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(Hansard)**

Monday 30 April 2007

Lundi 30 avril 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 30 April 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 30 avril 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE
AND SCHOOL SAFETY), 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION
(DISCIPLINE PROGRESSIVE
ET SÉCURITÉ DANS LES ÉCOLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 26, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety / Projet de loi 212, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui concerne le comportement, la discipline et la sécurité.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): It's my understanding that on the last occasion the speaker from Toronto–Danforth had finished, and I call for further debate.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I'm pleased to have this opportunity tonight to speak on Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety. It couldn't really come at a better time, second reading debate, in that this is Education Week, although, as a retired educator, I know that every week was education week. But this is the week that we set aside to recognize the great work that's being done in our schools across the province by educators and by the students. As a retired educator, I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to speak.

Certainly across this province, schools and school boards are understanding and seeing the great work done by our esteemed education minister, the Honourable Kathleen Wynne, and my colleague the member from—I should have looked at that before—Guelph–Wellington, who is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education. She has led the safe schools action team, and she reported to this House in the first part of the second reading debate the major recommendations of their report, entitled Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action. She has reported that boards offer access to alternative programming for students who have been expelled or who are serving long-term suspensions.

She has reported that mitigating circumstances are to be considered before any student is expelled or suspended, and she has reported that boards use progressive discipline as a matter of standard practice. So the member from Guelph–Wellington has led the charge on this, and I commend her for that. I see she's walking into the House right now. I know that the minister she serves under has certainly entrusted in her a great opportunity of getting out around the province and understanding and hearing about discipline and the like.

We know and I know that safe schools are a prerequisite for student achievement. I am proud to say that in 2007-08, in order to make Ontario's schools safer, we will invest \$31 million.

We, as legislators, have heard about the need for safe schools and the safe schools strategy in debate in this House, and this bill builds on that strategy by proposing legislative amendments to the safe schools provision of the Education Act that would more effectively combine discipline with opportunities for students to continue their education. This legislation will continue to make student safety a top priority while ensuring that there are strong consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

One of the pillars of this legislation is the greater emphasis on addressing a student's inappropriate behaviour with appropriate interventions. Also, individualization is the emphasis, that one size in discipline does not fit all. Every pupil and every staff member has the right to feel safe and to be safe in school and on school grounds. Every parent must also feel that sense of security when their children leave for school in the morning.

I would like to comment, as I alluded to earlier, about the safe schools action team for a moment. As I said, this work was led by my colleague from Guelph–Wellington. This team talked to those most affected and who were most knowledgeable about safe schools, and hundreds of people from all walks of life across this province stepped forward during broad consultations. What were found and reported on were the serious discrepancies in consistency and fairness in the application of the safe schools provisions of the Education Act.

1850

I believe the minister pointed out very well, when she led off the second reading debate, an area of concern when she reported that in 2000-01, the number of expulsions across the province was 106, yet by 2004-05, the number had jumped to 1,888. As she said, and I quote, "Clearly there was something going on with this legis-

lation that had been brought in by the previous government that was not just, that was problematic.”

Certainly there are problems, and there are opportunities and the need for change. In fact, expulsions with no programs available for formal academic or social supports are not effective expulsions. An Education Act that is ineffective in raising the issue of bullying to the fore or that is ineffective in reducing bullying in schools is not an effective act. Bullied students are not being properly protected, with many losing self-confidence and watching grades drop as a result of hurt, insults and bullying.

As a government, we know that effective discipline with opportunities is what is required in schools across the province. Strong consequences for inappropriate behaviour are essential, but a program to allow students to earn their way back into the classroom is essential too.

I commented about bullying. The amendments that are being brought forth by this legislation would add bullying as an infraction for which a suspension must be considered. We recognize the seriousness of bullying, and parents and teachers across this province also recognize the seriousness of bullying.

I would like to recognize at this time the great work by a retired teacher in my riding. Her name is Mary Lynn Alguire, and she's doing a lot work with the Upper Canada District School Board. During her career, she was a leader in classroom recognition of and intervention in bullying. She led many, many workshops for students, parents and teachers across my riding, and certainly she has been around this province too. Today, in retirement, she continues to offer her knowledge and expertise to this school board, the Upper Canada District School Board. As a teacher, I was proud to work alongside Mary Lynn, and now, as a legislator, I am proud to recognize her work around the issue of bullying in the classroom for pupils, parents and teachers both in my constituency and across the province of Ontario.

Rather than being in the malls and streets, students must have programs available to them in order to facilitate their return to the classroom. As you read through this legislation, you will see that an amendment to it would replace mandatory suspensions and expulsions for students with the requirement that principals and school boards consider and respond to all infractions that occur in the most appropriate way. What is proposed is a progressive discipline approach to choose the appropriate punishment in each case of inappropriate behaviour. There's certainly a range of punishments, from in-school detentions to referrals for consultation or transfer, before using suspensions or expulsions. As I said, there must be strong consequences for inappropriate behaviour, but there must also be effective discipline with opportunities.

As well, the proposed legislative amendments will clarify decision-making authority around suspensions for those so involved in the decision-making, those being the principals and the school boards.

We know that under the current legislation, teachers have the authority to suspend students. Not once in my 32 and a half years in the teaching profession did I

suspend a student, nor was I involved in the suspension of a student. Teachers rarely exercise the duty to suspend. Principals accept that responsibility. Teachers' federations have requested that a teacher's duty to suspend be removed from the act, and this legislation gives principals the authority to suspend and the boards the authority to expel. Principals are obligated, as in the past, to take into account the safety of students and staff.

There are certainly other improvements to the act. We're providing boards with \$20 million for supports to address inappropriate behaviour, including programs for all expelled students and students serving long-term suspensions. There's building capacity in school boards to address inappropriate student behaviour, providing training for principals and vice-principals. This bill offers a wide range of opportunities, opportunities for students who may from time to time not show appropriate behaviour in school and who do need the discipline required, but it also gives an opportunity—an opportunity of hope—that there is hope for the student to be integrated back into the classroom and to have the appropriate supports for that.

As I wind down the opportunity of speaking here—and certainly we will hear from a number of others this evening in the Legislature—on this first day of Education Week, I think there is nothing better than to have a piece of legislation before this House that teachers had been looking for and that parents had been looking for. I know that, as a retired educator, during my years in the classroom I tried to have many positive reinforcements in the classroom, as do most educators today. But there are certainly opportunities for students to step out of line and there have to be appropriate consequences and appropriate opportunities in the future.

Those are the comments that I would like to present to this House this evening.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech from the member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh in this Education Week and in the debate here this evening on Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety.

I'd like to touch on another aspect of safety, and that is related to school supervision time. I've had a meeting with representatives of the parent council in Muskoka, representing about six different schools, and they're concerned with inadequate supervision of primary-age children that's a direct result of this government's actions in negotiating a contract that reduces supervision time from 100 minutes to 80 minutes to 60 minutes over three years. I'm hearing from parents that there are now situations where there are four or five classes of young children being supervised by one teacher. This is not a good situation. It is not a safe situation. You might have a child choking in one room and obviously the supervisor, the person in charge, would not be aware of it. So this is a dangerous situation, and it's going to get worse as that

supervision time is cut back. This is a serious safety problem.

It was also brought to my attention, as the result of an incident that happened in Muskoka, that there aren't sufficient numbers of staff trained with CPR and first aid. It would seem to me that we need just about everyone in a school environment trained in CPR and first aid so that if we do get an emergency happening, that person is there to step in to provide the assistance needed.

That supervision time also is a problem at recess, where you have young children without adequate supervision time. As I say, it's as a direct result of the actions of this government. It's something that needs to be remedied.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I'm going to get a chance a little bit later to speak in detail on this legislation. I'm just going to comment on one of the points that the member raised, which I think is an important point, and that is the issue of the ability to expel students from school. I understand why, at times, teachers or principals feel that expulsion from school is necessary, but I often wonder how effective it is at being able to deal with the root problem.

You have kids of all ages out there, especially in the later primary grades through the high school grades, who have problems at home or have problems in their own personal lives and who cause a great disruption within a classroom and within the school, and I understand that's real. But I've always disagreed with the idea that you should be able to expel somebody out of the education system so that you pass your problem from the school to society. It seems to me the issue is that we have to provide the support to our schools and school boards in order to have the dollars to provide the kinds of programs that you need in order to keep those kids in the school. Otherwise, what are we doing? We're just passing off our problem to somebody else in society. It might be the police; it might be social services. Who knows? Sometimes a lot of these kids fly straight when they leave as well. That's the other side of the story.

1900

One of the aspects of this bill that I'm supportive of is the initiative to make sure there's a better process in regard to the question of expelling somebody from the school altogether, never to return. If we give the kind of support that we need to our teachers, principals and school boards to make sure that we try to deal with these children so that they're able to succeed, we'll be far better off as a society. Allowing an expulsion without any appeal or any process is, in the end, a disservice not only to the child but in the long run a disservice to society.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm not sure whether the government caucus is going to speak to these questions and comments or not, but I'm going to have an opportunity in a few moments to speak to Bill 212.

First of all, I want to say it's a pleasure to take part in this debate on the week that we call Education Week in the province of Ontario. Although school discipline has

not been a huge issue in the riding of Simcoe North, one of the things I want to put on the record tonight is the number of very positive things that are happening in our schools and some of the neat things that are happening in a number of the schools I've visited. I'm certainly appreciative of that.

I'm not so sure if any government ever gets education 100%, because it's a ministry where right now we're seeing declining enrolment with the demographics across the province, and it's affecting a lot of our school boards. I'll talk about that a little bit in my comments later. One of the things happening out there with education is the fact that there's a lot of pressure on school boards to look at some of the smaller schools, particularly the smaller schools across rural Ontario, and the threat of closure is always there. We've seen a number of them for years now. One thing I'd like to put on the record tonight is how much I quite often think that the smaller the school, the better the opportunities are for some of the younger people. Anything we can possibly do to keep our small schools open is a challenge that all members of this Legislative Assembly should support. I look forward to making a few comments in a few minutes' time, and of course I'll be supporting this legislation.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I just want to take a couple of minutes to add some comments on this particular piece of legislation. We talk about the challenges facing education with declining enrolment. That's across the province. I know that a week ago or so I met some folks from Spring Valley Public School in my riding in the municipality of Brighton. Obviously, these folks are concerned about declining enrolment, but they also talked to me about rural schools and how important they are to their community. They were quite pleased with the way that we've moved on the education file, but there's that sort of cloud that, with declining enrolment, schools might have to amalgamate. This is why it's important to protect public education.

We've been working very closely with these folks. Yes, nobody will ever deny that there are some challenges. The challenges are there. But I think we're committed in a non-partisan way, as I hear from the members opposite who are prepared to support this piece of legislation, to deal with issues like bullying and suspensions and those kinds of things. We need to do all we can to protect our public education sector and work with the parents' councils, schoolteachers, principals and all members of society because it's, as I've said in the past, our future. We cannot deny it. As I visit a number of schools in my riding, it's really refreshing to see these young minds, and it's encouraging that I know that we're going to have a bright future. I'm prepared to support this legislation like every other member in this House will.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh.

Mr. Brownell: I apologize for the delay. I would like to thank those who spoke on the bill. With this being Education Week, I thank all of the members who stood and spoke to their feeling on this bill as related to the

constituents in their riding and to those who teach in their riding.

The teachers of this province are very excited about opportunities that have been given to them and the opportunities afforded to them in the last few years. I look at my daughter, for example, as a new teacher in the riding, a second-year teacher in her first full year of teaching. She's often commented to me about opportunities that she's had since she started teaching and she's also talked to me about the frustrations. As some of the members indicated, there are frustrations. I know that we had some comments about the expulsions of students, but there has to be a spectrum, and that's what was alluded to in the presentation that I made: that spectrum and the range of a progressive approach to discipline in the classrooms across Ontario.

I indicated that they're from in-school suspensions to referrals to consultations to suspensions and then expulsions. Expulsions should come as the last step and there should be all those other appropriate opportunities, and the opportunity of integrating students back into the classroom, those students who have gotten themselves into trouble. I think that as we continue this debate tonight, we will hear more about the opportunities that we have with Bill 212 in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debates?

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to be able to rise this evening and speak on Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety. I understand that although we're having second reading debate tonight, it'll probably be the last night of debate. The government has decided to time-allocate this bill. That is a little disappointing, but they've been time-allocating every bill lately.

Anyhow, school discipline—and of course it's interesting that we're debating this bill during Education Week. That's one of the things that I wanted to mention tonight in my comments. And I'd like to talk about a number of the schools in my riding that I've visited lately.

I understand why you need legislation like Bill 212. There are obviously areas of the province where the bullying and the gangs—there's just a real issue, socioeconomic issues, where you need legislation. Of course, our government thought we had it correct with the Safe Schools Act and that there might be amendments needed down the road. We're not saying for a second that any government gets it 100% right because, let's face it, we need to know that all the people in the classroom—the teachers, their assistants and, of course, the students—feel safe and disciplined, and that school is a fun place to be where the kids get their education.

It's amazing, as you deal in politics, to watch the education system over the years. Up in Simcoe county, we've got a lot of rural community schools and they are considered large schools today compared to what the schools were like 30, 40 or 50 years ago when we had a number of one-room schools across all of Simcoe county. My father's school was a small school, just on the

opposite side of the hill from the Mount St. Louis Moonstone ski resort. This is going back 65, 66 years ago when my dad was a grade 6, 7 and 8 student. He was one of the closer ones to the school. He used to take a toboggan down the hill every morning and he had to get the fires going for the teachers and for all the students—it was a one-room school. The majority of the people who graduated out of the Hobart school at that time were very, very successful people and had good families and earned good livings and were good, active members of the community.

1910

My wife was in the last class of what they called the North River School back in Matchedash. It was a larger one-room school, but nonetheless grades 1 to 8 were all in the same classroom. The reality is there was a real bonding between the students and the teachers in those schools. Even to this day, they get together for parties and homecoming sorts of things in the summer months and talk about a lot of the old days because they were so closely knit in those communities.

Of course, we came a long way when we created the school boards. I know at one time we had 200-some school boards in the province of Ontario. Our government, the Mike Harris government, downsized that to about 72 boards. This government has chosen to leave those 72 boards in place, although I thought they might have wanted to change that and go back to the 200-some boards that were there before. I guess we did do something right or this government would have changed it back.

In my riding, I wouldn't say that discipline is a big problem in the schools. I'd like to make a few comments about a number of the schools in my riding that I've visited lately and some of the nice things that are happening in those schools and, of course, brag a little bit about some of the schools that are in the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and the Simcoe County District School Board and the two French boards that we have in the riding of Simcoe North.

Just recently I was out to Marchmont Public School. I have three granddaughters who attend that school. I was there for Earth Day. I've got to tell you, I was absolutely amazed at what the students and the teachers had accomplished at that school. They had brought in other schools to do environmental projects. They had it all in the large gymnasium. They showed off all the environmental concerns and projects they had created and had on display for the parents and teachers and other students as well.

What had happened at the Marchmont school in particular I thought was something that could be displayed in almost any school. Actually, I would have hoped that a lot more—or we could even take a project like that on Earth Day and take a number of adults out to see some of things the students had accomplished in their projects at that school.

Just a week ago I had an opportunity to go to the Uptergrove elementary school just east of Orillia. I men-

tioned this in the House last week, but at that school they've had some absolutely phenomenal class projects. I was there for the DARE graduation with the Ontario Provincial Police. It's a program where they bring in a constable, in this case Constable Gerry Dwyer. He worked with the grade 6 students on the dangers of drug abuse and alcoholism and all these sorts of things. The students all graduated that day. But that's also the school where Her Honour Adrienne Clarkson visited about three years ago or maybe four years ago. She came to honour a couple of students who saved the life of a school bus operator using an EpiPen, because the operator had been allergic to peanut butter and had come into contact with it somehow. The students actually saved her life and Adrienne Clarkson came down to honour them.

A couple of times this winter I've had the opportunity to visit Huron Park Public School up in Midland. They've got a program up there called Cuddle Up and Read, and it started out as an evening program run by teacher Debbie Just. She is a very strong-willed and certainly a very bright teacher who loves to get people to learn to read. They bring in sort of dignitaries and guests from the community to read to groups of students and their parents. Just recently, they extended that program to school during the day. Vice-principal Mark Pinell ran the program, and we had a number of people go in to read storybooks to kids, and they got them to ask questions etc. I was really quite impressed with how it was organized and the interest from the kids and actually how disciplined the kids were in that particular school, because they listened carefully while you read and then asked questions in a very polite manner after. I keep going through this list—I'm talking about school discipline. It was amazing in each case of all these schools that I visited how much discipline teachers had over the particular students in those classes. Again, I'm more or less bragging about these schools because I felt that they had gone out of their way to do a really good job.

I've been at another school a couple of times in the last year, and they visited Queen's Park one day. That's Warminster Elementary School, just west of Orillia. I'd been invited there through teacher Chad White. He's been a family friend for a number of years and I know his parents very well. We visited the school to talk to the students. They came here to Queen's Park. They actually had their picture taken right here in the Legislature, and I can tell you they were very proud to be here. Mr. White teaches grade 4/5. It's always interesting to listen to these kids and answer questions in the classroom, because they're just sponges for information. They love to ask questions and they love to be part of any presentation. They like to ask members of Parliament or their mayor or people from the community who visit their school a lot of questions, and it's fun to be part of it.

I have another school that I visited not too long ago, and that's East Oro Public School, which is sort of southwest of Orillia. Stu Finlayson is the principal there. I know that Stu's always looking for new programs and new ideas for the school. I was really happy not too long

ago when I had the opportunity to talk to Robbie Grossman, who's the son of a former leader of our party here at Queen's Park, Larry Grossman. There is a foundation in memory of his dad, and he was able to give some money from that foundation to the East Oro Public School because the Grossman family has a cottage not too far from there on Lake Simcoe. I know that every time I visit that school, again, I see discipline. The East Oro school, along with the Shanty Bay Public School and the school at Edgar, the W.R. Best school—each and every year they're the three main schools that visit the Oro World's Fair. I always see the students there, and again very well disciplined, great students.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the Moonstone public school, which is only about five kilometres from where I live, under Principal Lisa Ewanchuk. I attended a bingo there one night as a fundraiser. I go there each year on Canada Day and usually visit the schools for their public speaking contests as a judge. Again, I enjoy doing that and always enjoy how bright the students are and how innovative they are and enjoy being invited to those types of things.

I believe this coming Saturday is the 50th anniversary of St. Bernard Catholic school in Orillia. John Lynch is the principal there, and I know John has a lot of ceremonies planned around the 50th anniversary. Again, whenever you attend one of the schools in the Catholic system, they seem to be very much disciplined, and the students, in my opinion, seem to really enjoy being at school. It's a joy to be there.

1920

I want to go back just for a second to the whole idea of small-school closures. I know my friend from Northumberland mentioned it earlier. With the declining enrolment in rural schools—and we have that even in Simcoe county, which has a higher rate of growth than most areas of the province. But if there's one area we can all do better on, it's the threat of these school closures. I'm not sure what the final answer is. I know that every government represented here today has had to close schools because the funding just wasn't there. But I can tell you, as an MPP, as a parent or as a citizen, when you attend the rural schools, whether it's 200 students or 250 or 300, whatever it may be in size, you can be nothing but impressed by the quality of education, by the discipline and by the part they play in the community.

I know one school we had was Hillsdale public school at the far western end of my riding, and I can tell you that at one time they wanted to close that school, close it right down, period. Instead, the board made the decision to add onto it. And I can't recall the award they received, but just recently they received a major award that recognized the benefit they were and the great school that Hillsdale was. I apologize for not knowing the name of the award they received. But it could have been closed down.

So that's an area I think we can all do better on. I don't know what the answer is. It may be that you need changes to the funding formula, it may be special assistance, but I can tell you that when you visit these

small rural schools, the average person is nothing but impressed by the quality of education the children are receiving and by the community partners they really are, because many times those schools are the very hub and the very centre of their communities.

When we're talking about discipline, we know there are often kids who fall through the cracks. There's an area I'd like to compliment tonight that is in my riding and in the Simcoe county ridings. The member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Joe Tascona, the member from Simcoe-Grey, Jim Wilson, and myself met last Friday with the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County. They've gone through a very difficult time. Following the auditor's report last year that identified a number of problems with some of the children's aid societies in the province, unfortunately, almost all the children's aid societies were branded with that same statement. I can tell you that it has hurt the morale and it has hurt basically, I guess, the working conditions of the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County. I had the opportunity to meet with them, along with Mr. Wilson and Mr. Tascona, trying our best to see what we could do to instil confidence and to change the public perception—that not all children's aid societies have made bad decisions. I can tell you that the Children's Aid Society of Simcoe County has been well managed for many decades. If anything, I think they have probably always been underfunded. That's sort of an ongoing problem that the children's aid societies have, but they've always been able to attract a number of good foster parents. They've saved a lot of children's lives by the fact that they've been out there, that they've had the professional staff on duty 24 hours a day. They've been able to help families in need and basically children in need at those times.

I want to put on the record tonight how pleased I am with their performance, and I would ask my other community partners and the media in Simcoe county to take a good look at the children's aid society. It's a well managed and very professional organization that looks after many thousands of children every year and in fact saves many lives and helps many lives along the way.

I know we're winding down here now, and I just wanted to say that although I know I haven't really spoken to the bill as far as the actual contents of the bill, I wanted to talk about how important some of our small rural schools are, when I go into these schools, the discipline I see. I think that's so important, and I guess that's really one of the things that I'm so proud of, being a member of provincial Parliament representing a rural-type riding, because over and over again when I visit these schools, I see schools that are caring, I see schools that are disciplined, and I see schools where the kids really want to be.

I understand we are time-allocating this bill probably tomorrow night or tomorrow afternoon or whenever it may be, but I would hope that any piece of legislation that would involve discipline would get the support of the House. Probably we won't get it right every given time,

and I'm not saying for a minute we should, but I think there's an opportunity here by supporting this and moving on, that we try it and see what problems there are. For those areas of the province that need discipline and better school safety, it will be an opportunity to actually improve upon that.

I know we have a number of other speakers ready to speak on it tonight. I just wanted to wind up with one thing. If I could find anything really annoying with our school system in Simcoe county, it's the fact that they have all their graduation ceremonies on the same evening. Maybe the minister could send out a letter and say, "Can you hold your graduation ceremonies on different evenings?" It seems that about six or seven graduation ceremonies are held on the same evening and the other ones are the mornings after or whatever. We like to attend those graduation ceremonies. I think the members of Parliament, the MPPs and the mayors all like it, but unfortunately, the way they turn out, they all seem to be on the same evening.

Anyhow, it has been a pleasure to speak to this tonight. I look forward to any comments and look forward to future debate on the bill. I will be supporting this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the comments made by the member from Simcoe North, I too want to focus on small schools and my concern about how some of these small schools will be able to actually implement section 312 of the bill, which is a new section that calls on boards to provide programs for suspended pupils and expelled pupils. I raise that because in my riding they have four boards and some of those boards operate very small schools, but I also have two unorganized areas that have school authorities, where that school authority looks after a single school—a very small school in one case, only eight pupils; in the other case, even fewer than that.

While I agree with the new section 312 because, of course, I'm not interested in kids being suspended or expelled, being outside of the school system, not getting any support, not getting any help, the reality is, in order to implement some of these programs some of these small schools, in particular, are going to need some extra special funding in order to do that. I read in the minister's statement that \$23 million will be allocated. It's not clear to me if that's new funding, but I have to tell you, if you look at the level of students who were suspended or expelled last year—in the range of \$150,000—that's a large number of students. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of programs that are going to be required. I don't disagree with that. I absolutely want those programs to be established. The issue for me, though, as a member who has two small school authorities in particular: What is the funding that is going to be available for the school authorities, in particular, to actually put this in place?

The other thing I worry about is that the policies and procedures and guidelines of the minister with respect to the new programs will be developed by the minister,

developed by regulation. The question is, when will that happen and how adequate will they be? And most importantly, who is going to have input into the process of developing those policies and procedures that will actually form the basis for these programs that school boards are supposed to implement and enforce? So those are some of the concerns I have as a member who represents some small schools as well.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): I'm pleased to respond to the comments from the member from Simcoe North. I'm pleased to hear he is generally supportive of the bill. It was interesting that he spoke a lot about rural schools. In fact, when the safe schools action team did our consultation, one of the problems that we found with the current legislation was that when students under the current legislation are expelled, although if they're fully expelled there is an expectation that they should be able to go to an alternative program, and in urban areas that often happened, when you went into rural areas, if students were long-term suspended or expelled, there were often no programs in place at all to help them get back on track and back into school, which is what we obviously want to happen. Because there were no alternative programs available in most rural areas, kids were simply dropping out if they happened to be expelled or long-term suspended.

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That's one of the things that this bill will change. Instead of having a few alternative programs available in urban areas, there will be a requirement to provide alternative programs throughout the province. There is \$23 million in new funding being specifically provided—not just one time, but annually—to school boards throughout the province.

The member from Nickel Belt has noted that when you get into very small rural areas, that can be a challenge. But the legislation specifically provides that boards may co-operate in providing those alternative programs, and I think that as we get into more rural areas that may be what they do.

Mr. Miller: It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech of the member from Simcoe North on this education bill, Bill 212. I know the member from Simcoe North is very proud of his riding of Simcoe North. He always likes to trumpet success stories in the riding of Simcoe North, so of course he went on at great length about the Earth Day ceremonies that were going on. I know he likes to get around to all the graduation ceremonies. Certainly I'm looking forward to attending our youngest son Winston's graduation from high school this year from Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, as well as many other ceremonies this year.

This morning I started out the day by being up at Callander fairly early, just outside of the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, to attend a Parry Sound municipal association meeting. The mayor of Parry Sound brought up an issue with me to do with the Near North District School Board. He told me how he's concerned with how

well some of the elementary schools are doing in the Parry Sound area. In fact, the Parry Sound council passed a resolution. I'll just read a part of it:

“...in the West Parry Sound area performed considerably below those of other Ontario schools in communities with similar socio-economic characteristics,” ...

“Now therefore be it resolved that the Near North” District School Board “be requested to provide a full and proper reply on how the board intends to respond to the study and improve EQAO results in future tests for schools in the West Parry Sound area and further,

“That this resolution be circulated to” among other people, myself and the Minister of Education.

The mayor brought up a concern about a number of the elementary schools in the Parry Sound area. This being Education Week, it would be a great week for the Minister of Education to address the concerns raised by the mayor of Parry Sound and improve the performance and the way some of the children are doing in the Parry Sound area.

Mr. Bisson: I guess some don't understand the difference between a school authority and a school board, but that's a whole other story.

I get an opportunity in this particular debate, a little bit later on, to participate and put a couple of things on the record. I think it's important that it be said that there are a few things that need to be seriously thought about in regard to how we approach the issue of expulsion of students.

I was saying earlier, I've never favoured the expulsion of students. I've always thought that if you get somebody in grade 9, 10, 11 or 12 and you expel them out of school for bad behaviour, at the end of the day what are you doing but transferring the problem to society? On the other hand, schools and teachers are very challenged in dealing with problem kids. It's real; it's true. There are problem kids out there who basically act out in school and act out in the class and make life fairly difficult for other students at times and teachers and others. But certainly there has to be a way to address this problem in regard to being able to find ways to support kids so we can get them on the right track and they can get the education they need so that later on in life they can make choices about post-secondary education and eventually move on to bigger and better things in their lives.

Throwing a kid out of school—actually, I remember that one of my buddies, when I went to high school, was kicked out of school three weeks into grade 9. The guy never did return to school because he had been kicked out for bad behaviour in school and he was compulsive in his habits—let's just put it that way—but all that did was just transfer the problem back to the home and back into the community. Eventually, this particular guy got his life straight, but it wasn't until many, many years later, and eventually him going back and doing upgrading and getting himself together and returning to college and getting himself into a trade. He's now well employed and works in the building trades. But to say that expulsion

itself is an answer—it's not. This is one of the things this bill tries to do, and I'll speak to that a little bit later.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Simcoe North.

Mr. Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Guelph–Wellington, Parry Sound–Muskoka and Timmins–James Bay for their comments. I guess I don't really have an awful lot to add, other than that I was really happy to comment on some of the activities in some of the schools I've visited more recently in my riding. I've got to tell you that I've been very, very impressed with each of the schools I've visited over the years.

I guess I want to sum up by saying that I'm very concerned about the small schools. I know that will be a topic for other members here tonight, and I don't know when we'll actually ever resolve that. But I guess what I want to put on the record is that I think these schools in many of these small hamlets or small villages are really and truly, in a lot of cases, the hub of the community. When you see maybe two or three of those closed to build a big one or a bigger one somewhere else, I'm not sure that's really good for communities in rural Ontario. What I'm trying to say is that I think the challenge we have as legislators is to try to keep as many of them open as possible. There may be wings of schools we could close down; there may be classrooms we could close down. But at least we could do our very best to keep communities viable by having these schools remain open. I think it is a challenge that I hope everyone would always support. I can't think of anything more disappointing than seeing a school close down in a small community and just left there as a vacant building.

It's been a pleasure to make a few comments tonight, and I look forward to seeing others debate this bill as well.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It's a pleasure to participate in the debate tonight on Bill 212. I'm going to focus my remarks on disabled students and special-needs students, and how the Safe Schools Act in its present form has made life very difficult and very challenging for these students, and to question as well why it has taken this government so long to respond to what have been some very obvious and serious shortcomings and pitfalls in the legislation.

Regrettably, from my perspective, dealing with the Safe Schools Act has not been a priority for the government. It seems to me that it's coming very late in the day, in terms of legislation, when it was clear from the get-go that the bill had serious problems when it was implemented in September 2001.

In fact, if you start with a little bit of history, and that's what I'm going to do, if you go back to 1997, the Ministry of Education itself identified that any number of students who were disabled—in some cases, severely disabled—were at much greater risk than other students of being expelled or being suspended, and that the government had some kind of obligation to be clear that that kind of behaviour wouldn't result in those kinds of

outcomes for students who had no control and who, in some cases, didn't know any better in terms of their behaviours and how appropriate they might be in the classroom.

So let me deal with this, going back to 1997. This is what's called Draft Monograph No. 5, dated October 2, 1997. It's a Ministry of Education document that is entitled Guidelines for the Implementation of the Ministry of Education and Training's Violence-Free Schools Policy with Respect to Exceptional Pupils and Others with Special Needs. It says:

"Some students who have violent outbursts are not wholly responsible for their behaviour. Some students with severe disabilities have varying levels of understanding and controlling acceptable behaviour. These students may need additional support to understand, change and demonstrate acceptable behaviour consistently over time...."

"The ministry is concerned that if such pupils are suspended or expelled when behavioural episodes occur, these pupils will never have access to the education they require to succeed. If suspensions and expulsions are used before other educational strategies are tried, per the IEP, the student will be denied the very type of educational program which has the potential to reduce or even eliminate the pupil's unacceptable behaviour.

"Just as we would remediate a pupil who fails a mathematical/language test, rather than use suspensions or expulsions, we need to review the remedial strategies which can be used when pupils fail to meet behavioural objectives in their IEP. To do otherwise may potentially be viewed as discrimination toward a child due to disability...."

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"Exceptional pupils with behavioural and social goals in their IEP may not be able to make a cause-and-effect connection between their behaviour and the clear consequences of suspension and expulsion. Furthermore, for some students with severe disabilities, it may not be possible for the individual to control their behaviour. For these students, the behaviour may be a way of communicating, rather than a wilful act of malice. In this situation, the standard route of suspension leading to expulsion may not only be unfair, but may result in denying pupils who have disabilities access to education to which they are entitled under human rights legislation."

So it's very clear that as far back as 1997, the Ministry of Education recognized internally that suspension and expulsion of students with special needs, especially those who are severely disabled, made no sense, especially if those very same pupils did not have a clear sense of cause and effect and consequence.

The point is that, right from 1997, the government should have known, and did know, that it was a bad idea to implement a Safe Schools Act where, in fact, suspension and expulsion would probably be the order of the day for all students, regardless of whether they had disabilities—but that's the group I'm focusing on tonight. It's also very clear that the current government has

known that it has been bad, right from the beginning, right from the time they were elected, and it has taken until now, about five months before the election, before we finally see some legislation to deal with the very clear and obvious shortcomings of a bill that was implemented as far back as 2001.

Let me give a bit more history, because, as I said, the Safe Schools Act went into effect in September 2001. By December of that same year, ARCH and the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education were in the process of making recommendations to the former government to change the act. So, three months after it had been implemented, groups were already coming forward who were concerned about exceptional students, particularly disabled ones, to say, "This is impacting them unfairly, and we need to do something very serious about that." Those groups wanted to ensure that there was no discrimination or discriminatory effect on students with disabilities as a result of this particular legislation.

That is why, in December 2001, the coalition, along with ARCH, made the following recommendations to the former government with respect to changing the law:

"(1) Amend the Education Act so that, as in the case of mandatory suspensions, mitigating factors related to disability will be considered with respect to discretionary suspensions....

"(2) Amend Ontario Regulation 106/01 such that section 1 is available as a defence to either a mandatory or a discretionary suspension.

"(3) Amend the Education Act so that, as in the case of mandatory expulsions, mitigating factors related to disability will be considered with respect to discretionary expulsions. For example, the following amendment could be made"—which now mirrors the language in the act that's before us.

"(4) Amend Ontario Regulation 37/01 such that section 2 is available as a defence to either a mandatory or a discretionary expulsion.

"(5) Amend Ontario Regulation 474/00 so that it is clear that it has no application to students (including students with disabilities). The regulation was not intended to be used against students, whose behaviour is governable through the application of the suspension and expulsion provisions, both of which have corresponding appeal mechanisms." It goes on to suggest a number of changes in that regard as well.

So as far back as December 2001, two groups very concerned about disabled students in particular were talking to the former government, making recommendations about the changes that were absolutely essential so that the Safe Schools Act would not discriminate against disabled students. On December 4, 2003, the coalition—the same that I've referenced—and ARCH again met with the former Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy, and outlined the problems to him with respect to the discriminatory nature of the Safe Schools Act as it pertained to disabled students. They gave names, they gave stories of affected students, they gave the number of students who were being affected, they gave recommend-

ations, they focused on those factors that increased risk to these students and in their proposal gave to him what is called a "no-cost law reform proposal." Again, it involved many of the proposed changes that now are finally appearing in this particular bill, but this goes back to December 4, 2003, just after the Liberals had been elected.

They involved changes to mandatory suspension, section 306; changes to discretionary suspensions, section 307; changes to expulsion in section 309; changes to discretionary expulsions in section 310; and changes to regulatory expulsions in section 305.

All of this was given to the minister. Very clear language was even given to the minister in terms of the legislation or the amendments that could be passed that would change the nature of this discrimination. Again, nothing was done by the government at that time, by the minister of the day. If you look at the timeline with respect to what happened and when, all there was was more delay and more delay, when it was clear that there was a problem and it was clear that there were recommendations out there that could be implemented to deal with the problem.

On December 15, 2004, a whole year after ARCH and the coalition had met with the Minister of Education, the minister finally announced, "The Ministry of Education is sponsoring a school safety action team of experts from across the province. I emphasize the word 'action.'" This is from Gerard Kennedy. "Very shortly, we will be bringing in very concrete measures.... There are aspects that will deserve study and will involve the education community, reference groups on the Safe Schools Act.... Those are part of a comprehensive approach, but much of it will affect positively the well-being of students early in 2005."

Here we are in 2007, the start of May tomorrow, and still this bill is just being debated on second reading and still we see no change. February 23, 2005, almost a year later, after Mr. Kennedy had announced the school safety action team that very shortly will be bringing in concrete measures, we have the minister saying, "We are going to be holding public consultations on the Safe Schools Act. I would expect a report from the safe schools action team on the Safe Schools Act portion sometime around the fall of this year."

So now we're heading into the fall of 2005, when the promise for concrete action was December 2004, when the first meeting with this minister on these issues occurred in December 2003. It doesn't seem to be much of a priority for the government to make some of these positive changes.

September 21, 2005: "The government is launching a complete review of the Safe Schools Act. The review will include public consultations and be completed this fall. These consultations will help the ministry better understand how the act could be improved." Now we've gone from February 2005 to September. We're now only starting with public consultations. We already know what could and should be done because the minister has been

briefed a couple of times now by organizations that are most concerned about how the act discriminates against disabled students, and all we're getting now is an announcement of some public consultations that are supposed to be completed in the fall of 2005.

Now we go to June 25, 2006, a new minister: "Our government made a commitment to review the Safe Schools Act. That's why the safe schools action team was asked to listen to what people from across the province had to say about it."

That's June 25, 2006, and we finally see the introduction of the act. First reading would have been April 17, 2007. That's a heck of a lot of time for consultation. That's a heck of a delay when everybody knew there were problems with this bill as it went into effect in September, when the Ministry of Education itself knew there were serious problems with expulsion and suspension of disabled students as far back as 1997, and when two very prominent groups who deal with disabled people, and disabled students in particular, were making recommendations to the government as early as December 2003. Why wasn't this a priority for somebody in the Ministry of Education?

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All of us, as members, finally got a copy of the submission that had been made by the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education. We got a copy of this in March 2006, and it outlined a number of recommendations that had already been made to the government, not once but twice now; it also very clearly said on the overview that the coalition was very concerned that nothing had been done on this very important issue. They said in the overview: "But it is a cruel reality that the Safe Schools Act has made Ontario schools unsafe for some very vulnerable students—harming them, their families and their communities. Relevant policies are popularly known as 'zero tolerance.' We fear that this legislation has contributed to a climate of increasing intolerance, in our schools and communities. Not only can the coalition tell the ministry about the impact of the act, but we can also suggest what needs to be done to change it." Indeed, they have been doing that since December 3, 2003.

They went on to say that their requests for meetings with government and action on this issue have been denied and further went on to so say: "This summer"—that would have been the summer of 2006—"the Ontario Human Rights Commission itself instigated a complaint against both the Toronto District School Board and the Ministry of Education. Terms of a recent settlement with that board require changes to its safe schools policies' and students with disabilities. We are very interested in the outcome of the complaint against the ministry—to see if legislative change will finally be forced."

It begs the question of why it took a complaint by the Ontario Human Rights Commission against both the TDSB and the Ministry of Education to finally force some legislative change, to finally force some action on this really serious issue. I regret that, because very many voices were telling the government a long time ago—the

former government and the current government—that this bill discriminates against these children, and yet no one seemed to want to do much of anything to respond to that discrimination.

I guess the kicker for me, now that we finally have the bill before us, is that, in reality, suspended and expelled students will wait until February 1, 2008, before the school boards that they are associated with will even be forced to put in a program for them. So under section 312, boards are going to be required to put in programs that must be in accordance with the policies and procedures of the minister. We don't know what those policies and procedures will be. We do know that they're probably going to be set by regulation. We don't know who's going to be invited to participate, and we don't know when they'll finally be released and when school boards will actually have access to them.

I certainly hope there's going to be some consultation with the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education. I hope there's going to be some consultation with ARCH about these very specific guidelines, policies and procedures, especially as they pertain to programs that are being set up for disabled students who are expelled or suspended or who risk both of those very difficult options.

I said earlier—and I'm going to say it again—is there going to be enough money to put these into place? That is a very serious issue if you look at the statistics about the number of students who have been expelled and the number of students who have been suspended, and the figures I have go from 2004 to 2005. In 2004-05, there was 149,167 students who were suspended, and 1,888 were expelled. That's a lot of students out there who are going to require some very good programs to connect them back to the school system and the school community. But it is a lot of students and a lot of money, and we don't even know what the nature of those programs are going to be.

I'm also really concerned about the large numbers of younger students who have been expelled. Last year, in the TDSB alone, there were 761 seven-year-olds who were suspended. I don't know the details behind those suspensions. It's not my right to know that, but I certainly say that there is something wrong when those are the levels of suspension of seven-year-olds. We are going to need some very specific and important programs if we are going to attach even the youngest of these students back to the school environment again.

I raise again with the government the issue of timing. It's not as if we didn't know that there was a problem with the Safe Schools Act, even at the point that it was implemented in 2001. In fact, in 1997, long before the act became an act, serious concerns were being raised within the Ministry of Education about how expulsion and suspension negatively affected, more than others, disabled students, and how silly it would be to use those options to try and punish students or mete out punishment to students who, in many cases, were not even able to understand the link between doing something wrong and consequence.

In the few short moments that I have, I want to say something very specific about my concern about how many of those students who are suspended or expelled are somewhere on the autism spectrum in Ontario. Many autistic children, especially those who are severe on the spectrum, are not having their needs met in the school system, and there isn't anything in this bill that's going to do that. It's very clear that there isn't anything in the programs that are envisioned to be prepared that will deal with that, because the ministry has made it very clear that IBI, or intensive behavioural intervention, is not going to be permitted in Ontario schools.

It was very interesting that on February 23, to be exact, when the media asked the Minister of Education about autistic children and what we were doing to help them and how it was that many of these kids were out of school because they weren't allowed to have their therapist in school to help them, Ms. Wynne said, "Those days will soon be over since the government is issuing a directive to school boards that they won't be able to ignore." It's funny that on March 1, 2007, a week later, a memo went out from the Ministry of Education, from the deputy minister, that said: "The ministry will soon release a policy program memorandum on the use of applied behavioural analysis in schools. The focus of this will be on ABA teaching practices and not on intensive behavioural intervention that is used by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' autism intervention program."

It's very clear that for autistic kids who are very severe on the spectrum and who really need their IBI therapist in the class with them in order to learn, the government is not changing the position that was in place under the former government. The government is not allowing these students—many of whom are very disabled in that context—to have the supports and services in place in the school to allow them to learn. What is provided for under section 312 of this bill is not going to allow for that either, so that those same students are going to continue to be denied access to public education because they can't have their therapist in the classroom with them. I find that very regrettable indeed.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs. Sandals: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the member for Nickel Belt. First, briefly, a little bit about the timing on the safe schools action team. What was left out of the time line was the fact that if you look at problems in Ontario schools that were assigned to the safe schools team, bullying was a problem which affected many more children than expulsion and suspension did. So the safe schools action team, first of all, did an extensive consultation on bullying and then a report on bullying. Secondly, there was an extensive consultation on the issues of the Safe Schools Act.

It's interesting that one of the problems we heard about with the Safe Schools Act was the fact that in the first place, it had been written in great haste, with very little consultation, with just one or two groups of people;

in fact, when we did our consultation, we met with over 700 people in round table formats all around the province. We also dealt with a number of groups who had expertise in the field individually, including ARCH, so that there was a very extensive examination of the problem to make sure we got it right.

Specifically with respect to special education, one of the things that we heard from the spec-ed community is that it's not suspension and expulsion that are the problem, but something else, called "exclusion," which is defined in regulation 474 and which allows a principal to arbitrarily exclude a student from a school, and that this was being arbitrarily used in many cases with special education students. One of the things that we will be doing is amending that regulation so that it cannot be applied to students, and in particular, special education students.

With respect to the legislation itself, we are going to require principals to consider whether or not the student has the capacity to understand the consequences of their action. That is an important change asked for by spec-ed parents.

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Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased to respond to the member for Nickel Belt. She raises a number of interesting concerns, as she always does. She's very passionate and determined in her approach to everything she does in this House, and this bill, as you see, is no exception.

I have certain questions about this bill, reading some of the sections myself, as to how they may or may not affect students who come into the situation where they could be suspended. I have some questions that I will get to as I speak a little later in the evening, with regard to the appeal mechanism and process and how that may be enacted; if you are suspended and it is up for appeal, whether or not that suspension will be held in abeyance once an appeal is launched. I'm trying to see that in the act, and I haven't been able to see it yet. That's certainly something I have a concern about, because in any situation, if you register an appeal within the prescribed number of days, it says in here that the board then has 10 days to act on it. Well, if the suspension is for 10 days, how does an appeal mean anything if it takes them 10 days to actually act on it?

So there are some things in here, and as with every other bill, I'm hoping that we can get this bill to committee for some hearings that would hopefully improve the content and the result of the legislation. But as I say, I'll have a chance to speak to it in a little more detail later on in the evening. Again, I'll compliment the member for Nickel Belt for the passion she always shows.

Mr. Bisson: Again, the member for Nickel Belt has done the job that she always does, one that goes without saying. She's done her homework—pardon the pun—she's done her research and has put forward some good points.

The one that I want to speak to, and I hope that she can comment on, is the whole issue of IBI treatment for

kids within schools. We have in my riding—and I know it can't be any different than the ridings of other members in this assembly—situations where children who are in desperate need of intervention in order to deal with the effects of autism are not able to get the kind of support they need within the classroom and within the school.

We know the battle has been a long one. The parents have been asking this government, as they asked the previous government, to re-fund IBI treatment for kids over age six. To date, it has not been done. I remember the Premier, I remember Mr. McGuinty standing in this House just a couple of seats over when he was Leader of the Opposition, swearing and saying in this House and out on the campaign trail that he thought it was wrong that the Conservative government had basically unfunded IBI treatment for kids over age six and that, if he was to become the next Premier of Ontario, it would be fixed. Well, here we are, almost four years, at the end of the mandate, and nothing has been done; in fact, this government has brought kids to court in order to obstruct their will to get the government to do only what they promised to do in the last election.

What's even harder if I have in my riding, as you all have, kids who have autism whose parents come in to see me in my constituency office or otherwise and say, "Listen, our child is having a hard time trying to cope with the socialization in school and education in general and needs to get intensive behavioural therapy within the school," and you can't get the therapist to go in to give the type of support that that kid needs in order to get through the day in school. So I commend the member. We continue to fight, and one day hopefully there will be justice for these children.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): Just before I speak to Bill 212, I want to also comment on the fact that this is Education Week, and it seems appropriate to be debating this bill. I myself have a granddaughter, my eldest grandchild, who's going to be graduating in June from grade 8. For a lot of us, as parents and grandparents, we always sort of see the turning of another chapter in our book of life, and as my granddaughter Kristina moves from elementary school to high school, I'm very proud of what she's done.

Mr. Bisson: Not as proud as she is of you—oh, I got you blushing.

Mrs. Van Bommel: Thank you very much, sir.

When we talk about the issue of the amendments to the Education Act—when I was first elected, one of the first member's statements I made had to do with a young man in my riding who had committed suicide as a result of bullying. That was, for me, a very difficult time to do that, because we don't think of ourselves, in rural ridings, as having those kinds of things. Yet in rural ridings and in urban areas, the world is changing, and young people can reach into each other's homes now and they can bully each other through the Internet. When we see that we are adding bullying as an infraction for which suspension or expulsion can be mandated, I think it's

appropriate that we recognize this, because as I said, it's a changing world.

I also have to say I think it's important that we are replacing mandatory suspensions and expulsions with the ability for principals and school boards to address this in appropriate ways and to take extenuating circumstances into consideration. But I'm very glad that we are now addressing the issue of bullying.

Ms. Martel: I thank all of the members for their interventions. Let me say a couple of things in response.

The government could well have had consultation on bullying and at the same time moved forward on the changes that had been proposed as far back as December 2003 to Minister Kennedy, changes around mandatory suspension and expulsion and all of the circumstances around that, much as they appear in the bill. So there was no need to delay on a really important piece of this that had been given to the minister as far back as December 2003 so that the government could hold consultations on bullying. Of course the government should have done that, but they should have got right down to the business of moving the amendments on mandatory versus discretionary and suspensions versus expulsions, because we all knew it was a problem.

The Liberals knew it was a problem when the Safe Schools Act was being introduced under the Tories. So they had the language; they had the legislation. Much of what ARCH and the coalition brought forward actually appears in the legislation, but the government delayed and delayed and delayed for three years. From the time that Minister Kennedy promised concrete action, which was a year after he had first been made aware of this problem, the government delayed another three years before we finally got here today. There was no reason for that; there was no excuse for that. The government could have moved on the important recommendations being made by ARCH and the coalition and then brought in at another time, when the consultations were done, other changes around bullying. The government could have done both of those things if they were a priority.

I just want to get back to IBI in the class. Too many parents have children who need their IBI therapist in the classroom, and too many of these children are not learning in school because they don't have their therapist there to help them. Too many of these kids are not even in school, because their therapists are barred from the classroom; they cannot learn, because the educational assistants, as much as they want to do good work, aren't trained to work with these kids. It is past time, long past time, for the government to live up to its promise and allow IBI therapists in the classrooms in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 212 this evening. It's great to have an opportunity to speak on An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety. As we know, this act deals with safety in our schools, and I think we'd all agree that that's a prerequisite for achievement. But we'd also agree, I think, that

as well as safety in the schools, adequate funding levels for school boards, properly compensated education workers and properly maintained schools should be part of that prerequisite for a safe school environment.

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I'm going to make a couple of connections here. I want to talk as well about what's going on in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie and how some of the very positive investments that we've been making as a government have been providing real, tangible results in Sault Ste. Marie. As you know, we've provided an infrastructure fund of \$280 million that's going to leverage \$4 billion in school infrastructure across the province. For too long and for too many years, governments in the past have ignored this. We're rising to the challenge to deal with our declining infrastructure in our schools. As well, those of you around here will certainly remember the Rozanski report, which recommended that \$1.8 billion be put into education. We've exceeded that, and we're proud of that record. We've come up with over \$3.5 billion in new investment for education.

I want to talk about a couple of other things and some other programs that often don't get the recognition I think they deserve: new resources for our libraries, funding for community use of schools, breakfast programs, things like 20 minutes of daily physical activity. These all have a cumulative effect on the quality of life in our schools and an impact on safety and the outcome of safety in our schools. We can't simply speak about safety in our schools without recognizing that these topics are very interrelated. If we don't give kids the resources they need in their libraries, they will find other things to do. If they aren't coming to school properly fed and nourished to be able to learn in a positive environment, they're going to find other things to do. If we don't engage them in physical activity, they're going to find other things to do.

This is a very positive act, but I also want to connect it to some of the many important investments we're making as a government. When it comes to this particular initiative, we're going to be investing \$31 million in 2007-08 to make Ontario schools safer. We're building upon the safe schools strategy, proposing legislative amendments to the safe schools provisions of the Education Act that would be more effective in combining discipline with opportunities for students to continue their education. The proposed changes would of course continue to make student safety a top priority while also ensuring that there are strong consequences for inappropriate behaviour. There will also be greater emphasis on addressing students' inappropriate behaviour. Let's be very clear: This isn't about being soft on student behaviour; this is about finding the right remedies under very different circumstances, in many instances, to allow a student to be successful in our education system.

There are all kinds of supportive comments that have been provided that demonstrate that we're moving in the right direction. Here's what Frank Kelly, director of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, said: "Directors of education are committed to operating safe schools

across Ontario and are pleased with the government recognizing the damages done by bullying. To maintain safe schools, it is important to allow administration to deal with this behaviour issue which often leads to violence and makes it impossible for some students to learn effectively. As well, the concept of progressive discipline is an effective and fair method used by many administrators."

Emily Noble, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, who is actually from my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, said, "We are also pleased to see that the 'zero tolerance' philosophy has been rejected by the government. Proposing a progressive discipline approach to address inappropriate student behaviour and providing programs for expelled students and those on long-term suspensions are progressive changes that allow students to continue their education while taking responsibility for their actions."

Rick Johnson, president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, said, "The proposed legislative changes strike a responsible balance. They set out strong consequences for unacceptable behaviour and, at the same time, put in place alternative programs that allow students to continue their education while learning accountability if their behaviour."

"The proposed legislation supports boards in building more creative and flexible approaches to addressing the complex issue of discipline."

So it seems that it's certainly being well received by both boards and federations across the province, which is good news.

I think we have to be careful when we talk about suspensions and expulsions from school. I can give you an example: I worked for the OSSTF for a couple of years, and one of the schools I had to visit on occasion was a small school in Hornepayne, Ontario, about four and a half hours north of Sault Ste. Marie. If you know anything about this community, it's a rail town, and the high school is actually in a small shopping mall. The police station is in this building, there's a grocery store in this building—

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): A hotel.

Mr. Oraziotti: There's a hotel in this building as well, a community pool and a library.

I'll give you an example of some of the issues we were talking about when I was up at this school. A student had gone into the grocery store, ended up being charged with shoplifting and was banned from this building and this establishment. In effect, this small mall is the only thing that really exists in this community. It has all of the entertainment, all of the recreation, all of the services, so you have, in effect, now ostracized this individual from the community centre. There aren't a lot of other options.

If there's a way we can find to engage students in other programs where we can ensure they are going to take responsibility for their actions, but provide constructive programs for them as opposed to having these issues that result in these types of settings or in schools end up

becoming community problems that we all have to deal with and that become more costly later on, we're all going to be better served and we're going to help these individuals in Ontario reach their maximum potential by gaining an education, which we all know is very important.

We've tabled a number of positive amendments to this act, based on recommendations made by the safe schools team. I want to also commend our member from Guelph-Wellington, Liz Sandals, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education. She is doing a fantastic job on this file. Its report, the Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action, includes a few of the following recommendations: that boards offer access to alternative programming for students who have been expelled or who are serving long-term suspensions; that mitigating circumstances be considered before any student is expelled or suspended; and that boards use progressive discipline as a matter of standard practice. I think most boards are doing this, but we do have some examples where that's not the case.

Our goal is a fairer, more consistent application of the act and individualized appropriate consequences for students. For instance, just by using recently posted data on suspensions and expulsions, we can verify that the act is not being applied consistently across the province. Boards report an extremely large variance in the rates of suspensions, anywhere from 0.5% of students in a board to 36% being suspended or expelled from schools. So there are obviously some consistency issues here. This legislation is going to help clarify some of those things and also help put programs in place to build some greater consistency in the province.

Some of the proposed legislative amendments include—and I'm just going to highlight a couple of those:

—Adding bullying as an infraction for which suspensions must be considered in recognition of the importance of addressing bullying issues, which can have a significant impact on student safety, learning and school climate. Bullying is being added to the list of infractions for suspensions.

—Replacing mandatory suspensions and expulsions for students with the requirement that principals and school boards consider and respond to all infractions that occurred in the most appropriate way using a progressive discipline approach to choose the appropriate punishment in the case of inappropriate behaviour, such as detentions, referrals for consultation or transfer before ultimately suspending or expelling students. I think most boards are doing this. Again, we do have some examples where there are some inconsistencies.

—Requiring that consideration be given to mitigating factors before students are suspended or expelled, such as the safety of other students, whether racial or other forms of harassment were involved, whether the behaviour was related to a disability or the age of the student.

—Clarifying decision-making authority around suspensions and expulsions for principals and school boards.

Under current legislation, teachers have the authority to suspend; however, teachers rarely exercise this duty in practice. Education stakeholders—notably the teachers' federations—requested that teachers' duties to suspend in the act be removed. The proposed legislation gives principals the authority to suspend and boards the authority to expel. Principals are still obligated to take into account the safety of others. That would include, for example, students and staff.

Other improvements in relation to this are providing boards with \$20 million of supports to address inappropriate behaviour, including programs for all expelled students and students serving long-term suspensions. Again, these programs would be designed to address the causes of problem behaviour and allow them to continue learning outside the classroom. That is an important connection between some of those other programs we're funding—in this particular case, it's a \$20-million initiative—but there are a host of other initiatives such as the library programs, the school breakfast program, the alternative programs, the daily physical activity, community use of schools program, a whole host of them that will help address this issue.

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Also, building capacity in school boards to address inappropriate student behaviour; things like training opportunities and professional education as well; providing training to principals and vice-principals on how to apply discipline in a non-discriminatory manner, including consideration for anti-racism, cross-cultural differences and accommodating students with disabilities. The member for Nickel Belt spoke about that issue in accommodating those with disabilities and that this not be a factor in terms of the cause for suspension, and I would certainly agree that those students need to be accommodated.

We need to maintain the current list of infractions for which suspension is considered, but we need to develop more programs to assist students before ultimately getting to the point where we need to take that particular step and before administrators across the province are left with that as the only alternative; replacing predetermined, one-size-fits-all consequences with an obligation on principals and school boards to respond to all disciplinary issues that could lead to suspensions or expulsions.

Bill 212 is just one of the examples of the positive changes that we have introduced and certainly the constituents in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie are benefiting from many of these improvements in the education sector, because we believe in a strong public education system.

We've invested over \$18 million in new funding in the school boards in the Soo over the last three and a half years. In this year's budget alone, the base budget increased at the Algoma District School Board by \$2.5 million and at the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board by nearly \$2 million as well. When I'm talking about the Algoma District School Board, funding has gone up by 10%, or over \$10 million, in the last three and a half years; per pupil funding is 32% greater today,

or \$2,800 greater per student today, and that's significant. That's despite the fact that when you calculate the decline in enrolment at the Algoma District School Board and the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board in Sault Ste. Marie, we're talking about 2,500 fewer students combined.

In Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board, funding has increased by over 11%, or \$5.8 million, again over 10% as a board, both boards, and per pupil funding in this case has gone up 34%, or over \$2,800, again despite declining enrolment of close to 1,000 students.

Investments are paying off and the percentage of students in both boards in my riding who successfully passed provincial tests have increased in most subject areas and age categories under our government, and graduation rates have gone up as well. I think that's really the test that parents look for: "Is my son's"—or daughter's—"progress improving, are they in smaller classes, are they getting the results we want them to get, and are they getting the attention they need?"

This year's budget is about \$18.3 billion, again, over \$3.5 billion in new funding in the last four years, a significant achievement, and it's certainly more than Mordechai Rozanski recommended in his report.

Scores are up. Over the last four years, more students in grades 3 and 6 are doing better in reading, writing and math. Their results in provincial tests have improved by about 10%. Grade 9 students are meeting the standard on the applied and academic math tests, up 14% and 5% respectively. In addition to that, passing of the literacy test is up by 12%.

Graduation rates are up. Over the past two years, the rate of students graduating in Ontario has increased from 68% to 73%, meaning 12,000 more students in the province are now achieving a high school diploma and are better prepared for the future. Early indicators show that more grade 9 and 10 students are also completing their courses and are on track to graduate.

I know there was some comment made by the member for Trinity-Spadina about the NDP accusing the government of manipulating the EQAO testing, and I want to read something by Charles Pascal, who is the chairperson of the EQAO board of directors and former Deputy Minister of Education, to clarify the record here. He said:

"Mr. Marchese should know this, since it was his government that created the agency. He should also know the changes he criticized were recommended by Ontario educators and confirmed by an independent review panel of world-renowned experts in large-scale assessments.

"His charge the tests were shortened to make it easier is simply wrong.

"Mr. Marchese's statement that calculators are allowed for multiple choice questions is misleading and conveniently taken out of context.

"Mr. Marchese also stated that students are being given 'unlimited time' to complete the tests. Students are being tested on their skills and knowledge of the curriculum, not on how quickly they write.

"Mr. Marchese noted education should not be about political rhetoric or election grandstanding. We agree. We hope he does, too."

That from Charles Pascal, the chairperson of the EQAO board of directors and formerly the Deputy Minister of Education, in response to the suggestion that standards are being manipulated or tests are being manipulated. Very clearly, from this board, with the panel and the recommendations coming forth, that's certainly not the case.

We're proud of the results. The investments we're making in education are getting us the results that we need in education. More students are graduating, and we certainly have less turmoil in the education sector these days. I don't think anybody would doubt that.

Class sizes are smaller. Almost all students in junior kindergarten to grade 3 are learning in classes of 23 or fewer students; 65% are in classes of 20 or fewer and are getting more individual attention—something we committed to do—and those class size numbers are reflected right across the province, something that we're certainly very pleased with.

We've listened to school boards and made changes to education funding that addresses its needs. In response, and to continue supporting higher student achievement, new funding will be allocated to support these further changes to the new education funding formula. Highlights include three new grants to provide targeted funding to schools and students identified by our education partners:

First of all, there's the new program enhancement grant to support arts and music and physical education as well as outdoor education activities that provide students with a well-rounded educational experience.

Support for schools allocation to ensure schools in small communities with low or declining enrolment remain viable. We all know too well in this province what it means when a school is closed in a small community or rural community and it is the only community centre. It's tragic, and it's an incredible challenge for the families living in that area, who have to have their children on buses for an hour or more to get to their particular school.

First Nations, Metis and Inuit education supplements will provide enhanced support for aboriginal students, something that is obviously very important, as we want to ensure that First Nations students in the province of Ontario are able to reach their maximum potential and fully participate in education.

Since 2003, we've made 10 significant improvements on how funding is delivered through the funding formula. Those improvements continue in 2007-08, with additional grants and funding for the following: 1,900 new primary class size elementary specialist and student success teachers; additional support for special education; additional support for rising transportation and utility costs; and targeted support for French-language boards.

Bill 212 seems to have consensus out there in the education sector. There is a very clear opportunity for us to move forward, to work with our young people and

ensure that they have the opportunities to reach their maximum potential in the province of Ontario. Simply suspending and expelling students—obviously there are circumstances that arise where the safety of others is the priority, and we'll need to address that.

I'm pleased to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member for Sault Ste. Marie on Bill 212, the educational bill. He referenced the Education Quality and Accountability Office test. On March 24, the Beacon Star published an article about concerns with the west Parry Sound schools citing a recent study conducted by the C.D. Howe Institute. This study put four west Parry Sound elementary schools in the bottom 20% of schools with similar socio-economic factors like family income levels and home values.

Parry Sound Mayor Richard Adams is concerned with the response of the Near North District School Board and worries that the board is overlooking the Parry Sound schools. Therefore, he has put forth a report and recommendations in council calling for the board to provide the town with a full and proper reply on how it intends to respond to the study and improve EQAO results in future tests for the schools in the west Parry Sound area. Mayor Adams understands the importance of education for the children and the district as a whole. They are looking for a response to these recognized shortcomings within the Parry Sound district because it is imperative that the education standards of these schools are improved.

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The Parry Sound resolution also asks surrounding municipalities for support on this very important issue. There should be a reason why the results of the C.D. Howe study for the Parry Sound area are different than those across the board, and it is absolutely necessary that this reason be determined so that students in the area are provided with the best possible education.

While municipal government has a limited role in education, councillors and mayors in the region are doing all they can to ensure improvements are made in Parry Sound schools. I had the opportunity this morning to chat with Mayor Richard Adams at the Parry Sound municipal meeting in Callander, and he brought this point up again. I know it's of very keen importance to municipal governments in the Parry Sound area.

Mr. Bisson: To the member from Sault Ste. Marie, on a couple of points: In regard to standardized tests being easier, I've had this conversation with teachers in my own constituency as well as in other schools I visit around the province, and what's clear is that teachers are teaching to the test. It's clear that that's part of what's going on. I think it tends to skew, somewhat, where kids are really at.

We got into this debate some years ago when I was in school: Is this mandatory testing really necessary? What does it give us in the end? I think what's clear, from the people I've been talking to, including some of the students who have participated, is that teachers are trying

to prepare the kids for a better result on the test. So it's not as if this is a snapshot in the child's learning; this is a snapshot of what the teacher does and how well the teacher does in preparing the kid for the test. So what are we really getting as a benefit out of this test? I'm not going to say that there's no benefit; of course there's a benefit. But let's not make this out to be something it's not.

The other issue is the promise that was made by the Liberals in the last election—among the many promises that were broken—the whole issue of what we do with autistic kids. I'm going to get a chance a little bit later to talk, because I am sure that each of us has had to deal with parents who have come in to our constituency offices when it comes to services their kids are not getting in school and what kids don't get after age six. This Liberal Party, in opposition, was very specific: They were going to re-fund autism services for kids over age six. They haven't done so; in fact, they've brought the parents to court. When it comes to providing IBI treatment in the classroom, that is not allowed, and I think it creates a problem where a number of kids are expelled from school because they're autistic and we can't service them in the class.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): First off, I'd like to commend the minister and her parliamentary assistant on Bill 212, for setting the environment for great learning. What is being brought forward in this bill is setting the stage for a culture of co-operation, making sure that our students are safe in the classroom and in any school setting, and that schools have the values we want them to have: respect, fair play, teamwork and success. Unless we have that culture in place, the lofty achievements we're asking our students to achieve will be difficult targets to meet. But if we do have those values and have a system in place that addresses root causes that may be taking place at a school or with a particular student, then we are setting ourselves up for success—we want at least 85% of our students going to secondary school to graduate and go on to higher education or an apprenticeship, making sure we address issues that we're facing today.

I was in a school the other day speaking to students and teachers. The issue of the day is technology: Facebook and MySpace, bringing phones into the school etc. The students as well as the teachers, but more so the students—the overwhelming majority; I asked for a show of hands—felt that some of these things, some of this technology, did not have a place in school, partly due to the bullying mechanism it provides where students can bully over the Internet. Our government is addressing that, and I think that's a very good thing.

Mr. Ouellette: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the member from Sault Ste. Marie's comments on Bill 212. First of all, I want to comment on the member from Timmins—James Bay when he spoke about testing. Quite frankly, I'm very supportive of testing. I was on the board of governors of Durham College, and the number one question from the teaching faculty at the

college was, "Why can't we get entrance exams in?" because the graduating students from the various schools all graduated at a different standard or a different level. The one thing that testing does is ensure that there is some standard or level of consistency in all schools throughout the entire province. So I'm not opposed to it. Yes, you are going to get teachers who specifically focus on those areas, but you have to start somewhere, and I think it was a good idea.

The member from Sault Ste. Marie spoke about Hornepayne. I know that facility well. It has the city hall, the library, the hotel, as I was calling out to him—the whole kit and caboodle in the one main mall. Taking it to the other side, what happens when a student gets suspended from school there? Does that mean the individual is completely removed from the mall? I really don't know that, or how it works or some of the other components of what takes place. I expect to be speaking later on, but I'm not sure about that. What happens, for example, in Mattawa? Let's go back to Hornepayne. If that student gets expelled from the school and is assigned to another school, what are you going to do with a high school student? Where are you going to send them from Hornepayne, when you're talking about all those hours and the distance away from all the other communities? How would you assign another school in that particular case? As well, is there any transmission between school boards? You've got other school boards. In the event that that takes place, let's look at Mattawa. What happens in Mattawa when you have two school boards sharing the same facility? If an individual gets expelled in Mattawa and probably would have to go to North Bay, chances are the parents would send them to the other school board, which is in the same building in Mattawa. What are you going to do in that particular case?

Our job in opposition is to point out some of these things. Quite frankly, in a lot of rural or smaller communities in Ontario, we may see some challenges.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Oraziotti: I want to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Timmins–James Bay, Mississauga East and Oshawa for their comments on my remarks this evening on Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety.

I guess what I'm hearing this evening is certainly not controversial; it's not contentious. I think we have some consensus, certainly here, that we need to develop programs that are most appropriate for various types of behaviour in our school systems across the province and ensure that suspension and expulsion is not the first step in dealing with behaviour, depending on what it is, obviously. But we have cases in school boards across the province where that seems to be the case, and we believe there are other options. There are programs that need to be developed to ensure that students can continue to be engaged in the education system. If we simply move these out into the community, they're going to become

community problems, they're going to be larger, they're going to be more costly and so on.

I think we also have to ask ourselves, are all the components in the school system there for success? Do we have adequate learning resources in our libraries, do we have adequate class sizes, do we have community use of school programs, do we have a breakfast program, do we have daily physical activity programs? If we provide all these other programs, many of the issues around safety and bullying can be managed in the context of supporting the whole student and the entire school system. So before we simply focus all our efforts on safety, let's make sure we have a good look at how we're funding and supporting our education system so that we minimize these issues that become contentious in the province and that impact the lives of many people in the province.

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The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I normally would not speak on a bill of this nature, at least at length, and I probably will not use up my full 20 minutes. But having come from a very, very proud family that was very involved in education, I'm trying to transpose that to the present-day situation we face in our school system. It is a little difficult for me to transpose not only my own experience in the school system and trying to figure out where we're going in the future.

One of the points of interest is that tomorrow afternoon at 1:15 I'm going to be in my granddaughter's classroom—

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): You're not old enough to be a grandfather.

Mr. Sterling: I am old enough to be a grandfather, actually six times and maybe seven, depending on when the next baby arrives. It might have arrived already—another little girl, thank God.

Anyway, tomorrow afternoon I'm going to be with my granddaughter Tierney Sterling at St. Philip Catholic school in Richmond, Ontario—which is not in my riding now but will be after the next election, hopefully—and I'm going to be talking a little bit about what I did when I was a young boy going to school, talking about my experience at school and what my experience is now, what I've done during my life and that kind of thing.

Actually, my grandson Brayden, who is in the same school and is five years old, put my name in the hat as well. He was very upset that I wasn't going to his class as well, so that he will also have a grandparent in his class. This is during Education Week, so I'm going to enjoy it as well in terms of going over to see Brayden.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): You can still get nine holes in, Norman.

Mr. Sterling: I think it's going to be raining tomorrow, so I won't be able to golf.

My mom was a teacher. As many members of the Legislature know, she recently passed away. My dad was

a principal in a school. I want to go back in history a long time. When I was a youngster, if I got in trouble at school, the last person in the world that I would tell I was in trouble would be my mom. If I came home and said I was in trouble at school, I would get double the dose of punishment when I got home, because my mom always took the side of the teacher, of the school, of authority and all the rest of it.

It's a long way to come to a situation where we're starting to set up an appeal process for parents and students when trouble brews on the school scene. I think it's a bit of a breakdown in what has happened. I realize, of course, that we were very lucky in our family that none of my siblings or I had any problems with regard to being challenged; we were not afflicted with any challenges of any nature when we went to school.

When I look at this particular piece of legislation, I'm neither here nor there, because I really do want, and I think the members of our caucus want, the very best to occur with regard to amendments to this particular piece of legislation. But I do want to point out, as our critic Mr. Klees has pointed out, that section 310 of this amended piece of legislation in fact mirrors very much the legislation before. Section 310 actually mirrors the former section 311 of this bill, where it says, "A principal shall"—shall—"suspend a pupil if he or she believes that the pupil has engaged" in certain activities. So the principal has no choice but to suspend a student under certain circumstances, and there are eight different circumstances where that would happen:

"(1) Possessing a weapon, including possessing a firearm.

"(2) Using a weapon to cause or to threaten bodily harm to another person."

The principal shall suspend a student if the student commits "a physical assault on another person that causes bodily harm requiring treatment by a medical practitioner." The principal shall suspend a pupil "committing sexual assault." The principal shall suspend a student "trafficking in weapons or in illegal drugs." The principal shall suspend a pupil "committing robbery." The principal shall suspend a pupil "giving alcohol to a minor." And the principal shall suspend a pupil "for any other activity that, under the policy of a board, is an activity for which a principal must suspend" a student.

So the legislation hasn't really changed that much in terms of where we're going. People talk about zero tolerance and that now this is getting away from zero tolerance. I'm not certain that is the case.

But then the legislation follows in terms of what must happen, and there is a very complicated, involved scheme with regard to appeal, notice of appeal and all those kinds of things that follow the suspension taking place.

Going back to my original comments with regard to the history of my particular makeup, it is that the school, the teacher and the principal were always right, and I have a little concern that this legislation may be turning it a little much too much against the trust we place in the hands of the teachers and the principals of our schools. I

truly believe that this trust relationship is very important and that parents and our society and our Parliament must not make the job of the principal and the teachers much more difficult than it is presently.

I believe, however, that this government has failed to provide the alternatives that should be there if a student cannot succeed in the mainstream of our system. I think they have failed to do that. Prior to the last election, as my critic points out, the opposition then, now the government—the Liberals—railed against the Safe Schools Act. But it has been three and a half years since that election in 2003, and now we see, in the last, dying minutes of this government, a piece of legislation come forward to try to address this situation in setting up an appeal process. I heard from the government benches that \$18 million—I think that was the number I heard the former speaker talk about in terms of setting up programs—was a wonderful solution. Well, \$18 million is a lot of money to you and me and to everybody out there on the street, but \$18 million of \$18 billion—there's a thousand million in each billion, so \$18 million is one thousandth of the budget of the Ministry of Education. This money is really quite minuscule in relation to the huge number of students we have in Ontario, to try to capture those students who are having difficulty with the general education system of our province. I do not believe, notwithstanding what the government said during the past election, that this is a realistic solution to the problem at hand.

The other thing is that when the former Minister of Education, who has now retired from provincial politics, negotiated a province-wide agreement with the teachers of our province, he lessened the responsibility of the teaching profession for supervision. If that was part of the negotiations, that was part of the negotiations. But I remember back in the early days when I was a very young child going to school. My mom would head out the door at about 7:30 in the morning, before I would head off to school—I only had to walk about a block and a half or two blocks to school—because she taught school. My father died when I was very young, so she was on her own and she supported a family of four kids on her own. She taught school all during that period of time. She was out the door at 7:30 to go on yard duty at 8. The kids would arrive at 9; my mom would be out there, whether it was 10 below zero or whatever.

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Mr. Bisson: That's pretty warm, 10 below.

Mr. Sterling: For Timmins it's warm, but for Ottawa it's not so warm. At any rate, she would be out there very early. I can remember all the time that she did suffer supervision, and she did actually go to the school before that and put work on the board for her grade 2 class; 35 kids was a normal number.

We've come a long way from that particular situation. What I want to say is that the kind of supervision that was required of teachers then is not required now, and that was lessened in the contract this government agreed to sign. My critic, Mr. Klees, points out that if you're

going to do that, then it's incumbent on the government to provide the necessary resources to the boards to provide alternative supervision that will take place in the schoolyards etc., in the school corridors, to prevent bullying and other kind of things that can happen when supervision isn't there. The government has failed in that regard.

This is one of those kinds of bills that is hard not to support, because you want the system to continue to improve. If the educators and the public are saying this may be an improvement, then I'm willing to give it a nod on the ballot. I have those reservations that I have stated before, but it's not really yanking something from left to right or right to left or whatever it is, it's really notching something over a little bit, so I'm willing to give it a chance, and that's the way my party feels and my leader feels and our party critic feels.

The last thing I want to talk about is the process we're going through. I'm informed—and I have it in front of me—that Mr. Bradley has moved a time allocation motion on this particular bill. This bill is going to have two days of hearings, on May 14 and May 16, if that time allocation motion is carried, and it probably will be, because of course the government has a large majority in this place. I want to say to the government House leader that I don't think this bill should go to time allocation. I think we should have been able to come to an agreement with regard to this. I also want to say to the House leader that, as the former government House leader five or six years ago, I faced the very same problem.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I now know what it was like.

Mr. Sterling: The government House Leader says, "I now know what it was like." I only wish that the Minister of Energy, who was then the opposition House leader, was sitting beside him so he would listen to what the government House Leader now is saying.

I think that in order to make this place work a little better, we have to come to some compromises on legislation like this. Basically, I made the same argument when I was the government House leader. If, in fact, all members of the House are probably going to vote for this bill—there might be the odd one who doesn't—then we should not have to force these things to time allocation. We should be able to agree—the House leader should be able to agree—to an alternative solution.

As I say, I'm going to support this bill, with some reservations. I'm going to look at how the results come out. I think the real result will result from the financing by the government of alternative programs to deal with children who have difficulty in the mainstream part of our education. I don't think \$18 million is going to do it, but I don't know what the amount would be in order to face this. When I go way, way back, we had what we called a reform school that we would send these kids off to. I think that was probably the worst solution of all, because it probably taught them exactly the wrong thing to do, and they associated with some pretty shady people when they got to reform school.

Mr. Yakabuski: Hey, some of my best years were there.

Mr. Sterling: Notwithstanding that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke goes to the alumni events each year, as I understand it.

Having said that, I think we should vote for this bill. It would be nice if we had a longer time frame for hearings, but let's face it, we're into the last stages of our Parliament. This bill should probably have been brought forward a year ago and we would have had more time for consultation. But that's not the case, so my view is that we should get on with it, listen to what people have to say, and I would only hope that the government would be open to amendments if the public points to sections where we could make improvements to the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Bisson: To the member who just spoke, you're not going to get to your grandson's class, but he knows you're a classy guy and you're going to stop in and say hi anyway. You should at the very least walk into the classroom and wave and let him know you were there. I still don't believe you're a grandfather, but that's a whole other story. I didn't think you were that old yet.

Mr. Yakabuski: Take a look.

Mr. Bisson: "Take a look," he said.

Anyway, I agree with some of the comments made by the member from Nepean–Carleton, I believe—

Mr. Sterling: Lanark–Carleton.

Mr. Bisson: Lanark–Carleton. They always change your riding names.

Mr. Yakabuski: But never the member.

Mr. Bisson: But never the member; you can't say that.

But one of his points, and I spoke to this a little earlier, is the issue of the testing. I agree that testing is valuable. I agree that we should be testing kids to get a snapshot of where they're at. But one of the points I wanted to make earlier, and he alluded to it in his talk, is that I feel a fair number of teachers and schools are actually teaching to the test. There's a fair amount of preparation done by teachers to prepare the kids for the test. I can understand that, because we want to make sure that the school and the kids do well on those particular exams. But I'm not sure they're as valuable as we make them out to be, is the point I make. We went through this debate many years ago when we got rid of provincial testing, because we thought at the time—this was back in the late 1960s, early 1970s, when I was in school—that the value of grading kids on a provincial exam was not of a lot of worth, so we got rid of it. Now we've come back and done something not as strict or as rigid as we had when we were in school, but nonetheless, it's there. I just say on the issue of testing that I support the concept of the testing of kids but I'm not 100% convinced that, at the end of the day, it has the effect we want, which is to get that snapshot, because I believe we teach to the test.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I have to comment, because my good friend and colleague from Carleton—I still say Carleton though it's Lanark–Carleton—indicated a few

things that involved the procedures of the House as well as this bill. The parliamentary assistant informs me that you weren't entirely accurate in your evaluation of the bill, and she still allowed me to offer some comment.

First of all, I want to say to the member that it is always better, if we can, to resolve matters of how long we take on a bill through negotiations between the House leaders. An effort was made, I must say, on this particular bill once again to come to one of those agreements. It just didn't seem to be possible, remembering that all three parties in the House have to agree to it. But there was an honest effort on the part of the opposition and the government to try to come to a conclusion on this.

I must say that when we have allocated time, what we do consistently is that we allocate committee time. That wasn't always the case. Sometimes governments wanted to move expeditiously and didn't allow committee time. You'll notice that the time allocation motions for which our government has been responsible have put committee time in, and even third reading time. The member has been here long enough to know that there was a time when we didn't have third reading; it was on the nod. But these bills seem to go on forever. What's interesting is that this is one that has a consensus in the House and we still can't have an agreement to get it through in a timely fashion.

I want to say as well that we will give full consideration to the input that comes in committee. As to any amendments that are proposed, if they can improve the bill I'm sure the government would be prepared to accept them.

The last thing I would say is that the dangerous thing about this—it's a good thing I'm running out of time—is that I often find myself in agreement with my colleague from Lanark–Carleton on matters—but I've run out of time and I can't say where that agreement is.

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Mr. Yakabuski: I hope you will indulge me a little bit. In this time in the House I want to respond to the member from Lanark–Carleton, but I don't know if with two minutes I've got time to get too deeply in it.

The House has become a very partisan place of late because we're getting ready for an election and of course everybody is trying to set their stakes down in the ground. But I did want to take this opportunity—because you don't get that many opportunities—to say thank you to the Minister of Health for a particular situation that he helped me with and thereby helped a constituent of mine. I had a situation where it was determined by a family's medical people that a procedure that needed to be done would be best done at a particular place in the United States. I don't want to give too many details because I don't want to identify anybody. We met a bit of a block with the system, if you want to call it that. The matter was brought to my attention, and I took it personally to the Minister of Health. I must say that he reacted immediately, and his assistant Chris Farley-Ratcliffe was also very involved. I did want to take this opportunity, because this is a partisan place at times and we fail to

recognize sometimes how the place actually does work in a much better way to help us all. I would be remiss if I did not say in a public way that the minister intervened and helped us to a large degree and helped that family. To make a long story short, that procedure is now scheduled to be done in the United States, as was indicated would be best for the patient. I appreciate the help and the support of the minister on that matter.

Mr. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity. As I mentioned before, in listening to my colleague when he talks about his days, it's the same thing. This morning I was in two schools. I was at a high school—

Interjection.

Mr. Ouellette: No, no. But if you got in trouble, boy, you were afraid to come home and tell dad because you were more afraid of what happened at home, in the days when I went to school, than what happened at school. Part of it was that at that time the parents always, as the member mentioned, supported and backed up what took place in the school. But a lot of times now—I have a 10-year-old.

Interjection.

Mr. Ouellette: That's exactly it: You were more afraid of the discipline you got at home than at school. The parents backed up the teachers and the school and the system and that learning environment.

Now what we're doing is adding to the responsibilities in the school, having them take on more onus and responsibility. If you look at some of the sections, for example 310(1), where it speaks about how "A principal shall suspend a pupil if he or she believes that the pupil has engaged in any of the following ... or in other circumstances where engaging in the activity will have an impact on the school climate"—having an impact on the school climate. You're talking about Internet bullying, but there are so many other factors that, if I get a chance to debate later on, I'm going to try and bring forward. How much responsibility can you put on the schools and how are you going to police that? How are you going to look into those things? And what onus and responsibility do you then give the school? Quite frankly, we pass more on to them and we remove some of the responsibility from—it has to come back to the families, in some way, shape or form, in terms of what takes place in those particular situations.

I very much appreciate the comments and look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Lanark–Carleton.

Mr. Sterling: Maybe I should seek unanimous consent to give the member for St. Catharines more time to talk about where he agrees with me.

I'd just like to use this opportunity to thank all the members who have commented with regard to my remarks. I always look forward to participating in changes to our education system, as there always will be changes. I stayed in our education system a long, long time: elementary school, high school, and I went to Carleton University for four years of engineering and to the

University of Ottawa for three years of law. I've been in school a lot of my life. I've got to tell you that I want at this time to thank not only all the people who were involved in my education but in my grandchildren's education and in the education of all young people across Ontario.

This is Education Week. Notwithstanding all the rules we set here, notwithstanding Bill 212 and all the other things, we must always rely on the trust we place in our teachers, our principals, our vice-principals and all the staff in our schools to take the best interests of our kids to heart. I believe they do that. I believe they do a tremendous job in the province of Ontario. We must always work with them to improve that system.

I think Bill 212 gives us the opportunity to go into other areas and look at tweaking the system we presently have. Therefore, I, along with members of my party, will be supporting this, so that we can give the system the opportunity to change, as it should, as time goes on.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bisson: I'm going to have an opportunity to add a couple of points to the debate that I, and I know many other members, are interested in; that is, praising the Minister of Health. No, no, I'm just joking there. He's not even listening. I was having fun with you, George.

I want to speak on two particular points of this bill. One of them is the issue of expulsion. This bill is certainly going in the right direction. I want to say at the outset that I'm going to support this initiative because I think it goes in the right direction—maybe not as much as some people would want, but when have we ever passed legislation around here where we got everything right? Generally, we're going in the right direction, and that is the issue for me.

One of the issues in this bill that is important is the process by which you can or can't expel a child or a young adult from school. I've always been of the view that kicking a kid out of school is, quite frankly, an admission of the failure of the system. It not only fails the child but I think it fails society in general.

I understand that teachers and principals and other kids sometimes are in a really tough spot with some kids in school who act out in a way that is disruptive in the classroom and that sometimes can be quite threatening to the students or the teacher. My future son-in-law, Chris Gardner, who is a teacher, is teaching up at Roland Michener presently. He had the good sense to meet my daughter and propose to her. I didn't have to put a shotgun to his head, so that's a good thing.

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: Well, I'm a father. I'm allowed to say—I take that back. It's kind of in bad taste, but you know what I'm saying.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: No, she's not going to be happy. The point is that my daughter has made the right choice. Sometimes you have humour in things and it doesn't come out right. That didn't come out right, and I'm the first to admit it.

Anyway, my point is that he tells me, as other teachers across the system tell me, that at times there are kids who really act out, who have real big problems when it comes to the support they may not be getting at home, or sometimes they're getting the support at home but the child has difficulties, and the challenge that it presents to teachers. Teachers are hard pressed at times to have the kind of resources they need in order to support those kids, to try to move those kids through the system in a way that they can benefit at the end. I've always felt that in the end, throwing the child out of school as a way of dealing with a problem really only transfers the problem from the school to somewhere else in our society, and I think that doesn't serve any of us.

I want to talk specifically about a couple of cases, because I've had the opportunity, as other members in this House have, to deal with parents with children who have autism. Far too often, these kids are really the ones who are at risk. I wonder how many of the kids who are basically expelled from school come from the group of kids who have autism.

I'll go through a couple of cases, but I'm going to talk about one, first of all, just from memory. I was dealing with somebody in my own constituency whose child is now in grade 1. The child has autism and is not able to get the kind of support he needs in the classroom. They don't allow IBI therapy within the classroom, and this is something that is very much needed.

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We know by stats, for example, that kids who do get IBI therapy, who have an intensive behavioural therapist to work with them, by and large, succeed at a rate far greater than kids who don't get that kind of support. I have a particular instance in one of the schools in our community where the child needs IBI, and the school does not have the kind of support it needs to deal with this child. As a result, they asked that the child be withdrawn from the classroom. What does that do at the end of the day? Why not try as best we can to provide the type of support needed so that this child is able to develop and make the best life for the child? But the problem is that the school does not have the type of resources that it needs to provide the kind of service that child needs within the classroom.

The teacher's aides who are there to assist with the child, because there are teachers' aides in pretty well all of our schools, are not properly trained to deal with IBI. They are well meaning and they very much want to try to work hard. Certainly support specialists within schools do all they can to help kids, but dealing with kids with autism is a whole training in itself.

I just want to bring to the attention of the House a couple of cases that I was talking about to my colleague Shelley Martel, the member for Nickel Belt, earlier. One is the Downer family. The child's name is Joshua. I'm just going to read from the Peterborough Examiner, December 2, 2006, one story of one child. It says the following:

“Ruth-Ann and Sean Downer expected their four-year-old to start learning new things when he began junior kindergarten in September. They even expected to learn a few things themselves.

“But neither expected to learn the cost of ensuring their autistic son Joshua’s education would be tearful exchanges with teachers, months of research and a game of hardball with administrators.

“After Joshua spent four days in a junior kindergarten class at Immaculate Conception School in East City ... the Downers were told to withdraw their son” from school.

“The teacher felt Joshua posed a safety threat when he tried to leave the classroom and there were too few resources to deal with him....”

It goes on to talk about what happened. The child was withdrawn from the school. In this particular case, the child wanted to leave the classroom—I don’t know, to go to the washroom or whatever it might be—and the teacher didn’t have the resources to deal with the child, and the child was having an episode. As a result of not having the resources to deal with Joshua, the child was withdrawn from school.

They were told, “Why don’t you put your child in a private daycare if you need a place to bring him?” What an answer to give parents, for a school to tell the parents: “Rather than sending your kid to school like every other child, you’re going to have to send your kid to a private daycare.” It took them a couple of months to look at what they could do and how they’re able to best serve their child. But it’s quite telling because it’s the story of what a lot of parents normally go through. I’ll just read to the end of this.

“The Downers spent almost two months researching their rights, then November 22 at about midnight, they e-mailed a letter to the school board, politicians, the media and trustees.

“By 7:30 a.m. the next day,” they got a call from the school board and by 9:30 a.m., there was a meeting set up to assess Joshua. Eventually, Joshua was returned to school.

These parents had to undergo a fair amount of stress, along with what it meant to Joshua himself, of having the child out of the school system because the school felt that they were not able to deal with the child, as they didn’t have the support services to properly care for Joshua. The response was, “Let the child go home.”

I just say to the government across the way that this is wrong. We need to support kids in school. One of the things that we need to do is to allow the intensive behavioural therapists into the schools so that they’re able to deal with the child when they’re having their episodes and to help train the teacher and teacher assistants, by way of example, in how to deal with the child. Eventually, the child is able to do better.

Again, I use the stats that I’ve read somewhere. The question was, if there are 100 kids in school under the current system of dealing with children with autism, what percentage of those kids who get minimal services, as are

presently given through our school boards, are going to succeed in the end? The number is somewhere around 25%. When we look at kids who are having therapy and are able to utilize IBI therapy, the number is closer to 50%. Clearly there is a correlation between providing the child with the type of support services they need for them to succeed.

I want to bring up another case, and this one is just as traumatic as the first one. The child’s name in this case is Ian, and the grandparents are the caregivers for this child. I’m just going to read a little about what happened here. This is the grandparents writing the letter, John and April. It says, “Our grandson’s education assistant attended a one-day seminar.” So the training that the education assistant got to deal with young Ian was a one-day seminar getting him prepared to deal with the child as he came in. When the child got to school and was in his first day of school, “Within 30 minutes he was placed in a physical restraint by two adults. With a little more training and a little more understanding,” that would never have needed to happen. The point is that the education assistant, not knowing how to deal with the child, felt that the only recourse was to restrain the child. “It was a big trigger when he was asked what he wanted to do.” They’re talking about the child. The child was asked by the teacher, “What would you like to do?” He said, “I would like to play with Play-Doh.” The unfortunate reality is that two other kids were playing with the Play-Doh and there was no Play-Doh for him. As a result, the child was escorted—not pushed physically and hurt, but he was physically sort of corralled—towards another play area, and that child took it the wrong way and it caused an episode. As a result of the episode, the child was physically restrained by two adults in some sort of constraint, straps of some type.

Imagine a kid in their first 30 minutes in school, and the first experience of the school system is of that type. Clearly, that is not an experience that is going to bode well for the child.

As my good friend and colleague the member for Nickel Belt has been on for a long time, we need to get this government to hold to its promise in the last election; that is, first, to make sure we fund IBI therapy for kids over age six, and second, to make sure we provide the funding necessary for kids who need this type of support within the classroom. If they don’t get it, the only people we’re hurting in the end, besides the child, is ourselves as society. I think it speaks badly of what we’re doing in the education system.

I want to say that overall our education system is a very good one. I don’t want people to think for one second that I’m arguing that somehow or other teachers and schools and school boards aren’t doing a great job. We have one of the best public education systems in the world. We have lots to be proud of. We have lots of good examples of success stories within our school system. It has served us well over the years and continues to serve us well and is made better as time goes by and as we start to learn. But there are certain areas where we’re really

having difficulty, and one of those is the whole issue of giving services to children with special needs within the classroom. There is a long way to go. Far too often there's no diagnosis of the child's situation, and far too often the child is left unattended. A year, two years, three years go by, and finally, by the time we do the type of investigation that needs to be done to determine what the problem is with the child, we've lost valuable time, and as a result that child falls further and further behind. Obviously, one of the things we need to do better is the whole IPRC process where we identify children at risk, that we're able to properly assess them in a reasonable time so we can diagnose what the issue is for the child and then figure out what's the best way to deal with those children.

2120

I travel to and from the constituency of Timmins—James Bay every week by Air Ontario, being from Timmins, and other members who travel to Ottawa probably see the same thing I do. We have a number of children who travel on a regular basis from northern Ontario to provincial schools here in southern Ontario to the French system in Ottawa. Those kids have been identified as having special needs. We're not able to provide the service for those kids within our home school boards, so they're transported every week to a provincial school and back home every weekend. I've noted, over the years of travelling with these children, that some of these kids will be in the provincial school system for just a year, where they go to a special school to deal with their issues, and then they go back into the mainstream school at home. When I have come back into contact with these kids—because you're asked to speak at schools and you recognize one of the kids you've travelled with for a year on the aircraft—I see that those kids are doing well. There are some kids who tend to go longer. I know one young boy and one young girl who have been travelling at least three years, that I can think of, who have special needs in education. I can see already, over that time, that these kids are getting a lot better at coping with their situations and are able to excel, quite frankly, within the system afterwards. It shows that if you make those investments to support kids in their time of need, in the end that is something that will serve them well.

J'ai eu l'occasion—c'est une occasion que tu ne veux jamais avoir—mais quand même, c'est la situation où on se fait contacter dans nos bureaux de comté par des parents qui ont des problèmes dans le système d'éducation. Une des affaires qu'on voit assez souvent et qui est sérieuse dans le système, c'est l'incapacité du système de traiter les enfants et de donner du support aux enfants qui ont des difficultés d'apprentissage.

J'ai eu une situation dernièrement avec des parents dans la communauté de Hearst où ils ont essayé d'aller chercher auprès du conseil scolaire les services dont leurs enfants ont besoin dans le système. Pour des parents qui n'ont jamais eu l'occasion de revendiquer leur droit et le droit de leurs jeunes, des fois ce n'est ni apparent, ce n'est pas facile; des fois ils pensent qu'ils sont seuls et

qu'il n'y a personne d'autre qui est dans la situation avec eux, et des fois ils ne savent pas quoi demander au système scolaire ou aux élus. Ils ne savent pas quelles questions ils doivent poser, des fois.

Ça m'amène à ce point : qu'une chose qu'on a besoin de faire, c'est d'insister dans notre système sur faire donner l'information aux parents quand ils ont des problèmes avec le système scolaire. J'ai toujours pensé qu'on a besoin d'avoir—pas nécessairement un ombudsman—mais qu'on a besoin d'avoir quelque part où des parents ou des élèves peuvent appeler pour dire, « J'ai tel et tel problème. Quels sont mes droits? Quels programmes existent dans le système scolaire? Qui peut m'aider? À qui est-ce que je peux parler? » Parfois, ce qui arrive, c'est que les parents ont un problème avec le système d'éducation de leurs enfants, spécialement avec les soins spéciaux à l'école, et ce qui arrive, c'est qu'ils demandent aux professeurs et aux principaux—et possiblement à quelqu'un dans le système scolaire—et premièrement, des fois la personne à qui ils posent leurs questions ne sait pas qu'il y a un certain programme ou initiative pour les aider.

Numéro deux, les parents eux-mêmes ne savent pas quelles questions poser. Une des affaires qu'on a besoin de faire, c'est de trouver des spécialistes qu'on peut mettre dans le système scolaire—pas nécessairement dans chaque conseil, mais au moins pour avoir quelque part un central où les parents peuvent téléphoner et dire, « J'ai un problème avec mon enfant. Qu'est-ce que je peux faire? Qu'est-ce qui est disponible? » Là, ils auront au moins des avis de quelqu'un qui comprend le système d'éducation pour être capable de les envoyer dans la bonne direction, et ils auront aussi quelqu'un qui peut les représenter pour les aider et qui est capable de développer la solution nécessaire pour leurs jeunes dans le système scolaire.

Le dernier point que je veux faire, c'est dans la question des tests obligatoires. Ce n'est pas toujours apparent que le système de tests obligatoires, à la fin de la journée, est aussi valable qu'on le pense. Est-ce que ça fait du bon sens de faire des tests aux jeunes pour savoir où ils en sont? Oui. Est-ce qu'on doit faire des tests? Je pense que ce n'est pas une méchante idée, mais est-ce que la valeur de ces tests est exactement aussi bonne qu'on la pense? Je pense que la réponse est « non ». Ce qui est arrivé, quand nous allions au système d'éducation dans les années 1960 et 1970 : on avait des examens obligatoires qu'on écrivait à la fin de l'année pour le secondaire. En neuvième et dixième, pour aller en treizième année, on écrivait un test et on avait besoin de passer un standard provincial. Ça fait des années, et on a pu demander que ces tests-là soient faits.

Au moins avec des tests provinciaux, on avait le sens que le jeune avait appris ce qu'il était supposé d'apprendre, parce que, ce qu'il était supposé d'apprendre était sur ses tests. On était capable de voir si le jeune avait avancé au degré qu'il avait besoin.

Le seul problème avec ce système-là, c'est qu'on apprend qu'il y a un problème seulement à la fin de

l'année. On a besoin de trouver une manière d'identifier le problème avant, afin d'être capable de faire des corrections et d'aider les jeunes à avancer. Ce qui arrive avec nos tests qu'on fait comme cela, nos tests provinciaux : ce ne sont pas des examens, mais seulement des tests pour avoir un peu un « snapshot », une idée de jusqu'à quel point le système scolaire répond aux besoins des jeunes.

Le point que j'ai fait plus tôt et que je veux faire dans ce débat dans le temps qui reste, c'est que les professeurs préparent les jeunes pour les tests afin d'être capables de passer. Ce n'est pas nécessairement du mal, c'est ce que les profs sont supposés de faire, mais à quel point est-ce que ça nous donne quelque chose? Ce qu'on sait, c'est que les profs ont fait une bonne job à préparer les jeunes et les jeunes ont bien fait dans leurs tests. C'est ça que

cela nous dit. Mais à la fin de la journée, est-ce que ça nous donne vraiment un portrait de l'instance de ce jeune-là dans sa vie scolaire? Je pense que la réponse est « non ». On a besoin de revisiter cette question-là pour voir de quelle manière on est capable de faire un « assessment » d'à quel point les jeunes sont rendus qui nous donne vraiment le sens : est-ce que le jeune a été bien formé? Je ne suis pas trop convaincu qu'à la fin de la journée, on le fait avec le système présent.

Merci pour m'avoir donné ce temps de parler avec vous ce soir.

The Acting Speaker: The time now being 9.30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2126.

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Jeff Leal
Gilles Bisson, Bob Delaney,
Andrea Horwath, Jeff Leal, Dave Levac,
Gerry Martiniuk, Bill Murdoch,
Lou Rinaldi, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Ernie Parsons
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Khalil Ramal
Ted Chudleigh, Peter Fonseca,
Kuldip Kular, Jeff Leal,
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro, John O'Toole,
Ernie Parsons, Khalil Ramal
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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