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of Ontario



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Mercredi  
19 avril 2023

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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
Greffier : Todd Decker

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# CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 19 April 2023 / Mercredi 19 avril 2023

## ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

### Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023, Bill 98, Mr. Lecce / Loi de 2023 sur l'amélioration des écoles et du rendement des élèves, projet de loi 98, M. Lecce

Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3651
Mr. Mike Harris .....	3660
M. Guy Bourgouin .....	3660
Ms. Laura Smith.....	3660
Mr. Terence Kernaghan .....	3660
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy .....	3661
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	3661
Mr. Mike Harris .....	3661
Second reading debate deemed adjourned .....	3662

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

### Hospice Renfrew

Mr. John Yakabuski .....	3662
--------------------------	------

### Black Walnut Bakery Café

Ms. Peggy Sattler .....	3662
-------------------------	------

### Homelessness

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy .....	3662
---------------------------------	------

### Northern Health Travel Grant

Mme France Gélinas .....	3663
--------------------------	------

### John Brummell

Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	3663
-------------------------	------

### March of Dimes

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens .....	3663
--------------------------------------	------

### Innovation Arena

Mr. Mike Harris .....	3663
-----------------------	------

### Health care

Mr. Ted Hsu .....	3664
-------------------	------

### Housing

Mr. Anthony Leardi .....	3664
--------------------------	------

### George Leslie Mackay

Mr. Ernie Hardeman .....	3664
--------------------------	------

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche .....	3664
Ms. Andrea Khanjin.....	3665
Ms. Doly Begum .....	3665
Mr. Ernie Hardeman .....	3665

Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3665
Hon. Todd Smith.....	3665
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	3665
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3665
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens .....	3665

## QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

### Land use planning

Ms. Marit Stiles .....	3665
Hon. Doug Ford .....	3665
Hon. Steve Clark .....	3666

### Hospice care / Cost of living

Ms. Marit Stiles .....	3666
Hon. Sylvia Jones .....	3666
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	3666

### School nutrition programs

Mr. Wayne Gates .....	3667
Hon. Michael Parsa .....	3667
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens .....	3667

### School facilities / Refugee services

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos .....	3668
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	3668

### Services for seniors and persons with disabilities

Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3668
Hon. Sylvia Jones .....	3668
Mr. Joel Harden.....	3669

### Ontario Place

Ms. Christine Hogarth .....	3669
Hon. Kinga Surma.....	3669

### Tenant protection

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche .....	3669
Hon. Steve Clark .....	3670

### Affordable housing

Mr. Mike Schreiner .....	3670
Hon. Steve Clark .....	3670
Hon. Doug Ford .....	3671

### Public safety

Mrs. Daisy Wai .....	3671
Hon. Michael S. Kerzner.....	3671

### School facilities

Ms. Doly Begum .....	3672
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	3672

### Agri-food industry

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal .....	3672
Hon. Lisa M. Thompson .....	3672

<b>Long-term care</b>	
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3673
Hon. Paul Calandra.....	3673

<b>Health care post-secondary education</b>	
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3674
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	3674

<b>Health care</b>	
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam.....	3674
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	3674

<b>Women in sports / Tourism</b>	
Mr. Graham McGregor.....	3675
Hon. Neil Lumsden.....	3675

<b>Visitors</b>	
Ms. Doly Begum.....	3676

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /  
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES  
ET VISITEURS**

Ms. Natalie Pierre.....	3676
-------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /  
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS**

<b>Standing Committee on the Interior</b>	
Mr. Aris Babikian.....	3676
Report adopted.....	3676

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /  
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

<b>Advocate for Older Adults Act, 2023, Bill 101, MPP Lindo; MPP Vaugeois / Loi de 2023 sur l'intervenant en faveur des personnes âgées, projet de loi 101, MPP Lindo; MPP Vaugeois</b>	
First reading agreed to.....	3676
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3676

**PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS**

<b>Éducation en français</b>	
Mme France Gélinas.....	3676

<b>Education</b>	
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	3677

<b>Éducation en français</b>	
Mme Sandy Shaw.....	3677

<b>School boards</b>	
Mr. Dave Smith.....	3677

<b>Missing persons</b>	
Miss Monique Taylor.....	3677

<b>School boards</b>	
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	3678

<b>Éducation en français</b>	
M. Guy Bourgouin.....	3678

<b>Education</b>	
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	3678

<b>Trespass notices</b>	
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3679

**ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**

**Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023, Bill  
98, Mr. Lecce / Loi de 2023 sur l'amélioration des  
écoles et du rendement des élèves, projet de loi 98,  
M. Lecce**

Mr. Mike Harris.....	3679
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	3680
Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3681
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3681
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	3682
Mr. Ross Romano.....	3682
M. Guy Bourgouin.....	3682
Mr. Joel Harden.....	3683
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	3686
M. Guy Bourgouin.....	3686
Ms. Patrice Barnes.....	3686
Miss Monique Taylor.....	3687
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3687
Ms. Laura Smith.....	3687
Mr. Trevor Jones.....	3689
Ms. Chandra Pasma.....	3690
Mr. Mike Harris.....	3690
Mr. Joel Harden.....	3691
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3691
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	3691
Mrs. Daisy Wai.....	3692
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3692
Hon. Stan Cho.....	3694
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	3694
Hon. Stan Cho.....	3695
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3695
Ms. Patrice Barnes.....	3695
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens.....	3695
Mr. Billy Pang.....	3696
Mme France Gélinas.....	3697
Mr. Rob Flack.....	3697
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens.....	3698
Mr. Mike Harris.....	3698
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3698
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3698
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	3698
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	3701
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	3701
Mme France Gélinas.....	3701
Ms. Patrice Barnes.....	3702
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	3702
Mr. Ross Romano.....	3702

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 19 April 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 19 avril 2023

*The House met at 0900.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Good morning. Let us pray.

*Prayers.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT  
OUTCOMES ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION  
DES ÉCOLES ET DU RENDEMENT  
DES ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 18, 2023, on the motion for second reading of Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care / *Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.*

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'll recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Speaker, if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to allow the member for Ottawa West–Nepean to recommence her 60-minute lead when she resumes debate.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the member for Ottawa West–Nepean to recommence her 60-minute remarks on this bill. Agreed? Agreed.

Further debate? I recognize the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Speaker.

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to rise to speak to Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. This is another example of the government's Orwellian naming of legislation. I think a more apt title for it would have been "the micromanaging school boards as a distraction from the underfunding of schools act," or, as OECTA president Barb Dobrowolski recommended, "the failed Conservative government keeps on failing students act." I'd also like to suggest "the Wizard of Oz act"—pay no attention to the minister behind the curtain. Because what we have here is a spectacular refusal to take responsibility for the government's failures on the education file and the many ways in which this government is short-changing our kids. Instead, the government is trying to distract parents by blaming schools and school boards for the underinvestment. He's desperately hoping that you

don't notice that, once again this year, education funding is not keeping up with inflation. Instead, he wants you to believe that if he blusters enough about basic skills, you won't even notice that there's no actual plan here to address the real reasons why our children are struggling. He's hoping you won't pay attention to rising class sizes, to the cuts to teachers and education workers, to the lack of special education supports, to the absence of mental health supports, to the rising tide of violence in our schools because of the mental health crisis, to the burnout that teachers and education workers are experiencing because of the cuts and conditions imposed on them by this government, and to the impact of e-learning on students and school budgets.

This bill and the timing of it, along with the minister's announcement on Sunday, is smoke and mirrors. It is sleight of hand. It's saying, "Please look over here so that you don't notice what we're doing over here," so that you disbelieve the things you are seeing in schools with your own eyes.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Point of order.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Eglinton–Lawrence has a point of order.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'm sorry to interrupt my friend opposite, but she's imputing motive to the member from King–Vaughan, the Minister of Education. She's talking about his motives in bringing forward this legislation, which I think is against the rules, under 25(i).

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member is quite correct that the standing orders prohibit the imputing of false motives against another member, and I'll be listening carefully to ensure that that's not happening.

I return to the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Speaker.

Are our children struggling? Yes, absolutely. Do they need and deserve better supports? Yes, absolutely. But let's talk about why they're struggling and who is actually responsible and what the solutions are if you're not a minister obsessed with avoiding responsibility.

The past three years have been rough; there is no doubt about that. I know, as a parent, speaking to my kids' teachers at parent-teacher interviews, that they have flagged that students are behind where they should be. They can't compare kids to previous years because kids aren't meeting the same markers that they would normally meet. Kids definitely need support in their learning.

During the past three years, we have also had longer school closures here in Ontario than any other jurisdiction in North America because this government refused to make the investments and put in place the policies that

would have kept kids safe. They refused to invest in smaller class sizes. They gave COVID tests to private schools and left publicly funded schools at the back of the line. They made ventilation upgrades but refused to set any kind of standards for ventilation or implement any kind of monitoring or reporting that would ensure that we were actually getting better air quality in schools. They didn't fully fund COVID measures to protect our kids and to help prevent learning loss, either. They required boards to pay for many of these measures out of their own reserves.

For instance, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board paid \$30 million out of reserves for COVID safety measures and for investments to prevent learning loss. Trustees have told me that they viewed the reserves as an emergency fund or a rainy day fund, and a global pandemic is nothing if not a violent downpour. So they spent their rainy day funds. That's a decision I can wholeheartedly support, and yet I am left to wonder why they had to make that decision.

Why wasn't the Ministry of Education pouring funds into COVID measures and programs to protect against learning loss, especially when the government was sitting on billions of dollars in COVID relief funds from the federal government? Why sit on that money and then force school boards to spend down reserves?

And now some of those school boards are in the position of facing deficits, again due to the minister's underfunding of education, and the government is refusing to reimburse school boards for those COVID-related deficits.

The Ottawa-Carleton school board spent \$30 million out of reserves, and now they're facing cuts of up to \$10 million to \$13 million for next year.

The Toronto District School Board spent \$70 million out of reserves. Now they're facing cuts of upwards of \$64 million, and the government is forcing them to make these cuts instead of refunding them for those COVID-related expenses.

This learning loss, this need for additional supports for learning among our children didn't just happen. It's not just the inevitable outcome of a pandemic; it is a result of policy and funding choices by this government not to invest in our kids when they needed it most. So, yes, our kids came out of the last three years struggling.

Now let's talk about why our kids are having trouble catching up, and let's start with class sizes. I spoke with a teacher last week who told me that he has children who are at four or five different grade levels in terms of their ability, in a single class. That one teacher has to try to provide lessons and support to all those children where they're at so that everybody learns and everybody is challenged and no one is left behind. How are you supposed to do that when you're in a class of 35 students? How are you supposed to provide 35 students with four or five different skill levels the help and support they need, especially when five or six of those kids have an individual education plan or a disability and you have no EA in your class? And from the students' perspective, how are you supposed to learn when your classroom is that cramped and noisy? I know in my riding, I've heard from parents of children in

classrooms where they can't even accommodate the number of desks for the number of children in their class, so kids are sitting elbow-to-elbow at tables, trying to learn. How do those conditions set children up to succeed? Not getting enough attention in a noisy, crowded room—it would be a miracle if kids were doing well.

**0910**

Let me be frank here, Speaker: Crowded classrooms are not a new problem in Ontario. They were a problem under the former Liberal government, as well.

In 2014, nine years ago, when we were picking a school for my oldest daughter, the first school we checked out was projected to have a junior kindergarten class that year of 36 or 37 kids. My daughter was a shy, quiet kid. She would have been completely lost and overlooked in a class of 37 "kinders." Thankfully, we had another choice in our neighbourhood.

I know there are many, many other parents who don't have another choice, and getting a smaller class size for your child shouldn't come down to luck.

But what the Conservatives have done since forming government in 2018 is to open up a can of gasoline and pour it all over the fire of crowded classrooms. In fact, they wanted classrooms to be even more crowded than they are now. In 2019, they tried to jack up the average high school class to 28 students. Thankfully, parents, teachers and education workers stood up and fought back against that proposal, forcing the government to back down, although they still increased the average class size by one student, to 23.

The government has also been increasing class sizes through stealth, with its underfunding of education. One way that they're doing that is through e-learning. The government imposed a requirement on all students that they take two online courses in order to graduate high school. Many students, unsurprisingly, protested, as did their parents, so the government provided the ability to opt out. But school boards are being funded based on the assumption that every student is taking those online classes, regardless of whether they're actually taking them or not.

The government also made the arbitrary decision to set funding for e-learning courses based on a higher class size of 30 students per class. They have offered no evidence to demonstrate that kids need less support in an online class than they do in a classroom, and in fact, all of the virtual learning of the past few years would actually suggest the opposite.

There are many legitimate concerns with the e-learning plan, including the fact that not every child has access to decent Internet at home, and the fact that the agenda seems to be driven more by an interest in letting privatization and commercialization get a toehold in our education system than in actually meeting the needs of students. This is also a form of underfunding by stealth. As students opt out, boards will continue to get the e-learning ratio funding, which means that class sizes in high schools will need to be larger to accommodate the loss of funding.

Then there's the much bigger picture, which is that Conservatives are cutting education funding in Ontario by

not keeping up with inflation. Quite simply, funding for education in Ontario has not kept pace with inflation throughout the entire tenure of this government. Even under the Liberals, the system was not really adequately funded. But since then, the Conservatives haven't even kept up with the Liberals' level of funding. If the Conservatives had simply kept pace with inflation, funding would have been \$2.5 billion higher this year alone. And now, by the minister's own admission, the increase in funding for next year will be way below the rate of inflation. The latest Bank of Canada inflation numbers put inflation at 5.2%. The government's own projection for inflation this year is 3.6%. The minister's increase in funding is just 2.7%. So the government's funding isn't even keeping up with their own prediction for inflation.

By tabling this bill at the same time as announcing education funding for next year, Ontarians are being distracted from the funding announcement for next year. Because when you compare funding for next year with the funding in place before the Conservatives formed government in 2018, what we see is that average funding per student is down \$1,200 when you account for inflation.

As the ever-quotable Laura Walton said, the minister keeps referring to his funding as "unprecedented," but remember that "unprecedented" can also mean "lower than we've ever seen before."

The minister likes to use the word "historical" a lot. I actually think it's a pretty apt word because, in some important ways, we've seen this movie before. The last Conservative government, under Premier Mike Harris, also drove education funding levels down to very low levels, which resulted in a task force being created to review education funding in Ontario. That report called for a significant increase in education funding because the Conservatives had broken the system so badly.

This underfunding has been driving up class sizes and robbing students of essential supports. The background document that the minister released with the Grants for Student Needs yesterday revealed that for every 1,000 students, school boards now have 3.87 fewer secondary school teachers than they did in 2018. For a medium-sized board of 20,000 students, that's equivalent to 77 teachers, or roughly the size of one entire high school. What impact do you think that has on the ability of students to learn?

On top of that, school boards have told us that because this government's funding is lower than inflation and because they refuse to reimburse COVID-related expenditures, school boards are going to have to implement cuts. For the Toronto District School Board, this means the loss of 65 teachers, 35 special education workers, 35 child and youth workers, and 40 school-based safety monitors. In fact, the TDSB has to cut 522 positions because of their deficit; the Toronto Catholic District School Board will have to eliminate 120. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has already voted to eliminate 21 teacher positions and still has to decide what cuts they will make to education worker positions. So we're already at 663 positions lost in just three boards. How is the minister's commitment of just one new math lead per board going to

make up for that loss? How does the equivalent of one new position for just 20% of our schools make up for these kinds of cuts?

And what about these vaunted new positions that the minister has been bragging about since Sunday? First of all, let's be clear what we're talking about. These are not 2,000 new teachers. The government has been very carefully using the word "educators." That's because the government is not hiring 1,000 new teachers to support math and reading. The minister has been talking about "math coaches" in classrooms, and that was a commitment in the government's budget as well. What is a math coach? What are their qualifications? Are they going to have to pass the minister's famous math tests in order to be hired? All of this remains to be seen. We have no idea who these math coaches are. Second, let's put these positions into context, given the size of the Ontario education system. This is less than one additional education worker per school in Ontario—in fact, it's way, way less. It's equivalent to one new educator for every two out of five schools. Or, to put it another way, this is one new educator for every 2,850 students to provide reading help and one new educator for every 6,650 students to provide math support.

The minister spent quite a bit of time yesterday going on about math and reading supports and back-to-basics, but his new bill only uses the words "reading," "math" and "literacy" once. But somehow, just naming it as a priority is supposed to magically help children to succeed at reading and math while in crowded classrooms without additional supports available.

Teachers I spoke with last week in Ottawa told me that demand for resource teachers and for additional supports is at an all-time high. So many kids need help who never needed it before. But the schools don't have the resources to respond to that demand, so these teachers are constantly trying to triage: Who needs help the most right now? How can we divide the little bit of help that's available so that every kid gets at least a little bit?

This is not a scenario that demonstrates that we want every child in Ontario to succeed. And adding one new educator to only two out of every five schools isn't going to be any different in that regard.

#### 0920

It's not just teachers who are missing in our schools, and it's not just teachers who help our kids to thrive and succeed. The safe and successful functioning of our schools depends on education workers who support our children, keep them safe, and keep our schools running. Thanks to this government's underfunding of education and its attack on wages, we don't have enough education workers either.

School boards are spending more on EAs than they are getting from the government, but they're still not even close to being able to meet students' needs.

According to data released by People for Education in February of this year, 93% of schools in Ontario say they need support staff such as educational assistants, administrators, and custodians.

ECEs provide learning supports to our littlest learners. EAs provide crucial supports that help children with disabilities or accessibility needs to participate safely in our schools, making sure their needs are looked after.

One Ottawa teacher I spoke with last week said that when the EA is not present in her classroom—and she doesn't have an EA assigned full-time—all learning stops. She has 26 kids, including several with very high needs. Her focus has to be on keeping the kids safe and alive. Without an EA present, she can't do that and teach the kids at the same time. Unfortunately, it happens at least once or twice a week that the EA isn't present for the whole day, because the demand for EAs is so high and there aren't enough EAs available. Schools are desperately trying to triage who needs EA support the most at all times.

I heard from another Ottawa teacher that she had to change two GI tubes last week. That's work that teachers aren't supposed to be doing, but there's no support available for these kids, and the teacher had to put the interests and safety of the child first.

Another teacher told me that there aren't enough EAs in their school to support children who need help with toileting, so kids in her class are soiling themselves in class, and then she has to track down an EA who can help change the child after that has happened. We have so few EAs that parents are getting regular phone calls to come and pick up their children from school or are told that they can't take their child to school today because there is no EA available.

Earlier this year, parents at Cootes Paradise Elementary School in the Hamilton-Wentworth school board sent a letter to the minister asking him to take urgent action on this issue. They told the minister, "On Friday, February 3, 2023, several students with additional needs were effectively sent home from the school, because EAs were absent and the school was not equipped to support their additional needs. This has happened to students and their families several times this year but in the last few weeks, it is happening with increasing frequency."

Children like Desmond, who is four years old, has autism, is non-verbal, and requires assistance with eating and toileting—his mom, Amanda Strong, is getting called regularly to come and pick him up from school because there's no one available to support him. Amanda told CHCH, "Yeah, he can't talk, he's not toilet trained, but he still deserves to be here. He still deserves the right to his education."

The result of this lack of support is that there are parents who are sitting outside of schools all day in this province just in case their child needs to use the bathroom, but we also know that it's a minority of parents who can afford to do that. There are also children who are trying to hold it in all day because there's no EA available to help them. Just imagine trying to learn in that situation.

The EAs who are working in our system are overburdened and are being asked to provide unreasonable levels of support. One EA shared that one day last week, they were the only full-time EA in a school of 800 kids. Every day, after running from classroom to classroom, they go

home feeling like they failed because they can't possibly provide the level of support that is needed to every child.

I wish this was uncommon, but unfortunately, what we're seeing is that the conditions that teachers and education workers are being asked to work in, with overcrowded classrooms, children with high needs who aren't getting the supports they need, kids in crisis due to their mental health, and the absolute and utter disrespect from this government—teachers and education workers are getting burnt out and getting sick.

Absence rates are unusually high, both due to the levels of illness circulating and due to burnout and mental health issues. Staff are retiring at much higher rates than usual, and young workers are leaving the profession at worrying rates.

One teacher is on mental health leave after struggling to teach a class of 28 students in which 16 of the students had an IEP, and she had no EA support. The majority of her class required accommodations, but there was zero support.

We don't have replacements available when teachers or education workers are absent because of the shortage.

Just two weeks ago, we learned that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is being forced to close classrooms regularly due to the shortage of replacement teachers. Roberta Bondar Public School had to close two classes in one day. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has reported 462 class closures between January and June 2022 and 173 class closures just since November 2022.

Meanwhile, in the Ottawa Catholic School Board, there is one school that has had 122 EA absences unfilled as of March this year. This is not only a massive safety concern for students and staff, but it disproportionately affects students with disabilities or accessibility needs, resulting in those infamous phone calls saying, "Your child may not come to school today."

In these conditions, how are children supposed to catch up on their math and reading skills—especially for kids who aren't allowed to come to school?

The minister says his plan is supposed to get even kids with disabilities reading. Well, allow me to remind the minister that in order to learn how to read at school, you have to actually be at school, and these children are not able to be at school all the time because of his policy choices. No amount of setting priorities for school boards is going to change that.

Nous ne pouvons pas parler de la pénurie de la main-d'oeuvre sans parler spécifiquement de la pénurie des enseignantes et enseignants de langue française, car c'est un gros problème pour le système d'éducation francophone et le ministre ne fait rien pour le résoudre.

Il y a presque 500 enseignants et enseignantes qui travaillent dans le système d'éducation de langue française qui n'ont pas leur certificat, mais qui ont une lettre de permission du ministère. Ce nombre a augmenté de 450 % depuis 2012.

Le système d'éducation de langue française est le système d'éducation en Ontario qui grandit le plus vite. À



cause de cette croissance, le système a besoin de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants chaque année, mais l'Ontario n'en forme que 500 par an. Chaque année que nous ne faisons rien, donc, il y a un écart grandissant de 500 nouveaux postes qui ne peut pas être comblé sans se tourner vers des gens avec une lettre de permission. Si on ne fait rien, les experts prédisent que dans quelques ans, nous pourrions voir 3 000 personnes qui enseignent sous une lettre de permission dans le système d'éducation de langue française.

Cette pénurie d'enseignants et enseignants qualifiés met en péril la qualité de l'éducation francophone en Ontario. Elle rend plus difficile l'apprentissage de la lecture et des mathématiques pour les enfants francophones. Si le ministre s'intéressait vraiment dans la capacité des enfants francophones d'apprendre la lecture et les mathématiques, il ferait tout ce qui est en son pouvoir pour remédier à cette pénurie.

Mais ce que nous voyons, c'est un ministre qui reste les bras croisés, sans rien faire, alors que la pénurie s'aggrave d'année en année.

Et il le fait alors que nous connaissons déjà les solutions. Elles ont été élaborées par des partenaires de l'enseignement français, avec le soutien du ministère de l'Éducation. Le ministre les a présentées du bout des lèvres, mais il n'a rien fait pour les mettre en oeuvre. Il n'a même pas avancé le montant de financement recommandé par le groupe de travail.

Le résultat pour les enfants francophones, c'est le chaos. Il y avait plusieurs classes l'année dernière qui ont eu sept, huit ou neuf enseignants pendant l'année scolaire. Comment est-ce que les élèves peuvent apprendre dans ces conditions?

**0930**

Mais bien que le ministère ait maintenant plus de 900 enseignants de retard sur sa stratégie, il n'y a pas un cent de financement supplémentaire cette année, ni aucune mesure dans ce projet de loi pour aider à résoudre cette pénurie.

Où est le respect de ce ministre pour le droit des francophones à une éducation de haute qualité dans leur propre langue?

It's not just francophone kids who are getting their constitutional rights trampled on.

Kids with disabilities are also being shortchanged repeatedly. The Education Act states that the Ministry of Education is responsible for setting out a process for identifying and accommodating disability-related needs in the publicly funded school system. But this government significantly underfunds special education, leaving kids with disabilities struggling to participate in our system and unable to get the education they are entitled to.

I've already talked about the challenges with just being able and allowed to attend school—then there's the ability to participate in school. There has been a significant increase in the number of kids in our schools with a disability because of the government's destruction of the Ontario Autism Program. Kids who would have previously been in therapy rather than in school and kids who would have been in school but with the benefit of therapy that helped

them to participate have just gone without any therapy at all. These kids are in schools, but without adequate funding for special education, leaving parents to fight over scraps to try to get their kids the supports they need, while teachers are left trying to support students who are neither getting the therapy they need outside of school nor the support they need in school.

One parent I spoke to said her son with autism is in a regular class with no EA. He can't keep up with the curriculum, but she says she knows her son; he will just sit quietly, looking out the window, not causing a fuss, so no one will pay him any attention. But other kids get incredibly frustrated by the lack of support and become violent, lashing out at teachers and education workers.

I've spoken to educators in Ottawa who have been given Kevlar to wear at work by the school board because that has become the solution to violence. These are not soldiers in a war zone. These are teachers and education workers in our publicly funded school system.

We are not giving students with special needs the support and resources they need, and we are not giving teachers and education workers the specialized training they need to de-escalate and deal with violence. We're just sending them to work with Kevlar on.

Other special education teachers have told me that they are crowdfunding or prowling their neighbourhood Buy Nothing groups to stock up their classrooms in order to be able to support their students.

The government provides funding for special education separately, and this funding is not based on need. It is based on a statistical projection of the amount of special-needs education that will be covered in any given school year. And this formula does not even begin to cover the needs of children with accessibility needs. As a result, school boards are spending tens of millions of dollars out of their own funds on special education. So when we are looking at cuts—which is what we've been hearing from boards—one place that boards may look to is special education, because the base costs are not covered by this government's funding formula. This means that children who need and deserve help the most in our province are bearing the brunt of the government's cuts.

We are already hearing about the elimination of special class placements or congregate classes across the province. Kids are being integrated into regular classrooms because it's so much cheaper, but it's happening regardless of whether or not they can succeed there, and without the supports that would allow them to succeed.

And while our special education system is already in crisis, we are in the midst of transitioning as many as 4,000 autism legacy kids into the system with no additional resources and no transition plan. The government cruelly and abruptly capped the funding for therapy for these children. They promised a transition plan, but they didn't create one. In fact, they didn't even inform school boards that these children would be coming. They didn't provide a single additional penny in resources to school boards to support these children.

Michelle MacAdam, who is a teacher and a parent of two autism legacy kids, said, "Being in education myself, I know the lack of supports in schools, and I see these classes that are exploding, and I see the overwhelmed teachers. Now add in this tsunami of high-needs kids that are entering schools in September or in the next few months, you're going to have a lot of stressed teachers and programs that are overflowing." She's worried, first and foremost, about the safety of her children with no EA to support them. They are both non-verbal, flight risks, and at risk of choking from putting things in their mouths. Neither one is toilet trained. How will they be kept safe and supported at school with no additional resources? And she is not the only parent who is dealing with the repercussions of this government's reckless funding.

Last week, CBC Radio's Ontario Today had an hour-long call-in show with heartbreaking story after heartbreaking story about the impact of this government's decisions on vulnerable kids and their families in this province.

Connie has two kids on the autism spectrum, a 10-year-old and a 20-year-old. Her 20-year-old daughter received needs-based funding as part of the legacy autism program, and because of this, she was able to get through school and is now attending college. This funding is not available for her 10-year-old son. Connie has since had to remortgage her house seven times and continuously access the food bank, even with a dual household income, because her 10-year-old son's programming is so expensive. He also doesn't have the support he needs in the classroom. She feels she is being punished by this government and by the province. All she is asking for is basic support for her son to be able to learn in a safe environment, but instead, her son is taken out of the classroom to wander the hallways.

Margaret has a nine-year-old boy on the autism spectrum. Without needs-based support in his school, her son, who is non-verbal, has often been subjected to isolation, taken out of the classroom and put into a padded room because his teachers and assistants don't have the training or support to properly address his needs. Margaret says that she has reached out to her Conservative MPP on multiple occasions to no avail.

Students are being left alone because there are not enough teachers, EAs, and education workers available for them. Parents do not feel supported by this government. And transitioning kids from the legacy autism program into schools without support will have even more detrimental costs.

We've heard these stories and countless others from parents and educators worried about the lack of any kind of plan for this transition. This government is setting these children up to fail and has left parents and school boards to try to clean up their mess.

And let's be clear: This has an impact on the safety and ability of all kids to learn in our schools. Putting kids in classrooms with no supports leads to an increase in violent incidents, safety risks for other children, and disruptions in the classroom and evacuation of classes. I've seen this happen with my twins, who were in a class that had to be

evacuated for safety reasons at least once or twice a week. Despite their young age, they were absolutely exasperated with the number of times they had to go down to the learning commons while their teacher tried to de-escalate a situation.

And these are not the only kids with disabilities that this government has let down. Provincial and demonstration schools across Ontario are grossly underfunded, and as such, this has led to teacher shortages and improper maintenance on school properties.

W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in Brantford has been in operation since 1872 and is in desperate need of repairs. They have a rink that has been out of service for more than four years and chronic heating problems in the winter because the boilers continue to fail year after year. These are children who use their hands to communicate. How are they supposed to do that when it's freezing in their classrooms? Does the minister expect them to use sign language with their mittens on? The pool on-site also remains closed. Typically, this infrastructure offers the opportunity for deaf students to learn essential skills in water safety from an ASL-using lifeguard. These are skills that they cannot learn anywhere else. So having this pool closed presents a substantive safety risk for students.

**0940**

And this is not a unique experience for W. Ross Macdonald. It is one of only seven schools under the ministry's provincial and demonstration schools branch, and we've heard of similar issues across all of these schools. One school had an exterior structural issue, causing bricks and stones to be falling down, endangering the students, parents and staff entering the building. It was only when substantial safety concerns were raised to the ministry that they finally installed scaffolding.

Families should not have to beg to be protected by this government, but that has become the reality for families.

Stephanie Antone, a parent of a student at W. Ross Macdonald, told CBC last year, "There's no justification for why their schools are in the state they're in and that they are not taking the concerns of parents and staff seriously.

"You are creating a pathway for ODSP. How fair is it that a child with a disability is not given the same resources, and is not treated as important as a student without a disability?"

The reality of underfunding at these schools has gotten so bad that in March of last year, parents and teachers hosted a series of rallies outside of provincial and demonstration schools across the province, demanding more funding and resources from this government.

A parent whose children attend Sir James Whitney, a school for the deaf in Belleville, is deaf herself and attended the same school her children are currently enrolled in. She told Quinte News:

"When I went to this school we had at least 200 students. Now we have 47 students. We can have more students but many parents don't even know we exist, don't even know that it's an option for their students. We're not allowed to promote our school and the services and programs that are here.

“Deaf children are placed into mainstream programs and many of them do not succeed because of language deprivation. The interpreters may not be fluent. They may not have access to the appropriate courses that they would like to take. They need to have other assessments that aren't being done.

“We want to preserve it. It's a part of our history, a part of our culture. My parents went here. They graduated from here. I went here. My children have gone here. I value this community and I value our deaf schools.”

The same cannot be said of the government. David Sykes of the Provincial Schools Authority Teachers said it well: “Why is it that we teachers have to come begging to get the supports we need to provide the programs and services? Why is it we need to point out that they are actively preventing our members from finding kids in the mainstream or finding kids in communities who would benefit from these schools? Why is it the government continues to look at these schools through a deficit lens and not an asset lens?”

We should be improving the funding, the transparency and inclusivity in Ontario's provincial and demonstration schools, because when we don't, we are denying these children the right to equal treatment in education.

Let's be absolutely clear here, Speaker: These schools are under the direct authority of the provincial government. There is no school board here managing these schools that the minister can point the finger at and blame here. The blame lies squarely with himself and his ministry. Perhaps that is why he has been so quiet about these challenges that these students face in learning, the safety risks that they have to run just to be at school.

As a little aside, the minister is proposing training for school board trustees in this legislation, but perhaps he wants to consider some training for Ministers of Education and Ministry of Education staff as well, because what I've heard from teachers and union officials with the provincial schools is that the ministry has been incredibly disrespectful about the fact that many of these teachers communicate primarily with sign language.

De même, les réunions avec les conseils scolaires français et les syndicats de l'enseignement français se déroulent toutes en anglais et, bien souvent, les informations fournies par le ministère sont uniquement en anglais ou dans un français mal traduit. Une formation à la communication respectueuse s'impose peut-être.

So just to recap: Our kids are struggling because they're in crowded classrooms without adequate supports, including EAs; they're dealing with teacher and education worker shortages; and they are not getting the special education supports that they need and deserve.

They are also dealing with a crisis in mental health that this government is failing to address. A recent report by People for Education reported that 59% of students in Ontario are feeling depressed about the future. More than 90% of principals say that their school needs more support for students' mental health. Less than one in 10 schools actually have access to a regularly scheduled mental health

professional, and half of schools have no access to mental health resources at all.

I hear constantly from parents, teachers, education workers, principals, and mental health professionals about the crisis in our children's mental health. Rates of anxiety are sky-high.

When I met with the Ontario Association of Social Workers, they told me that even little children are experiencing high levels of anxiety that is making it difficult for them to go to school.

We've been through this with one of my children, who had real difficulty transitioning back to in-person school after virtual and has continued to face challenges with going to school day to day. We waited three months for an appointment with the social worker assigned to our school, only to be told that there are no mental health resources available and we are on our own.

Bill 98 allows the minister to set out policies and guidelines regarding the mental health of students, including the materials that have to be used in teaching students about mental health, but there's not a single additional resource provided here to actually support children who are dealing with mental health challenges. The Grants for Student Needs provide an additional \$11.9 million for the salaries of mental health professionals like psychologists and child and youth workers, and that's a good thing; it's not nothing, that's for sure. But it's only 3.1 cents per day per child in additional funding, when funding now is already at less than a quarter per child per day. Don't you think the biggest crisis in children's mental health following a multi-year global pandemic should merit a little bit more than 27 cents per day?

This crisis in mental health connects, as well, with the shortages that we're seeing in staffing, because supporting children with increased mental health needs with no mental health resources is putting stress on teachers and education workers and contributing to burnout. The more that we can't replace teachers and education workers when they're sick and on leave, the more we're exacerbating the problem and causing it to snowball.

The other thing is that when children are in crisis and they're not getting support, we see an escalation in violence. We're seeing this problem now across the province, unfortunately.

There are many students in the Toronto District School Board who have said they are scared at school because of the uptick in school violence. Students are feeling restless, stressed and anxious after three years of disruptions and years of underfunding. They don't feel supported. They feel forgotten—

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil on a point of order.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** I know the member was speaking to the bill, but I think she has sort of gone off track and we're now talking about Grants for Student Needs, which is not in the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will remind the member to make her comments reflect the content of the bill.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Speaker. I'm a little surprised that the member opposite doesn't understand the connection between school violence and children's capacity to learn reading, writing and literacy in our schools and what this might have to do with school boards. I am surprised, but—

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** The member should be making comments through you and not directed at me and my understanding of the policy items.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I agree with the member from Barrie–Innisfil. Please make your comments through the Chair.

You may continue.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Speaker. I hit a nerve, I see.

After traumatic episodes of violence and lockdowns, students are just supposed to go back to the classroom, back to learning without any mental health support. Violence is on the rise in school, and the majority of principals and vice-principals within our school boards attribute this to a lack of staffing, support and resources.

The TDSB has a staffing crisis, and students, teachers, parents, and education workers are feeling the pinch. But because of this government's unwillingness to reimburse them for the \$70 million that they had to pay to protect kids during the pandemic, they will be forced to cut even more staff, including child and youth workers and safety monitors. This is only going to make matters worse for our kids.

Don't our kids deserve to feel safe at school? Don't they deserve mental health supports in school?

This violence is not just limited to the TDSB. Violent incidents are happening at crisis levels across the province.

In London-area schools, reports by the ETFO Thames Valley District School Board show that there are an average of 636 violent incidents a month. This doesn't even account for the majority of violent incidents that go unreported. In some cases, kids are even being sent to the hospital with severe injuries.

**0950**

These are not just incidents occurring among students. Teachers and education workers are met with violence daily.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario is looking into violence against teachers and in schools to see if it will help this government understand the gravity of the situation.

Karen Brown, ETFO's president, said, "Many school spaces are not safe, especially for those working on the front lines with students whose needs are not being met. We hope the data collected will finally convince this government to take action to address the unacceptable and troubling rise of violence in schools."

I heard the same thing from Ottawa OECTA teachers last week. The number of violent incidents are rising, but

because there's pressure on teachers not to even report violence, what we know is just a drop in the bucket.

Teachers and education workers have been calling on this government to hire more mental health support staff and provide anti-violence training for the teachers and staff already working in our schools. They've been asking this government to work with them. The solutions are there, but instead, the government provides us with legislation that does nothing to address this. Our kids cannot succeed in math and literacy if they do not feel safe in our schools.

In my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, I've heard from several parents and teachers about how their kids don't feel safe at Pinecrest Public School. The parents who have reached out did not feel comfortable sharing their names, but in speaking with them, it's clear that these are not isolated incidents. Once again, this is rooted in the lack of mental health supports available to our kids. Pinecrest is a K-to-8 school and is just one of many public schools in Ottawa that has had to cancel classes as a result of being short-staffed. One of my constituents has a six-year-old grandson at Pinecrest. In two months, her grandson's homeroom has had three different supply staff, resulting in no consistency and a continuous lack of support for him and his classmates. In February, the students' parents received an email from their principal informing them that, because of absenteeism, their classes would be cancelled for at least two days. Imagine being in this situation, trying to scramble to see whether you can find child care for your kids or whether you may have to bring them to work with you the following day. This woman was lucky that she was in a position where she could look after her grandson for a few days while his classes were cancelled.

After continued disruption from the pandemic, this government's underfunding is resulting in our kids being out of the classroom once again.

Our kids are in crowded classrooms, not getting the supports they need, with teacher and education worker shortages. They're in a mental health crisis, but schools don't have the resources to address it, and they're not feeling safe at schools because of rising violence due to the mental health crisis and the shortage of workers. And what does the minister think is the appropriate response to this situation? A fire sale of school properties. Instead of investments in mental health supports and smaller class sizes, Bill 98 is giving the minister the power to compel school boards to sell school buildings and land to any individual the minister designates, at any price the minister designates. This is the same government whose cozy relationship with developers always somehow seems to cost the taxpayer money while resulting in sweetheart deals for developers—

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

I recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Through you, Speaker: I just wanted to see if there's any implied motive here.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will have to disagree with your comment, and I will allow the member to continue.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Speaker.

Surely, if the sole desire here was to make sure that every child can attend school in their local community regardless of what board they're in, the regulations on selling or transferring schools could just be limited to school boards.

What we actually need more than the sell-off of publicly held land to private, for-profit corporations is investments to address the repair backlog so that our children can learn in a safe environment. The school repair backlog is currently well over \$16 billion; we don't know by how much because the government stopped publicly reporting on this figure. But we know that committing only \$1.4 billion a year to building new schools and repairing existing schools means that the backlog is going to continue to grow instead of shrink.

Our kids are trying to learn in schools that are not in good repair, including schools that are not fully air-conditioned. When the temperatures hit 30 degrees in Ottawa last week, one of the first things I thought of was the poor teachers and students on the second floor of my children's un-air-conditioned school. Usually it's not until late May or early June that the temperatures get that high. I've sent my kids to school in the past thinking, "Well, they're not going to learn anything today. They're going to be lucky to survive." Teachers have had to employ creative strategies, including bringing Popsicles to school that they've paid for out of their own pockets, and cycling kids through the gym and the learning commons, which have air conditioning. These are our children's learning conditions.

The government has said over and over again that this legislation is based on what they have been hearing from parents, but I don't buy it. I have had countless emails come through my inbox since even just the start of this year from parents voicing their concerns with the direction that public education is going. When boards were raising issues about reimbursing COVID relief funds, the emails were pouring in. When the budget was tabled with no real inflationary increases for education included, the emails were pouring in. Since Sunday, the emails have been pouring in again.

Parents who are scared about what this legislation will mean, educators concerned with the Grants for Student Needs numbers all want to know who exactly has been consulted in the creation of this bill—who are the stakeholders that were involved? We know that it wasn't any of the teachers and education unions, because they were very clear that they were caught completely off guard by this legislation. That's incredibly insulting when the ministry is in bargaining with these teachers. That's not how you build a respectful relationship.

Cara Kane, a parent in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean, sent me an email yesterday with her concerns about this bill and whose interests it represents. She said, "Firstly, it is quite bothersome to state that this is in

response to what parents want ... how does he know what we want? What is he basing this off of? There has been no public consultation whatsoever with parents on this proposed bill. I want my child to go through this world as a kind person, who respects equity and diversity, who advocates for the community and stands up to bigotry, who explores her passions in a supportive environment, whatever they may be—whether it's math and science, or art and literature, or anything in between. I fear this bill is woefully out of touch with what parents actually want for our children, and there is absolutely no way for the minister to know this without actually engaging in a public consultation process that include the voices of all parents. I am also deeply concerned about the bill's new powers, which would require boards of education to report to the minister on these outcomes and provide the minister with the power to dissolve boards and appoint a provincial supervisor in the place of trustees. Communities vote for trustees—having a provincially appointed supervisor who has no relationship to/with the community, no understanding of what the school and community needs or values, and is not elected is insulting at best, and dangerous at worst."

What we needed to see from the minister this week was a significant investment in our schools, one that actually accounted for inflation and for all of the massive challenges that our children are dealing with—a plan that actually provided for smaller class sizes; a plan that actually put more teachers and education workers in every school so that every child could get the supports they need from caring adults in their classroom; un plan pour résoudre la pénurie d'enseignants et d'enseignantes dans le système d'éducation de langue française; a plan that made significant investments in mental health, so that every school in Ontario would have access to at least one regularly scheduled mental health professional; a plan that actually tackled the root causes of violence by providing mental health supports and increasing staffing levels; a plan that made sure that all of our children are in safe and supported learning environments by clearing the repair backlog; a plan that provided critical supports for our most vulnerable learners—students with disabilities and accessibility needs; a plan that adequately funds special education; a transition plan for the autism legacy kids; a plan that makes significant investments and provides transparency and accountability to our provincial and demonstration schools.

**1000**

Instead of that, what we have is a communications exercise that seems largely designed to deflect blame. And what is frustrating is that once again it is our children who pay the price for this minister's intransigence and this government's underfunding, just as they have paid the price throughout the past three years.

It is time for the minister to finally accept some responsibility, to finally make the investments that our children so desperately need, and to finally come up with a plan that actually provides our children—every child in Ontario—with the supports that they need to thrive and flourish.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions and answers.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I'm looking forward to getting a chance to take part in debate a little bit later this afternoon.

I did hear during the member from Ottawa West–Nepean's dissertation here this morning that she said a lack of capital funding has been something that has plagued the province over the last few years.

I'm just curious to know why \$15 billion in capital funding, which is the most the province has ever seen, would be such a plague on the province?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I suppose the member opposite did not carefully listen to my dissertation, as he thinks he did. He actually wasn't listening at all.

I did mention the figure \$16 billion, which is the school repair backlog—actually, we know that the school repair backlog is even greater than \$16 billion; we just don't know by how much, because the government has refused for several years now to report it. I know the member opposite hasn't benefited from these new investments in math, but I think the member can probably still do the basic math here that \$15 billion is less than \$16 billion. We're not even fully funding the repair backlog. And that funding also has to go to the creation of new schools. So if we wanted to be sure that every child had a safe environment to learn in, we would be investing more.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Merci à ma collègue d'Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean. Vous avez parlé de la situation dans les écoles francophones, la pénurie d'enseignants, de comment il y a, je pense, 300 lettres d'autorisation pour enseigner en Ontario. On sait que dans ce projet de loi, on ne le voit pas. Puis on a entendu aussi des associations des conseils scolaires francophones qui disent que ça ne répond pas au besoin, au grand besoin, parce que—si je vous ai entendu, même—c'était 3 000 dans votre présentation. Si ce n'est pas réparé, ça peut être jusqu'à 3 000, le manque d'enseignants dans les écoles scolaires francophones.

Je vous demande : ce projet de loi-là répond-il aux besoins de la communauté francophone? Et aussi, le manque de respect—vous avez parlé de ce qu'ils font quand ils rencontrent les conseils scolaires francophones et du manque de respect envers eux. J'aimerais vous entendre sur ces deux points-là.

**M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma:** Merci beaucoup à mon collègue pour la question. Il n'est pas du tout respectueux de rencontrer des conseils scolaires et des enseignants et enseignantes francophones et de parler en anglais, de leur donner des renseignements en anglais seulement. Il faut absolument leur démontrer le respect de parler dans leur propre langue et aussi de les consulter sur l'éducation française.

Je doute absolument que les conseils scolaires francophones puissent mettre en place un nouveau curriculum en français pour septembre. J'ai peur aussi que les changements dans ce projet de loi—si on ne consulte pas avec les conseils scolaires, les mesures ne répondront pas aux besoins des conseils scolaires. Et nous avons vu déjà la

pénurie d'enseignants et d'enseignantes de langue française. C'est parce que notre gouvernement a échoué de considérer les besoins particuliers des conseils scolaires francophones.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I listened intently to the information that was provided by the member opposite.

The reforms proposed in the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will ensure that Ontario is getting more classrooms into communities—including the French language.

To be clear, linguistic and denomination educational rights will be protected. In fact, the Ontario Human Rights Commission is pleased to know about the overhauling of the language curriculum and the screening of all young children, in its Right to Read post. Does the member opposite disagree with the Ontario Human Rights Commission?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks to the member opposite.

What we have seen is that parents have repeatedly complained about the human rights of their children not being respected, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission has had to respond that that is an issue of a lack of government funding rather than a failure on the part of the school boards.

Let me tell you, if we really respected the rights of francophone learners in this province, then francophone school boards and francophone educators would be consulted on changes before they were made. We would take into account the fact that decisions that affect anglophone school boards in one way do not affect francophone school boards in that same way. We would be considering the fact that children with disabilities and accessibility needs in the classroom can't get the same treatment as kids who don't need any special kind of support. We would actually be consulting with parents, with unions, with school board trustees to make sure the supports were in place to protect the right of every child in the province to a high-quality education.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for her excellent presentation. I'd like to thank her, as well, for bringing forward the concerns of parents, students, education workers, and trustees from across the province. It's clear that these voices are not reflected in Bill 98—it's clear that they were not consulted.

As the member has pointed out, mental health—there are four mentions of it within this legislation, and it only relates to policies and guidelines. There are not any additional resources.

Also, I find it quite concerning, after listening to the member's presentation, that violence does not appear in this legislation even one time—not even one instance.

My question to the member is, if the government wanted to show legitimate and authentic care for students with special needs, how would they update GSNs in the funding formula?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you to my colleague for the question.

It is absolutely essential that we take into account the conditions in our schools, because those are our children's learning conditions. When they don't feel safe, when they can't be in the classroom or they can't be in school because of levels of violence, they can't learn. When the supports aren't there, they are unable to learn.

Unfortunately, the way special education is funded, our children with disabilities are not getting supports, and that is disrupting their education. Many of them are not even able to be at school full-day, full-week because of this underfunding. Many of them aren't getting the supports they need to allow them to participate in learning in the classroom.

A government that actually wanted to help every child in our province to receive a high-quality education would be funding special education based on needs instead of some kind of strange statistical projection that has nothing to do with what is taking place on the ground in our classrooms.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you to the member for her speech.

I have to bring your attention to the pillar under accountability and transparency, as this bill proposes to strengthen accountability by requiring school boards, via the proposed legislation, to be more transparent about their spending and how it supports student outcomes. The member from Ottawa West–Nepean, towards the beginning of her speech, talked about the reporting on HVAC systems that were going into school boards. So I would have to think that the member would be supportive, because what this proposed legislation would do is have the school boards accountable for reporting on things like this.

Can the member from Ottawa West–Nepean say this is a good part of this legislation?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I'm reminded of a chart that someone sent me where step 2 was question mark, question mark, question mark, and step 3 was success, because what we have here is a bill that says the minister can set priorities for our schools in Ontario and that school boards must report on how they are achieving those priorities, but there's not a single additional resource for school boards to actually implement these priorities and to make sure that kids are meeting the measures expected.

Accountability and transparency are absolutely meaningless when school boards are being forced to make cuts to the teachers and education workers who would actually help our children to achieve success, when schools are lacking the educational workers that would actually allow children to be in classrooms so they could achieve success. Transparency is meaningless without an actual plan to get us from A to B.

1010

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** There's time for one final question. I recognize the member for London West—London—Fanshawe.

**Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong:** London—Fanshawe, thank you.

There's lots of great London representation here, so I know how the Speaker could get confused.

I want to thank the member for contributing to debate. She mentioned the legacy funding, the legacy children, near the end of her speech. I just wonder if she could expand on, since there wasn't a consultation, what that's going to look like for parents and legacy kids returning back to school.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks for that great question.

What we've seen is that kids who have been in therapy full-time for the past five years are being transitioned abruptly to schools with no support or coordination, no kind of plan. These kids, in some cases, are non-verbal, won't even be able to understand what is happening. Many of them are flight risks or safety risks. And yet, there are no additional supports to schools to actually keep these kids safe. What the parents of autism children are saying is that this is going to be absolute chaos and set these children—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** That is all the time for questions and answers.

Further debate?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I know we've only got about five minutes to get things kick-started here, but I did want to mention that I will be sharing my time, once we resume debate later this afternoon, with the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Of course, it is a pleasure to join debate today. It has been a good morning here in the House. I know that any member who has heard me stand up in here before will know—and I'm going to say it again for those who haven't heard—that I have five children, all in public school. That's why I'm very, very excited to see this bill, hopefully, come to fruition and become law in the province of Ontario. All of us here who are parents—or maybe even, dare I say, there could be some grandparents here in the House. They're also, I think, very excited to see a lot more transparency, a lot more accountability, and historic investments being made by the Minister of Education to move education forward in the province of Ontario.

Another thing that may come as a shock to some of the people here is that I'm the son of a former Premier. In my case—

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I didn't know that.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Yes. Actually, I believe he was mentioned already by the member from Ottawa West–Nepean this morning. So thank you to her for bringing him up and talking about the excellent legacy that the previous Conservative government had around education here in the province.

But I digress, Madam Speaker. I guess what I'm really getting at is, we've got a little bit of an inside track to try to figure out how to navigate the school system, and it can be a challenge for a lot of people.

The key goal for Bill 98 is simple: You should not need to be the son of a former Premier to know who to call about your child's education. You shouldn't need to be a former

school board trustee to know how to navigate the education system. You shouldn't need to be a member of provincial Parliament to know the local priorities of your school board. It's time to make the education system more accessible for the average family. For too long, information on local priorities has been too difficult to access for many families across this province. This bill, if passed, will make outcomes for families of all backgrounds—and I think that's key. We're not just selecting a few; this is for all the people across Ontario, to make education more equitable, and I hope members on all sides of the House can support that.

Bill 98, for the first time in Ontario history, would require school boards to make their plans to improve student achievement public. It would also require them to give every single parent the opportunity to view and review these plans at the start of the year and at the end to measure progress.

The Minister of Education has said this—and I agree: “Our government has no higher purpose than to protect the children of this province.”

I do want to say that one thing that I've been able to take part in was the Safer School Buses Act. Most of you who have seen a school bus here in the province of Ontario over the last year have now noticed that they have a yellow or an amber lens and a red lens. We were the last jurisdiction in North America to adopt this. I know this was something that you were very interested in. We've had many—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, but we've run out of time.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### HOSPICE RENFREW

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Last Saturday, I had the honour of attending a gala dinner in recognition of the 15th anniversary of Hospice Renfrew. It was a wonderful evening that presented the opportunity to honour and recognize not only those who have worked at Hospice Renfrew, but those who have volunteered, as well. A scrumptious meal was served, and board chair Gerald Tracey as well as other members of the board took their turns at the podium offering their thoughts and personal stories about what Hospice Renfrew means to them.

Almost 20 years ago, the original board chair, Jim MacKillican, sought my support in lobbying the government for a six-bed hospice in Renfrew. Once that approval was granted, it was amazing and gratifying to see the community come together, raising the necessary funds through gifts and donations in kind that saw it open its doors in 2008.

Over the past 15 years, Hospice Renfrew has proven to be an absolutely tremendous service for end-of-life care, delivered in a way that only can be provided in a hospice

setting. I know of countless families whose loved ones have experienced their last days in the caring, compassionate hands of the people of Hospice Renfrew.

In our changing demographics, it is clear that the end-of-life care delivered in hospices will be needed more now than ever as baby boomers become their residents. Our government recognizes this and is providing funding to hospices at levels never seen in the past.

Congratulations to all at Hospice Renfrew, and I look forward to closely working with you to achieve continued excellence in delivering what only hospice can.

### BLACK WALNUT BAKERY CAFÉ

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I rise today with sadness to share the devastating loss of the Black Walnut Bakery Café, which was destroyed in a fire on Sunday, in my riding of London West.

Located in an historic 145-year-old building, the Black Walnut Bakery Café has been an anchor in London's treasured Old South neighbourhood since 2011. Owners Ed and Mandy Etheridge are known for their dedication to the community and their commitment to maintaining the heritage feeling of the building. Local residents and Londoners have gathered at this neighbourhood gem for years for coffee, light lunches, and my personal favourite, oatmeal and date scones.

Many thanks to London firefighters who responded immediately when the fire broke out at 1:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, fought the blaze for over eight hours, and conducted search and rescue to confirm the building was unoccupied. These brave men and women ensured everyone was safe. While, luckily, no one was hurt, the structural and roof damage were too substantial, and the building could not be saved.

With overwhelming support from across our city, Ed and Mandy are determined to rebuild this beloved institution and are working to relocate their staff to Black Walnut's two other locations in the meantime.

I echo comments of the Old South Community Organization: The entire community stands with Ed and Mandy as they plan for the next evolution of the Black Walnut Bakery Café.

### HOMELESSNESS

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I'm proud to say that Ontarians experiencing or at risk of homelessness will be getting a hand up from our government to be better connected with emergency and transitional housing, including in my community of Newmarket–Aurora.

Last Tuesday, I had the privilege of being at regional headquarters in Newmarket to announce that the regional municipality of York will be receiving more than \$36.7 million in 2023-24 under the Homelessness Prevention Program. I am thrilled to say that this represents a 76% increase in annual funding. The boost in this funding is part of the initiative that we are taking to tackle homelessness head-on and provide support for Ontario's most



vulnerable by including an additional \$202 million annually in homelessness prevention programs in our 2023 budget, Building a Strong Ontario. This allocation will allow York region and local supportive housing service managers the flexibility to allocate funding where it is most needed, including capital projects.

I'd like to thank regional chairman Wayne Emmerson, commissioner of community and health services Katherine Chislett, and their entire leadership team for their continued support of our community's well-being.

I'd also like to thank the member for Thornhill and the member for Markham–Thornhill for joining me last Tuesday.

1020

#### NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** The Northern Health Travel Grant was set up to ease the financial burden on northerners having to travel down south for medical reasons.

As it currently exists, the Northern Health Travel Grant is leaving many northern patients in vulnerable situations, unable to access the care that they need. You see, Speaker, a patient needs to have the money upfront to travel to see a medical specialist down south, and then they wait, weeks or months later, to get reimbursed. Many low-income patients cannot afford those upfront costs, so the door to treatment for them is shut.

There is a list on the Ministry of Health website with 17 agencies in Nickel Belt that the minister says provide upfront funding to those in need. My OLIP intern Sophie called each and every one of them. If you are a member of a First Nation, if you're on Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, or if you're a child registered with Easter Seals, there is a bit of help for you. But for most people, there is no help available.

Minister, this is wrong. People should not have to come to see me desperate for care but not able to afford a bus ticket to Toronto to get the care they need.

It's clear that Ontario needs an emergency fund available to the people of the north facing these circumstances, because what we have now does not work.

#### JOHN BRUMMELL

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Mr. Speaker, it's with a heavy heart that I rise today to share some very sad news from the riding of Carleton. The last remaining member of the two-man team that covered local news across the riding of Carleton for nearly half a century has passed away. John Brummell, a long-time community activist and photo-journalist, passed away peacefully in his home on March 18, 2023.

John Brummell was very devoted to his wife, Rosemary, his daughter, Deborah, and his son-in-law, AJ, as well as to his family, friends and his community.

As an active volunteer in the community, John was a member of the Goulbourn historical society and the Goulbourn horticultural society, and a director with the Richmond Agricultural Society, just to name a few. His

lifelong contribution as a volunteer was his commitment to making our communities a wonderful place to live.

John received a city of Ottawa City Builder Award in 2017 because of his incredible success at bringing the community together through his involvement and love of photography.

The 80-year-old Stittsville resident was a familiar face around town, with many of his friends, family, and members of the community fondly recalling his ready grin and joyful laugh. Wherever news was breaking or the community was holding an event, no matter how humble the occasion, we all looked forward to a visit from John Brummell or his colleague John Curry, who passed away last year, on February 5, 2022.

With John's passing, it's truly the end of an era for the community.

I would like to pass along my deepest condolences to John's wife, Rosemary, his daughter, Deborah, his son-in-law, AJ, his family and friends, as well as to everyone in the community.

May he rest in peace, and may he always serve as a reminder to the rest of us about the importance of community journalism.

#### MARCH OF DIMES

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** I rise as a proud member of the St. Catharines community, celebrating the incredible volunteers who make our community so dynamic and so inclusive.

There are so many organizations with so many great volunteers. However, today, I would like to acknowledge March of Dimes during Volunteer Week in Ontario.

March of Dimes will be hosting their 37th annual volunteer appreciation event in St. Catharines. This will be the first time since the pandemic that they have been able to host this event. Some 29 volunteers will be celebrated, ranging from 2020 to the present. These extraordinary individuals embody the spirit of selflessness, compassion, and unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on the lives of others.

March of Dimes has been a beacon of hope for individuals with disabilities and their families for many years. It is the tireless efforts of our volunteers that have fuelled this organization's success. However, their impact does not stop there. Our March of Dimes volunteers are not only leaders in our community but also champions of change. They are advocates for accessibility, inclusion, equality, and their unwavering voice has helped shape policies to raise awareness about the rights and needs of individuals with disabilities.

Let us express our heartfelt appreciation for their tireless efforts, and let us be inspired by their example as we strive to create more inclusive and vibrant communities in Ontario.

#### INNOVATION ARENA

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I was pleased to join the Premier last week as we announced a \$7.5-million investment to help

build a state-of-the-art Innovation Arena at the University of Waterloo in downtown Kitchener. It has been an honour to work with the fine folks at the University of Waterloo and the city of Kitchener to see this project come to fruition. The new \$35-million facility will be a hub for innovation in Ontario's life sciences sector. Why is this important? First, breakthroughs in health care will enhance the quality of life for our residents here in Ontario. Second, it will attract additional investment to create great jobs and see start-ups grow.

But it goes beyond this single facility. The region of Waterloo is home to an innovation ecosystem.

Dr. Vivek Goel, president and vice-chancellor of the University of Waterloo, said that the Innovation Arena will play a crucial role in expanding the impact and scope of the University of Waterloo's flagship incubator, Velocity.

Our government is committed to supporting incubators across the province. These investments will fast-track the discovery, development and commercialization of made-in-Ontario research.

Our message to innovators is clear: From start to scale, we are here with you every step of the way.

#### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Picture this: Late afternoon, people are lined up in the cold—one on crutches—outside a family medicine clinic. This is reality in Kingston. And these people have a family doctor. They're just lining up for the after-hours clinic.

Kingston had about 25,000 people without a family doctor, as documented in the 2020 Kingston Region Physician Review Report. And now, six doctors are retiring in May, after trying unsuccessfully to find younger ones to take over—that's another 10,000 people without a family doctor. And as my office confirmed by phoning every clinic, there's only one walk-in clinic left in all of Kingston.

Kingstonians are scared. Entire families are scrambling to find a new family doctor. Some people have literally phoned every doctor in Kingston. People don't know where they're going to get their refills for restricted drugs. They're losing well-baby checkups. They're managing chronic conditions on their own. They're losing follow-ups after hospital and specialist care. They're standing in hospital hallways waiting for outpatient clinics to triage them.

As the government decides how to handle the primary care crisis, I must remind Minister Jones that the situation in Kingston is particularly acute. We need family doctors in Kingston. It should be designated a high-need community.

#### HOUSING

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I have more great news from the riding of Essex. In Essex, we have two really super builders. They are Rosati Group and Jones Realty Inc.

They are putting up a 74-unit apartment building in the town of Amherstburg, which is my hometown. That might not be a big building for a city like Toronto, but for Amherstburg it is a big building. It's going to let 74 families stay in the town of Amherstburg and live and work in the town of Amherstburg—or if you want to downsize, you're going to be able to stay in the town of Amherstburg and live in the town of Amherstburg. That's good news for people who want to live, work and stay in the town of Amherstburg.

So I want to encourage great builders like Jones Realty and Rosati construction to keep doing the great jobs that they're doing.

And I want to encourage the Associate Minister of Housing and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in their crusade to build 1.5 million homes in the province of Ontario, because people in Ontario should stay in Ontario and have a home in Ontario.

#### GEORGE LESLIE MACKAY

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** I rise today to recognize a great Canadian and Taiwanese hero, Dr. George Leslie Mackay. This year would have marked his 179th birthday, and all these years later he's still remembered and celebrated in both Canada and Taiwan.

George Leslie Mackay was born and raised near Embro, in Oxford county.

As a young Presbyterian missionary, Mackay travelled to Formosa, now known as Taiwan, and founded a mission in the town of Tamsui. While on that first mission, he fell in love with the island and its people, embracing it as his adopted homeland. He married a local Formosan named Minnie, started a family there, and set about helping people in any way he could, including practising dentistry as a method of outreach.

#### 1030

During his almost 30 years on the island, he built several schools, including the first school for girls, and Oxford College, and a hospital. He advocated for women's rights and public medical care, and he fought against discrimination.

Today, Mackay's legacy lives on in the schools that he founded, the cutting-edge Taiwanese health care system, and strong friendships between Taiwan and Ontario. In fact, Oxford county is now twinned with the Tamsui district.

I know that the black-bearded barbarian—as Mackay was often called—would be proud of the vibrant, pluralistic democracy that Taiwan is today.

May we continue to share a special bond and advance the values he championed.

#### INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Ms. Bhutila Karpoche:** I'd like to give a very warm welcome to the Girls' Government group from Parkdale—High Park. We have, from Annette Street public school

and High Park alternative school: students Olivia Walli, Ryo Kumar, Amelia Wallis, Maya Jordan, Vesper Johnson, Jo Connors-Robertson, Soleece McBrien; teachers Kelly Iggers and Christine Rowe Quinn; parent Jeanhy Shim; and from Humbercrest Public School: students Kayden Rankin-Goodman, Maya Witty, Clara Winders-d'Eon, Ella Kemper, Nesiah Craig-Williams, Evelyn Dinis, Ava Macklin; and teacher Jessica Bailey.

Welcome, and thank you for being here.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** It's my great pleasure to introduce a delegation here today from Ducks Unlimited who are having a reception here tonight, in the legislative dining room, at 5:30. I'd like to wish a warm welcome today to Joanne Barbazza, Jessica Whyte, Kimberley Kerr, Phil Holst, Sean Rootham, and Mike Williams. Welcome.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I'm very delighted to welcome two grade 5 classes from St. Agatha Catholic School who are here with us today, with teachers Shannon Murphy, Deirdre Moloney-Sciberras, Hyacinth Fernandes, Kathleen Dillon, and Theresa Moulds.

We also have with us trustee Nancy Crawford in the House.

Welcome to your House.

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Mr. Speaker, we have a delegation in the gallery today from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office: Director General Jin-Ling Chen; Edward Chung of the Canadian Mackay Committee; and members and friends of the Taiwanese community.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Incidentally, they came here to hear the statement I just made.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to welcome not one but two constituents from Ottawa West-Nepean today. We have with us Melodie Gondek, who is with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' District 25 and does great work on behalf of students in Ottawa, and Maria Sardelis, who is an advocate for seniors and people with disabilities. Welcome.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I'd like to welcome some guests from the township of Stirling-Rawdon. On behalf of myself and MPP Bresee, we'd like to welcome: Dean Graff, one of the councillors there; Caroline Smith, also a councillor; and their guest, Karen West.

Caroline Smith ran the Stirling theatre for years, and it's great that she has the opportunity to see some political theatre here this morning.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Akshitha Puttur is the page captain today from Waterloo, and she is joined here today by her mother and her sister Aishwarya, who just participated in the federal-provincial government model.

Congratulations, and welcome to your House.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** It gives me great pleasure to welcome, from the Access to Seniors and Disabled advocacy group, Maria Sardelis from Ottawa and Cherie Vandevonne from Chatham. Thank you for coming.

I would also like to welcome, from Congress of Union Retirees of Canada, Lance Livingstone and Ron Vanderwalker.

Thank you so much for your advocacy.

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** They're not here in the House, but I know they're watching this morning. I welcome them to Toronto—my grandson Greyson Uhryn as well as Chase Uhryn.

Thanks for the cookies and milk this morning.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### LAND USE PLANNING

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Yesterday, the Premier said there was no rhyme or reason to how lands were selected to be protected as part of the greenbelt. He said the greenbelt was formed by “a bunch of staffers in a room with crayons and highlighters and randomly just went on a map.”

If the Premier thinks the greenbelt wasn't formed using a proper process, well, can he finally share his process for removing lands from the greenbelt?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** I'm glad the Leader of the Opposition heard me yesterday, because that's the truth. I talked to people who were in the room. They sat there with a big map and they literally got highlighters—a bunch of staffers joking around, going up and down the roads. We know that's true. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? The Liberals changed it 17 times. They decreased the greenbelt; we increased it by over 2,000 acres. Some land shouldn't be in the greenbelt, and some should be in the greenbelt, and we're expanding the areas that we feel should be in the greenbelt.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I tell you, it really makes you wonder, Speaker, if this government's process was a bunch of Conservative Party donors in a backroom with crayons and highlighters and a map of the land they could buy up in order to turn a profit. Because the reality is, after the Conservatives were elected, six developers paid a combined \$278 million for land that could not be developed within the greenbelt. Then, suddenly, it was all removed. And five of these developers have lobbying records revealing their connections back to the Conservative Party. No one would spend that kind of money if they didn't think it would be open for development and they could cash in.

Again to the Premier: How did the government decide which parcels of land would be removed from the greenbelt?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** The decision was very easy. We're in a housing crisis right now; costs are going through the roof. It was very simple—supply and demand.

When we looked at the map—it's butt up against existing communities. As a matter of fact, one piece of field, I'll call it, about 10 acres, had housing all around all four corners—in an empty field with weeds in it. They call that the greenbelt? That's not the greenbelt. That's just a field with a bunch of weeds, and people around that neighbourhood all want it to be developed.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The final supplementary.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Wow. Very technical analysis there by the Premier.

The Conservatives' greenbelt grab is not about housing. If this government cared about investing in Ontario's housing stock, we'd see investment in public housing and in building homes that everyday Ontarians could actually afford to live in; not luxury mansions, on sprawl. Ontarians are following the money. They know it's not about housing. It's about insiders with connections to the Conservatives buying up land super cheap and then selling it off, developing it, for incredible profit.

Once again to the Premier, one more chance: Who was holding the crayons when the government decided to sell off the greenbelt?

1040

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Members will please take their seats.

To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Another fable by the New Democratic Party is being told in the Legislature this morning.

Through you, Speaker: She talks about public commitment for housing. Well, Minister Bethlenfalvy, under the leadership of Premier Ford, tabled a wonderful budget—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to ask the minister to withdraw his unparliamentary comment and conclude his answer.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Withdraw.

We added \$202 million to our Homelessness Prevention Program. And I want to thank members from both sides of the House for doing some great announcements last week—in fact, one of the ones was the member for Niagara West, who made a fantastic announcement that the member for Niagara Falls was pleased to attend. So some of her own members are celebrating the public commitment this government has made to ending homelessness by adding that additional \$202 million. I don't know about the Leader of the Opposition, but some of her members have got with the program.

## HOSPICE CARE

### COST OF LIVING

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Yesterday, my colleague the member for Sudbury stood in this House and told us that a hospice in his riding is having to rely on a food bank and fundraisers in order to feed its residents. This government responded by bragging about generous individual donations. It's almost as though this government wants Ontarians to think that it's perfectly normal for a hospice, where people go for end-of-life care, to have to rely on a food bank so its residents don't go hungry in their final days. Speaker, my question is to the Premier, and it's a simple one: Does this government think that is acceptable?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** I also should have highlighted yesterday—and the member from Sudbury would know this—that earlier this year, we actually gave that particular hospice over \$2 million. Why? Because we saw the need. We saw the excellent work that they were doing. We saw the pressures that they were under as a result of ongoing commitments that they have within their community to ensure that that hospice can continue to provide excellent service.

Speaker, in our health document, we actually talk about expansions to hospice and palliative care. We, as a government, have made that commitment and will continue to make that commitment, because we understand and appreciate how important palliative and hospice are in our province, and continue to be.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Supplementary?

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, it is shocking enough for a hospice to rely on a food bank, but usage is up across the board too.

I've been travelling around this province listening to ordinary Ontarians, and what I've been seeing is shocking—people working full-time jobs who can't get by, people visiting food banks for the first time. One in 14 families in the Waterloo region—in Vaughan–Woodbridge, 36% of food bank visitors were children; in Kawartha Lakes, it's 50%. In Mississauga, food bank use is up 400% over the last eight years.

Speaker, food banks have asked this government to tackle the root causes of food insecurity, yet the most recent budget provides almost nothing.

Will this government bring in measures like real rent control to make life more affordable for ordinary Ontarians?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Members will please take their seats.

To reply, the parliamentary assistant and member for Oakville.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** If I were the opposition, this is probably not a path I would walk down, and the reason is, because you have voted against every single measure we have taken to help the people of Ontario.

Let's take a look at what the government of Ontario has done to help the people of Ontario. We have reduced energy costs so families can afford reliable energy. We have kept transit affordable by removing doubling fares and extending fare integration. We are supporting parents with 46,000 new child care spaces since we took office, saving parents, on average, \$8,500. We are also helping post-secondary students with a 10% tuition freeze, which the opposition has opposed. Importantly, we've also brought in the most important tax credit in the history of Ontario: the LIFT tax credit, lowering taxes for lower-income individuals.

Where was the opposition when we brought these proposals forward?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The final supplementary.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Wake up. We don't support your plan because it's not working.

I wish this government would spend less time in the backrooms and more time talking to real people in this province who are really struggling right now.

I was recently in Northumberland county, where a single person on Ontario Works has to spend as much as 50% of their very limited income on food, at a time when housing costs there and across this province are going through the roof.

Food banks were created as a temporary measure. They're supposed to be a band-aid solution, and now we have way too many people relying on them just to be able to survive.

To the Premier: Will this government immediately double OW and ODSP rates to get people the relief they need, so people do not go hungry in the province of Ontario?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'd ask the members to take their seats.

And I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The response?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Again, we understand there are issues with inflation in this country, which I would hope the opposition would understand—with grocery inflation, with the Ukraine war and other issues.

However, we have made initiatives to help the people of Ontario. We put through a gas tax cut just last year and extended it through this year, for 5.7 cents a litre. Again, if I recall, the opposition voted against that. That is helping every single family in this province, every single business lower costs—bring inflation down, and help people to be able to feed their families, and help those businesses.

We've also, in this most recent budget, helped low-income seniors by expanding the GAINS program.

We've also increased ODSP payments by 5%—as well as expanding the number of people who are eligible for this program.

We will continue supporting the people of Ontario.

We're seeing record employment growth, record business investment, and the people of Ontario are on a good trajectory right now.

#### SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** My question is to the Premier.

Children in Niagara are going hungry at school under this government's watch. Niagara Nutrition Partners, which provides breakfast, snacks and lunches to students, have been forced to close nutrition programs at 16 schools, with nearly 50 more being affected. They face a significant funding gap from the province as food prices soar. Students can't learn and thrive when hungry. They have gone from feeding 17,000 kids to 24,000 kids a day. It's

shameful that this government will allow such a reality for children in the province.

Will the Premier follow the lead of other provinces across the country and provide the necessary emergency funding so that children in Niagara don't go hungry?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To respond, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** I thank the honourable member for the important question.

The Student Nutrition Program that the member is referring to is receiving annual funding of \$27.9 million.

We've said from the beginning that we will make sure that student and youth who deserve all of the supports get it in every way, shape or form.

If you look at the support that we provided to the municipalities, the \$1.2 billion, that helped them with food, with housing, with shelter—the \$8 million towards Feed Ontario; and then \$83 million towards the Ontario Trillium Foundation, to provide grants to help food banks across the province.

Once again, we will be there for children, for youth and families across this province, and we will not let them down—every day.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question? The member for St. Catharines.

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Back to the minister: Let's be crystal clear—here are the numbers from the border to Beamsville: 16 schools have closed their nutrition program, 30 more are projected to close, and 49 have been affected. We are facing a \$400,000 shortfall.

We all know food prices are going up and affordability is down, but this is not an excuse to let children go hungry.

I need a response from the minister that puts these children first. I need to hear these words: "This is not okay. I am going to look into it."

To the minister: Will you commit to assessing this program, and will you commit to emergency funding so children in Niagara do not go hungry?

1050

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Once again, I remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that not a single child or youth will ever be forgotten under this government—that's why.

I'll be very clear: Under the previous government, the Student Nutrition Program was just receiving support and investment of over \$8 million; today, that amount is \$27.9 million.

The member is asking for action. I told her from day one that I will work night and day to make sure that every single program that's being offered to the people of this province is at its best, and every day we'll make sure that it's improved. I ask the honourable member to join us.

The cost of living is rising. Why are they supporting a carbon tax that adds a cost to every single thing in this province?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock.

There's a great deal of enthusiasm in the House this morning on both sides. We have 45 minutes to go.

Restart the clock.

Next question.

## SCHOOL FACILITIES

### REFUGEE SERVICES

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** My question is for the Minister of Education.

Over the past decade, Ontario's population has grown rapidly. This means that more families now call Ontario home, and more children have enrolled into our publicly funded education system.

The previous Liberal government failed to plan for the future and shamefully closed 600 schools at a time when they should have addressed the growth in our province.

I am hearing concerns from parents about the importance of their children being able to attend a school near them. Families are counting on our government to take action when it comes to providing top-quality schools for their children.

Can the minister please explain how our government is ensuring that new and existing schools will address future growth needs?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I want to thank the member from Oakville North–Burlington. She's a school building machine—five schools in four years. Amazing. She's a strong advocate for the people of Oakville North–Burlington.

Mr. Speaker, while in Halton region we have wonderful municipal partners to work with us to get schools built in anywhere between one to three years, in many of our communities it takes upwards of a decade to build a school. That's going to come to an end.

The Premier is committed to getting on with streamlining and overhauling our capital approval process so we build where the growth is.

We have 300,000 people, according to federal immigration targets, coming next year and every year.

We have to work harder and smarter to build better for our kids.

This plan in the legislation allows us to streamline approvals, enables joint-use projects with community, allows school boards to work together and collaborate to share their assets for educational purposes. It enables us to build through a \$14-billion capital plan to renew schools and build new schools for the future.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you to the minister for that great response and for those five new schools in my community.

Strong public education and a sustainable school infrastructure system are fundamental in meeting the needs of growing communities like mine in Oakville North–Burlington and across Ontario.

Across our province, many communities continue to welcome and embrace Ukrainian refugees who are fleeing

persecution and war in their home country. In our local schools, Ukrainian children have been welcomed into classrooms, where they are receiving a top-quality education in communities that they now call home.

Can the minister please explain how our government is supporting our schools to provide a safe and welcoming environment for Ukrainian children and their families?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Canada has been, through our history, a safe haven for individuals fleeing persecution and war, and that is a great heritage which we could be proud of as Canadians.

Ukrainians are fleeing a war zone due to Vladimir Putin's genocidal war—an illegal war that has created so much impact on so many people around the world.

Canada has opened our arms, Ontario has opened our arms, and in our education system, through the most recent funding announcement, we have reaffirmed to school boards that we will fund every Ukrainian child who comes through our country to have free, publicly funded education. We are extending subsidies and daycare for their mothers, their parents and guardians. We are ensuring mental health supports in their language through a partnership with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. We are working together to make sure that those children who have faced so much trauma and affliction have the supports and the confidence that they can succeed in this country.

## SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** With food inflation at 10%, this government has given Meals on Wheels in Ottawa just a 2% increase and taken away their emergency subsidies. As a result, on April 1, Meals on Wheels had to increase prices. For their lowest-income clients, prices increased over 300%. Seniors, people with disabilities, and patients just released from the hospital depend on these meals for nutritious food. But since the price increase, some of Ottawa's most vulnerable residents have had to cancel their meals.

Why is this government making vulnerable people go without food instead of providing community organizations like Meals on Wheels with decent support?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** I'm not sure where the member was when we had our budget, but there was actually a very substantial increase in community care and community supports, like organizations such as Meals on Wheels. We know, because of the use of volunteers and community commitment, as well as paid staff, the Meals on Wheels organizations in all of our ridings have done exceptional work during the pandemic, while we needed to keep those connections. In fact, I met last week with organizations to talk about how the investments we announced in the budget can be used to most effectively continue to treat our seniors and our most vulnerable in-community, just as we've highlighted in our Your Health document.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question. The member for Ottawa Centre.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** I regret to inform the minister that she really should have consulted some of her senior officials, because Meals on Wheels Ottawa, Meals on Wheels elsewhere aren't reporting any increases in their budget—are there?

**Interjection:** Nope.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** There seems to be a disconnect between what this government wants to believe and organizations that are working hard to help seniors and people with disabilities and people in poverty.

You have to ask the question: Why is this government defunding Meals on Wheels? Why is this government wanting to push people into the arms of the grocery store chains that are ripping people off with price gouging on bread, milk and other essentials? Could it be because this Premier is personal friends with the Weston family? Could it be because this Premier once said, "God bless the Weston family"? Is that why—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock.

I'm going to caution the member on his use of language, first of all, because of the reactions it caused in the House, and remind members that it is in the standing orders that we should not impute motives.

I will allow the member to conclude his question.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Thank you, Speaker.

I just want to ask the Premier, why is he favouring profits for Loblaws over funding for Meals on Wheels?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Tomorrow, I'm going to make sure that the member opposite has a copy of the endorsement of the investments that we've made from community organizations like Meals on Wheels, who understand that the investments we announced in the budget are going to make a quantitative difference in the lives of the people they serve in-community. Because we know, appreciate and understand what they are doing, we have made an additional investment in the budget.

I'll make sure you get a copy of the press release.

## ONTARIO PLACE

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure.

Under the previous Liberal government, key infrastructure, tourism and recreational facilities like Ontario Place were unfortunately neglected. Instead of making investments and partnering with businesses to enhance the iconic waterfront location, they chose to close many of the features and attractions.

**1100**

Ontario Place still holds great potential and opportunities for year-round enjoyment, as a place for everyone, no matter if it's Ontario families or you're coming from somewhere around the world.

That is why our government must act now to follow through on our promise to bring Ontario Place back to life.

We cannot allow this once-in-a-generation opportunity to pass us by.

Can the minister please explain what our government's plan is to revive the amazing Ontario Place?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** The member is absolutely right; we are bringing Ontario Place back to life, and we will be making it a place that everyone can enjoy.

Yesterday, I joined the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport and the Premier to announce that we are moving the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place. We also announced that Live Nation will be renewing their lease with the province of Ontario and also building a brand new stage that will be active and operational all year around.

Mr. Speaker, with wonderful tenants like the Ontario Science Centre, Live Nation, and Therme, there will be lots for families to do. We are so excited that families will be able to spend all day there, from morning till night, every single day of the year.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I want to thank the minister for that response.

Under the leadership of this government, Ontario clearly has a vision and a plan for Ontario Place that's going to make it, once again, the world-class destination that it once was.

I remember, as a young girl, coming here in the late 1970s with my dad to visit Ontario Place, but it has changed so much. Now we go see concerts and we see places that are closed, and it's derelict, and it needs paint, and it needs upgrades. There's so much more that we can do to make that place so much better. Despite these years of neglect and deterioration—it's really sad that previous governments did not see this jewel in our community and fix it up and take that time.

I once again want to thank the minister for her leadership. And can she please expand on some of the new features and plans that will rebuild and revitalize Ontario Place for generations to come?

**Hon. Kinga Surma:** We are bringing it back to life. In fact, work will start in May in terms of the site servicing so that we can have electricity and running water and improve the quality of water on the site.

But what I'm most excited about was releasing the final renderings of the whole vision of Ontario Place, which include 43 acres of public realm and park space, which is bigger than Trinity Bellwoods Park. This wonderful space will now have boardwalks, piers, public beaches, waterfront access, a brand new marina, children's play areas, as well as food and beverages.

Mr. Speaker, we are excited that the final renderings are out in the public. We are completing the environmental assessment. And we will bring Ontario Place back to life.

## TENANT PROTECTION

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoché:** My question is to the Premier. Over 550 tenants of Livmore High Park signed and delivered a letter asking their corporate landlord, GWL

Realty, to stop rent increases of up to 14% this year. GWLR responded, saying that the building, being new, is not subject to guideline rent increases and pointed out that rent for a one-bedroom in High Park has gone up 46% compared to last year.

Does the Premier believe that a 46% increase in rent is manageable by tenants?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** The member opposite has a fundamental difference with the government on creating affordable housing.

We are in the middle of a housing supply crisis, and we're going to do everything in our power to build more purpose-built rental. We made a conscious decision. We delivered on our promise to existing tenants to protect rent control. In 2018, we made the exemption in the fall economic statement for one reason and one reason only, and that was to incent the construction of purpose-built rental. What happened last year? I've said it many times in the House: We had a record of 15,000 purpose-built rental starts in Ontario because of that. And already this year, we're seeing bright signs in this city. We're seeing permits for purpose-built rental five times higher than they were at the same time a year ago.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question?

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** What tenants in Ontario have experienced under this government is skyrocketing rents.

This is over 550 tenants and their families impacted in just one neighbourhood in my riding. Imagine how many tenants are impacted across this province.

There has to be some predictability in how much one can expect to pay in rent year after year. No one can manage unpredictable cost-of-living increases.

Minister, will you ensure that all tenants, regardless of when their building was built, can have stability in their rents?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** We are not going to go back to the failed policies of the 1990s, when they were in power and no purpose-built rental was built in Ontario.

We invoked the cap this year because of the inflationary rate, to ensure that the maximum under rent control was 2.5%.

We delivered in the middle of the pandemic. The Attorney General blocked evictions in the middle of the pandemic to protect the most vulnerable. We capped rent increases in the middle of the pandemic.

We have stood up year after year after year to protect tenants and strengthen the stock of community housing and purpose-built rental housing, and we are going to continue.

The question, though, before the House, with all of our renter protections in the bill before the House, Bill 97—will that member and her party, the New Democrats, support those rental protection measures in Bill 97? Yes or no?

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** My question is for the Premier.

The housing affordability crisis is getting worse, not better. Over 185,000 families are on the wait-list for social housing.

Until the mid-1990s, Canada was building 20,000 non-profit and co-op houses each and every year. In Ontario alone, 14,000 co-op homes were built between 1989 and 1995. In fact, 93% of our current below-market rental supply was built before 1996.

But instead of building more homes that people can actually afford, in the communities they want to live in, this government is imposing an expensive sprawl agenda that municipalities and families simply cannot afford.

Speaker, I want to give the Premier an opportunity today to commit to making the financial investment to build 122,000 non-profit and co-op homes—deeply affordable—over the next decade.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Thanks for the question.

I always say this about the Liberal-Green alliance: They always talk a good game in their questions, but they never deliver on it when the votes come.

Exactly what this member talks about, allowing a young family to have the opportunity to build a home that meets their needs and their budget, close to where they grew up—that's exactly what the policies we're consulting on right now will provide.

The member talks about supporting farms and farm families. It's going to be very interesting to see if he supports our initiatives to allow sons and daughters of farmers to be able to have a property on the family farm—or more importantly, to talk about workers and the opportunity to have a lot on a farm, to upgrade the opportunity for farm workers to have not just employment but a home there.

We've put all those policies down in some progressive bills in this House that this member has voted down every single time.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I don't vote for legislation that doesn't work. That's just kind of how I roll over here. I actually want some legislation that's going to build affordable homes in communities where people want to live.

Maybe the minister is saying that he will support my Bill 44 and Bill 45 that will allow fourplexes and four-storey walk-up apartments, will allow six- to 11-storey mid-rise apartments as-of-right in this province—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Let's get rid of that red tape and allow people to build homes in communities they want to live in, instead of paving over the farmland that feeds us—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.



**Mr. Mike Schreiner:**—contributes \$50 billion to the province's economy.

Speaker, is—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock.

1110

The Minister of Municipal Affairs will get a chance to respond, if he chooses to do so. In the meantime, I encourage him to—

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Oh, he has to finish? I'm so excited to answer.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Oh, okay.

I apologize to the member for Guelph.

Start the clock.

You can conclude your question.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It's good the Premier is excited, because I'm excited for the answer.

Will the government support Bill 44 and Bill 45, to build homes instead of paving over the farmland that feeds us?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Premier.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Thank you for the question from the member.

I just want to give some stats. Stats Canada came out with February's numbers—a 25% increase in condo permits, the highest increase in the entire country, which is great.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what really irks me? I really like the leader of the Green Party, but let me tell you something: It's a little rich when he gets up and says, "Housing, housing." As the Minister of Municipal Affairs says, "It's all talk, no action."

There are 444 municipalities in this entire province. Guess who has the lowest housing starts? It's his riding of Guelph. But this gets even better.

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Doug Ford:** This even gets better. The member didn't stand up—and we have a housing crisis for students at the University of Guelph. On the University of Guelph's property—guess what? They voted it down. They won't even give the kids—and he was in favour of it. That is terrible.

He talks a good game—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

Stop the clock.

The government side will come to order.

Start the clock.

The next question.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** My question is for the Solicitor General. My constituents in Richmond Hill are deeply concerned about the safety of our neighbourhoods. They are concerned about increased levels of crime. This is a serious issue, impacting many of our communities, especially in the GTA.

People should not be afraid to use public transit, commute to work, or go shopping.

Public safety needs to be a priority because it affects all of us in our daily lives and is important for ensuring strong and prosperous neighbourhoods.

People are looking to our government for leadership and solutions to get crime under control.

Can the Solicitor General please explain what actions our government is taking to address crime in our province?

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** I want to thank my colleague and wish her a very happy birthday.

Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct; public safety must be the centre point of our attention, as urgent change is needed.

Two weeks ago, as members will remember, this House came together in voting for a motion to call on the federal government to implement meaningful bail reform. I can assure this House that our government is looking forward to working with our federal counterparts, including Minister Mendicino, and we are ready to assist in any way we can to see critical change and reform as soon as possible. This matter cannot wait, and this House sent a strong message that signalled with our unanimous vote.

Maintaining law and order is impossible without our police services. The men and women in uniform who put their lives on the line need our support, and we will always have their backs.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Supplementary question?

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Thank you to the Solicitor General for that response. On behalf of my community in Richmond Hill, it is great to hear that the government is continuing to support our police services. This goes a long way in keeping Ontario safe.

However, for the people of our province, there are other issues that relate to public safety and crime prevention. The first concern is about how our police are tackling large-scale criminal activity, and the second is about the importance of bail reform policies. One of my birthday wishes is to have that bail reform under control.

Can the Solicitor General please explain how the important issue of bail reform will benefit Ontario?

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** Just last month, York Regional Police, Toronto police, the OPP, and Durham police, working collaboratively with our federal government and the US government, held a successful operation they called Moneypenny. Approximately—and this is incredible—1.5 kilos of fentanyl and carfentanil were seized. In addition, 86 illegal guns were seized.

We know that the majority of those firearms were smuggled into Canada from the US and sold illegally—and this is not new. That's why we're calling for greater border protection.

As a result of Operation Moneypenny, some offenders were charged with failure to comply in the courts, and that's why we need bail reform, as the member said.

Our message to the people of Ontario is simple: The safety of Ontarians is always our highest priority.

## SCHOOL FACILITIES

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I'm glad to see that my students from Scarborough Southwest are here today.

My question is to the Minister of Education.

Schools in Scarborough Southwest are literally falling apart, and it is unacceptable that, despite the urgent facility needs identified by schools and school boards, our children are forced to learn in poorly equipped classrooms.

Speaker, this government claims to be making historic investments while simultaneously committing less than inflation and underspending their education budget by hundreds of millions of dollars.

My question is, how will this government address the backlog of repairs that we have across the province and ensure that our children are in safe and well-equipped classrooms?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I do appreciate the question from the member opposite.

I'm working with the Minister of Infrastructure to accelerate building schools in this province. We brought forth legislation designed to help fix the problem cited, which is, there are too many schools that need repair and it takes too long to get it done. In this bill, we're going to accelerate the approval process. We're going to allow joint-use projects with community partners, to build better recreational facilities for our kids.

In the budget, \$14 billion is committed over the next decade to build new schools—\$550 million this year alone.

And the Auditor General has requested and recommended to government to invest 2.5% of our budget in maintenance and renewal in the GSN. We have done that. We are providing that stability and those funding guarantees to school boards.

We know there is much more to do.

If the members opposite want to improve the state of schools, they will vote for the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act to ensure we deliver schools quicker and get things done for the children of this province.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Supplementary question?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I invite the minister to come to my riding and see some of the conditions. Some of the school repair is the same amount as actually building an entire school itself.

Speaker, not only are our schools crumbling, but the government's continued underfunding of our education system is leading to cuts in teachers and education workers. These cuts have resulted in oversized classrooms, inadequate specialized learning programs, and a lack of mental health support. This has a direct and detrimental impact on our children's education.

So my question is, again, will this government provide our children with the support that they need, instead of putting pressure on our already underfunded education system?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Speaker, I am very proud that, because of the strong leadership of members from Scarborough from our government, we are building new

schools in that community, after years of repair backlog. In addition to that, we're building subways in Scarborough and renewing long-term care in hospitals. We're investing across the board to give hope to families in Scarborough.

When it comes to education, just this morning, the Ontario Human Rights Commission issued a statement on the legislation posted. They said, "The OHRC is pleased to read that the government of Ontario is committed to overhauling the language curriculum and screening all young children, as recommended in its #RightToRead report."

We have strong support from Dyslexia Canada, from special education families, and from the parent associations of Ontario—demanding that we lift standards and we do better for kids.

We just announced a \$690-million increase—the entire Ministry of Education budget. When you compare the peak of spending under Premier Wynne, it's 27% higher.

We are investing more, we are expecting more for children in this province, and we're going to continue to stand up for families in Ontario.

1120

## AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** Ontario's food processing industry is a core pillar of our province's economic success and sustainability. And in my riding of Brampton East, they are some of our largest employers, with companies like Sierra Processing, Sofina Foods, and Maple Leaf Foods bringing high-quality food to our plates every single day. The success of Ontario is tied to the success of these companies and their employees. Ensuring that we enable success is an important priority.

Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Could the minister please explain how the government is supporting food-processing businesses in my riding?

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** I'm very pleased to share with the House today that Ontario is Canada's food hub when it comes to processing.

The member from Brampton East is absolutely right; we have amazing food processors right in his home riding—and I appreciate the question very much.

Just recently, we hosted a food summit with over 200 participants. At that summit, we celebrated good work that our government has initiated; for instance, the Food Security and Supply Chain Fund, as well as the Strategic Agri-Food Processing Fund.

We're building more capacity, because the world is looking to Ontario.

I want to share with you, as well, that at the summit I was very proud to launch the Agri-Food Energy Cost Savings Initiative—because it's processors like in the member's riding that are looking to modernize and looking for ways to reduce cost of production. So through a \$10-million fund, we're helping food processors identify and increase efficiencies throughout their processing plants.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Supplementary.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** Thank you to the minister for her response and for doing a wonderful job hosting the Ontario food summit.

As was reinforced to me during the summit, this sector is crucial to the continued growth of our economy and building a stronger Ontario. It's important that our agri-food industry in Ontario is as competitive as possible.

Can the minister explain how the energy efficiency program will contribute to reducing costs for our food processors here in Ontario?

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** I want to thank the member opposite for participating in the food summit,

Food production affects everyone in this province.

To the students who are in the galleries today: I want to assure you that there are amazing careers—careers for life—in Ontario's agri-food sector. I encourage you to research those opportunities.

Our government stands with Ontario farmers and processors. Through the Agri-Food Energy Cost Savings Initiative, we are looking to cost-share up to 20% of all energy-saving initiatives that processors in this province undertake, up to a maximum of \$300,000. Why are we doing this? Because we want our story to be sustainable. We want to be ensuring that processors are modernizing and embracing every opportunity to reduce costs of production that ultimately translate into affordable, good-quality food on store shelves throughout this province.

#### LONG-TERM CARE

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** My question is to the Premier.

This morning, in the media studio, Maria Sardelis and Cherie Vandevenne spoke about the terrible suffering caused by the illegal use of the trespass act by care homes. Far too often, when caregivers make complaints about poor standards of care, facility operators retaliate by using the Ontario trespass act illegally to permanently ban entrance to family members.

Will this government ensure that care home operators cannot hide from accountability by using the trespass act to punish patients and their loved ones?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Long-Term Care.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I appreciate the question from the member.

I can appreciate that the member wasn't here in the last Parliament, so she was probably unaware of the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, which, of course, enshrined a Residents' Bill of Rights within the law. We learned during COVID how important it was that family and friends are able to visit their loved ones in long-term-care homes across the province of Ontario. That's why we enshrined that within the Residents' Bill of Rights. It might please the—well, I guess it would displease the member to know that of course the NDP voted against that piece of legislation in the last Parliament. Despite that, we made the commitment to ensure that it is within the Fixing Long-Term Care Act. We've actually gone a step further.

We've ensured that every single home across the province of Ontario posts the Residents' Bill of Rights right within every single long-term-care home across the province.

On top of that, we are still building out 60,000 new and upgraded long-term-care homes while we add 27,000 additional staff.

Again, they voted against that.

But I think we're on the right—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Supplementary question.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** We know, in fact, that these trespass orders are being used every single day, illegally, to ban people from visiting their family members.

In March 2021, this House unanimously passed a motion, presented by my colleague from Ottawa Centre, stating that the government of Ontario would "provide clear direction to operators of retirement, long-term care and group homes that they cannot use the Trespass to Property Act to ban family members who speak out about their loved ones' living conditions."

Will this government fulfil this commitment from 2021 by posting clear direction in publicly accessible spaces in every care facility in Ontario and ensure, also, that the police forces no longer misapply the trespass act by blocking families from visiting their loved ones?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I would agree with the member.

I found it odd that the NDP, in the last Parliament, actually voted against the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, because here's what it says as you enter the doorway of a long-term-care home—

*Interjection.*

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Despite the heckling of the member for Waterloo—who voted against this and, of course, voted against the millions of dollars in extra staffing for her riding.

Here's what it says on the Residents' Bill of Rights in the doorway of every long-term-care home: "Every resident has the right to ... receive visitors of their choice ... without interference"—so job done, as you have asked in your question. It says, "Every resident has a right to ongoing and safe support from their caregivers to support their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being." This is the wording that appears in every single long-term-care home across the province along with a Residents' Bill of Rights.

They voted against the Residents' Bill of Rights. They voted against the Fixing Long-Term Care Act. They voted against 60,000 new and upgraded homes. They voted against 27,000 additional health care workers. They vote against—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you very much. The next question.

#### HEALTH CARE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

All Ontarians deserve to have access to health care that they need when they need it.

Due to the neglect of the previous Liberal government, Ontario needs more doctors to alleviate the strain on our health care system. Unfortunately, too many Ontario students are going abroad for medical school because they haven't been able to find residency spots here in their home province.

Our government must take decisive steps to educate and retain doctors locally in order to connect people to care closer to home.

Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to expand Ontario's medical school system?

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for this important question.

Our government recognizes that in order to build up our health care system, we need to ensure that students pursuing medical studies have access to world-class post-secondary education. As part of that effort, we need to ensure that we have the capacity to train doctors locally—and this government is delivering. In 2022 alone, we added 160 undergraduate spaces and 295 postgraduate medical seats to be implemented over the next five years—the largest expansion of Ontario's medical school system in over a decade. As outlined in budget 2023, we are building on that expansion by investing \$33 million over three years to add another 100 undergraduate seats and 154 postgraduate seats, beginning in 2024, prioritizing Ontario students. This means that by 2028, Ontario will have the capacity to train 1,212 undergraduate medical students and 1,637 postgraduate students annually.

I can assure you that the future of medical education in Ontario is bright.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to the minister for that response. This is welcome news for my constituents. I've heard from many that their children can't get medical training here and would like to come and live here again. That is great news, and I'm sure in other communities it's welcome as well.

Expanding post-secondary education opportunities will make it easier for our homegrown doctors of tomorrow to receive training and provide world-class health care right here in their own communities.

1130

This is one of many important initiatives our government is taking to help build up our health care workforce.

However, I know there are some regions of our province where the need for doctors and other health care professionals is more extreme. It's up to our government to implement solutions that respond to these local health care needs.

Can the minister please explain how our government will prioritize medical training programs to support communities that have the most need?

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Thank you, once again, to the member for their interest and their work in building a health care system that delivers for all Ontarians.

Statistics show that doctors generally stay and practise in the area where they complete their medical education. Recognizing this, our government has taken a pragmatic approach to ensure that we are increasing medical school seats in regions across the province, focusing on areas that need it most. Because no matter where you live, everyone deserves access to a world-class health care system.

That is why we also announced the Scarborough Academy of Medicine, under the University of Toronto, and the northern Ontario medical school, as well as the first-ever medical school in Brampton, which will help solidify local health care needs in the region for generations—something the Liberals and NDP promised but never delivered.

This is how we are building Ontario's health care system to be stronger, more resilient and better than ever. That begins with a solid foundation in education.

## HEALTH CARE

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** To the Premier: My constituent Janice complains that the surgical wait times are simply too long in Ontario. She shared with me a BC government website which publicly lists specialists as well as surgical wait times—a very convenient tool.

Since the Premier won't keep his promise to eliminate surgical backlogs, five years after he was elected to do so, will he at least do the very minimum, which is to create a surgical wait time portal for Ontario patients, just like the one the BC government has created for their residents?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** I'm very excited to use this opportunity to talk about some of the innovations that we are doing under the Your Health plan. It, of course, includes expansion of surgical capacity, both within hospital and within community. When we expand our surgical capacity in community, with community-integrated surgical centres, we actually have more space available in our hospitals to do those more complex surgeries that are so critical—and of course, the emergencies that happen every single day in the province of Ontario.

Because of the investments that we're making in the Your Health commitment, we are ensuring that capacity is expanding in the province of Ontario.

Very specifically, in terms of posting and making people aware, our Your Health partners at Ontario Health are monitoring and publicly posting regularly where our surgical wait times need to be improved.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The supplementary question?

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Back to the Premier: I'm hearing a lot about the innovation that is coming from this province and this particular government, but we're not seeing the results on the ground. Unfortunately, surgical wait times are now longer than ever before.

Let me just rephrase this: The BC NDP government has created a central system for faster referrals. Their residents

can go online and see exactly what they need to see and get that information in a timely fashion.

This Conservative government scrapped the local health integration networks on the eve of a global health pandemic, and under this government there are now more private, for-profit companies charging for similar services. This is a disaster for Ontarians.

Why does this government insist on making health care worse and more expensive for Ontario residents?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** The fact is that Ontario leads Canada in our surgical wait times. We actually have the shortest wait times in all of Canada. That doesn't mean we can't be better, and we will get better as we expand our integrated community surgical centres.

The reality is that we should be very proud of the fact that we are now back to pre-pandemic levels because of an almost \$1-billion investment over three years in the ability for both hospitals and surgical centres to be able to expand their services. We've been able to do that during the pandemic and as we see the pandemic wane. It is very, very important that we continue to do that valuable work with hospitals and with integrated community surgical centre. We will do it. We've laid it out with Bill 60 and the Your Health plan. We are getting it done.

## WOMEN IN SPORTS TOURISM

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

This past Sunday, my community of Brampton had the pleasure of hosting over 5,000 hockey fans at the CAA Centre for the International Ice Hockey Federation's Women's World Championship. The gold medal game was certainly an exciting hockey match. Our Team Canada played so hard right until the end, and we're all very proud of their efforts. Medals and awards went to numerous athletes, but each and every one of the women is a true champion and an all-star. They are positive role models, providing encouragement for other women to stay active in sport.

However, according to a national study, unfortunately, 50% of girls will drop out of sports by adolescence.

More must be done to raise the profile of women in sports and create opportunities for greater participation.

Can the minister please explain how our government is promoting active involvement in sport for women?

**Hon. Neil Lumsden:** I'd like to thank the member from Brampton North for a number of things: your enthusiasm and your approach and what you do in the community.

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Neil Lumsden:** Absolutely.

I thought you had cloned yourself to 5,000 based on that gold medal game, because the fans in Brampton were unbelievable with their support for Team Canada—outstanding.

This government invested \$500,000 in the IIHF Women's World Championship in Brampton, and it was a

massive success—a success on number of fronts, in what it does from a tourism, culture and sport perspective in the community, and how it drives visitorship.

I stepped back at one point because I got there early, as I often do at a sporting event—especially when you're involved with it emotionally—to try to get rid of some tension, and what I saw when the doors opened were as many children as I saw adults; young girls who played hockey throughout Ontario wearing their jerseys, showing up with their parents and getting engaged. If they're engaged, that means they're looking at these women on the ice, especially Team Canada, and using them as a source of motivation and—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you. The supplementary question.

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** Thank you to the minister for that response.

We certainly saw and experienced excitement and fun in Brampton last week.

Sports events like this one in my community not only inspire future generations of athletes and increase physical activity, but they also contribute to the social fabric of our communities.

It's also encouraging to see the positive effects that a major event like this one had for the businesses in Brampton and across Ontario. Many Brampton hotels, restaurants and shops welcomed the boost in occupancy and sales as people enjoyed themselves in and around our city. It was a true winning experience for everyone.

Can the minister please explain how our government is supporting amateur sporting events and boosting tourism opportunities in local communities like mine?

**Hon. Neil Lumsden:** Again, thank you for the question.

I can talk for hours on what sport does, what it delivers to young people, and how it helps them and positively affects their lives, but I won't bore you, at least at this point.

The Ontario Sport Hosting Program is designed to help communities host national and international events. Again, it goes back to that tourism, culture and sport piece that work awfully well together to drive business to the economy. To that point, since 2018, we've supported 155 sporting events. That equates to about \$81 million of impact in the communities that were hosting these events. That's a big deal.

I was just in Ottawa, and we are investing \$300,000 in the World Rugby Pac Four international tournament to be held this year in July. The best of the best will compete in Ottawa. One of those four is Canada, which means we're one of the best of the best, including New Zealand, Australia and the US. Once again, it's a great example for all people in sport, but especially young women who can be motivated and inspired by watching their heroes on the ice or on the field.

## VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Scarborough Southwest has a point of order.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I see that the students are actually finally here today. I hope everyone will join me in welcoming the wonderful students from St. Agatha Catholic School, with trustee Nancy Crawford and their teachers Shannon Murphy, Deirdre Moloney-Sciberras, Hyacinth Fernandes, Kathleen Dillon, and Theresa Moulds. Welcome to the House.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

*The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.*

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** I'd like to introduce, from the riding of Burlington, today's page captain, Senna Chan Carusone. Welcome to Queen's Park, and thank you for your work as a page.

## REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Interior and move its adoption.

**The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Christopher Tyrell):** Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 71, An Act to amend the Mining Act / Projet de loi 71, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mines.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

*Report adopted.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### ADVOCATE FOR OLDER ADULTS ACT, 2023

### LOI DE 2023 SUR L'INTERVENANT EN FAVEUR DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

MPP Vaugeois moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to establish the Advocate for Older Adults / Projet de loi 101, Loi créant le poste d'intervenant en faveur des personnes âgées.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'd like invite the member to briefly explain the bill, if she chooses to do so.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** The bill enacts the Advocate for Older Adults Act, 2023, which establishes an advocate for older adults who is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. The functions of the advocate for older adults include advocating in the interests of older adults and family members of older adults who act as caregivers. In addition, the advocate for older adults is required to advise, in an independent manner, the minister, public officials and persons who fund or deliver services for older adults on systemic challenges faced by older adults, policies and practices to address existing systemic challenges and other matters that may come to the attention of the advocate for older adults.

## PETITIONS

### ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** J'aimerais remercier Colin et Hélène Pick de Capreol dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

« Soutenez le système d'éducation francophone en Ontario... »

« Attendu que les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité, financée par les fonds publics, dans leur propre langue; »

« Attendu que l'augmentation des inscriptions dans le système d'éducation en langue française signifie que plus de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants et enseignantes de langue française sont nécessaires chaque année pour les cinq prochaines années; »

« Attendu que les changements apportés au modèle de financement du gouvernement provincial pour la formation des enseignantes et enseignants de langue française signifient que l'Ontario n'en forme que 500 par » année; »

« Attendu que le nombre de personnes qui enseignent sans certification complète dans le système d'éducation en langue française a augmenté de plus de 450 % au cours de la dernière décennie; »

Ils et elles demandent à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario « de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants dans le système d'éducation en langue française de l'Ontario et de travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en oeuvre les recommandations. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je demande à Mridul de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

## EDUCATION

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I have a petition, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas parents have asked the Ministry of Education to find a way to refocus and get students back to the basics; and

“Whereas there is a recognition that there is a need for additional qualified and dedicated educators in Ontario; and

“Whereas, if passed, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will streamline certification timelines for those with in-demand expertise who have valuable skills to teach our students; and

“Whereas with a rapidly evolving economy, Ontario’s curriculum must be consistently updated to ensure relevant and modern information for students to access good-paying jobs; and

“Whereas students and parents deserve a world-class education system built, on strategic investments and initiatives, that will deliver the highest impact on student success, greater involvement and transparency for parents and respect for Ontario taxpayers;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To urge all member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the passage of Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023.”

Speaker, I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Frederick.

### ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

**M<sup>me</sup> Sandy Shaw:** J’ai une pétition intitulée « Soutenez le système d’éducation francophone en Ontario.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Alors que les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité, financée par les fonds publics, dans leur propre langue;

« Alors que l’augmentation des inscriptions dans le système d’éducation en langue française signifie que plus de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants et enseignantes de langue française sont nécessaires chaque année pour les cinq prochaines années;

« Alors que les changements apportés au modèle de financement du gouvernement provincial pour la formation des enseignantes et enseignants de langue française signifient que l’Ontario n’en forme que 500 par an;

« Alors que le nombre de personnes qui enseignent sans certification complète dans le système d’éducation en langue française a augmenté de plus de 450 % au cours de la dernière décennie;

« Par conséquent, nous, soussignés, demandons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants dans le système d’éducation en langue française de l’Ontario et de travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en oeuvre les recommandations. »

Je suis complètement d’accord. Je vais y ajouter mon nom et la donner à la page Maya pour apporter aux greffiers.

### SCHOOL BOARDS

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I’d like to thank Liz for her work on this petition. It’s greatly appreciated.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas parents expect that school board trustees and staff be qualified, accountable and focused on putting forward a plan to boost student achievement; and

“Whereas Ontario’s education system should offer the full accountability, transparency and responsiveness expected by families to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow; and

“Whereas currently, Ontario’s 72 school boards set their own priorities, creating inconsistencies in student outcomes across the education system; and

“Whereas training for school board officials, including trustees and directors of education, to ensure they are unified in their respective roles to help students build skills they need to succeed; and

“Whereas a trustee dispute mechanism should be put in place, saving precious time and countless taxpayer dollars by building a provincially appointed roster of qualified integrity commissioners to quickly and effectively adjudicate the disputes;

**1310**

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the passage of Bill 98, the Better School and Student Outcomes Act, 2023.”

I agree with this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to page Senna to take to the table.

### MISSING PERSONS

**Miss Monique Taylor:** I have a petition titled “Vulnerable Persons Alert.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is a gap in our current emergency alert system that needs to be addressed;

“Whereas a vulnerable persons alert would help ensure the safety of our loved ones in a situation where time is critical;

“Whereas several municipal councils, including, Brighton, Midland, Bonfield township, Cobourg and Mississauga and several others, have passed resolutions calling for a new emergency alert to protect our loved ones;

“Whereas over 90,000 people have signed an online petition ... for a ‘Draven Alert’ and over 6,000 people have signed an online petition calling for ‘Love’s Law’, for vulnerable people who go missing;

“Whereas this new alert would be an additional tool in the tool box for police forces to use to locate missing, vulnerable people locally and regionally;

“Whereas this bill is a common-sense proposal and non-partisan in nature, to help missing vulnerable persons find their way safely home;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support and pass Bill 74, Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition, will affix any name it to and give it to page Olivia to bring to the Clerk.

### SCHOOL BOARDS

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas parents have asked the Ministry of Education to improve accountability and transparency for students, parents, and Ontario taxpayers; and

“Whereas all 72 school boards must focus their obligations on improving student achievement by preparing students with the life, jobs and critical-thinking skills needed to succeed; and

“Whereas school boards should make public their plans to improve student achievement and offer every single parent the opportunity to view and review these plans at the start of the school year and the end of the school year to measure progress; and

“Whereas school boards should be required to increase transparency in how the school board will spend provincial tax dollars to improve student achievement; and

“Whereas students and parents should be put back at the forefront of Ontario’s education system;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the passage of Bill 98, the Better School and Student Outcomes Act, 2023.”

I am very proud to put my name to this petition and will provide that to Akshitha.

### ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Je remercie Robert Lebel pour la pétition intitulée « Soutenez le système d’éducation francophone en Ontario.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Alors que les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité, financée par les fonds publics, dans leur propre langue;

« Alors que l’augmentation des inscriptions dans le système d’éducation en langue française signifie que plus de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants et enseignantes de langue française sont nécessaires chaque année pour les cinq prochaines années;

« Alors que les changements apportés au modèle de financement du gouvernement provincial pour la formation des enseignantes et enseignants de langue française signifient que l’Ontario n’en forme que 500 par an;

« Alors que le nombre de personnes qui enseignent sans certification complète dans le système d’éducation en langue française a augmenté de plus de 450 % au cours » des dernières années;

« Par conséquent, nous, soussignés, demandons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des

enseignants dans le système d’éducation en langue française de l’Ontario et de travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en oeuvre les recommandations. »

Il me fait plaisir de signer cette pétition. Je la remets à Lazo pour qu’il l’amène à la table des greffiers.

### EDUCATION

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** This petition is titled “In Support of Improving Education in Ontario.

“To the Minister of Education:

“Whereas the government is committed to delivering a world-class education system that helps prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow; and

“Whereas the legislative changes proposed through the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, together with future regulatory amendments, would, if passed, lay the groundwork for a truly world-class education system, unified with a singular focus to improve student outcomes in important lifelong skills like reading, writing and math; and

“Whereas Ontario school boards are not consistently working toward the same priorities, school board performance varies across the province on indicators related to literacy, math, graduation and student attendance; and

“Whereas some parents can review and assess their school board’s performance while other boards do not proactively share this information; and

“Whereas in response Ontario is taking action through proposed legislation to set student achievement priorities and expectations for Ontario’s education sector, and proposed legislative and future regulatory changes, if passed, would allow the Minister of Education to set provincial priorities to:

“—focus boards in important areas of student achievement like reading, writing and math;

“—require school boards to report on progress toward these priorities and enable the Ministry of Education to support struggling boards sooner;

“—allow the minister to require school boards to make any report that the minister may require from the board available to the public;

“—require enhanced school board financial reporting on funding and spending, planned and actuals;

“—allow the minister to strengthen rules around financial accountability and transparency;

“—allow the minister to prescribe school board limitations in participating in business activities that could place school boards in financial risk;

“—allow the minister to enhance the financial accountability of school board-controlled entities, promote greater school board-municipality co-operation on delivering child care and enable an accelerated apprenticeship pathway;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To support the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023, and ensure its passage.”



I proudly affix my signature to this petition and will give it to page Frederick.

### TRESPASS NOTICES

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** This is entitled “For the Love of Seniors and Disabled.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas some operators of private retirement homes, group homes and long-term-care homes have banned family from visiting their loved ones by misusing the Trespass to Property Act;

“Whereas these punitive measures have been instituted when family or friends raised concerns for their loved ones;

“Whereas Ontario courts have ruled, pursuant to the Trespass to Property Act, a person cannot be trespassing if:

—the person has legally conferred authority; or

—the person is the invited guest of the occupant;

“Whereas on March 4, 2021, the Ontario Legislative Assembly unanimously passed motion 129, Voula’s Law, which requested that the Ford government provide clear direction that the Trespass to Property Act does not permit seniors’ homes or homes of the disabled to issue trespass notices...;

“Whereas the Ford government has not complied with the March 4, 2021 Legislative Assembly’s unanimous request via motion 129...;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That motion 129 be transitioned to a bill which would be a binding authority and in alliance with Ontario courts rulings regarding the use of the Trespass to Property Act.”

I support the petition and affix my signature, and I will give it to Maya.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### BETTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES ACT, 2023

#### LOI DE 2023 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES ÉCOLES ET DU RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 19, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** When we last debated this bill, I understand the member for Kitchener–Conestoga had the floor. There’s still some time on the clock, and I recognize the member for Kitchener–Conestoga to continue his presentation.

1320

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I recognize you as well. I’ve seen you around this place for many years, and I’m glad you’re here and still presiding over today’s, shall we say, festivities. Let’s maybe liven it up a little bit this afternoon here. I know the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane is certainly looking forward to some lively debate in the House.

I was just finishing off this morning talking about my private member’s bill that had passed and just talking about safety for students. I think it’s a good segue into what we’re debating here today, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act which, if passed, will clearly establish a zero-tolerance approach for any educator convicted of a sexual offence. I think that’s something that’s very important about this bill, Mr. Speaker, and of course, to our government, student safety is very critical.

But I do want to shift gears a little bit and I want to talk about where we were back in April 2020. As our world’s economy continues to change, we need to keep up with the times, and this is why the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, if passed, will implement a mandatory curriculum review process no fewer than every three years. I think this has been a critical theme, where we’ve heard from parents, where we’ve heard from students to and what we’ve heard from industry—really trying to focus back on to STEM programs and getting people prepared for the jobs of the future.

One thing we’ve seen certainly around Waterloo region is a willingness to get trades back into our high schools, and shop classes—automotive shop classes, which my son is actually taking part in and is loving it and is working on a career path to become a mechanic, which is phenomenal—but maybe a politician, too. He has taken part in Fed-Prov recently and of course was a page here. Pages, for your edification, I’ve had two sons who have been a page here in the Legislature.

It’s really important that we continue to focus on those STEM programs, to modernize and have the curriculum evaluated so that we’re able to keep up with what the jobs of the future look like. This is why Bill 98 seeks to streamline certification timelines for those with in-demand expertise who have valuable skills as well to teach our students, Speaker.

Another priority of our government is ensuring that the quality of education is consistent across Ontario. I think we have about 72 school boards—colleagues, correct me if I’m wrong. So making sure that we have the same rules, the same way of thinking, the same ideology across the 72 school boards, to make sure that if someone’s transitioning—I’ll use myself as an example. Ten years ago, I moved to Waterloo region. We had two children at the time going to school in North Bay. They were taking French immersion. I know there’s been a lot of talk about French-language education here in the House over the last couple of days. I think it’s very important. It was very interesting to see—from full-day kindergarten and also into grade 1, full-day French immersion in grade 1—when we moved down to southern Ontario, to Waterloo region,

French immersion didn't start until grade 1, so you lost out on it in kindergarten. Not only that, but it's only done in half days, where it's full days in northern Ontario, which I thought was very interesting.

Looking at the ways to be able to streamline the way that boards do business I think is extremely important and certainly something, as a parent—my wife is actually a member of the parent councils where our kids go to school, and it's very important to be involved and to make sure you know what's going on. But, also, part of what I alluded to earlier in my comments was that it can be very hard for parents to navigate the education system and to truly understand what boards are doing and what's happening at their schools. For a lot of us here, it's a little bit easier, because we see the inner workings and the nuts and bolts; we're interacting with those educational stakeholders on a regular basis. But most parents don't have the opportunity to do that. So, to be able to see school boards become more accountable is something we can all agree on. Certainly, we want every student to have the same opportunity here in the province. Again, making sure we're being concurrent and congruent across all of the 72 school boards is extremely important.

As I had mentioned earlier, I want to share my time with the member from Newmarket–Aurora so I think now would be the time to do that, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I recognize the member for Newmarket–Aurora.

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** As a strong believer in public education, a representative of democracy, of working families and as a parent, it is an honour for me to rise in the House and express my support for the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

Whenever I talk to hard-working families in Newmarket–Aurora, Speaker, the subject of education always comes up. Many families like what the Minister of Education is doing in terms of updating the curriculum to better reflect the needs of the labour market and ensuring our schools are safe and welcoming learning centres for all students. However, they also tell me there's a lot more that needs to be done, and they're frustrated by what they perceive as a big and impersonal bureaucracy in the form of their local school board that resists change and is neither properly accountable nor transparent.

Speaker, I do not typically quote former Premiers, but I think it is appropriate here to quote former NDP Premier Bob Rae's Royal Commission on Learning from December 1994 as it nicely surmises what I hear from parents:

“One complaint that we heard, repeatedly, was that the public education system no longer seems to be responsible to the public. This is one major cause of the lack of confidence that so many seem to feel for the system. Although board of education trustees and provincial governments are elected, there exists widespread unease that schools have become a kingdom unto themselves, with little need to report to parents or to the world at large what they are doing with our kids, and whether they're doing it successfully.”

Speaker, that situation has only increased in the three decades since that report was written.

As a parent with a child who has been part of this education system, I know first-hand and can understand parents' frustrations. I believe the Minister of Education has done a phenomenal job of driving transformational change, but the problems in the education system are deep-seated and go back decades, as the royal commission reported nearly 30 years ago.

The education system simply hasn't been meeting the needs of students in terms of learning core skills such as reading and math—and again, I can state this as a fact as a parent. The former Liberal government's discovery math and discovery reading programs were out of date, out of touch and in serious need of retooling.

Teacher education programs don't provide consistent training in the fundamentals such as math and literacy. Information about the overall performance of school boards isn't easily accessible by parents or the public, which has a significant impact on accountability and transparency. In my previous life in the private sector, if a multi-million dollar corporation could not provide accountability over the spending of revenues, well, I'll tell you now, Mr. Speaker, executives and boards would be quickly undergoing a makeover. And how it pertains to school boards? The ministry has a limited ability to drive or enforce provincial priorities. I have to admit this is why I know there are so many disillusioned families in our communities when it comes to the public education system. What the province prioritizes is not what the final outcomes are in our communities. Thus, a disconnect that needs to be corrected.

**1330**

Increasingly, Speaker, parents get see verbal spats among school board trustees that are also costly, time-consuming and add to the erosion of public confidence in the system. I have witnessed this first-hand in my own community of Newmarket–Aurora in York region. Speaker, we believe that the governance and accountability of trustees and our entire school boards will indeed improve our local education system so they can focus on what is important—back to the basics of reading, writing and math—so it is all about student outcomes and not about having to deal with situations that deter from this focus.

Thankfully, Speaker, our government is taking action to address these long-standing problems. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will, if passed, include legislative and regulatory reforms under four statutes to support improved outcomes through the following actions:

- drive provincial priorities and expectations for Ontario's education sector from the province through to the province's classrooms to enhance accountability and transparency;

- enable more effective governance through reforms for education sector boards of trustees, including a standard code of conduct;

- help to maximize the considerable real estate assets of school boards;

- ensure Ontario's teachers are trained for the needs of today's and tomorrow's classrooms; and

- provide the information and tools necessary to ensure consistent information and approaches to student learning,

including student learning about mental health and well-being.

Les conseils scolaires de l'Ontario comptent près de 700 conseillères et conseillers scolaires, qui prennent des décisions importantes et font valoir des perspectives précieuses et des considérations locales sur la façon dont les conseils scolaires sont régis. Les dirigeants des conseils scolaires jouent un rôle crucial pour veiller à ce que le système d'éducation de l'Ontario soit centré sur ce qui compte le plus : l'acquisition de compétences durables comme la lecture, l'écriture et les mathématiques.

Nous savons que les parents et les élèves ont besoin d'un plus grand nombre d'outils aux fins de transparence et de responsabilisation. Il est donc impératif que les personnes exerçant des fonctions de direction acquièrent les connaissances nécessaires pour assurer une éducation publique de qualité aux élèves de leurs conseils scolaires.

Toutefois, il existe aujourd'hui des incohérences dans la province en ce qui concerne le soutien et la formation fournis aux conseillères et conseillers scolaires et l'évaluation du rendement des directrices et directeurs de l'éducation.

Si elles sont adoptées, les modifications législatives proposées permettraient ce qui suit : d'autoriser le ministre à établir des politiques et des lignes directrices énonçant la formation que doivent suivre les conseillères et conseillers scolaires, y compris le contenu de la formation, le moment où elle doit être suivie et la fréquence; et de permettre au gouvernement d'établir un processus d'évaluation du rendement des directrices et directeurs de l'éducation.

Afin de renforcer le code de conduite auquel doivent se conformer les conseillères et conseillers scolaires et de réduire les perturbations pour que les conseillères et conseillers scolaires puissent se concentrer sur le rendement des élèves, les modifications proposées, si elles sont adoptées, établiraient un nouveau processus impartial, dirigé par le commissaire à l'intégrité, régissant le règlement des plaintes relatives à des violations du code de conduite.

These reforms are a major step forward in the government's efforts to make sure all parts of Ontario's education system are unified to prepare students for the jobs of the future and to be accountable to parents and taxpayers for these results. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act is necessary and is long-overdue legislation that will make a positive difference in the lives of students and parents. Positive and successful student outcomes are what our communities deserve.

I hope that my colleagues on the opposition benches put partisan politics aside and show their support as well.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions and answers.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you to the members for their comments. I'm sorry to say, the member for Kitchener–Conestoga was not nearly as entertaining as the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, but the member for Newmarket–Aurora sure was there at the end.

A question for the member for Kitchener–Conestoga: I'm glad to hear of your interest in school safety, your support for shop class. But what we're seeing from this

government is a lack of investments to actually keep our kids safe in schools, along with a lack of investments to actually provide them this tech education that has been promised.

Every student is going to be required to take a tech class, but we don't have enough tech teachers even for the number of classes that are offered now. Many schools have no shop space anymore or a computer lab. They're going to need to set that up in order to offer a tech credit. If there's no funding attached, then they're not going to be able to do that safely and to do that well. I feel like that's this whole bill. It's a grand set of priorities with no plan to get from here to there and no resources to actually do it.

Would the member support actually putting the resources towards school safety and tech classes?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Thank you very much. Listen, that's what is actually enshrined in this bill. We're upping Grants for Student Needs by \$700 million. We're putting \$15 billion into capital projects. And we're hiring more teachers with specializations to be able to teach these classes.

We look at the ideology that was perpetrated by the previous Liberal government that closed these programs, and, quite frankly, in a minority government, it was support by the NDP. I do find it a little bit strange that they would stand up and pontificate on those types of things when it is this Conservative government that is actually making the necessary investments, that is working with our schools and our school boards to make sure that we are hiring qualified teachers to teach these programs and to make sure that we have the ability to have the spaces for these in our schools.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I want to thank my colleagues from Kitchener–Conestoga and Newmarket–Aurora for their comments, and I wanted to direct a question to the member from Newmarket–Aurora. Also, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga had mentioned this, but you did as well, member from Newmarket–Aurora, talking about parents and how frustrated they've been with some of the issues that come up with schools and school boards and trying to actually have an influence on what's happening with the education of their children in our schools. I certainly hear a lot of that from my constituents. Also, as a parent of children, I know that that's something that we've experienced ourselves, and I know both you and the member from Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned that you had.

Can you just talk a little bit more about what you've heard from constituents and why you think this legislation is going to help?

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I'd like to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for her question.

I would have to say, number one, what I hear the most about is the concerns about where the funding is going and what is going on with that funding. In this bill, we will have school boards actually post financial results of what's going on, and it's going to be tied to our student outcomes.

At the end of the day, this is what it's all about. Everybody agrees—all my constituents want to see the best outcome for their child.

This is what it is all about: ensuring that transparency with the school boards so that we can have reporting that is tied to student outcomes.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Question? 1340

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** This morning, I listened to the MPP from Ottawa West–Nepean, our education critic, describe what's actually happening in schools, and I wonder what else in wonderland these members are talking about, because what we are seeing in our schools are students who do not have access to mental health supports. We see students who are losing teachers and educators and aides in the classroom. We see a deteriorating condition when it comes to the actual physical environment that they're in. We also know, despite the numbers that this government likes to throw around, that if you actually look at the numbers, if your funding was to keep up with inflation, that would be \$2.5 billion more. You talk about getting back to basics. To me, basics would be a safe, warm classroom for kids, with a teacher.

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. I have to say that mental health supports are what this bill is all about as well.

I know in my community of Newmarket, just recently we had a horrible incident of bullying, where two young girls were beating up on another child. Now, I've got to say, bullying has happened forever, but I do believe the magnitude of it has gotten worse. Two young girls were charged, by the way. This just happened maybe a few blocks from my own constituency office.

What we are doing is putting in a 170% increase. It's a historic \$130 million going into mental health. We talk about mental health and the safety. Safety equals mental health. This is why we want to help our students by providing consistency in the delivery of mental health education and services across all school boards.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Ross Romano:** I'd like to ask a question of the member from Kitchener–Conestoga while he's staring at my backside right now. Thank you very much for that, to the great member.

In seriousness, for those of you who may or may not know, of course, I'm aware that the member has five children, all in the secondary school level and junior levels. I've got three young children in grades 3, 4 and 5 myself. As parents with kids going to school, how do you really rank and feel—I'm just curious, to the member, in his own personal experience, less so as a legislator, as a member of the government, but more as father of five children in school—how do you feel our system is serving our students, and do you feel that we're doing pretty well for our kids right now?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** It's a great question. I know many of us, obviously, are parents here. I think there's some room for improvement. Certainly, our educators do a fantastic job, but there's always room to improve.

When I look at the breakdown of my children, I have two in high school, one who's going into middle school next year and then two more in primary grades. It's very interesting to see the level of engagement with their teachers and educators but more so with the way that the boards administer each of the schools.

I know I talked a lot about it in my remarks, but I'm really starting to see some streamlining and making the boards accountable for what they're doing and how they're planning things out within the different schools, certainly within our school board at Waterloo Region District School Board. I'm very excited to see that the accountability piece is going to be there, because I think that's the piece that's really lacking. A lot of parents want to see the board being accountable and want it to be transparent so they can see what their children are being taught and where that money that we are investing is being spent.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions? I recognize the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Merci, madame la Présidente. Ça me fait tant rire, comment le monde a de la misère, encore, après cinq ans, à dire « Mushkegowuk–Baie James ».

Mais ceci dit, ça m'impressionne tout le temps quand on voit un gouvernement mettre ça tellement beau et tellement rose dans l'éducation francophone, quand la réalité est complètement différente. On a une demande de 700 enseignants dont on a besoin dans l'éducation franco-ontarienne quand on sait que le gouvernement n'en propose que 500. Fait que, il va en manquer en quelque part. Par 2025, si on ne répond pas au besoin, on va être rendu à 3 000 professeurs ou enseignants qui vont manquer dans nos conseils scolaires. On sait que, juste pour les personnes non qualifiées qui enseignent dans nos écoles francophones, ça a augmenté à 450 %. Ce n'est pas un bon record, là. On va arrêter de se péter les bretelles, parce que j'aurais honte un petit peu, moi, d'essayer de faire croire à la population franco-ontarienne que tout va bien dans nos écoles.

J'aimerais vous entendre dire à la communauté franco-ontarienne les vrais—je veux entendre les vrais chiffres, parce que les vrais chiffres, c'est ce que je viens de vous dire. Je ne les invente pas. J'aimerais vous—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Response?

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Merci beaucoup au député pour la question. Je sais bien que ce n'est pas juste pour les parents anglais mais aussi pour les parents francophones. La chose qui est primordiale est la responsabilité et la transparence. Les parents—anglais ou français, n'importe qui—pourront voir comment les conseils scolaires respectent les priorités nécessaires, et reconnaissant les objectifs des mathématiques, de la lecture et puis de l'écriture. N'importe quoi en français ou bien en anglais—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Joel Harden:** It's a pleasure to rise and attempt to engage the government here on this education bill. I have to, though, take a step back, because one has to ask the

question: When a government makes simultaneous announcements in the same area, what's actually going on? On Sunday—this past Sunday—the education minister talked about this bill, but at the same time released the funding announcement, as the member for Ottawa West–Nepean mentioned in debate earlier this morning. Why do that? People are busy enough. Parents are busy enough. Kids who are working in our public school systems, attempting to be the best students they can be, are busy enough. As we await information about what this government's plans are for our public education system, why release two things on the same day?

I have a theory, Speaker, and it doesn't go to motive. It's a theory about why a government would do such a thing. I think it's because there's some bad news here. I know we're going to have a debate, in the questions and answers to my time this afternoon, about what that news is. I think it's bad news.

Here's why. I heard the education minister this week in debate get up and describe the funding announcement this week and this bill as a net positive thing for students and a net positive thing for our schools. But what the member for Ottawa West–Nepean said very clearly this morning is that the proof in the pudding always shows up at a school board level. It always shows up at a school board level when the people charged to actually oversee the schools at a local level look at the details about staff allocations, look at the details about resource allocations, and figure out what they're going to do with what the government offers.

This is what we've learned at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. After burning through reserves, based upon previous cuts from this government, they are staring down the probability of \$10 million to \$13 million in cuts going forward. That's not a net positive, as I see it. Here in the great city of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board has done the same assessment, and after burning through, I believe, as much as \$70 million in reserves, they are now looking at \$64 million in cuts. I know the education minister likes to talk about math and the importance of training up kids at math, but the math that I was trained to use myself leads me to believe cuts are not a net positive thing.

These 2,000 staff positions the minister talks about: As I read through the details of my colleague's presentation of what the minister presented, what I understood is that these aren't necessarily assigned to a particular occupation. They're math coaches, as I understand it, Speaker. If you were to take those 2,000 positions and put them across the entire school systems of all the boards that we have, you wouldn't even be sprinkling a meaningful amount per school. So if the minister truly wants kids to win and succeed, win and be the best person they could be, why would he be sprinkling such a paltry amount of resources by way of staff?

This is what I know from actual math. If the government had simply kept pace with inflation, according to the Bank of Canada—an actual, statistical source of data, unlike this government—they would be spending \$2.5 billion more this year in education. That is what would be required just to keep pace with inflation.

Now, what happens when we don't keep pace with inflation? What happens when school boards get shorted? What happens is, ultimately, staff and students get shorted. Sadly, I hate to tell you, Speaker, the people who are often at the top of the getting-shortened list are students with disabilities.

**1350**

I want to talk about a few stories, one of which comes from home and that has had some modest progress as recently as today, thanks to a family who is tireless in advocating for their child, but I think it will help give the government some sense about when they propose enhancements, but deliver cuts, who suffers.

Elliot Legault is a high school student in the city of Ottawa. His family lives in Ottawa Centre. Elliot Legault is an autistic adolescent. He's non-verbal, but what his behavioural analyst determined at the school board level and to the family is that Elliot has an incredible amount of gifts to give and bring, not only for himself but to his class.

But what happened in the pandemic is interesting. Because there was so much virtual education happening—special education was still going on in person, so Elliot, actually, during the pandemic, was one of those few students who got the benefit from schools being relatively open so he could, as is his wont, get up and walk around and explore and experience learning in a very interactive way. It's a necessity for Elliot; it's a necessity. So the pandemic, oddly enough, was a positive thing for Elliot as he was grappling with his learning journey in his high school.

But when people came back from virtual learning, things were very different for Elliot. There were obvious tensions with other students. Getting up and walking around are not necessarily understood by other students as part of Elliot's learning journey and could be understood as disruptive, and conflicts could be created. The only way those conflicts get mediated is with trained people in the classroom. That is the only way those conflicts get mediated. So the Legault family advocated for their son and went as far as the autism program at Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and made a proposal, successfully, to have CHEO-based resources allocated to their son's high school to make sure staff could figure out how to quickly mediate conflict as it was happening so it didn't spiral out of control, so a classroom didn't have to be cleared.

That's incredible. I think about the amount of parents who have the capability to figure out all those avenues of advocacy where they can connect with the children's hospital to the high school to the staff, but they accomplished all those things. But when people came back, those resources were time-limited. The CHEO resources were not there forever. They were gradually withdrawn, and staff were told, "Okay, here we go. We have all these students coming back in the high school now, and you're going to have to figure out a way to help Elliot without an EA today." That was often the response: "You're going to have to figure out a way to accommodate Elliot without the ability to move around, to go in the hall and walk back and forth, and keep him in the classroom."

You can tell it's a ticking time bomb of a problem. A conflict is going to happen. A classroom is going to be cleared. And surely enough there were a couple of incidents. Sadly, the Legault family was dealing with the situation that I was first presented with back in the fall of Elliot's high school education being reduced to two hours of learning a day—two hours. What does that mean for his dad, Steve, and his mom, Carrie? What it means is, Carrie is the full-time, stay-at-home educator. Carrie is not allowed to pursue her professional employment because we do not have the requisite staff to be able to help Elliot in Elliot's learning journey—quite frankly, not just Elliot's: It's everybody's learning journey when you have a mixed environment and kids learn how to interact with different kids who learn differently. So the Legault family is told by fiat that their son is only entitled to two hours of education a day.

I was made aware of a mom recently in Durham who just recently found out that her seven-year-old son has not been allowed outside for recess since October—since October. Why? Because staff worry that he is a flight risk. Staff worry that there is a conflict brewing at any corner, and they do not have EA resources, so the child stays inside for recess.

This is what happens. This is what happens when you short public education, and it doesn't go away by talking about 2,000 staff who are math coaches who magically might be able to present themselves to a classroom one day and help Elliot or help this seven-year-old I'm talking about. It doesn't.

So then the problem in this bill, as I understand it, gets even more complicated, Speaker, because in a context where this government is proposing enhancements to funding, enhancements to staff, but actually cutting the ability of school boards and schools and staff to provide that support, they're blaming school boards for improper governance. I would never say, Speaker, that there aren't problems at a school board level, certainly as there aren't problems in this building with how we interact and make decisions. There's always going to be, and you have to have good governance processes to hold people accountable, absolutely—absolutely. But beginning with the supposition of negativity is a problem.

It also concerned me, Speaker, that the Ottawa public school boards' association—I might have gotten the acronym wrong—the body that's responsible for bringing together the school boards to advocate here was not consulted on this bill. They found out about it in the media. Can you imagine, Speaker, for any one of us, if we were presented with a project of law a constituent wanted us to embrace, and that constituent just took to the media and said, "My MPP is lousy because they don't care about my issue," but we've never been consulted on it in the past and someone just holds forth and questions our integrity? We would be outraged, wouldn't we? We would feel like we were being disrespected. But that is precisely what this government is doing to school boards right now.

So I want to invite this government, if they're listening, to redo this process. If you're actually interested in code of conduct policies—proper code of conduct policies that

will help make sure that when there is a complaint about staff behaviour or trustee behaviour amongst each other—I want the government today in debate to confirm that they will consult with public school board authorities, consult with employee groups and parent organizations, put in as much effort as they did into the physical and health education curriculum of 2018. Do you remember that, Speaker? They went out on the road with that, and they found out from communities that their approach was wrong. I want them to put a similar amount of resources and effort into the issue of code of conduct.

I'll tell you why, Speaker. There's a disturbing story from my own community that I take to heart, that not a day when I walk into this place do I not think about. A very prominent trustee in our community for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth. Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth runs a family health organization. She's a family physician with an incredible pedigree and reputation in our town. Why? She was one of the primary health care providers during the pandemic that brought the immunization wave, the wave of mass immunizations that happened in our community, particularly for essential workers: people working in grocery stores, warehouses, trucking, the occupations that were essential, but they weren't health care. It was Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth that came to be known as a major organizer in our community for her work on mass immunization. Her efforts immunized over 15,000 people. They were called "Jabapalooza" efforts. They filled up entire streets—the Fourth Avenue where her clinic is based, the Common Ground family health organization clinic. You could see the street; she worked on it with the city. The road was blocked off, with people backed up for a long way, because they were scared about going to work if they weren't protected through immunization; they were scared about passing on a virus to an immunocompromised loved one.

Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth came to be known in our town for being a leader because of her work in the pandemic. And then, because of her experience in public advocacy, she decided, "I want to serve the public more." So she ran to be a trustee of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board in the very area where her clinic is based.

Trustee Kaplan-Myrth is also the first—to my knowledge, at least—elected Jewish trustee we have had in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board in a long time. And sadly, given what we have seen in some quarters of social media, she has been subjected to a tremendous amount of hate and anti-Semitic vitriol—constant. It's gotten to the point, Speaker—I want this said for the record. I won't read the text of the emails Trustee Kaplan-Myrth has received, but it's gotten to the point where every single day she's receiving a death threat from anonymous email accounts. That's not an exaggeration—every single day. That is what she is dealing with.

**1400**

So what has her approach been from advocacy to change the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board? On January 18, 2023, she went to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board with a proposal to hire a Jewish equity

coach, because there had been a number of disturbing incidents of anti-Semitism in schools and because of what she had experienced herself. The board unanimously adopted that approach, and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has set in motion by which schools can start to grapple—led by leaders in our Jewish and this Jewish equity coach—with dealing with the issue of anti-Semitism. Something to do—they didn't ask for the government's help in this. Trustee Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth led that effort.

So what I would tell this government if they want to revamp code of conduct processes is to talk to Dr. Nili. Talk to Trustee Nili. Talk to advocates in other school boards who have had to deal with awful incidents of hate in the classroom and awful incidences of hate that they've received as elected officials and ask them for their advice, because your provincial code of conduct will be better from those engagements. I'm happy to send along all the contact information I have from the rather ugly chapter that continues to unfold in our city.

I also, for the record, want to shout-out Proton Mail. Why, Speaker? Because Trustee Kaplan-Myrth approached Proton Mail—which if people don't know about, it's an encrypted form of email you can sign up to. This is where a lot of the hate for Trustee Kaplan-Myrth has come from: sources that can't be traced. And this company, when Trustee Kaplan-Myrth reached out to them, was horrified at the hate being spread out from their platform, and volunteered—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I'm just going to ask the member to bring his remarks back to the debate that we're focusing on today.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Speaker, if I'm understanding your comments correctly, given the government has proposed code of conduct changes provincially, I'm talking about a trustee who has been on the receiving end of a lot of hate. So I'm going to continue down this path, Speaker, because I believe it to be important. But I believe I am sticking to the spirit of what my colleagues are proposing here.

Proton Mail took action. This government could engage them as well. They could engage people who believe in good, corporate responsibility, inclusive learning environments, inclusive behaviour, but you didn't that. You dropped this on a Sunday without talking to anybody about it. That's not the way you deal with hate in our classrooms. It's not the way you mitigate and deal with conflict. That's my point.

Speaker, if we want to move forward in having positive education in our system—let me recap—what do we need? We need actual funding to go into our schools, and that has to keep account of where we're at with inflation. Right now, we are \$2.5 billion short, and who suffers? Disproportionately, students with disabilities.

The minister talked about the Right to Read report launched by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. I agree with him—a profound and important report—because I had the chance to meet with those advocates around dyslexia as well. But moving into a phonetic reading curriculum, thinking about embracing what they

are talking about, requires systemic changes to the curriculum, not only in the classroom but at the educational development level for teachers and education staff in colleges and universities. That requires money. We can't continue to ask staff and we can't continue to ask school boards to burn into reserves and do more with less.

And it particularly disturbs me at a time, Speaker—I was getting ready for debate this morning and I was surveying the ways in which in our larger economy, which our school boards and our schools are part of—there is an incredible amount of wealth sloshing around out there. Since 2019, profits in the oil sector have increased globally by 1,000%—

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

I recognize the member from Peterborough-Kawartha.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'm not sure what the oil industry has to do with Bill 98. There's no reference to the oil industry in Bill 98.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will allow the member to continue along his line of debate.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Now I'm really looking forward to the questions.

The issue here is school boards don't run on reserves. School boards run on funding. Governments send that funding to school boards from revenues that they draw in from a variety of sources. One of them is taxes from individuals and companies.

My friend from Peterborough-Kawartha, I think, knows that. But in a context where energy companies are making out like bandits and a Conservative government in England is prepared to set in a windfall tax for energy companies, why does this government—

*Interjection.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Once again, I apologize to the member from Ottawa Centre.

I recognize the member from Peterborough-Kawartha.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Again, I'm not certain what oil company or energy company profits have to do with Bill 98. There is no reference in Bill 98 to energy companies, oil companies or taxation of these companies.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will allow the member to continue along his line of debate.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Thank you, Speaker.

What I'd tell my friend from Peterborough-Kawartha is the government is shorting our public schools, and they could be allocating funds to help them. That's not going to come out of thin air; it comes from a government, like a Conservative government in England, that will actually find the resources to fund schools well.

You want them to do code of conduct processes well, you want them to do math and education well, you want them to do shop classes well—it doesn't come from thin air. It comes from a government with the courage to ask people who have to share. We got a lot of people hoarding wealth and shorting our public education system.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions and answers.

**Mr. John Yakubski:** I thank the member for Ottawa Centre for his address today. Math and literacy are two of the most important things we can be teaching our children. My children are all out of school, but we've got 12 grandchildren.

Today, we keep hearing from the NDP that they just like the status quo and they don't really want to see improvements into the numbers that are not positive in our school system. I am thankful to Minister Lecce for bringing transformational change to our system.

You've read the bill. I know you've read the bill. You see what we're talking about: thousands of teachers and leaders skilled in literacy and math to improve those test scores and the outcomes among our children and grandchildren in schools. I know you like the status quo over there, because you don't like to make changes and you don't like to ruffle the feathers of your friends. Believe me, there was lots on consultation, not with the NDP. We don't consult with the NDP.

But are you going to sit there and tell me today that what we have brought forth in this bill will not lead to improved outcomes and scores from our children—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member from Ottawa Centre for response.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** To my happy, log-driving friend from upriver: Yes, that is exactly what I'm saying. I'm saying you can't deliver on the promises you're making in this education bill if you're not going to fund it. If you're not going to ask your friends in the oil sector or the Weston family or the big billionaires in this country to pay a little bit more, you cannot deliver for public education; you cannot deliver for Ontario. That is exactly what I'm saying.

It's really too bad you don't have the courage to do that. It's really too bad you don't have the courage to ask people who are super wealthy—because back home in Ottawa Centre, there's a lot of affluent folks. When I knock on their doors, they say, "Joel, if the government of Ontario would ask me for a special levy on my company to pay for public services that my employees support, I would do that." But these guys are only interested in one thing: cutting taxes, attacking public services and making our communities worse.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** À mon collègue d'Ottawa-Centre, c'est tout le temps un plaisir de t'entendre parler ici en Chambre.

Je vais te poser la même question que j'ai posée au gouvernement, qui semble toujours mettre ça plus beau que c'est en réalité. On sait que dans le système d'éducation en français, il nous manque 700 éducateurs. On sait, par 2025, si on ne fait rien, il va nous en manquer 3 000. On sait aussi que le gouvernement parle de 500. Ça veut dire, encore—on a un droit constitutionnel d'avoir les mêmes services puis les mêmes droits auxquels n'importe quel anglophone et auxquels les enfants anglophones ont droit.

Je vous demande pourquoi le gouvernement s'acharne toujours—toujours—sur la francophonie, qu'il ne délivre

pas les services dont on a besoin. Les enfants franco-phones ont les mêmes droits en éducation. J'aimerais entendre votre—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Response?

**M. Joel Harden:** Merci, mon ami. C'est la même raison—la même raison. Si on a un projet de loi qui propose des idées, mais qu'il n'y a pas de fonds pour s'assurer que c'est possible pour actionner ces idées, ces idées n'importent—c'est impossible.

1410

Je suis d'accord avec le point de vue de mon collègue. Si on a une province qui a deux langues fondatrices, s'il y a des personnes avec le droit constitutionnel qu'ils peuvent s'éduquer dans la langue maternelle de leur choix, on doit le faire. Ce n'est pas optionnel. Ce n'est pas optionnel.

Mais je crois que la communauté franco-ontarienne sait tellement bien que ce gouvernement, ce n'est pas un ami. Ce n'est pas un vrai ami. Ils disent de bonnes choses—« on peut embaucher les gens »—mais s'ils ne dépensent pas les fonds nécessaires pour le faire, c'est seulement des mots.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** I find this presentation very interesting. The member's presentation didn't really talk about the bill. It talked about everything but the bill. The bill is talking about accountability and transparency. That is very important for every board, especially around special education. Why wouldn't you want to support transparency for monies being spent on special education?

When you talk about consultation that was not done, trustees voted on a code of conduct before COVID. We just hadn't implemented it. There was already a survey for all trustees to put together a standardized code of conduct. That is what we are doing now.

I find it also interesting, that story you told about the child that went to school during COVID. That child would not have been able to go to school because the NDP didn't want special education students in school during COVID. That you can very well see.

My question is, why don't you want parents to have accountability? Why do you not want students to do better? Why do you not support the bill and talk about what is in the bill?

**Mr. Joel Harden:** I've enjoyed getting to know the member but I've got to just say a few things. First of all, this government presided over the most lost class days of anywhere in North America because of its abject failure to take the pandemic seriously at the time when they did. That's the first thing.

Secondly, the other critical point they need to understand is that nobody on this side of the House ever once said a student with special needs did not have a right to get into their classroom and learn. We never, ever spent a day without thanking the staff for going in to help them. But on this side of the House we don't just believe in words. We believe in raising the revenue required to put into the system so those children and that staff can do their jobs well. These guys are just about words. They're just about platitudes. They're just about wonderful aspirational



things while shorting the system, underfunding kids and underfunding our staff.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Miss Monique Taylor:** I know personally I am always pleased to hear members, typically from this side of the House, speak in this House to talk about our kids within the school system who have special needs. Particularly we definitely hear from families with children with autism who are pushed out of school on a regular basis, not able to attend full-hour days. Poor Elliot was able to get two hours a day. I hear from families on a regular basis where they are not able to get into the schools at all due to the lack of EAs and supports in the system.

Maybe the member would like to go a little further on what he thinks should be in the bill to be able to support these students, along with the necessary funding.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Thank you to the member for Hamilton Mountain for the question. I have some good news about the Legault family. They've still got some room to move. They've moved Elliot's educational opportunity per day up to 4.5 hours, from two. That's because his dad, Steve, and his mom, Carrie, are tireless advocates for their kids. But you don't have to be a 24/7 advocate. That's what it felt like, receiving the amount of email I received from Steve. That is a crazy amount of obligation we're putting on families. We shouldn't be doing that.

The mom of the seven-year-old I spoke about earlier has started a practice of going to her school three times a day so her kid can get fresh air and walk around. This is absolute insanity. We are a first-world country. We are one of the world's leading jurisdictions in public educational achievement and we are putting students with disabilities under the school bus right now. That's what we're doing. We have to stop that. We have to make sure there's adequate funding for special education, and this government has to move beyond rhetoric and move into a funding position to deliver on the promises they're making.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'm so excited to be able to ask a question, because this has been very entertaining, frankly. The member opposite talked about underfunding, but everything, according to the NDP, is underfunded. I would just point out that per-student spending for elementary students in Canada is \$13,125, and in the UK, that same number is about C\$10,000.

Beyond that, you're talking about Elliot; Elliot has special needs. I am very passionate about making sure that we have resources for special-needs children. What this bill does is make sure that we know what the special-needs funding—which we've increased and are giving to schools—is being spent on. That's what parents want to know, because I've had special-needs teachers in my office tell me it's not being spent on special-needs teachers. I want to see it spent on special-needs teachers.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** I appreciate the passion this afternoon. That's what the member from Kitchener-Conestoga wanted. We delivered, right?

This is the thing: I don't think you'd find a person in this building who would be opposed to more accountability, but when you begin a project of law without actually consulting the key partners in the education sector, how good is your experiment likely to be? Consult all the single stakeholders, please. There are good practices out there. Follow them.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for further debate.

**Ms. Laura Smith:** It is an absolute honour to be here. I believe that the education of our children might be the most important issue facing us today, so I'm very thankful for this opportunity to stand before you and provide my full support to the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. Once again, it's an honour for me to represent the hard-working people of Thornhill and to stand up for the hard-working Thornhill families. I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward, along with his amazing team.

When I speak with parents in Thornhill, they tell me they're concerned about the quality of education their kids are receiving, and they wonder if it will do an adequate job of preparing them for the years ahead. To be honest with you, as a parent of children in the school system, I share this concern. I'm always worried about the outcome of my child, not just today but in the years to come. We want to set our children up for success.

Sadly, this particular concern amongst parents has been around for a very long time. I hope that my Liberal and NDP friends will take some time to look at a report that was issued by the Royal Commission on Learning, chaired by Monique Begin and Gerald Caplan back in 1995. To quote from the report, "Many parents came to us with shocking evidence of kids who finished high school yet wrote with all the sophistication of a nine-year old, of report cards that seemed deliberately contrived to sound like gibberish, of schools that made them feel unwelcome, intimidated, indifferent to them and not much more engaged with their children."

Nearly all of the parents I encounter—and I encounter quite a few. This is a reality for me. Like a few members in this House, when I go home, I hang up my hat as a member of the community and I become a mother. What I believe in is the idea of public education, but their school or their school board needs to be far more accountable to families and taxpayers. I agree with them.

Before I discuss the many merits of this bill, I also want to thank the Minister of Education for taking such a strong stance against anti-Semitism in schools and making learning about the Holocaust mandatory in the grade 6 curriculum. He did this back in February, and secondary school teachers within the Toronto District School Board were subjected to a professional day presented by the OSSTF teachers' union regarding a false narrative of anti-Palestinian racism. Many teachers who attended described the presentation as hateful, anti-Semitic and anti-Israel.

This is a predominantly concerning issue for me, not just today but literally every day in Thornhill. I can pick up my phone right now, and I can tell you about a school

that has just described an anti-Semitic incident—in my own son’s school. This happened just yesterday—just yesterday. This is a reality for me.

1420

While other people have turned their backs, Minister Lecce has not. He has always embraced this, and he has come to us and been there for us. Combatting anti-Semitism in schools is just one bold action that the minister has taken over the past four years to improve education in our province.

Our government was the first to mandate anti-sex-trafficking protocols, and we implemented a lifetime ban on any educator found guilty of a serious Criminal Code offence like sexual abuse or violence. In fact, we went even further by publicly posting the names of any educators involved in serious criminal proceedings with the aims of enhancing transparency for parents and protecting kids, because it’s always about protecting kids.

In our government’s first term, the Minister of Education revoked regulation 274, which was a regressive hiring rule that was brought in by the Liberals to appease the teachers’ unions. Now, instead of simply rewarding years of seniority, teacher hirings by school boards will be dictated by merit, where qualifications and experience guide hiring.

Regulation 274 was not the only Liberal mess our government cleaned up in the education file, Speaker. You may also remember the previous government disadvantaged countless numbers of students by closing over 600 schools across Ontario. After a decade of school closures, Ontario is once again building schools to prepare young people for the jobs of tomorrow. Those children are mine; they live in my home right now. We’re investing over \$15 billion over 10 years to support school construction, improve existing structures and create new child care spaces.

Perhaps more importantly, the Ministry of Education has been busy updating the curriculum to ensure it does a better job of getting students ready for the workforce. In simple terms, that has meant focusing on more science and math, including digital and financial literacy, and encouraging more students to take a good look at the skilled trades for lucrative and rewarding careers.

In the 1994 report I just mentioned, it said there is “a shared concern out there. It’s that Ontario’s schools aren’t equipped to deal with the future—a problem significantly exacerbated by our utter ignorance of what that future might bring.” The future is here now. We’re living it right now. Speaker, we know there’s a growing demand for jobs in the skilled trades, and that in the tech sectors, we need to promote learning STEM skills. I believe our government is definitely on the right track with respect to that.

These are real and meaningful accomplishments that have improved Ontario’s system of education to the benefit of students and parents. Clearly, the Minister of Education is driving transformational change, and the bill that we are debating is a necessary step toward improving education in Ontario.

Our legislation will increase accountability by giving parents new tools to navigate and understand the education

system while establishing basic qualifications for directors of education. Additionally, the minister will now be able to establish key priorities to ensure students have the skills and knowledge they need, especially in areas such as reading, writing and math. These are the core places.

Should it pass this House, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would enact over 20 necessary reforms, but I’d like to focus my remarks on a few measures that will increase accountability and transparency in the education system.

I believe most school boards are doing a relatively good job of educating our children. Ontario enjoys a five-year graduation rate of 89%, which is a key contributor to the province’s economic growth. Unfortunately, thousands of students annually are not graduating high school within five years, and eight out of Ontario’s 72 school boards have consistently shown the lowest performance in the five-year graduation rate in the past nine years.

To add to this problem, the Ministry of Education has limited ability to drive or enforce provincial priorities through to schools and school boards, and information about school board performance, education spending and how that money supports education outcomes is not easily accessible to parents, taxpayers or the public at large.

Just to put this in proper context, Speaker, Ontario’s school boards receive over \$27 billion in provincial funding to operate over 4,600 school facilities and a complex system of transportation. Some boards say they can’t make do with the money they have, even though our government is making record investments in education and funding has increased every year we have been in government. Understandably, many hard-working families in Thornhill and across this province are a bit confused about where all that money is going. Families have questions about their local school board’s ability to manage money, and they deserve answers.

To address these issues, our government’s legislation, should it pass this House, will:

- set provincial priorities on student achievement, require performance reporting and strengthen ministry powers to address variable board performance;

- require school board transparency in funding and outcomes;

- direct and/or prohibit school board participation prescribed business activities;

- empower the minister to send in support personnel to boards failing to align with provincial priorities and create corresponding obligations for school boards to co-operate;

- enhance financial accountability of school board-controlled entities to the public; and

- amend the Education Act to support the creation of an accelerated apprenticeship pathway starting in grade 11.

That’s an important factor because we want our kids to be exposed to the skilled trades, hands down. These are prudent, common-sense reforms that make school boards more accountable and transparent to families and taxpayers.

Our government is committing to taking a more prominent role in the performance of our education system, and that starts by passing the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. Families and taxpayers demand and deserve greater accountability and transparency from their school boards. Speaker, I hope that all of us in the House can at least agree upon that.

I'm proud of our government's actions to update the curriculum and ensure our schools are safe and welcoming, and I'm proud of this minister for delivering a thoughtful reform bill that will help make sure all parts of Ontario's education system are unified in putting students first.

I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** Thank you, Speaker—  
*Interjection.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Oh, I apologize. I recognize that you're going to be sharing time. You can go ahead.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that.

It's an absolute honour to rise in the House today and offer my full support to the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. Ever since our government was first elected in 2018, we've been busy ensuring our schools are safe, welcoming and inclusive learning centres for all students and modernizing the curriculum to ensure it's preparing young people for the jobs of tomorrow.

And once again, the government of Ontario is investing in schools and in our province's next generation. I'm pleased to say that after a decade, when the previous Liberal government closed over 600 schools across the province, our government is investing \$15 billion over 10 years to build new schools, improve existing facilities and create new child care spaces for working parents.

Our hard-working people in Chatham-Kent–Leamington who pay their taxes and play by the rules have been very clear: They value public education, and they're happy to invest in public education, but they want it to focus on preparing young people for the workforce, and they believe the system needs to be more accountable.

1430

For the most part, Ontario is on the right track—for the most part. We're among the top-performing education systems nationally and internationally. Our leading five-year graduation rate of 89% is a key contributor to our economic growth, and it supports efforts to maximize the productive capacity of our future labour force.

But, unfortunately, Speaker, our education system is not firing on all cylinders at the moment. This new legislation proposes specific remedies to get our system back on track. The performance of our public education system can be tangibly improved through greater accountability and transparency, better governance and leadership, maximizing school capital assets, training teachers for modern-day classrooms and ensuring there's

more consistent information and approaches to student learning. Speaker, those key reforms are the basis of the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

Our government has accomplished a great deal on this file over the past five years, but further transformational change requires both legislation and updated regulations. Speaker, if our legislation is passed, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will increase accountability by giving parents new tools to navigate and understand the education system and basic qualifications for the directors of education who oversee our school boards. This act will allow the minister to establish key priorities to ensure students have the skills and knowledge they need, especially in areas of reading, writing and math.

If passed, this act would legislate reforms under four statutes: the Education Act, the Ontario College of Teachers Act, the Early Childhood Educators Act and the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001. Speaker, our government's legislation will enact over 20 key recommendations across five themed categories, including, of course, accountability and transparency, governance and leadership, maximizing capital assets, teacher training and oversight, and consistent information and approaches to student learning. Clearly, these five themes are incredibly important to reforming our education system, but I'd like to spend a few moments on discussing teacher education and oversight.

Teaching is a special, important and challenging calling. I want to be clear: The great majority of teachers are dedicated professionals who deeply care about their students. I respect their work and our teachers, and so do my friends and colleagues on both sides of this House. Teachers like my amazing wife and many of our dearest friends are responsible for preparing our students for post-secondary education and entering the modern workforce. We need to make sure they have the very best people in front of them in every classroom.

Unfortunately, Speaker, teacher education programs do not currently provide consistent training in the fundamentals required by teachers and students, such as math, literacy, special education, mental health and technology in the classroom. Additionally, Speaker, the Ontario College of Teachers is not certifying teachers at the rate where they're needed, and many believe that teacher disciplinary processes should be enhanced to improve overall student safety.

Should this pass, Speaker, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would fundamentally change teacher training to be more holistic across the learning continuum, aligning with school structure and student needs. It would require initial teacher education programs in all faculties of education to include topics that are consistent with enabling teachers to graduate with a minimum of grade 9 math proficiency, appropriate proficiencies in literacy, enhanced learning and awareness of evidence-based approaches to teaching students with special needs, and appropriate learning in mental health and wellness.

Should it pass, Speaker, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would remove barriers by introducing

alternative certification pathways for priority groups and expediting entry into the workforce for individuals with relevant work experience. Our government would work with the Ontario College of Teachers to create more flexible certification options that will get more qualified teachers in the classroom faster, where they're needed. We'll also work with key stakeholders such as our Ministry of Colleges and Universities, Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and faculties of education to develop real opportunities for flexible, accelerated initial teacher education programs to better attract mid-career teacher candidates in needed areas such as French-language education.

This bill would increase public confidence in the regulation of the teaching professions and the protection of students by amending the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, by: specifically allowing for student victims of alleged sexual abuse, child pornography or criminal sexual acts by any teacher to receive funding for therapy; and clarifying certification reinstatement timelines for individuals who have had their licences revoked, so that it would take five years from the date of revocation before an individual may seek reinstatement from the college.

I have no doubt that parents and the broader public will support these very reasonable measures. There is no question that real reforms are needed and they have been needed for many years. This goes way back to the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning that then-Premier Bob Rae initialized.

To sum it up, "There's no excuse for bad teachers..." And quite frankly, there must always be a priority for the student to have learning over an inadequate teacher's right to a permanent job—it's fundamental. Quite frankly, it is universal. Teachers should be trained in the fundamentals of math, reading and special education, as well as mental health, and our college of teachers needs to be empowered to protect our most vulnerable.

This government is listening to concerns across this province and across my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington. This act is driving transformational change—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions and answers.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you to the members opposite for their comments. Let's talk about this government's record for a moment. Because what we learned this week is that:

- there are now four fewer high school teachers for every 1,000 secondary students in Ontario than there were five years ago;

- there is \$1,200 less per student in funding than under the Liberals, once you've accounted for inflation;

- 90% of schools have no regularly scheduled access to mental health professionals;

- 50% of schools have no access to mental health resources at all; and

- schools across the province have a shortage of teachers and educational assistants.

Why do the members think that school boards are going to be able to deliver more with fewer resources for our

students? And why are they talking about school board responsibility instead of ministerial responsibility?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I want to thank the member opposite for her question. As a mother, we want to get value for our educational dollar. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act advances vision for the education system that is centred upon preparing students.

When we talk about funding, this past Monday we announced a historic investment by providing \$27.6 billion for public education for 2023-24. As I said in my presentation, this has grown every year. Our government has continued to make these historic investments every year in the face of stagnant enrolment. We're continuing to put in, but we need to see the results.

My question would be, does the member of the opposition want to see value for dollars spent?

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** To the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington, you really touched on something that I think a lot of parents can appreciate. With a career spanning many years in law enforcement, I wonder if maybe you could touch on some of the things that you have seen in regard to sexual harassment and different things like that that we have seen and that still continue, unfortunately, to happen within our school boards and within our public education system.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** I thank my honourable colleague for that question. I policed during a time when police officers and law enforcement members were part of that learning community. We were part of the fabric. We coached, we entered the classroom, we spoke about civics, we spoke about public service, we spoke about duty to the community. Now that time has passed, or at least it's on pause.

**1440**

But teachers also appreciated that. Teachers appreciated their colleagues from the community, committed to community service, for coming into the classroom and mentoring and inspiring our youth, coaching our youth and acting as liaisons, safe people to go to with questions and concerns.

The disciplinary processes right now are a bit too loose. We need to make sure that all safe spaces for learning are truly safe and that unions can't influence the outcomes of, perhaps, disciplinary actions that should be directed toward the college and toward law enforcement, to keep only the best teachers in front of the classroom.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Joel Harden:** My question is to the member for Thornhill. I enjoyed her presentation.

When you were talking about your son, it really was resonant to me, because this is what I've heard from Dr. Kaplan-Myrth and many families back home. I just want you to know that a positive thing the government has done in mandating Holocaust education is that my daughter and I, when we caught up last night, took in a very powerful session with a 98-year-old Holocaust survivor that we've

seen in many schools in our community. That is a very, very positive thing.

What I'd like the member to comment on, in addition to that development: What is your vision, for your community and others, to make sure that this education is done in a rooted way that is consulted with the organizations we need to consult with, so students can tackle anti-Semitism?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** I honestly really appreciate the member opposite for his question and his statement. This is a reality in my community, and my vision is no different from any other parent in my community. Of course, anti-Semitism is a very real reality that we need to talk about, and it's not just specific to Thornhill; it's Canada-wide, North America-wide, worldwide.

My vision is to have students who are prepared for the next generation of jobs, so STEM is an absolute necessity for the next generation. Science, learning math: We've had very poor numbers in math, and I say that as a person who sat in school council and watched the numbers, in a library filled with other parents who would watch things go through. Our vision is accountability for the future students of Ontario.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Every day, parents tell me that they receive information from their children's schools. They get permission slips, updates on class activities, requests to take part in fundraising, artwork, report cards—the list is as endless as their backpacks are full.

Yet one piece of information they don't receive is how their children's school is performing. Ontario's 2021-22 EQAO assessment results show weaker performance in math across all grades and reading and writing in grade 3. You were just referencing this.

I know that our proposed legislation includes setting provincial education priorities for boards. How does requiring school boards to provide progress reports on provincial education priorities for student achievement support student success?

**Ms. Laura Smith:** In today's rapidly changing economy—and I thank the member for her very insightful question; as a parent, I completely understand how she feels. But in a changing economy, a key objective of our publicly funded education system must be to prepare students to achieve their goals and succeed in all of their endeavours. This includes partnering with the labour market of today and tomorrow, and that's part of so many of the initiatives that we've put forth to prepare kids for the future.

Parents and families expect accountability and transparency and responsiveness from their school boards, and they deserve access to publicly available and easy-to-understand—I'm going to underline “easy-to-understand”—information about how their school board is performing and how they are spending public funds to support student outcomes.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** This government did no consultation with parents or parents' groups in putting this education bill forward, so let me read into the record a letter that I received from a school, from the school council of the Cootes Paradise Elementary School in my riding, who wrote to myself and the minister. They said immediate action is needed in their schools.

The letter says, in part, “Our children with additional needs are not getting the education they deserve. We demand better for our children. There are three primary issues: insufficient funding, EAs needed in every kindergarten class and transparent contingency plans needed for staff absences. There's a lack of funding for EAs provincewide.”

They conclude by saying, “It's time to act on your promises, invest in EAs, hire enough of them, pay them what they deserve, mandate at least one EA per kindergarten class, plan for contingencies.”

My question is, why did this government not spend \$600 million of federal COVID dollars? Why did you underspend your education budget by \$500 million? This would have helped the school in my riding, Cootes Paradise Elementary School, to deal with the problems that they're facing right now.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** Thank you for that question from my colleague. We've heard time and time again across the province on consultation, the need for greater accountability, because it's directly linked to student achievement. The data collected by boards also shows the urgent need to address gaps in student outcomes. The reforms proposed in this bill will respond directly to these concerns and, I think, the shared concerns from my colleague from across the floor.

The ministry and our team know that it's partners who have considerable knowledge, experience and expertise. We consult our partners for the best outcomes, and that's what this bill will do.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** There's time for a quick question.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Thank you to the two presenters. I'm really excited about how this bill can create success for our next generation. I see that schools are taking too long to build, and they are getting more and more expensive. What is this bill going to do to help us so that we can prepare the school boards so that nothing gets delayed and we still have a top-quality learning environment for our students to accommodate this unprecedented growth?

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** Thank you for that question. My friend is absolutely right: It takes five to 10 years to build a standard school in Ontario. That's far too long. We need to cut the red tape. And this government, under the leadership of this Minister of Education, is investing \$15 billion to repair and renew our schools over—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, we've run out of time for questions and answers.

It's now time for further debate.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It is a pleasure to rise today to participate in this debate as the representative of my community of London West, but also as a school board

trustee who served on the Thames Valley District School Board for 13 years. There is nothing I would appreciate more than having a meaningful debate about ensuring better schools and improving student outcomes. But unfortunately, I don't think that's what we are doing here today with this legislation.

If this government was actually serious about ensuring better schools and student outcomes, they would have done the consultation that would be necessary to make that happen. They would have talked to the teachers unions, to the educators who work in our school system. They would have talked to principals. They would have talked to school board trustees. They would have talked to parents across this province, and yet we have heard nothing about a consultation that took place prior to the drafting of this bill, and we have heard nothing from the minister about what actually informed the legislation that is before us today.

I have to commend my colleague the critic for education, the member for Ottawa West–Nepean, who points out quite rightly that this government is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. It is an attempt to deflect the attention of the public away from the very critical issues that are present in our schools that face parents and young people in our province every day and instead deflect blame onto school boards, to teacher unions and to whoever else the government wants to assign responsibility for the problems that they have created through years of underfunding.

Speaker, I wanted to begin with a contrast to the major governance overhaul that we see in this legislation versus the last time in this province that an education governance review was undertaken. It was in 2009. It was prior to my election to this place, but I was a trustee on the Thames Valley District School Board and a vice-president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

#### 1450

A governance review committee was struck to take an in-depth look at school board governance and look at how we could actually improve school boards, improve the functioning of school boards to better support students in the province. The committee that was struck had representation from the four publicly funded school boards in the province; had representation from the Canadian Education Association, who participated in the process as a representative of the community; and also had representation from a former director of education. That committee met with representatives of 70 school boards in the province, 137 trustees, 54 directors of education, 71 parent representatives. There were 148 written responses to the consultation paper on school board governance. That process led to legislation that was introduced by the Liberals to refocus school board governance in Ontario. It's a stark contrast to the process—to the absence of process—that this government was engaged in in order to bring this legislation forward today.

But one of the fundamental principles that came out of that governance review process was the obligation of school boards to maintain a joint and equal focus on both student achievement and well-being. What we see in this

legislation is the government putting well-being to the bottom of the pile. This Conservative government has no interest in ensuring that students are able to function in our school system and deal with the mental health impacts—the ongoing, worsening mental health impacts—of the pandemic, the increasing numbers of students with special needs who are in our school system, and ensuring that every student in this province has the resources and the supports they need to be successful. We are seeing in our school system data showing how students' needs are increasing. The complexity of needs is increasing and the ability to access supports is declining.

There was a recent study from People for Education that was released in February on the mental health crisis in our schools. That report found that, in just three years, the number of students who described their mental health as good or excellent had dropped 12%, from 73% in 2019 to only 61% in 2022. But even more alarming, that report cited research from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that said 59% of Ontario students stated that the pandemic had made them feel depressed about the future and 39% reported that it made their mental health worse. What kinds of resources and supports are available in our schools to help students cope with the mental health stresses of the pandemic? There's almost nothing in our school system, Speaker.

People for Education reported that 95% of schools said that they needed some or more support for students' mental health and well-being. Only 9% of schools in Ontario said they have regularly scheduled access to mental health and addiction specialists or nurses. Almost half of schools had no access whatsoever to specialized mental health or addiction supports; 28% of schools said that they had no access to a psychologist, which is almost double the percentage just 10 years ago; 93% of schools said that they needed support staff such as educational assistants, administrators and custodians. We don't see those additional supports that school boards have identified as being so desperately lacking in our schools in this legislation that is before us today. Nor did we see it in the funding announcement that the government released at almost the same time as this bill came forward.

Instead, the government announced GSNs, Grants for Student Needs, that include only a 2.7% increase over the GSNs from last year. Everyone in this place knows how inflation has been hitting our wallets and our ability to ensure affordability. Everybody in this place knows that a 2.7% increase is far below the rate of inflation and therefore represents a cut. We see total funding that's available for school boards in Ontario that's \$2.5 billion short of where it would have been if school board funding had kept up with inflation since this government was elected in 2018.

We also know, thank goodness, from the Financial Accountability Officer, who is providing some transparency on school board funding—this government says this legislation is necessary for transparency. We appreciate the work of the Financial Accountability Officer, who showed us that this government is actually spending

\$1.1 billion dollars less than planned in education during the 2022-23 budget.

This increase to the GSNs that the government has announced works out on a per-student basis to represent an increase of one half of 1% for every student in our school. Their so-called plan for math education works out to less than 50 cents per student per day. Their plan to hire new education workers works out to one educator for every 6,650 students across the province. The legislation, along with the GSN announcement, is going to do nothing to actually provide the supports that students need in our school system.

I want to share some information, some emails that I have received from parents in London West about what is actually happening in our school system. This is a parent who said her daughter is in senior elementary. She has identified learning disabilities. She says, “Because of her learning disabilities, she has been in a particularly high-needs cohort with severe behaviour and mental health needs that go unaddressed annually. The particular behaviours in her cohort have led to teachers opting for early retirement, needing to access sick leave, choosing to leave the profession altogether. Sadly, the school has lost teachers seven out of eight years in the grade that this cohort reaches, including one teacher who was assaulted by a student and another one who passed away—unconfirmed stress-related condition.”

This parent asks, “Why is the government not providing access to reading support programs?” She said that there were a number of students in her daughter’s class who were struggling, yet only six students per year were able to access the program funded by this government to provide daily instruction. Her daughter had to wait three years and was almost denied as she was already in grade 6.

The parent asked how many of her daughter’s peers have similar literacy and numeracy learning challenges “without the ability to access what we have managed to track down independently?” This is a two-parent family who had the resources to get some additional support for their daughter.

She says, “How will the current government’s underfunding education affect my daughter’s future employment opportunities now that she is only five years away from the full-time job market?” These are all very good questions, and there are no answers for this parent in the legislation that we have before us today.

**1500**

I want to share a submission that was made by the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario Thames Valley Local during the pre-budget consultation in February. That submission references a systemic and pervasive crisis that is characterized by an increase in the number and severity of violent acts in schools, large numbers of teachers off work due to injury and mental health issues caused by violence and students who are immersed in and increasingly inured to the violence that surrounds them every day. They point to a six-month average of 636 violent incidents per month, which means that Thames

Valley District School Board is on track to report 6,360 violent incidents by the end of the 2022-23 school year. Much of that is due to those mental health challenges that I spoke to earlier with students who are experiencing increased mental health crises and do not have access to the programs that they need to support them.

The other thing missing from the government’s GSNs is funding to actually address the backlog of maintenance and repair that we have seen built up under the Liberals and worsen—close to \$17 billion now—under this government. Thames Valley District School Board is facing a backlog of \$700 million in maintenance and repair, and if that were to include HVAC updates and AODA compliance, that backlog rises to \$900 million over the next five years. And yet, nothing in this government’s budget or GSNs addresses that huge backlog of maintenance and repair that has built up in this province.

Thames Valley District School Board is also very worried about the fact that this government decided to discontinue the tutoring supports that were available for students coming out of the pandemic, which they saw as being very valuable and beneficial to students.

The other issue that I’m hearing about in London West related to school board funding, and again, not addressed in this legislation, not addressed in the GSNs, is the need to fund transportation to our schools. If kids can’t get to school, they’re not going to be able to learn.

Parent Vanisse Victoriano wrote to me to say, “I am a mother of two lovely kids. My 13-year-old keeps missing school due to a school bus shortage situation, bus delays and bus cancellations. My daughter’s school had five bus line cancellations today alone due to bus driver shortage.” This email was written to me in February.

She says, “I urge and beg you to help increase the bus driver wages so we don’t keep having this problem over and over again. The problem will only resolve once government starts paying better wages to bus drivers so that will attract more people to work as bus drivers”—

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Point of order, Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Point of order, I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Busing is not particular to this bill, so I just wanted to ask you in terms of the relevance of her comments. I know we’ve done a lot of retention programming for bus drivers, but it’s neither here or there. I just don’t see it in the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will consider that. However, I will allow the member to continue with her debate.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you very much, Speaker. I was here yesterday when the minister spoke to the bill and he did spend some time on the GSNs and what the funding was covering. I’m just pointing out some of what the GSNs are not covering that people in London West have highlighted as a gap.

I heard from some school bus drivers also who say, “Due to a funding shortage, we have been forced to cut back on the number of buses and routes in our region. That means that often, despite my efforts and those of my

colleagues, students are late or not picked up at all.” He says, “We are doing everything we can, but the system is under extreme pressure and it may buckle at any time. Please, for the sake of the students across this province, give the system emergency funding so that I can do my job and we won’t leave kids stranded.” These are some of the issues that we are hearing about in London West, as well as the need for new schools.

Now, this bill includes some provisions for the disposition of surplus property. The challenge that we are facing in London—it’s the fastest-growing city in Ontario, second fastest in Canada; it is seeing explosive population growth in areas outside the city, and this government continues to move forward with a funding formula that basically guarantees that the moment a new school finally opens its doors, there are going to be 10, 12, 15 portables on the site because, the way that new school construction is funded, it is planned around the number of students who are living in the community at the time that the new school is approved and does not take into account the planning projections for the number of students who are actually going to be in that area. We have seen a huge need for new schools, certainly in the northwest area of the city—terrible overcrowding in our schools, which is not good for student learning.

We know that what students actually need to be successful in schools are those resources and supports that I talked about. It’s an educator in front of a classroom; it’s reducing class sizes; it’s ensuring that we have caring adults in the school system to support kids who need supports.

As much as I would have liked to be able to actually talk about better schools and student outcomes, I’m not able to do that today because this bill does nothing to ensure that our students will actually be better off in our schools.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It’s now time for questions. I recognize the Associate Minister of Transportation.

**Hon. Stan Cho:** There’s a lot to unpack there, but I am glad that the member from London West brings up reading programs. My wife has been a teacher for over 10 years, a special education teacher here in Toronto, and every year—

*Interjection.*

**Hon. Stan Cho:** It’s interesting that the member from Hamilton Mountain chooses to heckle this, because it is those very parents that she should be talking to, in both London West and in Hamilton Mountain, about programming priorities, because every year, the school boards—I would think that if you think reading programs are important that you’d think ESL and special education programs are important as well. But every year, the board can cut those programs, while maintaining gifted programs—literally happening today—and it doesn’t have to explain a word to parents who rely on those programs.

To the parent from London West who’s watching this, this bill actually addresses the lack of transparency in programming from the school board level. It gives an

opportunity for parents to find out exactly where those resources are going and what they’re spent on.

The question to the member: Are you going to laugh at that transparency for your constituents or are you going to vote against this legislation that allows for that clarity?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I want to be very clear for this member that the parent who wrote to me about the lack of access for her daughter to a reading support program in no way blamed the school board. That parent knows exactly why this is happening in our school system. It is because of years of underfunding from this government and it is the government’s failure to actually provide funding that addresses the needs that our students have in Ontario schools.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I’d like to thank the member from London West for her comments and for showing how this piece of legislation does not have any focus on student achievement and well-being whatsoever. It comes down to the funding. The member has shown how this government has cut \$1,200 per student since 2018 and how the math investment that they would like to pat themselves on the back for amounts to about 50 cents per student. Adding one educator for 6,650 students—that’s one big classroom.

I would like to ask the member, how could this government modify this legislation to actually address student outcomes first and foremost?

1510

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate the question from my colleague the member for London North Centre. If this government really wanted to improve student outcomes, to ensure better schools in this province, they would consult with the education workers who are delivering the programs in our schools. I’m not confident that there’s a simple fix to this legislation that would deliver the outcomes that we want to see, because it all comes down to engaging with the people who are supporting students in our classrooms. It is reaching out to parents to really understand what it is that parents want to see in our school system, and it is using that information to move forward in a way that meets the needs of students in the province.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Hon. Stan Cho:** It’s very interesting to hear the response from the member to my last question, and it shows that the NDP simply doesn’t know how this actually works. You see, the Ministry of Education sends funding to the board. The board then sends it along to the school. They are responsible for the programming decisions. It’s not the government who sits here and says, “Let’s look at these programs and see what’s best for the needs of those children.” It is up to the broader public sector—the school boards, in this case—to make those priority decisions on what programming is best for children. That is exactly how that system works, and I know this first-hand because, as I said, my wife has been a teacher for over a decade and tells me how that system works and how the programming actually doesn’t have any clarity around how those



decisions are made. And parents are left in the dark when programs like reading programs are cut.

Now, we know the funding is up. You can read the budget. You see it's 27% higher than when the last Liberal government was here—a hard stop on the facts.

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Stan Cho:** The NDP wants to heckle, all they want, on the actual numbers, but what they can't deny is that there is no clarity for the programming. Now, are they going to vote in favour of programming clarity or not?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I want to remind the member, as I pointed out when I started my remarks, that I was a school board trustee for 13 years. I am very well aware of how the funding works. I am very well aware that year over year, the government was not providing school boards the funding that was needed to provide special-education programs in our schools. Year over year, the Thames Valley District School Board was spending millions more on special education than the government was providing. Instead of dealing with that reality, instead of ensuring that students are getting the resources and supports they need, especially students with special learning needs, this government has continued to underfund, to not provide students with the critical learning supports and educators—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Question: Do you see anything in the bill that's really going to support students with special needs? Because I'm very concerned. I see a lot of blame being cast on boards, who have to work with the budget they're given. They don't have a choice about that. So I'm very concerned that students with special needs are going to be left without the supports they need.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you very much. I can tell my colleague the member for Thunder Bay that I very much share that concern, that students with special learning needs are left out by this legislation and are in no way going to be better off if this legislation passes in this place. Yes, the government has failed to acknowledge and address the increased complexity of learning needs that we are seeing in our schools and to ensure that the additional education workers are there, that the additional resources are there to support students. In fact, they've gone in the opposite direction. By failing to fund education at least at the rate of inflation, they are actually ensuring that there will be fewer resources in our schools than there are right now.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you to the member for her presentation. I recognize her having been a trustee. I know she's also been a part of OPSBA.

I'm going to read this. We've done three years of consultation with trustees where they had a survey and they voted on a standardized code of conduct, and I'm just going to read this piece. It says, "The minister should establish a minimum code of conduct for trustees, in con-

sultation with trustees or their representative associations." This was a quote from the member. That is exactly what we are doing. Does the member disagree with her own recommendation?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I do want to point out to that member that schedule 2 of the bill, the changes to the Education Act, include a lot of other measures, not just the implementation of a code of conduct. That is what has raised concerns among school board trustees across the province, raised concerns at the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. The president of the association says, "Our association and local school boards must be properly consulted on the details of important changes to the public education system." They say, "Local governance, with students at the forefront, is a key part of our member boards' ongoing success. The importance of maintaining the autonomy of democratically elected local trustees cannot be overstated." If this legislation—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** We have time for one further question.

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** I'd like to thank the member from London West for enlightening us on quite a bit that is not in this bill and what was not addressed in this piece of legislation.

Last month in this House, I mentioned and brought to this House—advocacy group People for Education released its annual survey from 1,000 schools. It showed 91% of principals said more support for mental health for students and well-being is needed. Is this addressed in this at all? Some 900 children in Niagara are looking for mental health supports.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** You have 15 seconds to respond.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you very much to my colleague. Sadly, that is not addressed whatsoever in this legislation. If this government was serious about supporting student achievement and well-being, they would ensure that those mental health supports are there, and the support for students with special needs.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for further debate.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Speaker, as a strong believer both in parliamentary democracy and public education, I'm pleased to join today's debate and provide my full support for both the Minister of Education and his game-changing legislation, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

Speaker, whenever I speak with constituents and parents in my riding, education is almost always top of mind. In my social media group, I have over 100 parents' groups. Families in Markham–Unionville have made it clear to me a number of times that they strongly support Ontario's public education system, but they believe that the education system needs to be understandable and navigable for all parents, and it needs to be focused on the fundamentals—reading, writing and math—which, of course, includes financial literacy.

To quote the report issued by the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning that was established by the then-NDP Premier Bob Rae, "Helping children master basic reading

and writing skills is a critical first step, and every teacher of young children must be proficient at it.”

Speaker, I’m very optimistic about the future. We are building up Ontario. We are building up Ontario’s auto industry for the future of electric vehicles and EV battery production, encouraging the growth of a strong and resilient life sciences sector and attracting billion-dollar investments by manufacturers who know that our province is open for business. In short, Speaker, we are building a modern and advanced economy right here in Ontario.

**1520**

But, Speaker, if we want to grow these sectors and if we want to attract billion-dollar investments to our province, Ontario must have a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. And at a time when Ontario is facing the largest skilled labour shortage in a generation and more than 40% of jobs in Canada are at high risk of getting disrupted by technology and computers, it is critically important that we prepare the students of today for the jobs of tomorrow.

When our government took office five years ago, we knew we had to update the curriculum to better help our students meet the needs of the modern labour market. More specifically, that means: making financial literacy and digital proficiency key priorities; investing \$200 million to support a four-year math strategy; teaching valuable transferable skills such as leadership, communication, collaboration and critical thinking; promoting the skilled trades as a top-choice career path for young people; and increasing awareness of and accessibility to apprenticeship programs.

Last week, I had a very interesting experience. My water pipe in my laundry room leaked, and I called for a plumber. He came, he got it fixed, and he charged me \$280 for two hours plus materials. I talked to him: “Man, if you work five days a week, 52 weeks a year, you’ve got more than \$70,000 a year for one job per day.” Then I said, “Do you know what? If you get three jobs a day, you earn more than our Premier.” He smiled at me and said, “Do you know what? I got six jobs today.” This is how we want our young children to have a better job for the future and a career—also, improving science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, learning.

The good news, Speaker, is that our government has implemented many updates to the curriculum, and we are getting the job done across the province. The bad news is that approximately 15,000 Ontario students do not graduate high school within five years, and non-graduates have higher rates of unemployment and lower-than-average incomes.

As Ontario’s economy increasingly becomes a digital and global economy, we can’t afford to leave our young people behind. We need to take concrete and effective action, now. As you know, Speaker, our government recently announced that we are investing more than \$180 million in classroom supports for students to boost their reading, writing and math skills. Reading and writing proficiency is critical to lifelong success. If a plumber cannot read the manual, how can he repair or install anything?

This is why we are delivering a \$109.1-million investment for 2023-24 to help more students build stronger reading skills. This includes supporting nearly 700 reading-focused educators in classrooms who can help work one-on-one or in small groups to help students who need additional support in literacy; new tools and approaches in the curriculum, ensuring early readers experiencing challenges get the support they need; introducing new early reading screening for students in senior kindergarten to grade 2, to ensure they receive the necessary fundamental skills and early intervention in reading they require.

We are also building upon our four-year, \$200-million math strategy by investing an additional \$71.8 million in math recovery that will support nearly 400 new math-focused educators in the classroom, double the number of school math coaches in classrooms to provide direct support to teachers and students, introduce one math lead per board to lead curriculum implementation and support math culture in classrooms, provide subsidies for additional math qualification courses and professional learning for new teachers, and expand access to digital math tools and continue virtual tutoring services to provide additional support for students.

Speaker, these new initiatives to support students further demonstrate that Ontario’s government is working for families. But, Speaker, it is clear that if we want to truly reform the education system to prepare our young people for the jobs of tomorrow, we need legislative action. In the event that our legislation is passed, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will allow the minister to establish new key priorities to ensure students have the skills and knowledge they need, especially in areas such as reading, writing and math.

Speaker, I would love to walk my honourable colleagues through every section of this legislation, but my time is limited, and this bill is quite comprehensive. So instead, please allow me to focus on the fifth pillar, which is all about providing consistent information and approaches to student learning.

The current system simply isn’t meeting the needs of students in terms of learning the basics of reading and math or adequately preparing them for the labour market. Parents feel as though they are kept on the outskirts of their children’s education, and they aren’t sure how they can help to improve the system for their children. Well, Speaker, our government believes that parents should be in the driver’s seat when it comes to their children’s education, and the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will enshrine parental rights, should it pass. This would include requiring all school boards to provide and promote parent-friendly information as outlined by the minister. Parents would be provided with frequently updated provincial information for parents that will spell out their rights, roles and responsibilities within the education system.

Our legislation will support consistency in the delivery of mental health education and services, and promote inclusive language on special education in French versions

of the Education Act and the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001.

And, Speaker, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will help the minister work for families by establishing formal guidelines for a transparent and predictable curriculum review process that ensures the curriculum is reviewed on a regular basis and that it reflects future labour market needs. We are now using iPhone 14. The previous updated curriculum was 2009, which was iPhone 1—never updated in the last 14 versions of iPhones. We need to update regularly.

We are already taking action to support standardized and consistent student learning by investing in mental health and math supports and implementing literacy screening. As I mentioned earlier, Speaker, the Minister of Education has already taken many actions to update the curriculum to include more math and science, and focus on financial and digital literacy.

The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will build on these actions, Speaker, but I am especially excited about the proposed handbook for parents. All too often, parents feel helpless when they encounter a big government bureaucracy that they feel does not reflect their views and does not listen to their concerns. That is especially the case when I speak with new Canadians whose first language is not English. Many of these folks worry they may get into trouble if they express any dissatisfaction with the education their children are receiving, and that is only if they are listened to.

1530

We are fortunate to live in a free society, Speaker. And in this free society, this government will always side with parents, giving them a voice. Clearly laid out information for parents is an excellent idea that deserves our full support.

Speaker, I hope that all of our honourable colleagues on both sides of this House support our government's legislation.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):** Questions?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Just so you know, I'll be asking you my question in French en ce moment.

Les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité en français. En ce moment, les études démontrent qu'on a besoin de 1 000 enseignants et enseignantes de plus par année, mais l'Ontario n'en forme pas plus que 500 par année. On a au-dessus de 450 % des enseignants et enseignantes dans nos écoles francophones qui ne sont pas formés.

Qu'est-ce que le gouvernement a dans son projet de loi pour s'assurer que les enfants francophones ont droit à une éducation en français avec des professeurs formés?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you for the question from the opposition side. It is very important that we need to carry on supporting the francophone communities in our education sectors. That's why we are investing more in education. If we have the opportunity to read about our budget for this fiscal year, we may see that there is a \$2.1-billion increase in investing in the public education sector.

That is one of the reasons why we are supporting this bill: because we are investing more in education than ever.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Questions?

**Mr. Rob Flack:** I really enjoyed the member's presentation this afternoon. One of the things in my region is we're going to have a lot more jobs; we're going to have a lot more families moving into that region. As such, we're going to need to build more schools. We're going to need more capacity. So my question to you would be, with this need to ensure that Ontario school boards are prepared for this growth now and in the future, how will this bill better prepare us to meet the demands for our students and of our families in the years ahead?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you to our colleague for this very important question. One of the reasons why is we are talking about education, not only software that the member opposite mentioned—we need more teachers—we need also hardware. That's why we are proposing to build more modern schools and build them faster. Schools are not being built fast enough for our growing needs. Plans to build are often bogged down in endless red tape and turf wars between various actors. This is not acceptable. So over the next 10 years, our government is investing \$15 billion in capital grants, including an additional \$600 million announced in the 2023-24 budget, encouraging the development of joint use agreements to develop and maintain a local school presence among smaller boards, especially in more rural or remote communities. Our singular focus is to maximize provincial real estate holdings to build schools faster for parents and students.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** My question to the government side: I find that this is a curious set of priorities that the government is choosing to focus on. This morning, I brought it up at question period. It was brought up that school programs like the ones that provide nutrition to students in Niagara are in crisis across this province: 16 schools have closed their nutrition program, 30 more are projected to close and 49 have been affected. The government knows that we are facing a \$400,000 shortfall on the nutrition program. My question is, why are we not making items like this a priority right now when we are talking about education?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** I want to repeat what I have just told the member from the other side, and I want to correct my record as well. When we look at budget 2022-23, our budget was \$32.4 billion. For this coming fiscal year, if passed, it will be \$34.7 billion, which is an increase of \$2.3 billion. How much we have increased is a record in the history of education in Ontario. We will keep investing more and more, and in this budget, you can see more. In the next year, we are looking at \$36.1 billion, and the next, next year will be \$37.5 billion. We will keep increasing investments in the education sector for our students today and for tomorrow.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I think the member from Markham—Unionville brings a very interesting perspective to this.

Correct me if I'm wrong: You were a school board trustee, I think, at one point, prior to getting elected here to the provincial government. Maybe you could talk a little bit about some of your experience and what it was like having to work with, maybe, some challenging colleagues who didn't necessarily want to hear the views of parents being brought before the board and the other trustees.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you very much for this question. As a previous school board trustee, I enjoyed that for four years a lot. I was so blessed that I was in a well-equipped school board with a lot of staff support, a lot of training, a lot of briefings. I can still remember the first year as a newbie becoming a trustee—nothing is what I knew. So the school board provided us a series of training so that we know what is the code of conduct, what is our job description and what we can and what we cannot do.

This is very important to me, because we need to always understand our own jurisdiction. We don't cross our border. We don't step on other people's toes. We help each other so that we can be a board that can help our students move forward. That's why in this legislation, we need to provide more funding for school boards for trustee training so that they know what they should do and what they shouldn't.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I heard the member boast about his government's investment in schools in Ontario, but I wonder if he would share with the people of this province what that investment would be if it had kept pace with inflation, because just looking at the dollars, without taking inflation into account, presents a very different picture of how school boards are funded.

We know that when inflation is taken into account school boards are receiving on average \$1,200 less per student in the 2023-24 school year than what they received in 2018-19. Total funding is \$2.5 billion short of where it would have been if it had kept pace with inflation. So would the member please comment on what the numbers would look like when inflation is taken into account?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Since we took office, the increased investment in education is over 27%. Let's talk about numbers; I like numbers. The students' education provides a solid foundation with a record investment in student learning. Our government is making a historic investment in Ontario schools by providing a projected \$27.6 billion in public education for this coming year. Along with funding for school board operations, targeted initiatives will support student achievement and well-being.

The Minister of Education also announced that we are investing more than \$180 million for 2023-24 in math and reading support for Ontario students in our classrooms and at home. This is building upon our previous \$200-million investment with support to students with our four-year math strategy. The numbers go on and on. I don't know why you are not supporting this one, but this is very well-supported education—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

1540

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** We heard the MPP from St. Catharines just say that our priorities in bringing forward this legislation are curious. I think that was her word. I don't understand what is curious about student achievement and going back to basics, making sure kids can succeed and get good outcomes. So I'd like to ask the member if he thinks those are good priorities.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you to my dear colleague for asking a very important question. Writing, reading and math are very important for our children's future. Every single one of the pages, the young people here, need to be well prepared for their future. No matter when they go through high school or when they graduate from high school, they need very well-trained reading, math and science for their future.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's time for further debate.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Well, I'd like to put myself in the picture. I have a PhD in education, and I taught future teachers at the faculty of education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay for about 10, 11 years, until I was elected to my current role as an MPP. Before that, I was a guest artist educator in schools throughout the province, working together with classroom teachers at all grade levels to design creative music projects with students.

Now, this goes back to 1998 and, at that time, all the instruments in elementary schools were broken. There was nothing useful there to use, so I wound up buying and building—using recycled materials—to create enough instruments for the children I was working with in schools. Underfunding was very present then as well.

So my time in schools usually involved 10 half days, sometimes over a week or over two months, in both capacities and working with, together, collaborating with teachers in classrooms and teaching future teachers at the faculty of education. I've been witness to the stresses faced by teachers with classrooms with too many students, not enough EAs and the ever-increasing demands on teachers to fulfill the roles of teacher, social worker, mental health worker, all while being blamed for the socio-economic conditions shaping the lives of students, conditions that were completely out of the control of teachers.

I see the minister's current bill as a grand effort to divert and misdirect. Like a skilled magician, illusion distracts the audience from the reality of what is actually taking place before our eyes. I have many thoughts on what I think the purpose is of various bills in education that have been introduced and the persistent underfunding. I will just add that if we were able to access the mandate letters, perhaps we would know actually what the intent was behind the bills that we see that we have so many concerns about, but the government continues to resist sharing that information publicly. It kind of makes me think, gee, when we want parents to know exactly what's going on in schools, the people of Ontario also have the right to know how decisions are being made in the Legislature, the people who represent them here, but that is not an option at this moment.

According to this bill, the minister wants people to think that the challenges for students are all about weak board governance or weak teachers, but the reality is quite different. I ask myself, why would the minister create a distraction at this moment in time? Well, this distraction is not all that different from the ones that have preceded it, always with the intention of blaming teachers and now blaming boards for societal stressors that do have an enormous impact on student success.

Now, I'm not saying that teaching and board governance can't be improved—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

I will recognize the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to standing order 25(i), I ask, through you, that the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North withdraw the comments they have made imputing unavowed motives to the Minister of Education.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I'm not going to agree with the member at this time, but I will caution the member to be careful in her comments.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you, Speaker.

Now, I'm not saying that teaching and board governance cannot be improved, but many boards—and I heard a board representative interviewed this morning on my local Thunder Bay radio station—already write annual reviews and reports on their performance and post them publicly. So the requirement to do something that is already happening—again, I'm concerned that this is a distraction and a way of finger pointing to take blame away from, really, the cuts that we have been experiencing to education funding.

So, frankly, when the minister refers to working with experts but has not in fact met with boards, met with teachers' unions, met with many people who actually do the work, I'm concerned that it's not a full picture that we are seeing. And I really ask myself, why would he not take the time to have conversations with people working on the front lines?

We do know this minister was never a student in a public school and, I warrant, has very little idea of the realities of teaching, let alone teaching in classrooms with too many students and trying to integrate all students, whatever their needs, without enough EAs, social workers, mental health workers to support the students and, frankly, to support the teachers and other staff.

We know that there was funding for COVID that the federal government provided. Many schools had to actually put up the money to address the COVID situation in their schools, pay for PPE and so on, and that money has not been returned to the schools. The government has chosen not to give that money to the schools, so that's already put them in a shortfall position. I do want to note also that it's interesting that private schools had access to PPE when public schools did not.

So, I'm just going to—I have a lot of different things here. But I recall—really, I do have a long memory,

especially about things to do with education and health care. I remember when the Mike Harris government started the attack on teachers; I remember it as if it were yesterday. John Snobelen's advice to the Premier of the time: Create a crisis, and then you can impose basically whatever you want, any kind of solution that you want.

When the Ford government came into power, one of the first things they did was propose cutting staff, including over 10,000 teachers, arguing perversely that it would build children's resilience—

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Point of order.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I apologize to the member.

I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** As a young member of this Legislature, I appreciate the minor history lesson, but I fail to understand what it has to do with the bill. And some of the other things that are being implied right now, I just don't see them in the text of the bill itself.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I'm going to agree with the member and please ask the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North to deal with the bill that is in front of you today.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I think my focus, really, is on better schools and student outcomes, and my purpose in referring to the history is that there has been a past practice of, really, defaming teachers, pointing fingers at teachers and now pointing fingers at boards as being the cause of problems that I suggest have more to do with a lack of funding and constraints that are put on boards and schools to provide services that they simply do not have the resources to provide adequately. That puts them under enormous pressure, and it puts our students under enormous pressure. That is very much pertinent to the bill on the table.

Again, there is a risk of imputing motive, so I will try to be careful here. I am concerned, as always, that there is a lot of money to be made by privatizing education. My concern is that as schools are underfunded and as there is finger pointing, then it creates an opportunity, really, for privatization. It creates an appetite for it. That concerns me.

**1550**

I want to tell you a little bit about my nephew. He was a very active boy, but he was also oppositional. He was not doing well at home or at his public school. Luckily for him, his parents had the money to send him to a private school, where there were only 15 students in the class. Not surprisingly, happily, he really thrived in a small setting because he was able to get one-on-one attention, much more attention from the teacher than in the classrooms where I've been a visitor where we're dealing with 25 to 35 students—very, very different situation.

My nephew has grown into a very lovely, smart, confident man, and I really wish that all young people could have that advantage of being in small classrooms and really having the attention of teachers.

Again, I feel that the bill really points at boards as if boards were the source of a fundamental problem, and I

just don't buy it. I want to talk a little bit—the Associate Minister of Transportation expressed earlier a lot of frustration about board decisions and the impacts of those decisions on what kind of programming is available. Yes, ministries don't determine programming, but budgets do.

I'm just going to take us on a little bit of a journey. In my teaching at the faculty of education, particularly during COVID, from one year, we went to having 22 students in an online class. I was teaching music in this case—incredibly difficult to do in an online context, but that was the situation.

But the second year, our class sizes were doubled. My initial response was to be angry, of course. We're being paid the same money, we're expected to educate the next generation of teachers, and yet it's extremely difficult to do.

But why did this happen? What could I say? I could go to my dean and my chair and say, "This is incredibly difficult," but the reality is they got a budget. That budget was limited, so they were forced to work within that budget and make their decisions on that basis.

That is exactly what boards have to do. They're given a budget. They have to make a decision. It's not going to be the decision that everybody wants because the money isn't there. There isn't enough money.

Really, instead of providing schools with the dollars they need to have reasonable class sizes with good resources, we see this government claiming to be spending what they describe as historic amounts of money. But we know, in fact, that the dollar amounts do not come close to matching the rate of inflation. In fact, inflation-adjusted school funding is down about \$1,200 per student since the Ford government came to power.

In addition, we also know that thousands of children with autism are being moved into regular classrooms without any transition planning and without the needed supports in classrooms. There will inevitably be a crisis in classrooms if the supports are not there to support these children. You cannot be a teacher alone in a classroom, even with an EA, and have many students who really need special attention. You can't do it. It's not physically possible, and it is a recipe for failure.

I really question why teachers and boards are being blamed for things that are really outside of their control.

I'm going to go back a bit in time. In 2000—that's when I first started teaching at the faculty of education—I witnessed math and literacy get the lion's share of instructional hours relative to every other subject area. When the province went to a two-year teacher education system, math and literacy got an even higher percentage of instructional hours while other subject areas, such as phys ed, music, drama, social studies, shrunk to the smallest possible unit of instructional time.

My point is that math and literacy are already the primary focus of faculties of education, existing teachers, as well as teachers in training. There can always be improvements, but rather, not only do we have to look at class sizes, you also actually have to look at the capacities of specific children to learn easily. I'm very, very

concerned with the 100% emphasis on math and language skills, that far too many children are going to be shamed into seeing themselves as failures. Frankly, not succeeding in math and literacy is nothing to be ashamed of. Children need to be able to celebrate the gifts that they bring, and teachers need to be able to support the development of those children, whatever skills and gifts they have.

I think of the many children I have met who have fetal alcohol syndrome. These children have different degrees of what is currently understood to be permanent brain damage. These kids are in school. I'm very close to some who are now adults. They can learn and grow in schools, but to demand that they need an arbitrary level of math and literacy competence is not only unrealistic, it's frankly cruel. No one should set arbitrary limits on what a child can accomplish, but likewise, no one should impose arbitrary expectations on children whose gifts may lie elsewhere.

To punish and shame schools, teachers, boards and students because they have a higher percentage of children with significant challenges is the worst possible model of education, and because the government keeps going down this road of forcing everyone to teach to the test, and because teachers and schools are evaluated on the basis of test results, it's in the interests of schools to actually discourage the attendance of children who may not have the capacity to do well on these tests. Should this happen? Is it against the rules? Sort of, sort of not. There is wiggle room—and frankly, it doesn't matter whether it's allowed or not, because it happens, and I know it happens. It happens because there is so much emphasis on jumping through the testing hoops, there is an incentive to attract the students who are easiest to teach and discourage those who are more of a challenge. This is human nature: If you are going to punish me and my school for something that is out of my control, I will use whatever tools I have to protect myself.

All students deserve the opportunity to develop to their fullest capacity, and that includes students with the widest possible range of attributes. In order to meet all students' needs, however, the funding and staff need to be in place to support every student, and that is far from the case with the funding model being used by this government. Instead of being honest about what students, teachers and boards actually face in their individual communities, this bill blames boards, teachers and administrators for conditions created, really, by anti-public-education, anti-teacher and now anti-board policies.

I've just got a couple of minutes. I did hear one of the members talking about trying to have ideological unanimity across boards throughout Ontario. I'm thinking about—I've taught in Catholic boards, I've taught in public boards, I've taught in First Nations boards. They're not all ideologically lining up to one viewpoint. What they do all share is putting students first, putting the well-being of students first, and that has to look different depending on where you are, what students you have in your space. Teachers do understand that. I believe boards understand that, and recommending and really enforcing a cookie-

cutter view of what boards must think and do and prioritize actually underserves the students.

Yes, of course, they need to know what their responsibilities are, like any board position. Anything that we take on—if you do a volunteer position somewhere, you want to know exactly what your responsibilities are. I don't have a problem with that, but I do have a problem with the notion that all boards must think alike and have exactly the same results, because children and communities are different. Some communities, certainly in my region, have very, very significant challenges, and those students need to be supported, cared for, loved, encouraged and not shamed for not being the math geniuses or the language geniuses.

**1600**

I have a nephew right now who is the loveliest young man. He's 10. He's not going to do well in math and he's very, very slow with language. That's the reality. Should he be punished? I don't think so.

I really think that the bottom line is that schools need money. They need more money than has been given. Schools have actually experienced significant cuts since the Ford government came into office, and that has resulted in crises in our schools, classrooms that are too big to manage and many, many students who need a lot of additional help. The money is not there to provide those supports.

I'd like to thank you, Speaker, for your tolerance and for the ability to speak here.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for questions.

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North for her presentation. I took note that, at least in what I could capture, twice in there was a notation about blaming teachers. This is not at all about blaming teachers. This is a bill about accountability, not blaming teachers. Why doesn't the opposition believe in accountability for anybody in our education system?

At the end of the day, Speaker, this bill will, if passed, ensure educators are equipped with updated knowledge. The member also spoke about what's out of the teacher's role. Well, we're going to ensure that they have updated knowledge and abilities to best serve our students for the best student outcomes. Why doesn't the member opposite believe in that?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** There is already a great deal of accountability built into the system. In addition, at faculties of education, there is constant research taking place about looking to improve how different subject areas are taught. The bottom line is, the money is not there to look after children and give them a fair education.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** “All students”—I'm quoting the member opposite—“deserve the opportunity to learn to their fullest capacity.” I couldn't agree more as a mother of a special-needs child, as is my friend from Newmarket—

Aurora. We certainly care about these things. This government has actually increased funding for special needs in schools by about \$100 million every year since we have been in office—every year. But parents come to me and they say “Where is the money going?” I don't know. We don't know, in fact.

What this bill is trying to do is to say, “We need you to report, school boards, what you're spend spending that money on.” Because I've had teachers and parents tell me that when school boards need money, the first place they take it from is the special-needs funding envelope. I support this legislation because I want children with special needs to have the advantage of that money.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I would also like special-needs children to have the advantage of money, of as much money as is available. They all need support. But again, what you see is robbing Peter to pay Paul. When there's not enough money in the overall budget, when there are not enough teaching staff, when class sizes are too large, what do you get? You have a crisis in classrooms. We know there is not enough there to support special-needs kids. We know there is not enough there to support the average kid in the classroom. It's just not there. Class sizes are too large.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** It is clear that since this government came into power, there is now \$1,200 less money per student than there was when they took power in 2018. There are now four less teachers per 1,000 students in secondary school than when they took power in 2018. They are, through this bill, improving: one new teacher for 2,850 kids for help in reading and one new teacher for 6,650 kids in math.

You gave the example of your nephew, who needed more support in order to be successful. He was lucky enough that his parents were wealthy. What do you figure will happen to all of the kids like your nephew who need extra help?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** They won't thrive, and frankly, they become the problem kids the teachers can't cope with. If there are many kids with many challenges in a classroom with 35 kids, even 25 kids sometimes—I've been in classrooms with 25 kids, but six were special-needs. You have one teacher, perhaps one EA. It's not enough. As I said earlier, if every student was in a classroom of 15 students, wow, what a difference we would see in success rates.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** The minister started out with a quote from the NDP government, made back, about the accountability for school boards.

We have a task force that was set up by the Liberals in 2009, which the member across the floor sat on, and the recommendations that came out of these are exactly the recommendations that are here: “The ministry should monitor the implementation of plans for improving student” success “and, where necessary, investigate and

make further recommendations to bring the board into compliance with expectations for student achievement.” That is from the task force that the member across sat on.

Again, “The minister should establish a minimum code of conduct for trustees, in consultation with trustees or their representative associations.”

So my question to the member: Why do you disagree with these implementations?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I do think it’s important to monitor results, but I question whether test results—test results give you a tiny, tiny slice of information. It doesn’t tell you the socio-economic conditions of the school or the students or all the other things that contribute to success. And again, right now, those tests are a very, very limited view of what counts as success.

So a code of conduct is fine. I just don’t see that that’s where the problems lie. The problems lie in lack of funding and class sizes that are too large.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I’d like to thank the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North for her presentation and also speaking to her expertise in the field of education. Myself, I am also a trained educator.

When we hear this government use terms like “back to basics,” it really does betray an ignorance about education itself. When discussing special education learners or, really, education at large, often the analogy is used of animals: You can’t teach a fish to climb a ladder nor can you teach a giraffe to swim. But there is the concept of Gardner’s intelligences, whereby each student learns in very different ways, whether a visual learner, an auditory learner, a kinesthetic learner.

What concern me the most were member’s comments and the government’s discussion about ideological sameness across boards. Is this similar to the notion of disrespecting individual learners and expecting sameness based on ideology rather than reality?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** That certainly concerns me. Thank you very much for that question, because ideology

seems to be driving a lot of what is in this bill and the government’s plans for education. We know that ideology has nothing to do, in the end, with what is possible to do with children or younger adults in classrooms. There’s so much variation, there are so many different factors, and, frankly, trying to impose a singular viewpoint on outcomes is nonsensical.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Ross Romano:** I listened to the member’s comments, and I really want to thank the member opposite for her comments. When she talks about it not being a good idea to have accountability measures; when she talks about it not being a good idea to give tests to kids so that we can figure out what their skills are and where they might need more work on and how we could better help them—that she is so against that and that her party is so against that, I thank them for that. Because everybody else in the province of Ontario knows how important accountability is. Everyone else in the province of Ontario knows how important it is that we deliver the best possible education to our children.

**1610**

My question for the member opposite is, do you not feel incredibly lucky and honoured that your policies are so far off that you just can’t possibly get the support of the people of this province to ever put our children in a position to have to endure those policies that are so detrimental to our children’s development?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Well, it’s an amusing question, but thank you. Of course, nobody here has said that we’re opposed to accountability. What I have said is that accountability must go beyond test results; it must include other data. Otherwise, it’s too narrow to make any informed, intelligent judgments.

Frankly, I’m just going to throw it back because it’s nonsensical.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, we do not have time for further questions.

*Report continues in volume B.*



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Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
<b>Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)</b>	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
<b>Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)</b>	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
<b>Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)</b>	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
<b>Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)</b>	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
<b>Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)</b>	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
<b>Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)</b>	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
<b>Skelly, Donna (PC)</b>	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)</b>	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
<b>Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)</b>	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associée du Logement
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Kanata—Carleton	