different curriculum. In FDK you have play-based learning; in grade 1, that is not the case.

When you're looking at school boards making decisions specifically around the funding that flows from the ministry and creating SK/grade 1 splits because, due to funding, they need to eliminate ECEs and decrease funding in order to provide programming—I was asking for your opinion on if this is actually what was meant for an FDK program, when you have students who are SK and not actually in an FDK program, and running two different curriculums. Having been a school board trustee, I respect the fact that they have to make the decisions, but they make the decisions based on the funding that comes from the ministry, so the decisions are being made solely on the fact that they do not have enough funding to add extra classrooms. We're seeing increased numbers in FDK—30-plus children—and in some cases, boards are then creating SK/grade 1 splits.

What I'm asking is: Do you think that this was actually what the intention was of FDK, and is this really what should be happening with our SK students? Should they be getting split up and put in with a grade 1 classroom?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Well, let me tell you the intention of full-day kindergarten—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: As a school board trustee, I fully understand the intention of full-day kindergarten. What I'm saying is, when you're taking students who are supposed to be in an FDK classroom and you're putting them in with students in grade 1, where you're talking about different pedagogy and you're talking about a different curriculum, you are now no longer really fulfilling the intentions of an FDK classroom. That is based solely on the funding that comes from the ministry, that boards are doing that.

What I'm asking is not the intentions of FDK—I'm fully aware of what they are—I'm asking if you feel that the intentions of FDK are being fulfilled when you are taking SK students and putting them with grade 1 students, where it's a totally different delivery of curriculum—and not having an ECE, which was also the intention of FDK.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I believe that the intentions of FDK are being met, that 260,000 kindergarten students are entering our system each year. They are benefiting from this incredible and historic investment in education in Ontario.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: So you feel that those SK students who are going into a grade 1 split are being serviced and receiving the same education, getting the same supports—and this is no slight on the teachers that

are teaching these SK/grade 1 splits, because they do the best that they can with what they're given. But you think that those SK students that are being taken out of FDK classrooms, where there is a teacher, and at times—not always—an ECE, because that was the intention but it doesn't happen—so those students that are being taken out of a FDK classroom and put in a grade 1 split are getting the exact same educational opportunities and supports as students in a FDK classroom?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: As it relates to full-day kindergarten, this is a historic investment that we've made—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I understand that, but I'm asking if the students in an FDK classroom are getting the same education and the same supports and the same opportunities as the students that are in a split SK/grade 1. That's what I'm asking.

I fully understand the intention of FDK. I fully understand what it does for students. I'm asking if the students that are meant to be in those classrooms and are not in those classrooms—they're in a different learning environment—if they are getting the same education, the same supports and the same opportunities as their counterparts that are in an FDK classroom.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Our investments in our earliest learners are ensuring that all of our early learners are receiving the best education in Ontario. That's why we're making this investment. This is a program that we introduced that we have continued to fund and to support. As the assistant deputy minister said when we answered your question this morning, children are being better prepared for grade 1 having gone through the pedagogy and the play-based learning, the inquiry-based learning—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The play-based learning which they're not necessarily getting in a split class.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: —benefiting from the teacher in the classroom along with the early childhood educator in the classroom. The investments that we've made on the capital side to build out the spaces for our full-day kindergarten—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: So the fact that you're not actually addressing the question speaks volumes about how you feel. You feel those students are being serviced the same.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Will you let her answer?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mrs. Gretzky, one at a time, please.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my belief—and I see that every time I go into our full-day kindergarten classrooms, seeing our classroom teachers and our ECEs working together as a team with those students—that they are getting the best possible learning and the best possible education. I'm really thrilled to see your recognition that this program is working and it's a fantastic investment in education in Ontario. We have committed to this, we've committed to this in our budget—we're spending over \$1 billion on full-day kindergarten because we believe in our early learners and making those additional investments in their learning. We're seeing the results of that.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. So it appears as though you do think that those that are in SK/1 split are getting

the exact same opportunities and supports as those that are in full-day kindergarten.

My next question, then, is: When it comes to ECEs, those that actually have an opportunity to spend a significant amount of time in an FDK classroom—because they aren't getting a chance to spend full time in a classroom like they're supposed to—is there a time allotted for professional collaboration? Is there time that's actually mandated where ECEs and the teachers in these kindergarten classrooms have an opportunity to have professional collaboration, and if so, is this actually being enforced at the school board level?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: So let's talk about what is happening in full-day kindergarten and the—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Well, I would like you to answer my question. I know what's going on in the classroom, but I would like you to answer my question.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I appreciate your question. We are committed to our investments in full-day kindergarten and fully committed to this policy. We are investing in this program.

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Deputy, I'm going to ask you to talk about our play-based learning and what's happening in our full-day kindergarten. We're delighted to talk about this.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Well, I'm asking specifically about time allotted and mandated for professional collaboration between ECEs and classroom teachers, and, if there is such a thing, is that actually being monitored in school—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to address your question through to the deputy.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Shannon Fuller, early years division.

Yes, absolutely, there is time allotted for professional development between the learning teams and the FDK class.

I think very important for us to also note is that one of the key goals in achieving excellence and the vision for education going forward really is to extend the principles of play-based learning established in full-day kindergarten and child care up throughout the education system. So we're actually looking to have opportunities through our cross-ministry pedagogical leadership, kindergarten through to grade 3 team offering professional learning sessions in all regions across the province to school board teams and other partners over the past few years, building on professional learning that has been targeted to kindergarten to grade 3 educators since 2010.

I think that also speaks to your question around the experiences that children may be getting in combined kindergarten and grade 1 classes, in terms of a lot of those pedagogical approaches looking to apply well beyond kindergarten and really providing some important and unique learning and developmental opportunities for the children who are in those combined grades.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you. I appreciate that there are professional learning opportunities. What I'm asking is, is there time each day, each week, each month, what-

ever it may be, not for professional learning, but for there actually to be professional collaboration between an ECE and a kindergarten teacher?

So, within the classroom, the ECE who should be in that classroom and the teacher who's in that classroom: Are they allotted specific time, and is that mandated, that they are allowed so much time every day or every week to actually sit down and discuss the students in the classroom, the needs, the achievements they've had and the struggles of some of the students? Is there an opportunity for an ECE and a teacher to sit down and discuss those things? Is it mandated time? If so, what is it and is that being enforced through the school boards?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to reiterate that we are investing in Ontario's education system. We provide that space for learning to occur, but we also understand the role of the principal and the classroom teacher, together with the ECE and, frankly, all the supports that are within our school system. I just want to say that the classroom planning is something that the teacher and the ECE do. They are aware of their students. They have a curriculum that is provided. But in terms of the delivery of that curriculum, that is the role of the classroom teacher, the ECE and, frankly, the school community.

Deputy, I'd like you to talk more specifically about that.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: MPP Gretzky, specific to your question, the time is not mandated for planning between the ECE and the teacher. However, they do co-plan together in most schools, in most cases, and part of that is based on their planning time as well. In some schools where there is more than one kindergarten class, principals, when they set schedules, create those schedules so that those four individuals, the ECEs of two different kindergarten classes and the teachers of two different kindergarten classes, can in fact co-plan together so that they have some consistency across the school as well.

So it's not mandated—and it was intended so that they could use their professional judgment in how they manage that time, essentially, together. There are places where it could be different, for sure, but we do see some best practices around boards where that in fact happens.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have just under two minutes left.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: So, then, my next question is around funding for ECEs. That money that flows from the ministry to the school boards for ECEs, is that enveloped? Is that given to the boards specifically for use on ECEs, or is that open-ended money where the board can actually use it for other things? When the money is given, is it given and only able to be used for the funding of having ECEs?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to ask the deputy to talk about the increasing funding that we're making in our education system.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Thanks, Minister. Executive director Josh Paul will address that.

Mr. Josh Paul: Yes, thank you for the question. Funding for staff in the FDK panel is treated the same as

all the other panels in the Pupil Foundation Grant and the Grants for Student Needs and is not specifically sweated, although there is funding generated specifically for ECEs—you can see it in the regulation and in the technical documents. Once you hit 26 students, you generate the funding for a full ECE.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay, it's not sweated, so therefore boards have the opportunity to actually take the money that was meant for ECEs in FDK classrooms and use that for other things, such as a shortfall in funding for special education or something other than ECEs. It's not specific to an ECE; the board can ultimately do what they need to or want to with the money.

Mr. Josh Paul: Absolutely, the board does have flexibility, but it's worth noting that the boards are regulated to have a class size average of 26. In that class, they would have to have an ECE and they'd have to have a teacher. That's where the funding comes in. So there's not a lot of flexibility there for boards to move around because of the need to have that staff in those classes.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I also want to say that—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm sorry. We're out of time now, Ms. Gretzky.

We now move back to the minister, so you can continue on. You have 30 minutes to respond.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: We'll pass it on to our Associate Minister of Education, Indira Naidoo-Harris.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the 2016-17 estimates with you for the Ministry of Education. It's an honour for me to be here with you today with the Minister of Education, Minister Hunter.

I also want to start out by of course thanking our senior ministry officials who are here with us today for all their hard work and preparation for this discussion. A special thank you to the deputy minister, Bruce Rodrigues, and the associate deputy minister, Shannon Fuller.

I want you to know that I am very proud of our government's record on education. I am a parent and I've had two children go through the education system in this province. I really do feel that the proof is in our children. I'm lucky and fortunate to say that my children have been excelling, and I know we are all here in this room today for our children and we want to ensure that they are getting the best start in life.

Our government has made great progress in helping all students succeed and reach their full potential. Together with many of our stakeholders, we have transformed Ontario's education system into one of the best in the world. Let me tell you, that is quite an accomplishment. I have lived in several parts of the world over the years, and this is something I am particularly proud of.

For those of you who don't know my family history at all, I would like to point out that I come from a family of educators. I really do understand the intricacies and details of education in other countries and the important role it plays in ensuring that our children get the best start in life and putting them on a path to lifelong success.

Both of my parents were educators. My father was actually a lecturer at a teacher training college in southern Africa and then wound up becoming a principal of schools in Canada and finally superintendent of schools. My mother taught for more than 40 years and was named one of Alberta's 100 most memorable teachers in the history of the ATA.

I tell you this because I want you to know that they had varied experiences. As a child growing up in a household of educators, with aunts and uncles who were educators and so on, you get a sense for how important it is that we really do the right thing for our children, because it really does make a huge difference in their lives. An investment in education is an investment in all of us. It lays the foundation for future generations and puts our young people on a path to success. It's a gift we give our children that no one can ever take away from them.

We know that the short- and long-term effects of creating a strong education system are significant. It helps to reduce poverty, eliminate the gender wage gap, support new immigrants and put our young people on a path to lifelong success. It also supports our older communities in our country. All of this contributes to the overall health and strength of Ontario's economy.

This is why we're working to create a system that is seamless and integrated, starting right from the child's earliest years. I want you to remember that word, "seamless," because I think it's particularly important.

Our government's investments in publicly funded education have delivered tremendous results. For much of the last 13 years, our accomplishments were guided by three core priorities: increased student achievement; closing the gaps in performance for struggling students; and increasing confidence in publicly funded education. With these priorities at the core of our work, we're getting great results—results that are demonstrated by real data.

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In 2003, only 54% of children in grades 3 and 6 were achieving at the provincial standard—only 54%. In 2004, only 68% of our students were graduating. Today, those numbers have increased substantially. Today, those numbers stand at 71% and 85.5% respectively. This is a significant increase, and one that we should all be proud of. I can tell you that in my own riding of Halton, those numbers are actually increased and are greater.

Our students are graduating. They're graduating in record numbers. They're graduating in historic numbers with the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed in the 21st century and compete in the global economy.

In fact, Ontario's graduation rate increased again—as I mentioned—to 85.5% in 2015, which is 17.5% higher than the 2004 rate of 68%. This is an historic achievement for our province and for our children. Our children are graduating in higher numbers than ever before, and that's something that I think we should all be celebrating.

An additional 190,000 students have graduated who would not have done so had the rate remained at the 2004

level. These are people who are in a better position to succeed today because they have graduated. They're on their way.

I want you to take a moment and think back to what it used to be like when not all of our kids graduated from school, when the rates were much lower than this, when they weren't at 85.5%. That was a different time. Our goal at that point was just to ensure that our children were finishing school and graduating.

They are better qualified to take that next step today to getting a post-secondary education or entering the Ontario workforce.

Internationally, Ontario has achieved great success to become a leading jurisdiction in the English-speaking world. In March 2012, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, came out with a report called *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*. They explained that Ontario's emphasis on education has achieved real, positive results in increased literacy, numeracy comprehension, improving graduation rates and reducing the number of low-performing schools. This is an international body, an outside body that judged our system and gave it high marks. This builds on previous OECD reports that have ranked Ontario students among the best in the world.

Perhaps most meaningfully, Ontario has been recognized as one of the few jurisdictions in the world where students are meeting or exceeding international standards, regardless of socio-economic background or first language. This comes from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment.

This is something that I think we should all truly be proud of, because it puts us on a track for fairness when it comes to education. I came from a system originally that wasn't fair to everyone, so I really do understand the impact of ensuring that our education system guarantees that our children will be successful, regardless of their background.

As well, an international study by McKinsey and Co. ranks Ontario's education system as one of the best in the world.

These are accomplishments that we can all be proud of. Regardless of our party backgrounds or our values, this is something that we should be talking about and speaking about to our children, and encouraging them that they are on a track to a successful life.

One of the big reasons for this success is because our government, since 2003, has focused on innovation along with continuous improvement and transformation. We are now giving students the best possible start with full-day kindergarten, the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation.

I remember when this idea was first being talked about. It was something that many people didn't really understand how it was going to be implemented and what the impact would be. Well, here we are, several years later, and the impact that it is having on our children is profound; something we have accomplished in record time.

We've also focused on better ways of teaching our students the basics of literacy and numeracy, and we've worked to develop their higher-order skills. As a result, creativity and critical-thinking skills are embedded in all aspects of our education system. This is a whole new way of engaging Ontario's young learners in the classroom, and it's getting results.

Ontario has been a trailblazer in offering students opportunities to gain real-life, hands-on experience in the workplace. Our co-op program is one of the best programs out there. The ground breaking Specialist High Skills Majors program lets students focus on a career path that matches their interests and skills while they work towards their diploma. Careers in things like health care, computer engineering, aerospace—I know the minister mentioned a list of them herself when she was speaking.

In my riding of Halton, Notre Dame Secondary School has a program on aquaponics. It's truly remarkable and it's something to see in action. These kids are actually using aquaponics to not only build a greenhouse around, but also fish—they're raising fish. It's about sustainable food and creating a sustainable food system. These kids are energized, absolutely energized, by this program. Let me tell you, they were teaching me things I had no clue about when I toured that school, and I walked away feeling like our younger generation and our future were in good hands. It's truly amazing and inspiring work and it gives students a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the world.

As well, dual credits keep students engaged by allowing them to participate in apprenticeship programs and training and college courses.

We've also made progress in the following areas:

- higher-quality teaching and learning for kindergarten to grade 12;
- a robust leadership strategy;
- healthy, safe, accepting and inclusive schools—I think that's a particularly important piece for us to think about these days;
- hands-on and engaging secondary programming;
- a revised and expanded curriculum;
- First Nation, Métis and Inuit educational supports;
- improved governance;
- the politique d'aménagement linguistique;
- parent engagement; and
- a prominent role for the student voice.

Now, I'm painting a very solidly bright picture, but while we are proud of what we have accomplished, the true measure of a society is not one that rests on its laurels, but one that actually understands that there is more work to do and that we should stay ahead of it all. We're working hard to improve the education experience for Ontario students because we do know and recognize there is more work to do. I understand and welcome your comments because that's what we're all here to do today: ensure that we are doing the best we can.

Education plans must evolve and change with the needs of a society. They cannot be intransigent and they

cannot sit solidly without being able to be flexible, because our children are flexible and we live in a changing world. If we're going to teach them to adapt and be able to really thrive, we have to give them those skills.

One of the most significant challenges and opportunities before us is how to best prepare our students for a rapidly changing, technology-driven, globalized world. What is abundantly clear is that in order to out-compete the rest of the world tomorrow, we need to out-educate them today. And that's what we're doing. Our education system is one of the best in the world. With its overall budget of \$25 billion a year, the Ministry of Education provides one of the most important public services to Ontarians. Our goal is to take our publicly funded education system and help our students achieve even greater success. Because we are Ontario and we lead the way.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education released a vision paper—Energizing Ontario Education—that served as both an inspiration and road map for the years ahead. Five years later, we know we need to reflect on that progress and consider where we want to go next.

In April 2014, our government launched *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*. We did so in consultation with hundreds of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, including education, business, research, innovation and not-for-profit, along with indigenous communities and, of course, parents and our students. We tried to bring everyone to the table and give them all a voice. Our path has been marked by the inclusion and consideration of our four systems: public, Catholic, English and French.

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Since then, our renewed vision for education has formed the basis for moving Ontario's education system forward. Together, we are working toward what Ontarians view as essential outcomes for children and students to help ensure that our young people have the talent and skills they need to lead in a global, competitive economy.

In partnership with our many stakeholders in education, we are transforming our system to deliver responsive, high-quality and accessible services and programs that are integrated from early learning and child care through to adult education.

As I mentioned earlier, for most of the last 13 years, we have focused on three core goals, but as part of our renewed vision, we have added a fourth. Our four key goals are excellence, equity, well-being and public confidence. The renewed vision lays the framework for us to move forward. It provides us with a focus for all of us to help make a great education system even better.

Of course, there is going to be a continued focus on the basics of reading, writing and a renewed focus on mathematics, but I also want to emphasize that we are broadening our view of student achievement to include an even greater emphasis on higher-order skills. These include critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and entrepreneurship. All of these are necessary for developing global citizens in a civil society.

These are the skills and tools that our children will need to thrive.

In addition to measuring how well our students meet academic goals, it's important to know whether our system is producing healthy and well-rounded adults. It's not just enough to get good grades, as we all know; we need to make sure we are also supporting the emotional, social and physical development of our students.

Promoting and supporting well-being is of fundamental importance to our students and their futures. We are committed to working with our partners to find out how we can support the well-being of our students—but we are ensuring that we're promoting well-being in our school communities. It's part of our renewed vision.

We're also embracing the role of technology and have improved our governance structures. Our renewed vision for education is providing us with a unique opportunity to improve an already great education system.

I'd now like to provide you with a bit of a recap of some of our recent achievements. Let's start with 2014-15. That school year marked the complete rollout of full-day kindergarten, making the program available to all of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds. At the end of the day, our program will have enrolled more than one million students and saved families an estimated \$1 billion in child care costs. Think about that: a million Ontario students.

In addition, the \$150-million Technology and Learning Fund began its rollout in 2014-15 to support technology, pedagogy and 21st-century competencies for classrooms of the future.

Together, we have implemented *Creating Pathways to Success*, a career/life planning policy, including an online pathway planning tool for grades 7 to 12.

We are also continuing to collaborate with our external partners and with our partner ministries on Ontario's Special Needs Strategy. This involves working to increase the integration of education services and services delivered by other ministries and community partners for children and youth with special needs—very important work.

We released *Foundations for a Healthy School* to support building learning environments that promote child and student well-being.

We launched a current, relevant and age-appropriate health and physical education curriculum that started being taught in Ontario classrooms in September 2015.

And through our *Parents Reaching Out Grants*, we invested \$31 million to support parent engagement to ensure that those parents are there, even when their kids are getting older, and are part of their learning experience. Because we know our kids perform better in education when their parents and their families are involved.

We doubled overall funding for school renewal and targeted boards with older facilities.

We launched a renewed math strategy, as the minister told you about earlier.

And we published and launched Ontario's *Strategy for K-12 International Education*, which outlines a framework.

The Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, was proclaimed on August 31, 2015. This was the first new child care legislation in Ontario in almost 70 years. It was an idea whose time had come. The new legislation and regulations lay the foundation for our exciting new, historic initiative in early years and child care. We are transforming the way we deliver child care and early years learning in our province. The changes will support a more responsive, high-quality and accessible child care and early years system that is better able to serve Ontario's children and families. This historic transformation is visionary and puts our children on a path to lifelong learning.

I want you to take a moment and just dream with me; dream about the possibility of putting our kids on a path to early learning not just in full-day kindergarten, not just in grade 1 and not just in child care centres. We know that our children are sponges from the moment that they are born. Imagine a society and a civil system that takes into account that those zero-to-four years are key—most parents know that anyway—when it comes to learning.

This is also the next step in seamless learning, one that starts from infancy, moves to child care, then full-day kindergarten, elementary school, high school and post-secondary school. We'll put our kids on a path to success from their earliest years. By focusing our attention on early years learning, we are shining a light on a new and exciting area of education and giving our young kids a head start in life.

Following this ground breaking initiative in early learning and child care, we announced the creation of approximately 4,000 new, licensed child care spaces. To support these spaces, we dedicated \$120 million in new funding to building safe, high-quality licensed child care spaces in schools across the province where there is significant demand. But we didn't stop there. We have further committed to help create 100,000 new licensed child care spaces within the next five years, a historic investment.

Think about it: The number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario has now grown to nearly 390,000, doubling since 2003. We're not done. We're now going to create an additional 100,000 spaces, so that more working families can find affordable, quality, flexible care.

Another big part of our plan to modernize child care is the transforming of our family support programs into an integrated group of Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres. These programs will create valuable support for families. We know that they will have a significant positive impact on children and their parents and caregivers. It will enhance program quality, consistency and accessibility.

In response to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the government plans to invest more than \$250 million over the next three years in programs and actions focused on reconciliation. This will include investments to increase the number of culturally relevant child care spaces off-reserve and expand access to child and family programs for indigenous children and families both on- and off-reserve.

I was recently on a trip up north and I heard about the needs and the challenges that families are facing, whether they live in rural areas, northern areas, urban areas or on- or off-reserve. I want to tell you that the comments that I heard were very, very remarkable and were really very thoughtful. We're going to take some of those ideas and thoughts and put them into action.

This is a visionary, transformative plan for our children. The strategy will help school boards expand and enrich the learning environment for all students and educators.

In 2015, the five-year graduation rate, again, surpassed 85%, and all of these success stories and many other accomplishments are the result of strong partnerships—all of us here at this table, all of us working together. As a result of that collaboration between all of us—ministry, school boards, professional associations, community partners and parents—we're going to work together to deliver the best, high-quality education system we can in our province.

As you may know, we have almost reached the targets that we set for student achievement and have surpassed our goal for the graduation rate. This is important, because as far as we have come toward realizing these goals, we will always have—what we are aiming for is excellence. Excellence can only be measured by how well we adapt and respond to the changes happening in the world around us. From the implications of new technology, a globalized economy, demographic changes and social media, the ground beneath us is moving, and we have to move with it or we're going to be left behind. I don't think that any of us in this room are going to sit around and watch that happen to Ontarians or to our kids.

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The world continues to change; we need to keep up with it. We are moving ahead with our plans to modernize the education system, as outlined in our renewed vision. We will be sure to make changes that have the most positive impact, while ensuring that it remains effective and sustainable.

This is an exciting time for Ontario education. We have so much to be proud of, and yet so much to aspire to in the coming years. We have learned a lot from the journey so far. Now it's time to build on our experience as we continue to move forward on the next phase of Ontario's education strategy.

Can I ask you, Chair: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have just over five minutes.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Five minutes? Okay.

Together with our sector partners, we are working to get the most out of our government's investments in education to truly become an education system of the 21st century.

We've come a long way in the last 13 years. As I already mentioned, Ontario's publicly funded education system is one of the best in the world, and it's also the choice for 94% of Ontario's students and families.

I'd like to go back, if you will, to a couple of the things that we have been able to accomplish over the

years. This year, for example, more than 2,300 school council and regional projects, through the Parents Reaching Out Grants, have been funded to help remove barriers to parent engagement. For those of us who have sat on parent councils, you understand the importance of initiatives like this that get parents involved in their kids' education and allow them to have a voice, and allow them to be active in their schools.

We also doubled overall funding for school renewal and targeted boards with older facilities. I mentioned this earlier. This will help to ensure positive and safe learning environments for students.

We launched a renewed math strategy, as I mentioned. The goal is to help students improve and build their math skills by giving teachers and students more tools and resources. I have a 17-year-old who's in school right now, studying math. It's important to make sure that they do get that best start in life and that they do get those supports out there because the world is changing. The demands when it comes to math today are not the same demands when it comes to math when I graduated—or many of us in this room. It is a more demanding field. We have to keep up and we have to ensure that our children are able to keep up.

As I mentioned also, we're transforming education, trying to ensure child care, including investments to increase the number of culturally relevant spaces in our First Nations. We've come a long way.

Our government is immensely proud of everything we have accomplished in education, but I'm even prouder to say that I believe the best is yet to come. I am excited to move forward and see what's over the horizon because that is where the future is, and Ontario has a very bright future ahead of us. I know that when it comes to child care in this province, I am doing my very best to ensure that what we do today will have a long-lasting impact on a child's future.

We are modernizing and transforming child care in Ontario for healthy child development in a safe and supportive child care environment which provides the best start for children today and a stronger future tomorrow.

Learning begins from zero to four years old, goes on to full-day child care and then full-day kindergarten, then grade 1, then elementary school and then high school and, finally, university. We're building high-quality, seamless, integrated education and really doing it in a very modernizing and forward-thinking way. Ultimately, in the end, our children will be on the receiving end and will be the ones that will have a stronger future. And when they succeed, we all succeed.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to thank Minister Naidoo-Harris for really talking about how our investments are making a difference in our earliest learners. Education is one of the most valuable and valued public services.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have just under two minutes, Minister.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: And we see that. We see that in the commitments that we're making to funding for education.

Our government strongly believes that every student deserves a safe, modern and healthy learning environment. You can see that in the investments that we're making in better buildings, which are leading to better student achievement and well-being. We're committed to ensuring that schools receive that support. That's why we are ensuring that there is strong, stable funding sustaining our education system. If you look at the increases that we've made on a per student basis, it's actually \$4,500 on a per student basis since 2003-04. You can really see that our students are receiving the necessary investments that they are needing so that Ontario's education system remains the best system, the strongest system, for all of our students.

I want to say that, working together with our education partners, right from the early years through to elementary into high school and beyond—our investments in post-secondary education and ensuring that our students have those pathways, whether they choose to go to college, apprenticeship training, university—that they're prepared, of course, to meet the world which they will confront.

Ontario's public education system is strong. Our two million-plus students are receiving the necessary supports and the investments in their education system and—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Sorry, Minister; you are over time now.

We are going to move on to the official opposition. Mr. Smith.

Mr. Todd Smith: Why, thank you very much, Chair. Good afternoon to the ministers and the staff, as well, who are joining us. I hope the ministers had a lively caucus meeting this afternoon and are feeling chipper for the rest of the day here as the sun sets.

One of the issues that Minister Hunter and Associate Minister Naidoo-Harris touched on during their remarks, both this morning and again here this afternoon, from Indira Naidoo-Harris, is the graduation rate. Minister Hunter was talking about it this morning, saying that 17% more students are graduating now than were, say, in 2004: 86% of students are graduating. That's fine, but what we're hearing is that students are being pushed through the school system. I'm sure you've heard the same thing—that they're graduating. Actually, even this morning, when I asked the minister about that, if she thought that students were ill-prepared to move on to post-secondary, she didn't really answer the question.

If students are being pushed through the system to graduate, to increase the statistics that both of you have been talking about here—and I must say, I would give you both As for your talking points if I were a teacher; you're both doing an excellent job there—but how are students actually not graduating? Why are 14% of students not graduating in Ontario? I would love to hear the minister's response to that.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: We're certainly very proud of the graduation rates. As I said, if they had stayed at the rates that they were at in 2003-04—that's at 68%. We've exceeded the goal that we had set for ourselves. The

graduation rate is now 85.5%. We're very, very proud of that. At the same time, as I said this morning, we're not resting on our laurels. We are continuing to invest in student achievement. I'm going to ask the deputy to talk about all of the work that we are doing in student achievement—

Mr. Todd Smith: Before you do that, I do have another question.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm answering your question. This is a critical question in terms of the achievement rates of all of our students. It is very important that we focus on all students, so that all students can succeed. It's important that we recognize that our investments that we're making in education—and I want to make sure that we recognize that, despite declining enrolments in our schools, the per pupil funding has increased more than \$4,500, to \$11,709: an increase of 63% since 2003-04.

Mr. Todd Smith: No, I know all the talking points. I know all the numbers; we've heard them all already.

1700

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: These investments are being made in the classroom learning of our students so that they are receiving the supports that they need so that they're achieving that success—

Mr. Todd Smith: Minister Hunter, they're not, though. When you talk to those who are working as post-secondary educators, they are telling us that the students who are graduating from high school aren't as prepared for post-secondary education as they were 15 years ago. More of them are graduating because they're being pushed through the system.

My question is, how are 14% of them not graduating from high school? What are those individuals doing? The teachers that we speak with are telling us that they're being forced by administration and school boards to pass students that are ill-equipped to move into the workforce or go on to post-secondary education. They're being forced by the ministry to pass the students. Are they being forced by the ministry or are they being forced by the school boards to pass students?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to say—and I will pass it on to the deputy to talk specifically about the achievement gap, because a goal that we have is ensuring that all students succeed. If you look at some of the investments that we're making, we talk about our literacy achievements, for instance, and the investments that we've made there. Some 71% of elementary students are meeting or exceeding the provincial standards in reading, writing and math. This is up by 17% since 2003.

We had a significant debate around our early learners today, and our investments that we're making in full-day kindergarten. We're absolutely committed to ensuring that the learning pedagogy is working for our earliest learners.

Our investments and our record on education are very strong, and it's to the benefit of students.

Deputy, I want you to talk about the 14.5% and the things that we're doing to close that gap.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Thanks, Minister. Directly to your question, MPP Smith, a couple of things—one is this notion of being pushed through. I think that in order for a student to graduate, a student needs to meet the grad requirements. I think to sort of characterize it as being pushed through diminishes both the student's achievement as well as what the teacher has done in order to support the student in getting there.

A student, in order to graduate, must meet the requirements, and these students that graduate have, indeed, met the requirements. So that 85.5% of students are the ones that have met the requirements that have been set out by the ministry and are eligible to graduate and then choose whatever it is that they choose to do after that, whatever pathway it is.

Whatever the criticism happens to be of post-secondary institutions as to whether indeed students are prepared or not is a different discussion from the grad discussion.

Mr. Todd Smith: I think that the biggest difference, and what we're hearing, is that students in their high school careers have no concept of what a deadline is because of Student Success. They don't have to meet the deadlines that are imposed by the teachers. The teachers have no support from the administration or the school boards. Can you see where that's a problem when you move on to post-secondary education?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I will turn it back to the deputy, but I do want to talk about some of the programs that we have to engage our secondary school learners, such as our Specialist High Skills Major program, where they are able to select a cohort of study that they're interested in, that is leading to a particular path and career. We talked about programs like aviation—a really highly skilled and sought-after curriculum.

There is the Dual Credit Program that is allowing a student, while they are in high school, to earn credits in one of our colleges, once again linking what they're learning to that career path which they choose.

It's very important that we look at the fact that we're preparing students to be citizens and that the whole focus of education is to prepare them for that particular path.

Mr. Todd Smith: I would argue that the focus is on increasing the statistics and not ensuring that the students are prepared to move on to post-secondary education. It's not just me saying this. There are third parties out there; there are post-secondary institutions out there.

You just blew your horn about the stats that you've achieved when it comes to the reading and writing portion of the curriculum. Clearly, the math scores are another matter, and I know my colleague wants to ask more about the renewed mathematics strategy that the province is implementing. But even post-secondary institutions, like Seneca College, out there are saying that 47% of students in college have to take remedial English classes because they're not prepared when they hit post-secondary education. So there's that kind of third-party support for what I'm saying here today. Clearly, students aren't as prepared as perhaps they used to be. They're

being graduated and pushed through the system. I don't mean that to be demeaning. It's just what we're hearing from our post-secondary institutions. It's also backed up by what we're hearing from those in our high schools: that teachers have no authority, and they don't have the support from the administrations, to fail a student if they don't meet the deadlines. They have this other avenue that they can take to achieve their credits well after the deadlines—in some cases, three or four months later. That's an issue for me.

I'll pass it over to Mr. Coe here. I know he wants to talk about the math—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Are you going to give me a chance to address the question?

Mr. Todd Smith: Sure. Please address that. Neither of you looked like you wanted to, so—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: The comment around students as statistics is really baseless. We talked about Ontario's education system being globally recognized as a system of education, and that's based on the quality of our teachers and our education workers. It's also based on the quality of our students. We have outstanding students here in Ontario.

I went to a student awards night in one of the schools in my riding last week. One of the teachers said to me, "Our students who graduated last year received \$750,000 in national and international scholarships." That is the quality of the students in which—

Mr. Todd Smith: And that's great. There is that upper tier of students who is doing extremely well, but there are many who are being pushed through the system.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's an example of—

Mr. Todd Smith: This is our time for questions, so I'd like to have—

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Well, it's also a time to respond once you do ask the questions.

Mr. Todd Smith: No, it's really our time now for us, as opposition MPPs, to pose our questions.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Right, to pose a question and then to listen to the response.

Mr. Todd Smith: My colleague from Whitby–Oshawa would like to ask another question, because we only have 20 minutes. Thank you, Minister.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. To the minister and the associate minister and deputy minister: Welcome. To the staff behind you: Thank you very much for coming back this afternoon.

I'm going to take you back to my line of questioning this morning. It was on the mathematics strategy. In 2014—I'll take you back to 2014—the government announced \$4 million annually for additional qualification courses for teachers in mathematics, totalling \$12 million.

Minister, can you provide specifics about who took these AQ courses, and what, if any, the resulting impact was on student success?

Chair, I don't seem to have the attention of the minister or her deputy minister.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Just continue your question, please.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The bells are a quorum call only, so disregard them.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you. To the resulting impact on student success, I'd also like to know, Minister, if that was measured, and if it was measured, are there reports available that you can share with this committee? Minister, please?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Deputy, can you speak to that?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Minister, your opinion, please.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Go ahead, deputy.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: MPP, speaking to the \$4 million in particular around the money that was allocated for PD and for teachers to take AQ courses, we do have the number of teachers who were enlisted in those courses. I don't know if the ADM has that right at her fingertips, but we do have that information.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I can help you with that, Deputy. The government did announce, on April 4, 2016, that 6,000 teachers had taken advantage of this program.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Okay.

Mr. Lorne Coe: What I would like to know is, out of those 6,000 teachers who took advantage of the program, in terms of the success of that on students, how did you measure that?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to ask the deputy to talk about this—

Mr. Lorne Coe: What was the resulting impact on student success?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I do want to say that our investments in professional development for our teachers are directly tied to the curriculum and student achievement. We value the investments that we're making in our teachers, because that's leading to student outcomes and student achievement. So it's very important, the work that we're doing.

Deputy, I want you to address this.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I agree with the aspect of importance, but did you measure the impact of the number of teachers who took it, relative to the students' success?

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Not in any quantifiable way, in terms of a number, in terms of that impact. But what we do know is that from an anecdotal perspective in terms of the impact, we know that teachers are far more comfortable in teaching mathematics at that level, both within the content and the pedagogy. So when we go into schools and we have conversations with teachers about their level of comfort—have they grown because they've taken that AG course? Yes, in fact, it has grown. It's anecdotal, but we don't have a concrete, quantifiable measure to give you a number for.

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Mr. Lorne Coe: So simply put, you didn't evaluate how that money was spent, and you announced that 6,000 teachers took advantage of the \$1,000, so it begs the question: How did you evaluate that? If I understand your answer correctly, you didn't evaluate it. Is that correct?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Well, I think what I had said was that we invest in our teachers, so investing in professional development tied to the goals that we have for the curriculum is something that's very important for us to do.

As the deputy has said, 6,000 teachers have taken up on that, and there are many more—we continue to have teachers that are enrolled in those opportunities, and it's important that we give the system time to experience the renewed math strategy and the outcomes that we desire, which is that students are grasping the curriculum and the results will show over time. I think that that's something that's reasonable to expect.

Mr. Lorne Coe: So even if a teacher accessed the entirety of the \$1,000 that was available to them, it would mean that only \$6 million of that \$12-million funding that was announced in April 2014 has been used. How are you accounting for that? Where is the rest, how is it being used and can you provide that information?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm asking the deputy and his colleagues to address the question. Go ahead, Deputy.

Ms. Cathy Montreuil: I'm Cathy Montreuil, the assistant deputy minister of the student achievement division.

Yes, we did have 6,000 teachers go through the AQ program. The goal of that program was to increase teachers' knowledge of the subject matter. Since then, we've also looked at studies, including PISA international studies, to say that we need to then build on the content knowledge with the pedagogy. The renewed math strategy has invested heavily in allowing those teachers to come together and apply that knowledge in ways that have effective pedagogy directed specifically at their students' learning needs, so what we've done is leverage that.

The other thing we learned through the studies of results is where teachers took those courses in more than a single position. So in a school where a cluster of teachers took those courses, we do have evidence of impact. So in the new renewed math strategy now, we've encouraged schools to come together and take those courses together, including the principal, because we do have direct evidence that that will leverage improvements in mathematics for kids.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for that answer. My question to the minister, then, is this: Can the minister provide detailed accounts for the outstanding \$6 million? That was my question. Can that information be provided, Minister?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I will endeavour to look into that.

What I believe your question is about is the investments that we're making in professional development for our teachers: Are we seeing that result based on that investment?

Mr. Lorne Coe: No, no. Minister, my question was that your government announced an allocation of \$12 million in April 2014 for Additional Qualification courses for teachers in mathematics—totalling \$12 mil-

lion. What I've heard thus far in response is \$6 million has been spent to date.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Well—

Mr. Lorne Coe: Let me just finish my question, please, Minister. What I'm asking for is, can you here today—and if you can't today, can you provide us with an accounting of how the additional \$6 million has been spent? Because obviously, it hasn't been spent in the way it was announced.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: As I said, we will endeavour to see what we can do to look into that for you, but we are addressing the question of the allocation of those funds as it relates to the math strategy for our schools. I do want to make sure that that is understood as well.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Coe, you have under two minutes.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you very much, Chair.

What you just said to me is that you've undertaken to provide this committee and the committee members with an accounting of where the additional \$6 million that was announced in April 2014 has been spent. That's my understanding. Is that correct?

You said that twice, Minister, so I'm just repeating it for the benefit of the minutes. Is that correct?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Can we just take a few minutes' break? Is that okay—five minutes?

Mr. Lorne Coe: This is our time, Chair.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I think I'm fine to do that.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): We'll come back to it, but what is the five minutes for, Minister?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just need to step outside, Madam Chair. Is that okay?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay. Is that okay with the committee? Okay.

We have five minutes. We'll come back at 20 past 5.

The committee recessed from 1715 to 1722.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I believe we're back in session.

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): If we could all be a little quieter, that would be wonderful.

We now go back to Mr. Coe. You have just over a minute.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you. Minister, you wanted to take a break. I know you've already responded twice to my question and you've undertaken to provide the information, and I'm sure your deputy can provide it. I just need an affirmation from you, please, Minister, that you can provide the information that provides an accounting for the additional \$6 million that has not yet been spent, apparently, on the Additional Qualification courses for teachers. The only accounting that has been announced in 2016, as you're aware, I'm sure—your deputy is nodding—is that only half of that money has been used.

I'm asking you, Minister: Please provide to the committee members an accounting for where the additional \$6 million has been spent or allocated elsewhere in your global budget. Could you please provide that?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I will answer your question. The \$6 million has been spent, as the deputy has said, on professional development for teachers in the area of math. Any remaining amounts will be carried forward—and that's going towards our program in math, and we have a renewed math strategy.

I would like the deputy to speak to the details, or his assistant deputy.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid there's no time. We are out of time, but you can come back to it later.

Now we turn to Ms. Gretzky.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have several questions that are tied together, so I'm going to ask that you jot the gist of the questions down as I go and then answer them all together at the end, please.

Of the total operational expenditures, what portion is being spent directly on students via teachers, support staff or classroom resources versus administration and other non-classroom lines?

The second question is: Of the total amount allocated for full-day kindergarten, how much is actually being expended on FDK program lines, and how much is being allocated elsewhere?

The third question is kind of a two-part question. Of the total allocation of administration and governance, what portion is being spent by school boards on labour relations legal expenses? Then part A to that is, when a strike or lockout occurs, does the money for staff salaries go back to the ministry or does the board keep this money? If the boards do keep the money, are boards limited in what they can use the money for? Part B to that is, when administrative staff are performing additional duties because of a strike or lockout, can the school boards pay bonuses or additional salaries to the staff who are fulfilling the duties? Generally it's administration, so do they receive additional compensation on top of their salary for doing the work of those on strike or lockout?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Could you repeat the second question? You had five questions. Could you repeat the second one?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm asking for the total allocation of administration—no?

Interjections.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Of the total amount allocated for full-day kindergarten, how much is actually being expended on FDK program lines, and how much is being allocated elsewhere?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Okay, I will start, and then I'll ask my deputy and colleagues to provide you with the details.

I think what's important in terms of our investments that we're making in education and together with all of our education partners—we talked about the importance of acknowledging that relationship between the classroom teachers and, really, the entire education system, whether it's principals or vice-principals, in the delivery of learning outcomes for students.

You asked about operating expenses and how much of that is going towards the classroom learning. I would say

that the majority of the budget that is allocated, and let me make sure I give you the exact amount—it's \$22.9 billion in funding that is being put into education, an increase of 59% since 2002-03. This is going towards our students—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay, can I just interrupt on that? Because you mentioned there has been an increase in funding. Has there actually been a dollar-amount increase? Say there was 22-point-something-billion dollars spent in the last go-round. Is that number actually significantly larger?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, let me answer that.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Or are you using that number based on there being fewer students in the classrooms, and therefore what you're saying is that \$22 billion is more money because there are fewer students?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: That's exactly the point. Despite the fact that we have declining enrolments, our per pupil funding—it's an increase in dollar amount. More than \$4,500 on a per student basis has been increased. It's now \$11,709 per student that's being allocated. It's an increase of 63%.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Maybe to that point, could you tell me if the needs of the students have actually decreased? The needs of the students that are still in the classrooms, in the schools: Have the needs of those students decreased, specifically those with special education needs?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I think that special education is such a great place for us to really look at those investments, because we are actually spending \$2.7 billion on special education.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: But in fact, there are 25 school boards that now have less money for special education funding, and many boards are pulling funding from other envelopes, from other areas, in order to pay for special education. So I would argue with you that it's sufficient funding.

Anyway, I would like to also have my other questions addressed.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm going to pass it on to the deputy to provide that.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Thanks, Minister. Executive director Josh Paul will give you specific numbers, MPP.

Mr. Josh Paul: Thank you for the questions.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Could you introduce yourself again? Thank you.

Mr. Josh Paul: Josh Paul. I'm the executive director of education finance in the Ministry of Education.

I'll see if I got them all.

In terms of what is spent on the classroom, if we look at the total—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Could you speak right into the microphone, please? Thank you.

Mr. Josh Paul: Certainly. My apologies.

In terms of the overall Grants for Student Needs, there are basically two components. There are the Foundation Grants, which are monies for the classroom and monies for school principal, vice-principal and staffing. Then

there are a whole host of grants that augment those foundational grants for special purposes.

In terms of the overall spending on the classroom, what you can see is that there is \$10 billion directly spent of the \$22.9 billion on the classroom.

In terms of overall administration, the School Board Administration and Governance Grant is approximately \$600 million of the total \$22.9 billion.

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I think the third question, if I understand it correctly, was what proportion is spent on FDK—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Of the total amount that's allocated for full-day kindergarten, how much is actually being expended on the FDK program lines, and how much is being spent somewhere other than FDK?

Mr. Josh Paul: In terms of the overall amount on FDK, there is a very explicit amount set out in the Pupil Foundation Grant. I'd have to follow up on the exact proportion of the total \$10 billion that is generated by FDK.

I also don't have the proportion of spending on FDK. I would have to follow up to see if that data was available, if we cut the data that way when we collect information from the school boards.

So I'd have to follow up on both of those points.

I think the third question you had was, during a strike situation, is the board allowed to keep some of those savings, or does it flow back to the ministry?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Yes. You did skip ahead, but we'll do that, and then I'll go back. It's fine.

Mr. Josh Paul: Okay.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: There was a lot, so it's easy to miss.

Mr. Josh Paul: Yes.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: To your third question—

Mr. Josh Paul: Oh, thank you.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: —around admin and governance labour relations and—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Yes. How much do boards spend on legal expenses when it comes to labour relations?

Mr. Josh Paul: In terms of the exact expenditure, that would be covered off within the overall School Board Administration and Governance Grant. I don't have the exact expense on labour relations per se, but the government has put forward a specific amount of funding—it's around \$4 million—that flows to boards, that they in turn flow on to trustee associations as their bargaining representatives. That is an amount that flows quite transparently to the GSN.

Whether or not boards also have additional costs or bear additional burdens is not something I have the information on, but with the advent of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act and the trustee associations playing their role, most of the burden associated with bargaining would fall on trustee association representatives. So, really, that \$4 million is a good proxy.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. So you don't track individual boards and how much they spend, of what they receive, on legal costs?

Mr. Josh Paul: Not that I'm aware of. I would have to follow up.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. Then the next one, which is where you went, was, when a strike or a lockout occurs, does the money for staff salaries go back to the ministry, or does the board keep that money? And if the boards do keep the money, are they limited in what they can actually use that money for?

Mr. Josh Paul: The money does come back to the ministry. The boards are allowed to make application to keep a certain amount for extraordinary expenses related to dealing with the strike or lockout situation.

Your question as to whether or not they have the ability to use the funds in particular ways—and in particular, I think you mentioned bonuses—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Yes, that was the second part of it. When administrative staff are performing the additional duties because of a strike or a lockout, can the school boards pay them additional money above and beyond their salary? Can they get bonuses—

Mr. Josh Paul: I would have to follow up on that question. I don't know the specific answer. I don't know if that's proscribed or if there's a specific mandate against that, per se.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. So it is possible, then, that they can use money they receive for staffing—during a strike or a lockout, they can use that money for something else.

What you're saying, if I'm understanding—and I know there's a regulation. There's regulation 486/98. It actually allows boards to subtract from strike savings the amount of expenses that are approved by the minister "if they are necessarily incurred by the board in connection with the strike or lockout and the amount of those expenses is reasonable in the circumstances."

What I'm wondering, then—it's saying the boards can subtract money from the strike savings. Does that money that you've given them for salaries then come back to you? You said they have to apply. Does it come back to you and then flow back to the board after they've made their case, or do they actually keep what they feel they need and then have to justify that and ask for permission?

Mr. Josh Paul: They keep what they need, but they justify what they need. What I don't have the answer to specifically is what kind of proscriptions we've put around the use of those funds. I would have to follow up. I don't have the answer to that question.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. I would appreciate a follow-up. That information would be somewhere, as to what boards are actually allowed to keep that money for? Okay.

Then I'm going to jump to something different. I'm going to talk about ESL students, English-as-a-second-language students.

Often, we have new Canadians, those who immigrate, or refugees, even, who come to our country. We've had a large group of Syrian refugees that have come specifically to Ontario. I think it's fantastic that we've taken them in and are giving them opportunities they wouldn't

have at home. But my concern is, when we have students coming in where English is not their first language, are there extra supports? Is there extra funding? Are there extra supports, extra resources, whether that's classroom teachers, psychologists, support staff, or those that specialize in the language of these students? Are they then put into place? We have schools that get a large number of refugees or immigrants. Is there some sort of program in place in order to identify the schools that need the extra support, and is that support given?

What I'm hearing is that many schools have an influx of Syrian refugees, and there are no additional supports put in place for these students, who need mental health supports, who need counselling, who need language assistance. They have very specific, very specialized needs that are not being met. Often, what that does is create additional mental health issues for them. They have a feeling of not fitting in. They don't understand the language, so therefore they can't possibly thrive in a classroom where all they're speaking is English. Is there money set aside that flows to the boards for that? If so, how is that, for lack of a better word, activated through a school board in order to get those additional supports?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: First of all, I want to say that supporting children and youth, to get that support that they need, is an absolute focus. Ontario welcomes newcomers—over 100,000 each and every year. Our schools are one of the first places that a newcomer child will go. Our schools are welcoming places for students who come from around the world.

We forecast approximately 4,000 Syrian newcomers coming in, based on the latest wave. We absolutely provided additional supports to school boards so that they would be able to provide the necessary additional supports, whether it's language supports or other types of supports, as students are adjusting to their new environment.

I'd like the deputy to fill in as well.

Mr. Bruce Rodrigues: Thanks, Minister. There are two parts to that question, MPP Gretzky. We'll have executive director Josh Paul respond on the monetary resources that you're speaking about—if they get extra funding to support that. Then I'll have the ADM, Janine Griffore, speak about the supports that are available around that particular piece.

Mr. Josh Paul: Josh Paul, finance.

The Grants for Student Needs are based on two count dates, in October and March. When newcomers come in and they're captured in either of those count dates, the GSN will automatically adjust and flow funding to boards for those pupils.

In the case of Syrian refugees, the ministry has made a special request of boards to track any additional costs above and beyond the usual GSN costs to ensure that the ministry is aware and can make a decision about what types of supports and additional funding to put in place above and beyond the normal GSN costs.

The funding automatically will adjust over time, but there is a bit of a lag. In the interim, we're collecting

information about the extraordinary costs associated with Syrian students.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: If boards have to track the newcomers—and I just mentioned Syrian refugees because it's the latest, but it happens in many instances with newcomers to Canada. Often you will find that they live in one particular school community because they are with others who share cultural similarities and the same language. So you often find schools that have a large group that will suddenly come.

It's my understanding, then, that when we have school boards that are already strapped for money and are required to produce a balanced budget, and are already cutting, oftentimes, programming and staffing—in many cases, you'll find that schools do not have all the mental health supports that they need because of funding, so they're expected to absorb the cost of providing very valuable and necessary services for these students. At some point, they'll be reimbursed for the costs they've absorbed on the front end. Is there a timeline for that, or at what point does the funding flow before a board actually has to absorb the costs? When is there going to be a plan in place to provide the language supports and the mental health supports to newcomer students, especially when you're talking about a large group that comes from a similar culture or a similar language? When is that going to be—rather than being reactive--proactive?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to also touch on the supports other than language supports, because mental health—you mentioned that. Many of these children might have experienced trauma. How do we handle that? It is important to note that we are providing funding for mental health leaders in each of the 72 boards, so that that resource is there within the board. We also fund school boards so that students across the province have access to social workers and youth workers. There's a team approach.

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I want to give the deputy a chance, as well as the assistant deputy minister.

Ms. Janine Griffore: Janine Griffore, assistant deputy minister, French language, aboriginal learning and research division.

In terms of our Syrian newcomers, the Ministry of Education, prior to welcoming our Syrian newcomers into the schools, put a committee in place, a working group in place. Through that working group, we were receiving comments from directors of education. Concerns from directors of education were coming into the ministry. One of the first concerns was around, specifically, the initial language assessments. The Ministry of Education reached out to Retired Teachers of Ontario and trained a number of new, initial language assessment teachers to be able to conduct those assessments so that boards who did not have the necessary supports in place or resources in place had an opportunity to draw from that pool in order to be able to—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Ms. Gretzky, you have about a minute left.

Ms. Janine Griffore: —to be able to place those students in terms of their language acquisition.

Also, in terms of the School Mental Health ASSIST, the Ministry of Education did put additional supports in place for our Syrian newcomer students. School boards, on an ongoing basis, were able to communicate, to the Ministry of Education, needs and the ministry did in fact respond to those needs by adding additional supports.

There's also, basically, a lifelong learning committee that was put in place. Education was working with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, meeting with community members. The Ministry of Education was not alone in responding to those needs. We reached out to a variety of community groups and organizations that would be—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid that the time is up now for the third party questions. We will move to the government side. So if you would like to finish, it's up to you.

Ms. Kiwala.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: We don't have too much time left—but maybe if you want to come back at the end if there are a few minutes. I've got a few things that I would like to cover. Can you hear me okay? Yes.

There are a few things that I want to address today, and I want to pick up on a couple of things that I've heard around the table today.

There was a comment made about the fact that high school students now don't know how to meet a deadline when they get into university. I have two children who have just finished high school, and I can tell you, categorically, that they are pretty good at completing deadlines. My youngest girl has just gone into first year at Queen's University. She attended one of our Ontario secondary schools in Kingston and the Islands.

I also want to welcome Paul Kossta here today, from OSSTF and acknowledge the work that is being done through our high schools. We have a lot of very, very positive things to say about our local high schools in Kingston and the Islands. I've had some great experiences there.

Another comment was made about blowing your horn about the stats. One thing that I do want to say about that is that stats are at the nugget of evidence-based approaches to education. I think it's something that we have to work with, and if we're not working with our stats, then what are we doing?

I also want to talk a little bit about split grades. There was an article in the Globe and Mail in 2015, September 17, with the title, "Are Split Grades Something to Worry About?" It was a very interesting article. Annie Kidder, who was the executive director—you've probably read the article—is also the co-founder of People for Education, an Ontario-based organization that supports public education in all of the school boards. Her comment was, "And the evidence is that there is no negative impact on academic success."

Again, as MPPs, we always go back to our own personal experiences. My children have gone through the

public school system. They have been in mixed classes almost all the way along. The one thing that I think is absolutely fantastic about a mixed class is that younger children have an opportunity to learn more if they want to, but they also have the guidance with our excellent teacher base to get the attention that they need for the grade that they're at.

Also, children who are in the older class or the older grades also have an opportunity to do some nurturing and to do some guiding of the younger students. It's an excellent opportunity and it's something that for some children, as was described in that article—there was one student who was a little bit shy and had the opportunity to do some mentoring right within the classroom of a younger student, and apparently the courage that he developed from the opportunity stayed with him throughout the rest of his academic career. I think that it's important to put these things into context.

Also, with respect to split classes, it's something that's being used quite frequently in other countries because of its high success rate, such as Australia, France, Switzerland and the Netherlands. New Zealand, which has the highest literacy rate in the world, routinely groups children in different grades in the same classroom.

I think it's important to bring out concerns that are really pertinent about education, and I'm looking forward to hearing more about what you've got to say.

But the question that I would like to focus on today is about Treaties Recognition Week. Last week, as you know, was Treaties Recognition Week. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, this is something that's pretty important to me. I also want to talk a little bit about how important Treaties Recognition Week is. I had an exceptional opportunity to be present at a treaty signing in Chapleau Cree on one of the trips that I made with the ministry, actually. I was representing the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

To be present during that time and to understand how critical the resolution of these treaties are within the First Nations community is extremely important. You have an opportunity to see four levels of government, including the First Nations government, coming together and deliberating about all aspects of the treaty.

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The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry plays a very key role in those negotiations, as do the surveyors, who will make sure that they carve out the actual space of the land that's in question.

Treaties Recognition Week was very, very important for the Ontario government and their commitment to reconciliation with our indigenous partners. I know that it's evident in the Ministry of Education's efforts to provide teachers with resources for the classroom that explain what treaties are, and that our government is serious about learning from our past and embracing the future. We can't get better as a society and we can't truly reconcile with indigenous people in the province unless we recognize what has happened in the past.

I know that you have been doing quite a bit of work on developing resources for the Treaties Recognition Week, to provide First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in our publicly funded school system with the resources that they need. I'm hoping that you can talk a little bit about that. I know it's a source of pride for the ministry, so I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say to that.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Absolutely. I believe that it's a source of pride for the ministry and for this government. I couldn't be more proud of the opportunity to participate and to be part of this moment in Ontario's history, frankly.

At the launch of Treaties Recognition Week, Minister Zimmer and I were at David Bouchard school in Oshawa and met Alex. Alex, apparently over the two years, has grown about a foot. Everyone was very proud of him. I think he's about 10 years old now. He had made a wampum belt which illustrates the Treaty of Niagara and the friendship that was established through that treaty. He made it out of Lego. It's purple and white. Apparently, Lego only makes certain quantities of purple Lego. So with the demand being created by this tool that's in all our elementary schools—which is a teaching aid to help our schools and our classroom teachers really teach all of our students, our indigenous and our non-indigenous students, about the history of treaties. In meeting Alex and going from classroom to classroom—the learning was so powerful. It was so incredible. One boy said to me that he had learned more in the three weeks that they were learning about treaties than he had in the last three months in history because it was deep learning. It was interactive. They were interested in it. It was very real.

I really want to commend our government for showing this leadership. Last May, many of us were there when the Premier apologized for Ontario's role in the legacy of residential schools, and really affirmed our commitment to reconciliation with indigenous people in Ontario. That's not just something we're talking about.

The fact that that same month, Minister Zimmer tabled legislation in the House that declared the first full week of November every year as Treaties Recognition Week in Ontario really shows our commitment. I couldn't be prouder, as Minister of Education, that that initial start was right in our schools because, you know, as Justice Murray Sinclair said in the commission report, education heals. You could really see that in the learning that's occurring in our classrooms as it relates to Treaties Recognition Week.

I have more to say on this but I wouldn't mind the deputy just talking about the investments and how they're unfolding.

Ms. Janine Griffore: In terms of Treaties Recognition Week, it's basically the beginning of a long journey and it's the beginning of reconciliation. As the minister

indicated, indigenous education is not just for indigenous students; it's for all students. It's to grow the knowledge and awareness of all students around indigenous histories, perspectives, and ways of being and knowing.

Around Treaties Recognition Week, specifically, the Ministry of Education—prior, I should say, to Treaties Recognition Week—had an indigenous leads gathering. At that particular gathering, we had representatives from all 72 school boards in Ontario come in and share best practices around presenting indigenous education in our schools. That gathering was a day and a half of sharing and of reaching out to community members, because this is very much around not only the Ministry of Education providing the resources but working very closely with our indigenous partners and organizations in this reconciliation journey.

We have struck a joint committee, a steering committee, with our indigenous partners on developing curriculum, specifically around treaties but also around residential schools and indigenous ways of knowing and perspectives. We are in the process of co-developing curriculum. This is a new opportunity for us at the Ministry of Education. As we co-develop this curriculum with our partners, we are in fact growing in that reconciliation journey. What we're providing our teachers are opportunities of not only receiving the curriculum but also providing input into that process. It's a longer process when you co-develop curriculum, but you have greater ownership and a greater understanding of what we need to do in order to ensure that we also grow our indigenous student achievement levels, close gaps between our indigenous students and non-indigenous students, and really be able to move to a place of reconciliation which—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Under a minute left now, Ms. Kiwala.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I do want to underscore the learning that's occurring in the Ontario curriculum. It's really important. When we speak to the indigenous elders, they tell us that it's important that children see themselves in Ontario's curriculum. Our First Nations, Métis and Inuit need to see themselves in the curriculum, and that's exactly the work that is being undertaken together. It's a co-development that is occurring. It's addressing the residential schools and the legacy of residential schools.

You might have remembered, during the Premier's apology, Elder Andrew talking about his experience in residential schools. There was such deep emotion that was shared that day.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid that brings our time to an end, Minister, and to the committee. We stand adjourned until tomorrow at 3:45 in room 151.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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