

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

E-8

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

E-8

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Education

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 6 November 2019

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mercredi 6 novembre 2019

Chair: Peter Tabuns
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Peter Tabuns
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et de l'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1181-6465

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 6 November 2019

Mercredi 6 novembre 2019

The committee met at 1613 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Good afternoon. We are going to resume consideration of vote 1001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. There are two hours and five minutes remaining.

Before we resume consideration of the estimates, if there are any inquiries from the previous meeting that the minister has responses to, perhaps the information can be distributed by the Clerk. Are there any items, Minister?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Not at this time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Thank you. When the committee last adjourned, the official opposition had seven minutes and seven seconds remaining in their rotation. The floor is yours. Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Chair. It's nice to see you in the chair today.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good afternoon to everyone. I want to pick up where we left off yesterday afternoon. As I recall, I think I started to ask a question and we didn't get to hear a response. I'm just going to go after this again, just because it seems like an important one.

We were talking yesterday, Minister, about the review that's taking place around potential school closures, and the possibility of a lifting of the moratorium on school closures. I mentioned that the Treasury Board president announced, I believe it was just last week, that there is a discussion of selling off public assets like school buildings. Schools were one of the examples. I wanted to know how much savings you are looking for with that, and what the implications are.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much, member. Good afternoon, everyone. I can suggest that in the context of savings, as I understand it, there are none booked in that respect. The aim of our review is really to optimize government assets as well as board assets. There are hundreds and hundreds of schools that are unused in the province. Those are decision points made by boards of education, both English and French, public and Catholic.

The moratorium will remain under way, or we will maintain the moratorium, until we have suitably reviewed the PARG process, as I mentioned yesterday, to strengthen the rural considerations that I thought were stripped out by the former government and that ultimately led to an

economic loss for many communities and small towns and hamlets in the province.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So you are not saying that you're not looking at the potential for the selling-off of assets. You're correct that obviously it's a board decision if the moratorium were to be lifted and then a school could be closed. Some schools are already closed, but they're not exactly underutilized. Most school buildings right now are being kept for various reasons by boards. Boards have gone through many rounds of closing and, in fact, selling off schools, because it is one of the only ways that boards are able to raise the revenues that they need, because they're so poorly funded by government—by your government, by previous governments.

Anyway, I'm going to move on. Yesterday I asked a bit about the capital repair backlog on our schools. We learned yesterday that there's \$400 million more on top of what was an existing, pretty astronomical—and frankly, I think, for many people unimaginable—school repair backlog, which was previously, at the end of the Liberal term, \$15.9 billion and has now ballooned by \$400 million more to \$16.3 billion. It was confirmed here by the deputy minister.

We also have a report out that 2,400 schools and daycares across our province have elevated lead in their tap water. Now, honestly, we asked the minister some questions about this today, so I'm not going to go after this particularly, because I don't think we're going to get much help here. I think people in this province have been dealing with this for so long. It's just very dispiriting for those of us—many parents, including myself, were very involved in trying to push to have the previous government address the school repair backlog. We're barely making a dent. It has actually increased significantly under your watch.

So I want to get to that. I want to understand a little bit better some of the numbers that have been provided in the estimates with regard to the school condition index and the school renewal fund. I'm pulling out a B memo that I have here.

I've been talking to a really great organization. I'm sure you're familiar with them: Fix Our Schools. They're parent-led, non-partisan, focused on one issue only, and that is repairing our schools, right? It came about, as I've mentioned here before, because families were frustrated that their kids were going to schools with hats and mitts on in the winter and sweltering in the spring and fall. Certainly in my riding, we've had many experiences of

kids who were actually sick from the heat. I've talked to many teachers who keep an eye on the temperature; some of them even tweet it out in their classrooms because it's just so unimaginable. It really is heartbreaking to see these young people who are feeling so uncomfortable in our schools.

That's just the tip of the iceberg, because the issues are so many. Another example I like to share is going into one of the schools in my riding—many of the schools in my riding are over 100 years old; that's the case in many parts of the province—and seeing the teachers in a kindergarten classroom have to use the water tables, which is what you use for water play and learning in a classroom, to collect the water from the leaks in the roof. For me, that was one I will never forget, because it was really impactful.

1620

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): You have one minute left.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Anyway, what I want to know, Minister, is: The commitment of what amounts to \$13 billion that you've talked about over the next decade—does that cover the school condition index and the school renewal fund funding to school boards for the coming decade? Is it both pieces?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. Both pieces actually make up the \$1.4 billion. For context—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, the \$1.4 billion or the \$13 billion? The \$1.4 billion is the—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Renewal funding that has been consistent from last year to this year, which meets the 2.5% request, by the recommendation of the Auditor General, which we're meeting this year as we had met last year.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But the \$13 billion over the 10 years—so \$1.4 billion of the \$13 billion over 10 years: Does that also include the SCI and the SRA?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'll turn to the deputy for this for additional context. But I think it's important for the committee to note that the AG, some years ago, requested—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Sorry, Minister. Your time is up. I hate to cut you off.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay. We can return to that.

The Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): I move to the government. Ms. Park.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Minister, thanks for taking time with us this afternoon to go through and explain the increase in investment in education and child care that our government is making. More good news today that—I think we can expect increased investments in the year ahead.

I want to focus my questions a little bit around child care. It's an issue that's really important to the young families in Durham that I represent. Specifically, I know that we talked a lot about this when I was talking to families at their doors during the election campaign: the need for a bit more flexibility in how child care is funded, particularly for rural families.

I have rural communities in my riding that sometimes have to travel greater distances to get the child care they

need, or resort to their neighbour down the street—and the costs that come with a service that's provided in that way. Would you be able to outline for me, Minister, how our government has aimed to increase that flexibility?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, I appreciate that. I also believe that parents in the province of Ontario deserve to have an element of flexibility and mobility in how they can use those dollars to best suit the needs of their kids.

I think a contrasting point amongst the parties, overwhelmingly, is a realization that there is one party that is a vehicle for providing families choice and fiscal support, and that is our government. Because we understand that institutional daycare—while there are strong merits for it and we continue to support it through historic investment, we also believe that the best decision-maker, when it comes to their kids' future and the child care that they receive, are parents—the moms and dads of the province of Ontario.

That's why, in the first budget, in one of our first acts in our blueprint that was announced last year, was to expend or allocate just shy of \$400 million in new monies, allocated within the budget, to support child care relief for working families, middle-class families and low-income families in the province. Obviously that augments a variety of other taxable savings initiatives.

I think it would be imprudent not to highlight the fact that in the most recent fall economic statement announced by the ministry, according to public accounts, next year we intend to spend more than \$1.2 billion than we did last year. As the Minister of Finance mentioned in his speech just moments ago, there is an over \$200-million net increase in expenditure, meaning that in this fiscal year coming we will spend more than any government has in the history of this province; more than we did last year at the historic high. That supports child care. It supports the 30,000 child care spaces we hope to see built and realized over the coming years in schools, as well as independent daycare expansion.

So because of advocates like yourself and others and parents across the province, I think it has really hit home, when it comes to the policy makers of the government—that includes my predecessor, Minister Thompson, and it includes myself and the entire caucus and the Premier. I think all of us in the government are quite committed to providing choice, to providing more money in parents' pockets. What I reject is this omnipresent reality within the political discourse that government knows best. And I say this with great respect to many public servants who work very hard in the system, particularly in education, and our child care advocates and the people on the front lines.

With respect, I trust a parent every step of the way, every day, 24/7, 365, more than anyone else, to spend their money. They will optimize their dollars. They'll choose the best services, the most culturally appropriate and geographically beneficial to the family. We just believe in them to make the best decision. That's why we created this tax incentive, which we believe will work.

Last year, as proof positive that the framework we're building on child care is working, there were over 19,000

child care spaces built in the province of Ontario. That's not a coincidence. It's because of, in part, the ingenuity of independent daycare operators and small business people, many of them parents themselves. It's also because we've continued on and strengthened the in-school child care expansion.

In Durham region, where you proudly hail from, there are many families benefiting from that relief and from that child care support—the EarlyON centres and so many others. My goal is to continue to partner with you and others from the region to expand it and provide better choice for families in Durham and in every region of the province.

Ms. Lindsey Park: That's great, Minister. I want to thank you for the CARE Tax Credit that's aimed at helping families who, again, can't necessarily choose a publicly funded child care space because it doesn't work—maybe because of where they live in the province or the type of care their child needs that's unique.

That's part of our plan, but another big part of our plan is, in fact, building more government-funded child care spaces. That's an important pillar, I think, in our very comprehensive child care initiative that we are journeying on here.

I know that the number of child care spaces that have been built in our region has increased from 2017-18 to 2018-19. I just wondered if you could talk a little bit about where we're at. We're here at estimates talking about the numbers, so if we can talk about some of the numbers as they apply to Durham region, I'd be so grateful.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed, it has gone up.

I'm going to refer to the ADM, Ms. Fuller, for additional context. But I think the fact that a billion dollars is allocated to build 30,000 child care spaces in schools in Ontario—we have approved new schools being built in Durham region. Of the 30,000 that are committed, 10,000 will be in new schools; the residual, the 20,000, will be in existing schools. That's a good start for those who benefit from living near a school. For those who don't, of course, we think the mobile tax credit, the child tax credit, is going to help.

For the specificity on the good people of Durham, I will turn it over to Ms. Fuller.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: My name is Shannon Fuller. I'm the assistant deputy minister for early years and child care at the Ministry of Education.

Thank you very much for the question. The funding allocation for Durham region for child care is just over \$64 million. The region received their allocation for 2019 this summer and has just received, as have all of our municipal service managers, their 2020 allocation. We've worked very closely with our colleagues in Durham region, who are very passionate about continuing to support child care in the region, as well, to ensure that we are being responsive to their needs and their feedback. This is something that we continue to work very closely with them on.

We did release the 2020 allocations. This is the earliest that we have released them. We are looking to work very closely—as we covered yesterday a little bit—to align our

calendar year and fiscal year in a way that really helps communities like Durham and others across the province to plan better and to be more supportive of children and families and their communities for planning for child care and early years.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: One of the messages I heard when I had the benefit—I believe it was with you, actually, at AMO—was from mayors across the region, and I met some from Durham region, in fact, including, I believe, their chair. One of the requests was, “In municipalities, we have limited means to raise revenues”—and we appreciate that—“so provide us with predictable funding updates. Give us the schedule of commitments for next year, and end the perennial last-minute”—at least, from their impression—“disclosure of those investments.” We heard that loud and clear. We made a decision, as you will know, to announce next year's allocation, which will be, for the Durham region, just over \$64 million for 2020. That's a significant sum of money that I know will be optimized in your region and your community and for your constituents, and obviously that is in addition to the tax relief that's helping people directly, right in their pockets.

1630

Ms. Lindsey Park: Thank you, Minister. I know it's a balance between having targeted initiatives that we create at the provincial government and allowing flexibility at the municipal level to implement the programs that they want to implement. That allocation that we give to regional governments or local municipal governments—it's twofold in Durham region, but in some areas they're single-tiered—what are they able to use that funding for? I think sometimes we just see numbers in the paper, and we hear of the municipalities doing this, the province doing this. What is a municipal government able to do with that funding allocation they're given?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It sounds like a brilliant question for ADM Fuller.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you for that. It is a great question, an important question. We do try to ensure that there is as much flexibility within the system while maintaining our accountability in terms of our partnership with both our municipal partners and services to management, as well as our First Nations partners, that we do work very closely with in terms of providing early years and child care funding.

When we look at the funding model, we really do look at it as something that we hope to support, an integrated early years and child care system across, so that starts with EarlyOn child and family centres. You're likely familiar with those in your community. Those provide free drop-in, play-based programs and information around relevant community and specialized services for the parents and children within the community. They do receive a separate—from that \$64 million—funding envelope associated with that. That's used to create new spaces, extend hours at others, and do community outreach across.

The funding can also be used for operating funding, and so that helps to support the costs of running child care across the board for all parents and children. Fee subsidies

is a critical area which that operating funding is used for, and so that's how that funding happens.

As well, there are funding lines associated with the allocation of full wage enhancement, home child care wage enhancement, and child care expansion. That could be both in the context of creating new spaces or expanding the number of spaces for an existing provider. Really, we try very hard—to your point about different communities having different needs—to focus on ensuring that we are able to support, through that funding, both centre-based as well as home-based child care spaces, depending on family need and what works really well for children.

We also try to ensure that we have opportunity for those supports to reach child care spaces both in schools as well as in homes, so we're looking to balance that as well, in terms of parent choice and child need.

So we focus on those areas and the funding is used for that. It's also used, as I mentioned, in First Nations communities and then also used to support before- and after-school programs as the children enter into full-day kindergarten and move into before- and after-school programs. That supports child care fee subsidies in those contexts and also, potentially, recreational programs, depending on the opportunity that the family decides to choose.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Thank you so much. I think the minister was referencing, at some of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario meetings, that he—I can't imagine what his schedule was like during that conference, because I'm sure you get requests as the Minister of Education from every municipality in the province. I know he listened carefully, and there was, I believe, in late August, on August 19, an announcement that came to share with municipalities about the way the funding models are going to work over the next few years. I was wondering if you could, Minister, explain just how we've chosen to phase this in as a government, to be responsive to municipalities.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, absolutely. Thank you for the question. Indeed, a request made by municipal partners was to provide greater phase-in time to permit them to make those relevant adjustments. I think it's important to have context. For many, many years in the province of Ontario, under successive governments, the funding model was what it is today, as of the new funding model announced. In the latter years of the former government toward the election period—among many other public policy decisions that were predicated, in my estimation, on political interest, not public interest—they reverted to a different change. They changed the model that had existed for some time.

The model that exists today, with the phase-in that was requested from municipal partners, was to have an 80-20 capital differential, where the province is expending 80% and the municipality has 20%. However, what's different about their system and ours—I would argue ours is dramatically better—is that for the first time in Ontario's history, the 80%, our commitment, is not predicated on the municipality matching their 20%. We've given them unrestricted access to that capital, which they appreciate,

because some municipalities, for a variety of reasons, may not be able to afford that that year or may choose to make other priorities in the context of what's pressing in their locality. So that's an important step. That's the first year of the plan.

The second year of implementation deals with administrative costs. We have, as was the case for the critical mass of the former government's tenure, a 50-50 cost split on the administrative costs. We think that is reasonable. We provide them a second year on implementation to return to what always was.

The final was with respect to the maximum spend, when it comes to administrative costs, from 10% down to 5%. Again, this is in the public and the taxpayers' interest, because I think they want to see more monies flowing to actually build and/or support child care, and not necessarily expend dollars on the administration of child care and perhaps the staff support that's required to maintain it. So we've returned to that, and that's happening in the final year or the third year of the phase-in.

That was broadly received well. I think they appreciated that the government listened—that's an important responsibility—through those meetings. We heard that expression of support for that change from both urban and rural communities, and I think that was telling.

I look forward to meeting with more mayors in January and in the coming months at ROMA, at AMO. I met with the AMO municipal table just a month and a half ago or so with Ms. Fuller, and that was a very successful exercise, where we unveiled those changes and, as well, provided commitments that we would be giving their allocations for next year this fall—which may seem small, perhaps, to most, but for municipal partners, it's quite a game-changer to provide predictable funding for the coming fiscal year. They can actually better optimize tax dollars utilized in a more prudent way.

And that's really what we want to see from all levels of government. We're walking the walk at our level, to our extent, but this initiative, I think, will see actually more child care being built, effectively embracing the principle of doing more with less; and that certainty, that predictability, that heads-up for the next year is going to go a long way.

I don't know, Ms. Fuller, if you have anything to add?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Just to build on what the minister has said, I think one of the key things that we're looking to partner closely with our municipal colleagues on as well, as we look at year two and year three of the funding changes coming into effect in 2021-22—we are committed to working with them to reduce the administrative burden associated with those funding changes as well. I think we've started down a good path there. We have already eliminated the requirement to submit a ministry-determined application form for the Wage Enhancement Grant. That was something we consistently heard was a big barrier for that. We also reduced the number of our reporting submissions from three to two times a year, while still maintaining the accountability that we know we need to have in place, of course.

We also removed some status update reporting for some of the different areas and streamlined our approach to target data submissions for our municipal partners. And we have committed to continue to work. We've done a line-by-line review on all of the requirements associated with our reporting and our funding, and we're having ongoing conversations about how we can work together, again, to ensure we're maintaining accountability and responsibility, but also to reduce administrative burden and allow people to focus on the child care side of things.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If I may build on that point, the red tape reduction bill, Bill 66, for independent operators was a significant win for both common sense, when it comes to good business practices, and to incent more participation in the child care sector, especially after the province made a determination to enter all-day kindergarten. That had some adverse impacts to that sector, so these types of red tape reductions were very necessary. The fact that over 19,000 child care spaces—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): You have one minute left.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —of which the critical mass was private and independent speaks volumes to the efficacy of that.

1640

Ms. Lindsey Park: Thank you, Minister. I just want to thank you for listening to municipalities and being responsive to what they're saying. I think that's something I've heard a lot from my community since you transitioned into this file this summer: that everyone perceives that you care and you're listening. I think that's what people really want in a Minister of Education, so I credit you for that.

I think also on the municipal front—these AMO tables that you've obviously appeared at since taking over as minister—we're having those meetings more frequently as a government than has ever happened in the past. I think our municipal partners are really happy to be able to have a responsive government that's willing to have conversations with them and work together, so I think that's really great news and I think—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Sorry to cut you off, but your time is up. I'm sorry.

We'll go back to the official opposition. Ms. Stiles?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you. I thought I was in the Twilight Zone there for a moment. It feels like we're in two separate universes talking about our municipal partners and how they feel about these cuts.

Anyway, I want to start off just to rephrase the question I was asking earlier. I want to be very clear: I'm asking you about the \$13 billion that you've committed—not an insignificant chunk; I mean, I'm not saying that—over the next decade. It won't necessarily also help us keep up, but anyway, it's \$13 billion over the next decade. I want to be more specific. We know it covers the school condition index and the school renewal fund. Does it also include funding for additions and new school buildings?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the early years it does. Just so we're clear in the context of the AG recommendation of 2.5%, we expect that we'll be able to maintain that

commitment, that recommendation, over the next decade. We believe we'll be able to hit the renewal target of 2.5%.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You said “in early years.” Can you be specific? What years does it also include the funding for additions and school boards?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. I'll turn it over to the deputy.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: School buildings?

Ms. Marit Stiles: School buildings, yes.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We have more specificity about the early years, and we would continue to work with our partners—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Excuse me.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Once again, can you please introduce yourself?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Thank you. I apologize.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): It's okay. Thank you.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I'm Nancy Naylor. I'm the deputy minister.

So the \$13 billion includes, in the early years, the capital priorities fund, of which for this school year we do expect to allocate \$500 million of funding for new school buildings or school additions. Now, you'll appreciate that we are still bringing into our capital budget some of the projects that have been announced in the past, and as we allocate them, they will not all be built in the same year; they'll be built over, perhaps, a period of three years going out.

We smooth out allocations done in the past and allocations in the future, so the \$13 billion does include a projection of school renewal continuing and, certainly, this year's capital priorities, and that will be a matter of negotiation with our partners around allocations for additions and school replacements in future years.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So just to make sure I'm completely clear, that \$13 billion includes potential requests for capital like new additions and new buildings for schools, not just for the early years program?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: For the capital priorities cycle that we're entering into, we'll expect to be allocating in this fiscal year, but for additions and replacement schools, we do smooth that over years, so we take into account some of the project approvals that have been done in prior years and the amount of time that we would expect that this cycle of allocations would take to build out.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But that still is included in the \$13 billion?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Yes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I may return to that at another point.

I want to turn to what you've now called the Priorities and Partnerships Fund—I keep mixing it up. Last December, I think you may recall, school boards were pretty blindsided by the \$25-million cut to a number of ministry programs that supported some of the most vulnerable students in the education system, programs like Focus on Youth, which is an after-school program, and summer

programs that arguably keep kids in school, help to give them stability, and help to prevent youth violence. Other programs that were cut included tutors in classrooms, experiential learning for adults, Indigenous-focused collaborative inquiry, daily physical activity in elementary schools, physical activity in secondary schools, and the SpeakUp programs.

When we were briefed on those cuts—eventually—ministry staff explained that some of these services could return in the GSNs, Grants for Student Needs. I'm trying to not use so many acronyms this time. Can you tell me which of those programs that I listed were rolled into the grants?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We'll just take one minute.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'll defer to them. I'll just note that it was our government in April 2019 that announced this \$330-million fund. Those monies are flowing to help support, as noted by the member, vulnerable children in class. I will defer to the specificity of the question—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm asking about very specific things, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would rather hear from the folks who can give me those answers.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Nancy, if you would be so kind.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Sure. I apologize; we were just refreshing my memory. But in the 2019-20 Grants for Student Needs, we didn't transition anything into the 2019-20 GSN. It is a transfer payment program. We're always looking for investments that prove out, that look like they are long-term, stable investments, in which case we would migrate them into the GSN so that there is the assurance of funding year after year. But we didn't move anything into the 2019-20 GSN. It's an ongoing consideration.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Those programs that I listed are not included in the GSNs? None of them are rolled in?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Right. But when we did the allocations for the 2019-20 Priorities and Partnerships Fund, which was the renamed and renewed EPO—

Ms. Marit Stiles: It was previously the Education Programs—Other.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Exactly. We did return and support a number of areas where school boards and partners had indicated that the loss of that funding was a loss, and we did return to some of those.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Some of those?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: That includes the Focus on Youth and that tutoring program.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So we know the EPO has been rebranded into this Priorities and Partnerships Fund, with some of those funding streams within it renamed. The Priorities and Partnerships Funds allocated to school boards: Briefly, can you tell me what kind of programs they fund?

I might want to just add that the funding has, according to the estimates, been cut by about \$107.8 million. Maybe you could also explain to me why that is.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm happy to answer the first part of the question, if you would permit me, or would you prefer the—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want really specific answers, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay. With respect to where the funding flowed, I can alert the committee that for Indigenous, for example, it was an over-\$17-million allocation within the PPF to support student performance and well-being. There is maths supports, over \$51 million, in that respect. For mental health, there is over \$16.6 million, largely linking mental health supports and students and providing additional access. For special ed, there is just over \$20 million in allocations that are helping those kids, as well as their families, providing support for both. In STEM education, it's just north of \$3.75 million to help strengthen STEM education in the class. There are a variety of initiatives for student pathways, helping them to transition from secondary into either college, an apprenticeship or university. That's a \$71-million allocation.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So can you explain where the cut is, then? What was cut that leaves us with this \$107.8 million less than what was previously funded? Because you've already said that the programs weren't rolled into the GSN, so that's why I was checking that first, to give you some reasonable doubt. But go on, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I am going to refer to the ADM. I just want it to be noted for the committee that, as was announced less than an hour ago, there is an additional \$1.2 billion that we plan to be spent next year that was not spent this year. There is a \$200-million net increase broadly within the Ministry of Education—

Ms. Marit Stiles: And you'll be using that to fund this \$107.8 million? Anyway, it doesn't matter, because I really just want to know what was cut.

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Ms. Nancy Naylor: Sure. I can speak to the numbers. I believe the number that is printed in the estimates for this is \$270 million. What we ended up allocating was \$330 million, so it's an additional \$60 million. That represents, we felt, continuing all the investments that were proving out to be a good learning experience or supporting positive learning environments, both in school boards and with some of our third-party partners.

It does represent a little bit of a change from the prior year. However, there were a number of projects that were concluded and wrapped up. There were also a number of funding streams in the prior year that had been supporting activities such as conferences and travel, where our partners had agreed to work in a more virtual way and a more cost-effective way. So in many cases, we're supporting the same level of activity with a slightly different mode of delivery.

Ms. Marit Stiles: With less money. You also mentioned, I noticed in the estimates, that the third-party PPF funding—that's the Priorities and Partnerships Fund—is seeing a decrease of \$44.6 million. Could you tell me what kinds of programs are funded by that stream, and which programs were cut?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: What we can say is, again, some of our third-party partners, I think, were the first to step up in terms of continuing our funding with them, sometimes at a lower amount, because they were agreeing to work differently: a little bit less in terms of face-to-face travel and conferences, and more in terms of direct engagement.

I think we are supporting virtually all the same partners that we had been supporting. But we would have to return—I'm sorry—with a detailed list of exactly—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If you could, please. I would love to receive a detailed list and have it tabled here. I think that the deputy minister is agreeing to do that, if we could have that recorded.

Indigenous-focused collaborative inquiry was one of the previously called education programs—other funding that was cut last December. Could you tell us what that program did and what the rationale was for cutting that, please?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the PPF, there is \$17.77 million for Indigenous supports. But I'll defer to the ADM.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes. I'm asking about a specific program.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Give us one minute, and we'll just check about—

Interjections.

Ms. Denise Dwyer: My name is Denise Dwyer. I'm the assistant deputy minister of Indigenous education and well-being in the Ministry of Education.

The Indigenous-focused collaborative inquiry was taking what was normally collaborative inquiry, which was a form of pedagogy that involved experiential learning with the teachers. In this case, it had a very Indigenous focus, so it involved those teachers working with the Indigenous community that was related to their particular board, and, as well, with students. They would develop ideas for a project that had an Indigenous focus; maybe it was a land-based learning or other types of projects. Then, with the elders from the community and the teacher—there would be some time away from the classroom—they would work on these projects as a way of experiential learning.

It allowed a number of things to happen. For the teachers, it allowed them to understand a lot more about Indigenous perspectives, Indigenous students' needs, history, tradition, how to relate to members of the community and the importance of those elders being involved in the school experience and the child's learning—very important factors for success for Indigenous students.

Those projects were done in particular boards. What we were doing was taking a look at the responses from teachers after that about how it impacted their own learning, and how it made them feel more skilled to teach curriculum that involved Indigenous content.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But it was eliminated. It sounds pretty good me.

Ms. Denise Dwyer: Yes, that was the nature of the project.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Can you explain to me why it's been eliminated?

Ms. Denise Dwyer: The project was being done in two different divisions—my own as well as the student achievement division. It had some good outcomes. It had been around for I think about two years; I'm going to have to double-check on that. In examining all the supports for Indigenous students, it was one of the programs, it was determined, that would not continue.

There continues to be approximately between \$21 million and \$22 million spent on specifically focused Indigenous supports between the Indigenous education and well-being division and the rest of the ministry in terms of supports—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Because I know this has been cited repeatedly as an example of something that was really doing good things, creating great outcomes. So I wanted to understand why that was eliminated.

I have to say, if I may—what?

Ms. Doly Begum: Maybe the minister could say why it was eliminated.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Maybe the minister could explain why that particular program was eliminated.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Could we add something, Minister?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure, and I'll return to the question.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Yes, I apologize. I just want to highlight that the Ontario budget this year did announce \$3.25 million to support the implementation of the new Indigenous curriculum. That was released by the ministry for the 2019-20 year—

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's not related to this Indigenous-focused collaborative inquiry program.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Actually, the funding is quite available to boards to support ways that support teachers in feeling comfortable in delivering that curriculum. I think some of the lessons learned from the original funding investment—we expect that some of this funding will be used in similar ways.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to answer the question—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm just going to move on, Minister, because I don't think we're going to get a straight answer on that.

I want to ask you, when this happened—I remember it was over the holidays last year, because it was both a very unpredictable cut and it was delivered over the holidays. It was a cut that, I have to say, really devastated a lot of people because these cuts were focused on the most at-risk and vulnerable youth. I just want to know, under your leadership, maybe, if that's a thing of the past. Is that something that boards can expect again over this holiday season?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Member, the Indigenous Education Grant has risen to \$80 million, a \$67-million increase from 2005. That is a significant fiscal commitment to the success of Indigenous First Nation, Inuit and Métis students. It was this government that announced a month ago—I've yet to be questioned on the reciprocal education

agreement from other parties, beyond our government—a seamless transition and success for those people who face red tape and bureaucratic delays to getting education. It's the government that has increased First Nation education to the highest levels ever recorded—ever—in the history of the province—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, you're going to have trouble delivering any kind of curriculum with 10,000 fewer teachers—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, if I could just finish that point—

Ms. Marit Stiles: —10,000 fewer teachers in four years.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think the important element here is that we're not just putting money in the system to support the success of those children; we're also ensuring, in the context of course selection—we've now added 10 additional courses for Indigenous students—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Which again, Minister—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry, Chair—

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, Minister, I'm going to ask my question.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —if you would be so kind as to let me conclude my thought—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You've had a lot of time to respond. I want to tell you my point here—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Let him answer his question, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'll be very brief. I appreciate that it is your time.

The other aspect of it is in the context of even the question asked today in question period: We have a duty to ensure that the history of First Nations people in this country is remembered by the next generation, which is why, in grades 1 through 8, we have now strengthened in every grade additional knowledge of the history, language and tradition—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to respond before we move off this.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —of the First Nation, Inuit and Métis people. I was proud to meet with Grand Chief Fiddler. I was proud to meet with a variety of chiefs, including at Nipissing First Nation, among others—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, Mr. Chair, I've heard enough of this.

That response today in question period was so deeply insulting, I can't even begin. It was one of the most deeply insulting responses to a question I've seen in that Legislature since I was elected. It was shameful, Minister. That is not what that member was asking you, and you know it perfectly well. You're cutting 10,000 teachers from—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Is there a question here?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I don't think I'm required to ask one. I could sit here and talk all day if I wanted to.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Chair, she keeps interrupting.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You're interrupting me.

1700

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): With all due respect, sir, she's talking. Let her finish, please.

Ms. Marit Stiles: As I was saying, it was an unfortunate response to a really important question in the Legislature today. I would encourage anybody watching this to check out the question that MPP Sol Mamakwa asked. It really is, when we talk about—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think maintaining the history of First Nations is an important element of the Ministry of Education—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, I'm talking, please.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): You have one minute left, please.

Ms. Marit Stiles: When we are talking about the implementation of a curriculum, to then not want to address the elimination of the very people who are going to have to deliver that curriculum, I think, is hugely problematic. We know now—and nothing has changed—you've made clear in these sessions that we still have 10,000 fewer teaching positions over the next four years; they're being eliminated. Yesterday, I reviewed with you all of the courses that have already been eliminated by this government because of your cuts to classrooms. And you're trying to sell this story to Ontarians that you're somehow increasing opportunities for learning—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Member, your time is up. Thank you.

We'll move to the government side.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Minister, I just wanted to digress for a minute on skilled trades. I have five kids, whom you've met—four girls and one boy. All four girls went to university and they loved it. When my son was going through high school, I felt sad because he was falling behind and getting through the cracks, and he didn't have an opportunity to be able to figure out what he'd like to do with his hands.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Anyway, I felt sorry for him and his buddies, because when I was a kid going to school, there were obviously tech classes, there was home ec and there were all kinds of things you could learn. You don't know what you don't know.

My son decided he was going to go up to college and he was going to become a welder. He's 24, as of the other day, and he now owns his own company, Mac's Barging, and he is extremely successful. But he took all that initiative on himself to go and do that, because he didn't have the opportunity—and, sadly, one of his friends ended up dropping out of school because he didn't have the opportunity to know that he would be good with his hands.

The reason I'm saying that is that I literally have a perma-smile when I watch what we're doing as a government and when I watch what you've done with education. After 15 years of so many things being neglected with the schools and everything else, it is a breath of fresh air to be grateful that the next generation, my grandkids, are going to be in a great situation with the education system and with going safely to school.

Can you just elaborate on the skilled trades for us today? Because there are lots of parents watching who

want to know that their kids are going to have an opportunity to work with their hands.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, I hope there are a lot of parents watching; I have a different suspicion on the audience. But I think you're absolutely right. The member from Burlington is the proud parent of a son, as mentioned, who's now doing very well. He's entrepreneurial and, I think, demonstrates to anyone out there who may feel that university or perhaps college isn't for them that there's still an incredibly dignified, high-wage and successful pathway for them to succeed.

There are so many cases like that. I want to profile Kaia, who Minister Dunlop and I met at a college just last week with parliamentary assistant Oosterhoff. We had a really fun time meeting this welder.

If I'm not mistaken, less than 5% of women are in the skilled trades—

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, 4%. I think that's just absolutely unacceptable, the gender disparity. We want to see more women participate in that area of growth. I know that's a priority for Minister Dunlop, for example, along with yourself, the member for Durham and so many others here who care deeply about that.

Part of it, I think, is championing the cause and being much more public about it. There has been a stigma. I come from an immigrant family. This is not a comment on all families, but my parents literally couldn't afford to go to college or university. In fact, when one of them wanted to go, their parent, if you can believe it—you're a mom—if you could ever conceive of looking at your child and saying, "You're not going to school; you're going to work." But that was just an existential reality for that family, for my grandparents, and they had to go to work.

Then for their children, it was the dream of law school or accounting or some profession, but some sort of liberal arts education was the pathway for me. God forbid that I went into an apprenticeship.

I think we have a role to play as well to destigmatize it amongst all families—not just immigrant families, but all of us. I think many parents have this bold aspirational vision for their children. They want them to achieve what they couldn't, and I think that's positive, but we want to make sure that we destigmatize it.

The second part of it is providing program supports. Some 58,000 students today are going to benefit from the SHSM program that Minister McNaughton, Minister Dunlop, PA Oosterhoff and I announced last week. In that program, 122 new programs are being offered at over 2,000 schools. This is really transformative when it comes to getting young people—particularly young women, First Nations, underrepresented groups and racialized groups—seeing themselves in the sector. That, for me, is really the first step.

Even when it comes to how we advertise as a government, how we frame the discussion from a marketing perspective, we've got to do a better job—I say this institutionally or from the corporate perspective of the government—to make sure that people see themselves

reflected in that sector, so we're going to keep doing that. And because of your advocacy, among others, we're going to obviously continue to make it a priority. The fact that it has been profiled in the fall economic statement today, I think, speaks volumes about the political priority of the government. We're going to continue to make sure there's money on the table to do that.

And obviously STEM, which speaks to that, among other sectors of the economy, is so consequential—

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The member from Eglinton—Lawrence is nodding aggressively because she has spoken to me many times about the need for more STEM education, as you have, in the context of young people who want to get access to good-paying jobs in the global marketplace. If we don't emphasize it, if we don't go where the puck is going, a generation of kids could be imperilled.

To however many parents are paying attention today, they should know that we are getting ahead of that problem. We are investing significantly in STEM, particularly math. We're updating the curriculum; it will be announced—unveiled, rather—in the spring and implemented next September. There's a \$200-million, four-year math strategy, financial literacy compulsory in the education system in grade 10 careers, and experiential, hands-on forms of numeracy. It's not just abstractions and theory; it's saying to a student, "You've got to draft a budget for the first year after graduation, or else you're not getting a secondary diploma." That is the type of materials and course focus and competency that parents want.

Look, I wish I had that. I'm sure many of us, both those who went through it in the recent past or for your children or whomever, wish we had that area of focus. For my nieces and for your children and others, I really envision a system that is much more responsive to labour market needs and the life skills that are necessary for young people to be successful.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Mr. Oosterhoff.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Merci, monsieur le Ministre, pour votre contribution ici aujourd'hui. Avant que je commence à poser des questions en français, je m'excuse pour l'accent, pour la grammaire et pour toutes les « mistakes ». Je ne suis pas francophone, mais je suis vraiment francophile, comme je dis chaque fois que je parle en public.

Je sais très bien que notre gouvernement—et votre contribution aussi—est pleinement engagé à appuyer la communauté franco-ontarienne ainsi qu'à promouvoir et à préserver la culture franco-ontarienne et la langue française dans notre province. J'ai vu, depuis que j'ai commencé à travailler avec la dernière ministre de l'Éducation et avec toi aussi, l'importance de la culture, de l'héritage et aussi de l'éducation en langue française dans notre province pour les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes.

Ma question est simple, mais peut-être c'est nécessaire aussi d'avoir la contribution de votre autre député : pouvez-vous nous expliquer le protocole de l'entente

relative à l'enseignement dans la langue de la minorité et à l'enseignement de la langue seconde? Mais, avant, peut-être que c'est possible d'expliquer un peu l'importance de l'éducation en langue française ici en Ontario.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you. Merci—that will be my contribution, although I will endeavour to be better at the next estimates. I want to just note that Denys, who is with us, the ADM for French-language education, as well as teaching, learning and achievement—I will defer to him, but I would just say on this that I was proud to join you, as someone who I know personally was involved in the negotiation, or rather involved in this file broadly with the Minister of Francophone Affairs, Minister Mulroney. We were with an incredibly exciting group of young students learning French.

I'll just say first off that French-language minority rights are absolutely of importance to this government. The preservation and the identity and culture of the French language is part of the shared history of our province; it predates Confederation. We are committed to it, which is why we're investing more in the French language than any government in the history of Ontario.

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The minority-rights agreement you cite is a historic agreement with the federal government that was of consequence. We believe—it is my position and that of the Minister of Francophone Affairs most principally—that there is an unequal funding arrangement in the federation where the federal government disproportionately funds other minority students in other provinces outside of Quebec, whereas Ontario has a significantly reduced per-person commitment. We think that's unfair.

We fought with the federal government, which is why it led them—I will give credit to the feds, to the province working with us, to Minister Joly specifically in heritage—to see more monies flow to the province for the first time in many, many years. That's a great success story of the efficacy of our negotiators, the toughness that we took, the principled position that we took in the context of better equity when it comes to funding from the feds.

And I don't make this an either-or, you know, Manitoba and/or Ontario, but look at the data points for Manitoba, for example: They're significantly higher than Ontario, when it comes to the feds supporting minority rights. We don't think it has to be at their expense. We think the feds should do their part to ensure all minority students in this country get access to education in the language that they deserve.

With that said, I'm going to turn it over to Denys for specific technicalities on the agreement, because I know he was very involved in that.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Merci.

Mr. Denys Giguère: Bonjour. Do I continue in—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Your preference.

Mr. Denys Giguère: My name is Denys Giguère. I'm assistant deputy minister for French-language teaching, learning and achievement division. Merci.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Qu'est-ce que tu préfères? Si tu veux, en français—

M. Denys Giguère: Je peux continuer en français. Pourquoi pas.

Votre première question était sur l'importance de la francophonie en Ontario. Il faut savoir, donc, qu'historiquement les francophones sont en Ontario depuis plus de 400 ans, d'une part. D'autre part, il y a plus de 620 000 francophones en Ontario. C'est une population tellement importante qu'en fait c'est la plus grande population de francophones hors Québec. Le Québec a plus de francophones que l'Ontario, mais sinon, au Canada on a la plus grande population de francophones. Un autre point qui est important, c'est que les écoles de langue française sont en pleine croissance. On a maintenant 110 000 élèves dans nos écoles, et ce chiffre continue de croître. Bien que ce n'est pas de mon ressort, je vais aussi dire qu'il y a un engouement pour le français langue seconde également. Donc, l'importance du français en Ontario est indéniable.

Le gouvernement fédéral, en vertu de la Loi sur les langues officielles, a comme mandat de faire la promotion du bilinguisme au Canada. Un des meilleurs endroits pour faire ce travail-là, c'est le secteur de l'éducation. Le protocole est donc le mécanisme qui est utilisé par le gouvernement fédéral pour travailler avec les provinces et territoires et financer ce qu'on appelle le « coût additionnel » pour offrir les services éducatifs dans la langue de la minorité. Ces coûts additionnels sont beaucoup associés, par exemple, à l'éloignement, à la ruralité et à l'isolement, mais il y a une bonne partie aussi qui va à la promotion de la langue et de la culture. Même si je vous ai dit qu'on a la plus grosse population francophone et que nos écoles accueillent de plus en plus d'élèves, le fait demeure qu'on ne représente que 5 % de la population. Donc, une bonne partie des fonds, par exemple, de l'entente—que l'on appelle communément l'entente Canada-Ontario, mais c'est le protocole—va à organiser des activités culturelles, des activités d'acquisition de la langue dans les écoles—

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Mais, ce n'est pas le ministère de l'Éducation aussi?

M. Denys Giguère: Absolument. Il faut être très, très clair que chaque dollar que le gouvernement fédéral investit a un dollar du gouvernement provincial—et beaucoup plus. Je vais être honnête avec vous : c'est très facile pour nous de démontrer au gouvernement fédéral qu'on investit beaucoup plus dans l'enseignement de la langue de la minorité, qui est le français en Ontario. Mais, effectivement, les deux niveaux de gouvernement y contribuent.

En plus des activités culturelles, il y a toute une gamme de services et de produits pédagogiques qu'on produit. Avec 5 %, encore une fois, de la population, ce n'est pas toujours rentable pour une maison d'édition, par exemple, de produire un livre de mathématiques en neuvième année. Le nombre d'élèves est trop petit pour que ce soit rentable. Or, nous, avec cette entente, on peut travailler avec nos partenaires et on peut aider à produire ces ressources-là dont les enseignants et les enseignantes ont besoin et dont les élèves ont besoin, donc, d'où l'importance de ce mécanisme.

Comme l'a mentionné le ministre un peu plus tôt, on vient de conclure les négociations du protocole. Le nouveau protocole n'est toujours pas en vigueur parce que, bien que l'Ontario l'ait signé, il y a des provinces et territoires qui sont en train de faire leurs propres processus. Au terme de ce protocole-là, pour la première fois depuis 10 ans, on va avoir une augmentation—c'est modeste—de l'ordre de 15 millions de dollars pour tout le pays. Proportionnellement, l'Ontario va recevoir un peu plus de 4 millions de dollars de cette somme-là.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Bien sûr. Alors hier après-midi, j'étais au TFO pour une vidéo. Quand j'étais là, ils me disent que le TFO produit un milliard de vues de leurs vidéos sur YouTube. Ce n'est pas juste le YouTube mais, je pense, les différents enseignants et les élèves qui utilisent TFO.

Est-ce que c'est possible d'expliquer un peu le pouvoir du TFO et pourquoi c'est nécessaire à maintenir ce programme pour l'avenir de nos élèves et le système des écoles?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm happy to provide opening comment and then I'll turn it back to the ADM.

I met with the leadership of TFO and was very impressed with the models they've built that they've actually exported around the country and around the world. It's a really fascinating capacity they've built. In the context of French education, the primary audiences for their services are in elementary and high school. They obviously target as well children, teenagers and adults who are trying to learn French, using a multimedia platform that, as you mentioned, has almost reached, as I understand it, just about a billion views on YouTube, which is not insignificant for any corporation or agency, let alone a provincial one. So we're very proud of their work and proud of the public servants that work there and the partners and boards that do good work to promote the French language and take seriously the mandate of that organization, which is the promotion of French language and all of the associated culture, history and the shared values. We think we have a system that is working—obviously TVO and TFO, both of which are agencies, effectively, of the ministry and largely funded by the ministry.

I think the lesson for us is, how do we scale that up to see more young people? Particularly in the context of immersion in other languages, we're seeing exploding numbers of student or parent interest. How do we further scale that so that more young people can access secondary languages? Because there are many proof points, or evidence, of young people and people in general who have been able to use it in their professional careers—to the parliamentary assistant, from a jealous minister. The point is that clearly it is of use. It is necessary. There's an economic imperative. I think there's also, in the context of French-language minority rights and our commitment to their protection in Ontario—reverting back to the founding of our country, English and French—I think it underscores our commitment to ensure the preservation of both language and identity.

Denys, anything else?

M. Denys Giguère: Bonjour. Donc, pour parler de TFO, je dois avouer que TFO, à mes yeux—je vais vous donner mon opinion personnelle—c'est vraiment une histoire de succès. TFO a fait un virage vers l'ère électronique il y a quelques années de ça. Quand je les ai rencontrés dernièrement, ils m'ont annoncé qu'ils avaient effectivement sur YouTube un milliard de vues maintenant pour leur programmation pour la petite enfance.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Excuse me. You've got one minute left. Thank you.

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M. Denys Giguère: Donc, ils font énormément de progrès, de beau travail. TFO est un ambassadeur hors pair pour l'Ontario, à mes yeux. Il faut savoir qu'une petite entreprise de l'Ontario comme ça est capable d'exporter sa programmation en Louisiane, à New York et en France, même—TFO vend en France. Donc, ce sont des ambassadeurs, et ils sont maintenant à Ottawa, associés à La Cité collégiale. Ils ont déménagé leur studio à La Cité collégiale. Ils aident à la programmation et, de plus en plus, ils intègrent les étudiants de La Cité. Tout ça, c'est de la technologie de pointe. Quand on parle de « STEM », c'est un exemple parfait.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Merci beaucoup pour vos réponses. C'est bien.

M. Denys Giguère: Merci.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Je n'ai pas d'autre—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Because you're just waiting for me to say your time's up—okay.

We'll go back to the official opposition. Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to ask a couple of questions about the EQAO. EQAO testing remains—I think it's fair to say, from the many calls I get—a significant source of stress for a lot of students and parents and teachers alike. Your government announced some modernizing of the agency, but there are very few details so far available. I'm asking whether or not you can confirm that the funding for the EQAO has increased this year and by how much.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: If you give us a minute, we'll get that information. In 2019-20, we are allocating \$31.56 million to EQAO. That is an increase of \$30,000 over 2018-19.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right. Can you tell me how much of that is the increase in the salary for the new chair of the EQAO, because the salary is \$140,000?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I don't have that information.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Maybe I can help a little. The previous chair was asked what was the most that he'd ever received as a per diem, because he was paid per diems. He said, I believe, that the most he'd ever been paid in a year was \$5,000 a year, and I think that held up. That's a pretty significant increase. That seems to me like pretty much half of the increase to the EQAO. Could you confirm that, please?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: The \$300,000 was actually specifically designated around an IT effort that we're working on with EQAO. We are taking their data stores and migrating them to the Guelph data centre. We're relieving

them of the costs and the obligation of maintaining their own data stores, and moving them to the Guelph data centre.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, okay. That's interesting.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: For your previous question, I would say it's something that the agency is managing.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And then what did that come out of, that \$135,000 that went to—let's face it; we might as well say it—a former failed Conservative candidate?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will jump in, deputy.

Two things: The first is that the member is cognizant, no doubt, that the part-time position that existed under the former government has changed to a full-time position under this government. The rationale, the impetus for that, Chair, is because under the former government and under the former leadership, we did not see, and the parents of this province or educators alike did not see, the test results improve at all. In fact, they stagnated, for a decade, every year—at best, stagnated; at worst, reduced in real numbers.

With respect to Dr. Montgomery, who has a PhD in educational psychology, his primary research is on student and educator stress, coping, burnout and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, I know. I've met him.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If I may just finish the one point—he has worked for over 20 years in education in this sector, largely in his capacity of working with a variety of colleges and universities. We believe that his knowledge and expertise as well, related to research in K-to-grade-12 education at the University of Ottawa and student achievement, are a great example of illustrious candidates we can elevate to do the important work of improving scores, particularly in the area of math. His research is specifically germane to student improvement.

I just think that that is important to note, Chair. I think it would be really unfair, for people who put their names forward in the context of appointments, to denigrate them at this committee. I actually think that their knowledge, their experience and their 20 years on the front lines of research at the U of O are not something that I would belittle.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm not doubting his knowledge. I've met the man. I have no personal issue with him. The point is that what you already have at the EQAO is a CEO who's full-time who runs the agency, and you've now created a chair position that really is—I think it's highly unusual to then pay another person, a chair of a board, a full-time salary like that, equivalent to a CEO's. You've already got a CEO.

Anyway, I guess my point would be, I wonder what kind of message you think that sends to, for example, an occasional teacher making below the poverty line right now who has just been told that they don't have a position at all this year. How do you think that goes over?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think for educators and for all partners in education in the province, they want to see data that informs our public policy development, which is why the maintenance of the EQAO is important. I don't believe

the other members would support even the inception of EQAO.

We believe that measuring results and performance data are actually an important behaviour both in public and private organizations. That couldn't be said for all members of the committee, but I think what's important is that we have seen, year over year since the implementation of a form of math under the former government, a decline in real numbers.

So if the instinct is to defend the status quo, then I will fundamentally disagree with you, member. I think—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm not defending the status quo, Minister. I have some significant questions and concerns around the EQAO. I think that the concerns that I've been asked about, what I've been asked by many, many people, is why the government decided to make this kind of political appointment of a chair—when they're talking about cost savings and having to pay down the deficit, why they would choose to create this position when they already have a full-time CEO.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Administering a test—just to finish the thought—to 500,000 students, providing that test going forward for new educators in the context of math: I think many parents, at least the folks I speak to, are pleased to see that the government is measuring results.

Do you support the measurements of EQAO? Do you support measurements and—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, I support research and data, but I have big concerns about this test—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: But not measurements at the EQAO?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I actually do. You'd be surprised at what I support, Minister. But actually, it's not your opportunity to ask me questions; it's my opportunity to ask you questions—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think it's an opportunity to disclose to the public that you oppose any form of measurements—

Ms. Marit Stiles: What I question, Minister, is why you're increasing the job of a chair—which is basically a volunteer role, right? It's been managed previously in essentially a volunteer role. You have a CEO. I just don't understand what the accountability is of this person who you have now given a \$140,000 salary.

Anyway, moving on, I want to continue to talk a bit about staffing and resourcing. Minister, I want you to have a chance to talk a bit about your own budget, under ministry administration. Can you give me a breakdown of your office's full-time equivalents, as well as how that compares to the last three years?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. I'll turn it over to the ADM from finance. They may have additional—

Ms. Marit Stiles: While you're going through that, if you wouldn't mind letting me know which of those are political staff, political hires.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, obviously, I would not be cognizant of benchmarking current FTEs against what would have happened in the former government, but my officials—I'm happy for them to attempt to respond.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, interesting. Okay.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Yes, that may be a question we have to take away. I do know that our minister's office operates within the budget that's allocated to them. We work very closely with them to make sure that they're respecting all of the public service expenditure guidelines, that they're within the FTEs and within all the spending requirements. So I can give you that assurance for the current minister's office. We would have to go back a little bit—as a point of comparison to the two prior years, I apologize, we don't have that data with us today.

1730

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciate that. I would love to have that information. I think that should be tabled. That's very legitimate information to provide to this committee.

I'm kind of surprised that the minister doesn't know who works in his own office. I mean, I know it's probably a pretty significant number, but for us it's like—you know who works for you, usually, especially the immediate people around you. I'm assuming that many of them are your most trusted staff and advisers.

Okay. I'm just going to keep going, then. So I'd like that, and I'd like to know how many are political staff. I also wonder—and I'd like this clarified—if that number includes, or if you could provide, the staff that are assigned to your office but whose budget may be funded from another minister's office or the Premier's office. Sometimes I know that happens.

Did you catch that? Sorry, I want to be sure everybody got that. Minister, do you want to respond to that?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. It does not. It does not include those. But, as the deputy minister has noted—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Does that mean you don't have any? But you don't know how many it is, right?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The answer to the question is that those budgets are not conflated. Having said that, in the context of the numbers of FTEs, especially compared to years past, we will return to you with that number.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want that to please also include—I'm actually kind of surprised it's not available here; I would have assumed you would have anticipated that question—the minister responsible for child care and early years. Would that be included? What is it, an associate minister? And also the parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I can speak to that. At one point—there is an artifact of previous administrations that is still in our 2019-20 vote and item structure, and it does reflect the structure under previous governments where there was an associate minister. This government has not appointed someone in that role. So that ministry administration number does include our minister's office, the office of the parliamentary assistant. It also includes the deputy minister's office and the corporate functions in the ministry, such as HR, finance, audit and legal.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. So you're going to give me the information about all of the political staff and the minister's staff, right?

I just want to ask again and give you a chance—because I can't honestly believe that you can't tell me right now,

right here, how many political staff work in your office, Minister. I can't understand that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Is it so extensive that you can't—come on; I know it's not that extensive. Please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, no, no. Member, the issue isn't knowing the number; it's knowing the budget allocated associated with it, which is what you asked for to be benchmarked year over year. We have 22 FTEs in my office in the Ministry of Education—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Twenty-two full-time equivalents in your office currently?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: That's right.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, so you do know it. Okay.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, yes. You asked specifically comparative for the last three years—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right, right.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I wouldn't know that. I wouldn't know what Minister Mitzie Hunter had, for example. What I can assert to you is that we are very committed to ensuring that the government respects tax dollars. I know, as an individual member, that if I'm not mistaken, last year I did not put in a single expense. I think I'm one of three or four members that didn't do that last year—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciate that. I didn't ask that, but that's good to know.

Now I just want to move on because I know I'm running out of time. How many more minutes do I have?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Seven and a half.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Seven and a half. So you're going to get back to me with the specifics of how many are political staff. Are those all political staff, Minister, the 22 full-time equivalents?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Those are staff in the minister's office. Just one point: I just looked very briefly at the data points, and the reduction year over year is \$2 million. I think that's a 10% reduction from the minister's offices for the last year.

Ms. Marit Stiles: For all of the minister's offices?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, for—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Does that include the parliamentary assistant?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It does.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you were going to give me the breakdown—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will provide that. I just want the record to note—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Because it could also be that people are just earning a lot less; I don't know. Maybe that's an issue. I don't know, but we'll find out because we're going to get that information.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to alert the committee that year over year spending is down 10% and—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Since when?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, the year prior, of course—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay, but we'll get the years—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The fiscal prior.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So the year prior was under Minister Thompson?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, it would be—well, this is the estimates—

Ms. Nancy Naylor: It reflects the difference between the 2018-19 estimates number and the 2019-20 estimates number.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right, okay. I wonder if you could point to me where I would find your ministry's advertising budget. Would that also fall under ministry administration?

Ms. Mersad Fard: My name is Mersad Fard, acting director for corporate finance. The ministry administration program includes the budget for the communications branch, and that would be included.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. Can you tell me how that compares to the last five years, as well?

Ms. Mersad Fard: We don't have that.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We can take that back.

Ms. Mersad Fard: We can take that back.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Could you compare it to the previous year, even?

Ms. Mersad Fard: Our estimates don't break it down into that level of detail. We can definitely take that back and look into it.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want specifically the ministry's advertising budget compared. Since you don't have that information on hand, if you will table it then. I have a commitment that that will be tabled with the committee? Yes. They're indicating yes.

What advertising is the ministry currently engaged in? I understand there are radio ads running currently to promote the education plan, for example. I'm sure there are more, but I'm just wondering what other advertising is under way.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Sorry, I don't think we have the staff that could speak specifically to that number, but we do have a public information campaign under way right now. It's a fairly modest budget. We could bring that information back to the committee.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Would any of that include when the Premier goes on his little news channel, the fake news channel thing? Does that fall—if he's talking about education—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No.

Ms. Marit Stiles: No. That's just his own—that's just your party—well, it's the government. It's the government caucus. Okay, I've got that.

You're going to give me information about all the ad campaigns that are under way, all the advertising. I'm going to see a detailed breakdown, I hope, of the advertising that's taking place.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You can. As you noted, families may hear them on radios across the province; they promote our positive plan for education in the province.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you're going to provide us with the information about that advertising campaign and all of the details of that? I think it's really important. This is something that we've all—when you were in opposition—

well, you weren't there, but when your party was in opposition, everybody was pretty critical of the Liberals, for good reason. I would love to see—I think people have reason to be concerned, but also it's one of the many things that we know—you call them public information campaigns. Let's share some more information about that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. I think, Chair, that the Auditor General—everyone should know the AG would have approved those ads before they're on the air or they're in print or they're on television, which is, I think, the ultimate adjudicator on the merits of the ads.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Absolutely. It's just good for the public to know how much is being spent.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to go back for a moment. How many minutes do I have left?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): You have almost three minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I appreciate that the parliamentary assistant asked a similar kind of question. A year ago, during the fiscal update, when we saw the French language commissioner eliminated, it wasn't a secret that Franco-Ontarians felt, at the very least, I guess, disrespected by this government's actions and, at worst, I'd say, targeted by them. Something that comes up a lot when I'm talking to teachers and folks on the francophone boards, both Catholic and public, is how the loss of the 10,000 teaching positions that we're going to see over the next four years is going to be felt in the French public and French Catholic systems. I know the minister knows this, but for French boards, teacher recruitment and retention is a major concern. What I am hearing is they are very worried about how they are going to attract anyone to Ontario when they know that this is hanging over their heads. The potential for job losses, for the large class sizes, the loss of courses and the move to a mandatory, untested, experimental e-learning plan is really not a great incentive to attract teachers when francophone teachers are in such high demand across the country. I wonder if you could respond to that, please.

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Hon. Stephen Lecce: We obviously are committed to French-language and minority rights education, a charter-protected right. Section 23 maintains our commitment, and so does the Education Act. I think what is important to note is that there's a \$1.8-billion allocation for French language which is up from last year—year over year, the highest allocation to date. That represents a \$16-million enhanced allocation, year over year. But we recognize that we were also able to deliver, for the very individuals that you spoke of, a commitment through the federal government—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): One minute left.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, Minister—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We negotiated a \$4-million allocation from the feds to enhance per-pupil funding for minority rights, which we believe was an important step. The feds still have more to do, because the per-pupil funding at the federal funding actually discriminates

against Ontarians. I think a unified voice in this respect would be helpful.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So, Minister, are you committing—if I may, because we're running out of time. Are you saying that those boards won't lose the teaching positions? How are you going to prevent this from being an issue, because I don't understand how—are these job losses going to be applied to the francophone boards differently?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What I'm committing to francophone speakers in the province, and families, is that the government has increased investment to protect their language identity—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, respectfully, that does not answer the question, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I've also met with a variety of French-language stakeholders where I committed to working with them, and I think we may have, if I'm not mistaken, addressed this in our own meeting—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Sorry, Minister, your time is up.

I'll turn it over to the government. Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to talk about what I consider a really good-news story about what's changed in education. One of the changes that you're making in education is the use of service dogs in schools. I was rather surprised to learn that all schools didn't let service dogs into their facilities, for whatever reason. I suppose they have their reasons for doing that.

I've been a Lions member since 1987, and certainly service dogs are something that we've supported for years. I've had the opportunity to visit our school in Oakville, which incidentally was started through the efforts of a Lion from St. Marys by the name of Bruce Murray. He got a bunch of people together and then they got this school going in Oakville. It's supported by the Lions Foundation of Canada. I've been there, and it's quite a thing to see the training of these dogs.

When I was down there, we watched a group of dogs that were being trained for the visually impaired, and at the end of the tour we saw the dogs and their handlers coming back in from the town. That's the last test. People who can't see, who are using these dogs—for the last test, they go drop them off in the city someplace, and they have to make their way back to the school. It takes some of them an hour, and it takes some of them five hours, but that's the way it works. It's quite a story. Now they have all kinds of dog guides serving children with mental disabilities, so there are all kinds of different dog guides they have right now.

Minister, the government recently announced its policy on service animals in schools. Why is this a government priority?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that. There have been great advocates for the cause, including the parliamentary assistant, who championed this cause with MPP Fee and others who wanted to ensure that, particularly for children with exceptionalities and disabilities—visual impairment, among others, noting that there are benefits even for children with juvenile diabetes and others—there

really is evidence that underpinned the decision to pass the Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act. Essentially, that allowed the ministry and the minister—it gave that individual the authority to request all boards—because roughly, I believe, 39 of the 72 had frameworks in place for service animals. The rest did not, so you could have an experience where you could be in the same community, but a public board has it, the Catholic doesn't, or vice versa, and that's a problem.

We have asked all boards—we've mandated them to come up with a policy that works best for their kids and their locality—consulting, but with a bias, obviously, toward inclusivity for children who seek that support. I think for us, it's just if any small or large—look, this may not be an issue that affects every home in the province, and I get that. But for those that it does, it could literally transform the child's ability to adapt and to remain in class in a productive and positive manner, and that is a very good thing. That's why the parliamentary assistant, the deputy House leader, myself, my predecessor Minister Thompson and so many of us thought it would be prudent to move forward with that initiative. We announced that in Kitchener-Waterloo, in a community that has faced this issue publicly.

We're going to continue to support that through PPM 163, which essentially addresses that issue specifically, provides that authority and requests that boards provide that framework. That, so far, has yielded a really good response from stakeholders. There's obviously consideration for allergies and other real impacts on kids. Should, for example, a service animal—it could be a dog; it usually is a dog—have an adverse impact, then the educator and the principal will use their best discretion. But the idea is to provide an integrative and inclusive manner so kids can ultimately stay in class and learn and participate in the classroom, which otherwise they literally couldn't do.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: These dog guides—and that's the way it's supposed to be, dog guides, not guide dogs; it's dog guides—can cost up to \$30,000 to train. So it can be an expensive proposition.

Of course, they use all kinds of dogs. I keep talking about the Lions Foundation. There are other organizations that supply dog guides, and I won't want to discredit them, certainly, but the Lions Foundation actually, about 15 or 20 years ago, started their own puppy farm. This is in Breslau. They used to do tours there, but because of disease issues and whatever else, you can't go in to see it. But they breed their own dogs now because the supply of dogs was not there as they were needed, especially with the use of dogs with autistic children and this type of thing. So they have their own breeding school. It's quite a story that they have.

What policy guidelines has the government released to school boards regarding service animals?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We released PPM 163, which essentially mandates them to come up with a framework, to make sure that at least they have a policy, because as you know, 39 of 72 did and the rest did not. A critical mass did not. So that effectively mandates them to come up with

a policy. It doesn't mandate the outcome; it just requests them to meaningfully consult, listen, have a bias toward inclusion and support these kids. Let's give them every pathway to succeed in class. That's why it was really important. So many stakeholders, largely in the ASD community, among others, signalled that it can seem small, but it can really transform the ability of a young person to stay in class for a sustained period of time. It creates a safe space for them.

I just think that anything we can do, anything at all that can help these kids, is the right thing to do. That was the driving force behind the parliamentary assistant, the deputy House leader, Minister Thompson and so many others who really worked hard on this with our officials to drive an outcome.

Is there any additional context you may want to add about 163?

Ms. Holly Moran: Sure. My name is Holly Moran. I'm the executive director for the student support and field services division in the ministry. As the minister mentioned, it is one of the government's priorities to make sure that every student in Ontario has access to a safe and healthy learning environment. Support animals and service animals are often a very big part of that.

The legislative amendment that was passed in the spring was followed almost immediately by a very broad-based consultation with groups across the province. We did it online in order to make it affordable and easy to access. We heard from parents. We heard from students. We heard from service animal handlers and guide dog handlers. We heard from educators as well. There were 1,900 responses to that online survey as well as five written responses that were received. In consideration of all of that feedback, that's what led to PPM 163.

Just to follow up on the minister's comments as well, the amendments to the Education Act actually require each of the boards to develop the policy. It's a requirement, not an option. The amendment also enables the Ministry of Education to ensure that those comply with that policy.

1750

The policy is there to ensure that there's some transparency and consistency across, as the minister mentioned. From board to board, there was variation when we had only 30 who voluntarily introduced those policies. Now we have 72 across that will have some consistency in elements. You can imagine that families travelling from board to board would want to have a similar experience and would want to know what to expect, just as a family that doesn't require a service animal but may have a child who has a phobia or a fear or an allergy to animals would want to know how those issues are going to be handled in their local area.

A "service animal" typically refers to "an animal that supports a disability." I think, notably, as well, in this jurisdiction—many jurisdictions have limited the species that are able to qualify as a service animal. Dogs are certainly the most frequent. In our jurisdiction, we have chosen not to place a limitation on the species of the animal, so it could be a dog, it could be a cat, it might be a

pig, it might be a goat. It could be whatever happens to work for that student in that school.

Families will often inquire about the use of a service animal as their IEP—their individualized education plan—is being developed for their student. Service animals can be there to support emotional needs, therapeutic needs and medical needs for the student. We want to make sure that those needs are addressed. But the decision-making is locally based so that those school boards all have the flexibility within the context of PPM 163 to develop what works for them at the local level.

What I would say as well is that the consultation extended for about six weeks. It took place from April 4 to May 11. We carefully considered all of that feedback as we were looking at what to include in the PPM. That's a historic moment for us. It's the first time that the ministry has ever had a policy requiring that kind of support for students.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: That's quite interesting. I want to thank you for that answer. I suppose, other than the person who has the dog, the public has to be educated on the dog too—or the animal, I guess, since you say you might allow a goat in there.

I'm going to talk about dogs. When they are working, you shouldn't be petting that animal. The dog is working. When they take off the collar or the harness, then they know they aren't working. Then they get petted, and that's okay. But I suppose there has to be some sort of an education with the teachers or the hierarchy in the school as to what can and cannot be done with the animal that's in there. Is that something that's being addressed?

Ms. Holly Moran: It would be a component within the policy, if the board chose to do that. I think it presents a wonderful opportunity for boards to think about the entirety of the school community—the educators, the students, the other educational supports that are within that school community as well—to look at how to support that student by not interfering with what that animal is there to do.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I see. You said you had 1,900 responses.

Ms. Holly Moran: Yes, and five written.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: And five written. Can you give me a demographic of the people who responded to this? It wasn't just people who needed these animals; it was others too?

Ms. Holly Moran: Yes. We did hear from educators, we heard from parents, we heard from parents of students who require service animals as well as from parents of students who don't. We heard from trainers of these animals, we heard from handlers of these animals, and we heard from students with special education needs who might require a service animal—quite a broad range of folks.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: To the best of your knowledge, was there anybody who replied to you who just took an interest in this thing, who didn't have a dog or a child or whoever might need a service animal? Were there any of those who called in and said, "We've heard about this, and

we think this is just a great idea”—just the ordinary person I guess I’m talking about?

Ms. Holly Moran: Certainly our parliamentary assistant would have experience with that as well. He’s quite passionate about the issue; absolutely.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Okay. I guess there are things that maybe you know and I know, because we’ve had some experience in this type of thing. The training of these animals just doesn’t exist in school. It exists with people who take these animals in and start training them. They do the potty training, if I can call it that, and get them used to riding in elevators and being around people and all this type of thing.

I know, Minister, if I could put a plug in to you, or give you a suggestion, in your spare time you can qualify to train a dog, if you want to put that in your resumé.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I’ve got a lot of spare time for personal things.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yeah, right.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: So, thank you so much for your recommendations. I’ll consider that tonight at 11 o’clock when I get home. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: There are quite a few people who take time to do this, and they don’t get paid for it. It’s something that they love to do. There’s a procedure, certainly, to qualify for something like this.

Kudos out to these people who train these pups, because they keep them for six or eight months and then they go back to the school. There are a lot of tears shed because they actually fall in love with these animals while they get them going. Hopefully, with what they’ve done with the dog, the animal will be qualified to go on in its schooling.

So, there are quite a few people who do that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And we know, as the Pope said, all dogs go to heaven. So, we really do support them.

But I think you raise important points about the volunteers and those who work in this sector that help to expand that capacity. Those families really are unsung heroes.

I met one of them. I met MPP Amy Fee’s son’s support staff—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: And Rickman.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, Rickman, really a cute dog—and I met the support staff. I’ll just tell you, she was very emotional that day—the parliamentary assistant will remember that—because for many years, families fought just to get basic access to a service animal that allowed their child to sit and be in a space with his or her peers. It’s simple to us but transformative for them. I think you’re right to raise the partnership that’s required, from those who do the training, to the parents, who have been incredible advocates for this, and obviously to the educators, who I think have overwhelmingly embraced this, and who

themselves recognize the efficacy of these animals and the positive role they play.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I would assume—I hope I can assume this—that this has been a policy that has been well accepted in the education business, with all educators.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think, in short, the answer is yes.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: That is certainly good news. I don’t know how anybody would say no to something like this.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Yes?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I just wanted to ask a question.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Go ahead.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much.

Minister, all of us have people in our constituencies who come and talk to us, and sometimes there are very, very sad stories. I just wanted to speak to you for a minute about a very touching moment with my constituent Natalie Pierre. Her son, at 17, took his life when he got home from school. She came and spoke to you at CAMH, and actually got up to speak when she was there. She was overwhelmed with your compassion and your passion when you spoke to her before and after, when we were there. First of all, I want to thank you very much for that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): You have one minute left.

Ms. Jane McKenna: She was so touched by that.

I just wanted you to maybe say a few words on that, with what we’re doing with mental health, with kids in school, and how to help so that doesn’t happen again.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: First off, thank you for elevating that story. The night prior—this all happened so quickly. Natalie is an incredibly courageous parent who faced incredible darkness in her life—courageous to speak about her adversity—but with a mission to ensure that no family and no child has to face that sense of isolation.

I think the announcement on doubling the mental health envelope—the discussion we had with the parliamentary assistant for health, MPP Martin, and those students and those young mental health workers was eye-opening, just to discover how omnipresent the challenges are when it comes to mental health.

But I think the investment, the stories and the individual leadership exercised by Natalie and by others are what’s going to help put—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Minister, I’m sorry. I’m going to have to cut you off. It is 6 o’clock, and that is all the time we have available today.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on November 19, when we will meet to resume consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. Thank you, and have a great night.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

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Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

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Clerk / Greffière

Ms. Julia Douglas

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