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(Hansard)**

SP-48

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SP-48

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Estimates

Ministry of Education

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Budget des dépenses

Ministre de l'Éducation

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Monday 9 September 2024

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43^e législature

Lundi 9 septembre 2024

Chair: Steve Clark
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : Steve Clark
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Monday 9 September 2024

Lundi 9 septembre 2024

The committee met at 1300 in committee room 2.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. This afternoon, we're meeting to consider the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Education for a total of three hours. We're joined today by Hansard, broadcast and recording, legislative research.

From the Ministry of Education, we're pleased to be joined today by the Honourable Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education; deputy minister Shannon Fuller; and a number of members from the Ministry of Education's staff.

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

Are there any questions from members of the committee before we start? Seeing none, I'm now required to call vote 1001, which sets the review process in motion.

We're going to begin, Minister, with a statement of no more than 20 minutes. I will interrupt you briefly with, "One minute remaining."

Minister, the floor is yours. Welcome to the committee.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Good afternoon, colleagues. It's great to see everyone here today. I'm pleased to join you to discuss the Ministry of Education's upcoming plans to support students and children across Ontario. I'm joined here by my officials, my wonderful deputy minister, and my staff.

It is a big honour for me to serve as Ontario's Minister of Education and lead initiatives to ensure that every child has access to quality education, child care and opportunities for success. I've had the pleasure of working on a number of different government files focused on addressing the diverse needs of children, families and educators. This has provided me with a wider context to the opportunities within this ministry.

On a more personal note, as a parent of three daughters, I've had the privilege of witnessing first-hand the profound impact that dedicated teachers and child care work-

ers can have on students' lives. I've also had the opportunity to work as an educator at the college level, teaching in front of the classroom, with many students who had come directly from our K-to-12 system.

While I know this committee is a time to discuss numbers, I want to take a moment, as the new Minister of Education, to talk about my priorities in this role. In my first month as minister, I have made an effort to be present in schools and child care centres, hearing from students, parents, educators, trustees and staff. I spoke to union leadership in my first 24 hours as Minister of Education and have checked back at the end of the first week of school.

As I've received briefings from ministry officials, many of them behind me, I've travelled to sites in four different school boards in southwestern Ontario, central Ontario and in Toronto. These conversations and real-world lived experiences are as foundational to me as these briefings that I've received. Teachers, students, parents, custodians, support staff, members of the school board, bus drivers, ECEs, crossing guards, EAs, principals, school trustees, administrative assistants, cafeteria workers and every education partner offer critical input on our education system. I understand that it takes a village to get a child from kindergarten to grade 12, and I'm grateful for everyone's effort and energy in doing this critical work.

A spirit of collaboration and listening will guide me as education minister. I look forward to hearing from real people and learning how we can continue to make Ontario's schools some of the best in the world.

At the end of the day, I want to continue to deliver a first-class public education, child care system, early years program in our province—one that teaches them to be caring members of their community, one that opens their minds to the world around them, and one that trains them for good-paying jobs that will fulfill them.

Whether you're in this committee room or across the province as an educator or parent, we are all here fighting for the best future for students in Ontario. With this mission in mind, we are setting new records in public education that will have a lasting impact on our students. We have secured an increase of \$745 million in core education funding, bringing our total investment to \$29 billion. This is the largest investment in public education in our province's history. Our \$3.49-billion commitment to special education is unprecedented, ensuring that every student receives the support that they need. We're leading

with a \$118-million investment in student mental health—an increase of 577% since we took office—because the well-being of our students is at the heart of everything we do.

We're not just investing in education; we're building it, with \$1.3 billion dedicated to new schools and projects to create more student spaces. This supports 60 new school-related projects and creates over 27,000 new student spaces and over 1,700 new licensed child care spaces.

We're also making sure that every student has a smooth journey to their education, with a significant investment of \$1.3 billion in student transportation, supporting more than 870,000 students to get to and from school every day. This is just a glimpse of the profound impact that we're making.

My predecessor, Minister Stephen Lecce, took a decisive step by introducing groundbreaking legislation to transform educational standards and empower both students and parents. In June 2023, the Ontario government passed the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, better known as Bill 98, to improve education system accountability and enhance the experience of students and parents. Subsequent to the bill's passage, the ministry worked with education partners, including school boards, to implement many of the regulations, policies and other measures in the act. These measures refocus school boards on their core activities: improving academic achievement, developing students' life and job skills, and enhancing transparency for students and families.

Our government strongly believes in supporting students when they've faced incredibly difficult circumstances. We want our schools to be places where students feel safe and supported. That's why we expanded eligibility for therapy and counselling for all student subjects of alleged sexual abuse by Ontario certified teachers. We also improved discipline processes at the Ontario College of Teachers and College of Early Childhood Educators, to create a zero-tolerance system for any educator convicted of a sexual offence, along with an expanded public registry of all discipline decisions.

These are just a few examples of the initiatives we've put forward. We will continue taking action to better support students and parents. This landmark legislation is not just a set of rules; it is a promise to our parents and students: a promise of clarity, empowerment and unwavering support.

We recognize that uninterrupted in-person learning is essential for student success. Students deserve the full school experience, including field trips, extracurricular activities and learning alongside their peers. That's why, in the 2023-24 school year, we continued to work tirelessly and successfully negotiated central agreements with all four teacher federations and the remaining education worker unions, securing a stable and conducive learning environment without strikes.

Additionally, we worked with the Ontario College of Teachers to reduce certification decision times for internationally educated teacher applicants nearly in half, from 120 calendar days to 60 business days.

We also introduced a new transitional certificate for eligible students enrolled in regular teacher education programs to work in publicly funded schools while completing their studies. Since the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, over 2,100 teachers with a transitional certificate have been hired. This initiative will offer teacher candidates enhanced hands-on learning, better preparing them for the teaching profession, while also providing school boards flexibility to address short-term supply teacher needs.

This year, we will see a continued focus on our curriculum. We're getting back to basics by strengthening foundational knowledge in literacy and math, to provide students with the skills they need after graduation. Additionally, we will work to increase the transparency and accountability of the education system and facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments for students both online and offline. Every student needs a welcoming space where they feel valued, respected and empowered to learn, and we can then prepare them for strong careers.

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Yet, we face a pressing challenge: the urgent need to build more schools to support a growing Ontario. As a mother, I understand that the local school is the heart of the community and that it's so important for young families to have a school that's close to home.

As I mentioned earlier, we announced \$1.3 billion to support the construction and expansion of 60 schools across the province. Through our new measures to build modern schools faster, school boards are encouraged to standardize the design of new school construction, identify opportunities to work together on joint-use school projects and bring forward shovel-ready proposals. This will reduce construction timelines by up to 50% to meet the unprecedented path of growth across the province. I am proud to say these measures will provide Ontario students with state-of-the-art learning spaces and offer more Ontario families access to child care.

In addition, we are making significant new investments for the upcoming school year to support essential areas. We're prioritizing mental health initiatives, enhancing safety measures in schools and providing robust supports for special education.

These efforts are underpinned by our commitment to transparency and accountability. We have restructured our funding model to make it easier for parents and guardians to understand how resources support student needs.

As I mentioned earlier, the Ontario government has invested \$28.6 billion through core education funding and \$403 million for responsive education programs and funding to external partners for a total of \$29 billion, our largest investment yet in our children's future.

We're investing \$95 million to enhance literacy supports across our schools, ensuring every student from kindergarten to grade 3 receives the evidence-based screening, reading programs and specialized instruction they need to develop essential reading skills for lifelong success.

Maintaining and improving our school facilities is crucial. A \$2.5-billion investment to support ongoing oper-

ations and \$1.4 billion to renew and improve schools will help ensure that learning spaces are conducive to academic success.

A \$10-million investment for school security infrastructure, including vape detectors, will maintain secure learning environments where students feel safe and supported.

Our priority remains steadfast: to build a strong foundation for our students. This means focusing on back-to-basics learning to boost reading, writing, math and other STEM disciplines, and making sure that every child can succeed. Beginning September 2024, students will learn from new and up-to-date curriculum, including a de-streamed grade 9 Exploring Canadian Geography course, new grades 9 and 10 business study courses, new grades 9 and 10 technological education courses and a new grade 9 English course for French-language schools.

New additional mandatory learning on mental health literacy is now included in the grade 10 career studies course. It will help young people develop necessary skills they can depend on to manage stress and know where to turn when they need support.

The ministry will continue to ensure students learn key financial literacy skills which begin in grade 1 and continue in every grade, through mandatory learning, to grade 10. We also have financial literacy modules to support learning in the classroom and at home.

We are also ensuring our youngest learners are well prepared for success. Starting in September 2025, the kindergarten curriculum will include new mandatory learning focused on early reading, math and STEM education.

We continue to integrate the values of diversity and inclusion into the curriculum, encouraging students to embrace diverse perspectives and cultivate empathy. Beginning in September 2025, we will introduce new mandatory learning in grades 7, 8 and 10 history on the exceptional contributions and history of Black Canadians who helped build Canada, and new mandatory learning in the grade 10 Canadian history course about the Holocaust and Holodomor famine's impact on the Jewish and Ukrainian communities in Canada.

The ministry is also taking proactive steps to ensure every student acquires financial literacy learning and other essential life skills for the future success in their lives. Starting in September 2025, students must complete a new financial literacy graduation requirement as part of their grade 10 math course, to demonstrate practical skills and knowledge in financial literacy. This learning will equip students with the skills to create a budget and manage their money, protect themselves from financial scams and plan for long-term investments, such as saving for their education or buying a car.

We are also conducting consultations on important life skills and the return of modernized home economics education to build a strong foundation that sets students up for success.

To ensure all students have the support they need to thrive academically, we are working with partners to

identify how we can support school boards in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. This way, we can provide consistent, high-quality education, ensuring that every student receives the attention and guidance that they need. It's particularly important for the French education sector, so we can build on our government's French teacher recruitment and retention strategy, and empower students to excel in French. Our dedicated teachers inspire. They guide and tirelessly support students, helping them strengthen foundational skills and explore their interests.

I will now pass it over to my deputy for additional opening comments.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Good afternoon. I'm Shannon Fuller, deputy minister of the Ministry of Education.

I just want to say how pleased I and our leadership team are to be here with you today to talk through the important work that we have the privilege of being able to do to support the education and the child care system in Ontario.

As the minister noted, this year we're continuing to increase our investment in education, with a total budget of \$39.3 billion, which is an increase of 2.9% over the 2023-24 estimates. This includes a \$28.6-billion investment in core education funding that is ensuring we continue to have a successful school year for our students, from kindergarten right through to grade 12. It also includes an \$870-million increase in funding for child care, paired with a new funding formula that's providing more predictability and stability for our child care providers across the province.

We are committed to continuing to deliver a world-class education system built on the investments that we just discussed and focusing, as the minister noted, on a back-to-basics approach on education and preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow.

We're also focused on delivering the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act to focus on increasing transparency and accountability for funding, for parents to be better engaged in how the province funds education and how school boards spend public dollars that impact their child's education.

We're also very focused on the delivery of high-quality, affordable early learning and child care, and we know the critical role that that plays in supporting children's learning, development and well-being while parents go to school, work to support their families and contribute to economic growth and productivity.

The Canada-wide early learning and child care system will help Ontario achieve average fees of \$10 a day per average—for children under the age of six by 2025. Ontario families with children under the age of six in the CWELCC-enrolled child care programs have seen child care fees reduced by an average of 50% from 2020 levels, saving parents approximately \$6,500 per eligible child, on average, for a full year, with many parents in communities across the province saving additional funding from that.

I'm looking forward to being able to discuss this and many of the other areas that you're interested in hearing more about today with our team, who are all here behind us. We have Didem Proulx, who is here to be able to dis-

cuss any areas of detail with regard to capital and business support; Andrew Davis, who is our assistant deputy minister from the education labour and finance division; Doreen Lamarche, who is the executive director of the education finance office; Holly Moran, who is here as the ADM responsible for early years and child care; Yael Ginsler, who is our ADM of the student achievement division; Claudine Munroe, our ADM of Indigenous education and the well-being division; Phil Graham, who's here to support the work that we do in strategic policy and planning; Clayton La Touche, who's here as the student support and field services division representative; Giselle Basanta, who is the ADM of equity and the governance secretariat; Didier Pomerleau, who's here as the assistant deputy minister of the French-language education division—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got one minute left.

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Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much—Paul Cleaver, acting as the CAO and assistant deputy minister for our corporate management and services division; Rocco Passero, who is our CAO, CIO, and ADM of the community services I&IT cluster; and Ian Ross, who's the director of our communications branch.

We're very proud of the work that our team does each and every day, and I'm glad you'll have the opportunity to meet with them this afternoon. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): I want to thank you for your presentation.

We're now going to begin the questions and answers, in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition, 10 minutes for the independent member, and 20 minutes for the government members. The time will be allotted in that way.

As always, I would ask members of the committee to direct your comments through the Chair.

And just like the deputy minister did when she was speaking, if any of either the ADMs or the other staff in the ministry are going to speak, I would ask you, for the purposes of Hansard, to state your name and your title prior to making your presentation.

With that, if there are no questions, I'll turn it over for the initial 20 minutes. MPP Pasma, you can go ahead.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much, Chair, and let me start by congratulating you on your new appointment.

And there are many congratulations to go around. I haven't met you yet, Ms. Fuller, so congratulations on your appointment—and of course, Minister Dunlop, on your very new appointment. I really appreciate that you're here. I'm sure it's not easy to walk into estimates only a few weeks after being appointed, but we do appreciate that you're here, and I know that parents and education partners are grateful, because they're really hoping for some answers.

I was very glad to hear you say that one of your goals as education minister is to build some of the best schools in the world here in Ontario. Our schools are certainly

facing some challenges, and as a parent I would love to see those challenges addressed so that my kids and all our kids in the province are getting the best possible education.

I recognize that since you're so new, you might not know the answer to all the questions today, so I'm hoping that you're prepared to have the ministry follow up in writing where you do not know the answer. I'm also happy, as somebody who has been the education critic for a couple of years, to follow up with more information if I am saying something that's totally new to you this afternoon.

I want to start with something pretty basic. Do you know what your government's 2024 budget said inflation would be for 2024?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. It's a pleasure to work with you as a critic, as well. I think I've been quite open, in my last few weeks as being the minister, that I will have an open door policy. I've reached out with union leaders, and I look forward to working with you, as well, as the critic.

And thank you for recognizing my—this will be my fourth week on the job, coming to estimates. And I thank my team for being here with me.

I'm going to pass the question to my deputy to assist with that.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much, Minister.

As mentioned, we're continuing to build the investment in education, with a total budget of \$39.3 billion, and I'm pleased to have—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry; I just want to be clear. The question was the level of information that, in the government's 2024 budget, they said it would be for 2024—not the education budget.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Inflation.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Inflation.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: The inflation budget for the entire government of Ontario's funding?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What the government's budget predicted that inflation would be—so not for government spending, but what inflation in the province of Ontario would be for this year.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Well, we're here talking about education specifically. I can talk about the investments that we're making. You mentioned about schools early on. We've consistently allocated approximately \$1.4 billion each year to school boards to renew and improve their school facilities—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to reclaim my time, then, Chair, because the answer to that question is 2.6%.

So my next question is, do you know what the per student funding increase for this year's core education funding is, according to the ministry's own documents?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Yes, of course. I'm pleased to have Doreen Lamarche from our finance division come and speak to that. Thank you for the question.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Actually, maybe before I pass it over to the ADM, I want us to be clear that we are continuing to increase our investment in education, with a total budget

of \$39.3 billion, which is a just over a billion-dollar increase, or 2.9%, compared to the 2023-24 estimates.

I will now pass it back to our ADM to break that down further.

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: Good afternoon. I'm Doreen Lamarche. I'm the executive director in the education finance office of the education labour and finance division.

Thank you for the question on the core education funding. It was released in April 2024. Total education funding is projected to increase by 2.7%.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: My question was about the per student increase.

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: Yes. So whenever you look at total core education funding, there are a number of factors. There's enrolment growth that contributes into our funding formula. So if you deduct the enrolment growth, then the per pupil amount is projected to be about 1.9%.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So, on the one hand, we have the government saying, "Inflation is going to be 2.6% this year," and on the other, "Per student funding"—which actually recognizes the growth enrolment—"is only increasing 1.9%." So education funding overall is increasing less than the rate of inflation for the sixth year in a row under this government, and an increase in funding that is less than the rate of inflation is actually a cut to funding.

But this cut this year might actually be worse than it appears, because the ministry documents also show that \$1.4 billion of that core education funding is not actually being allocated to schools and students; it's for something that the document calls "planning provision amounts." And I've heard from trustees that in briefings with the ministry about the core education funding, they are being told not to expect to see any of this money, that it will not be going to school boards to spend on in-school supports, which is a big concern, because if you remove this \$1.4 billion from the core education funding, that's almost 5% of the total that is not going to our kids and to our classrooms.

So, my first question is, what is this \$1.4-billion fund for planning provision amounts?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Before I pass it back to the ADM, I want to be very clear that we have—and we will continue to increase funding in education every single year of our mandate.

ADM, would you like to speak further to the \$1.4 billion?

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: Yes. Thank you for the question.

In education funding, a large part of the process is forecasting how many students will be in the province of Ontario, and so as we release education funding every year, the numbers can fluctuate, and therefore there is a notion of a planning provision that we include into core education funding. This funding will be provided to school boards. So it will not be removed from core education funding, and therefore that 2.7% is expected to actually materialize. In addition to that, funding could actually increase further to that as enrolment grows or if other

factors that impact the core education funding formula actually materialize through the course of the year.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Last year, the planning provision amount was \$300 million; this year, it's \$1.4 billion. You're projecting a 0.8% increase in enrolment—to say that 5% of the overall budget is being set aside for potential enrolment that you can't predict. That's just not adding up for me.

Can you walk me through how you figure you need to set aside 5% of the budget in case there's an unexpected spike in enrolment?

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: There are a number of factors that feed into core education funding. About two thirds of the funding formula is responsive to enrolment, so that's a portion of a possible increase. There are other factors, as well, such as changes in fuel-escalation costs for transportation, for example. We also have, as you will know, successfully landed collective agreements with our partners, through the course of the 2023-24 school year. There are amounts built in there, as well, to account for some of that increase in salaries for those staff.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So this is all going to school boards; you just don't know which school boards, at the moment—that you released the core funding documents?

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: In the spring, we release core education funding, well in advance of the school year. Central bargaining went through the spring and the summer, and it's just still wrapping up. We have a couple of teacher groups we are still working with, and therefore once all those agreements are landed, then the more detailed board-by-board numbers will be made available to school boards.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Is any of this funding being intended for remedies for Bill 124?

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: Bill 124 was largely settled in the 2023-24 school year, and therefore it has been accounted as part of our 2023-24 numbers.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So you're not anticipating that there will be additional funding this year going towards Bill 124 remedies?

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Ms. Doreen Lamarche: It should not be a material impact in our numbers. Of course, when you think about salary increases, one of our numbers at part of the base, obviously, when it goes forward, is part of that increase year over year, so it will have that impact for what was there in the base, being added to the salary increases coming up—but there shouldn't be anything materially more different in Bill 124 that was resolved in 2023-24, for which is accounted for in our public accounts.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

To come back to the minister: You mentioned that you intend that funding will increase every year under this government; as I said, it's increasing less than the rate of inflation every year. Inflation in Ontario, under your government, has been 17.5%. Through last year—that doesn't even take into account this year—per student funding has only grown 7.3%.

I hope you're not, like your predecessor, going to refuse to agree that 7.3% is less than 17.5%. That is essentially a big cut over the past six years and funding that is going into our schools, into our classrooms, into the front-line educators and supports that our kids need every single day, and one of the things that we are seeing that impact is the number of educators who are actually in our schools.

Do you know how many fewer educators we have in our schools now, compared to 2018, because of the fact that your government has been cutting funding through not keeping pace with inflation?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Today, we have more than 126,000 full-time equivalent teachers through publicly funded French and English public and Catholic school boards. Through teacher training programs, we are training an additional 5,500 to 6,000 new teachers every year. What are the results of that? Since 2018, the government has created nearly 4,000 new teaching positions to support students in math, in reading, in special education and a range of other areas.

But the challenges that we hear about from some of the school boards—are facing and are in a few specific areas. Teacher absenteeism is one of those. High rates of teacher absences increase the need for daily occasional teachers, who may not always be available. I can ask my deputy to speak to what we're doing on this—including a provincial task force with teacher federations and a new policy requiring school boards to improve attendance management practices.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much, Minister.

A key priority for us, certainly, is to ensure that we have the appropriate number of educators and that educators have what they need from a supply and demand perspective.

I'm happy to invite Phil Graham, our assistant deputy minister for strategic policy and planning, to come to the table to discuss that further.

Mr. Phil Graham: Good afternoon. I'm Phil Graham, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy and planning, Ministry of Education.

Thank you for the question.

We are working on a number of fronts with school boards to make sure they have a sufficient supply of qualified teachers.

As the deputy and the minister mentioned, there is a challenge that some school boards face with respect to occasional teachers, driven in large part by fairly high rates of teacher absenteeism. There are also some particular gaps in teachers with specific qualifications—qualifications that are highly specialized, such as technological education, French as a second language, and a few other areas. We have taken a number of steps to support school boards in the recruitment and retention in these areas. The minister mentioned, in her opening remarks, regulation changes that allow second-year teacher candidates in their initial teacher education program to also work as an occasional teacher, providing school boards with another option to source the qualified teachers they need to support students.

We've also done a lot of work with the Ontario College of Teachers, which has a role in certifying new teachers once they finish their education programs. What we've done, through their certification process, is to reduce the time it takes to certify internationally educated teachers, from 120 working days to 60 business days.

As was referenced, as well, working with teacher federations on the issue of teacher absences through a provincial working group—as well as a policy and program memorandum to help support school boards with their attendance management policies.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So, to answer my original question—there are 5,000 fewer educators in the province, thanks to the government's funding cuts, and hiring a few math coaches makes up for only 6% of the educator positions that we've lost. That's having a significant impact on our kids, with larger class sizes and kids not having the attention that they need from adults in the classroom to actually succeed.

Since we're on the subject of teacher shortages, I want to dig into that a little bit more. I find it a bit troubling that you are addressing the situation as teacher absenteeism. Yes, we are seeing higher rates of sick leave use, but we are also seeing that teachers are dealing with incredibly challenging situations in the classroom, including the problem of violence. Teachers are second only to firefighters and police officers in their use of WSIB for injuries. So I don't think we can address this as teachers abusing sick leave; this is teachers needing to use a very high rate of sick leave, and we should be asking why that is.

We are also seeing additional challenges that suggest that we have a real problem. There are 46,000 teachers in the province who are certified but not currently teaching in our education system, and if that doesn't say that we have a huge problem in our education system, I don't know what would.

We're seeing an average of 5,500 teachers retiring or resigning from the system annually, and I am hearing from teachers and principals alike that whereas teachers used to wait for Christmas or the end of the school year, now they are retiring the day that they are eligible—in some cases, even in September—because that's how eager they are to get out of our education system. And 17% of teachers are leaving within their first five years of teaching.

We're trying to address a recruitment and retention challenge. We have new teachers in teachers' college who are joining the system, and one out of five of them won't make it to five years in the system.

What are we going to do, meaningfully, to address the recruitment and retention problem in Ontario—other than blaming teachers for using sick leave?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I think there's a whole lot to unload in the comments you just made.

I think, too, to be clear, that nobody is blaming teachers for absenteeism—we're speaking to the fact of what we're hearing from school boards.

We're taking a very collaborative approach to dealing with the teacher shortage. As I already mentioned and as my ADM talked about, as well, we recognize that this isn't

just an Ontario issue; this is, frankly, a Canadian-wide issue that we're hearing about—teacher shortages. In my former role as Minister of Colleges and Universities, I was working with Minister Lecce, looking at opportunities to increase the number of teachers. We increased the number of French-language teacher spaces at the Université de l'Ontario français, looking at opportunities with the English boards, as well.

One other thing I wanted to clear up is—you keep talking about cuts to education. Let me be clear: Year after year after year, we've increased funding to education.

You talk about teachers leaving. We've increased the number of teacher spaces by 4,000.

I've talked to parents and to new teachers who are starting or have just started the school year—who are very excited to join the profession.

I'm going to pass it to my deputy.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much, Minister.

As the minister said, a whole variety of different types of initiatives are under way to support some of the issues that you've raised with us today.

I think it also may be helpful to invite Clayton La Touche to come and speak to us a little bit further about some of the important work that's happening across the system. But before we do that, I think Didier Pomerleau can talk a little bit about some of the important work happening in the French-language teacher space, as well.

Mr. Didier Pomerleau: Good afternoon. I'm Didier Pomerleau, ADM for French-language education.

This province and this ministry are very committed to the well-being of the French-language educational system and to French-language students' educational success. We wish and we work for access to a supportive learning environment for these students.

Therefore, I'd like to be able to talk a little bit about the French-language recruitment and retention strategy that we have been implementing for the past several years. There is \$23.6 million that has been invested so far in this strategy, \$17.2 million through the Ministry of Education; of that, \$12.7 million for French as a minority language, and the remaining \$4.5 million for French as a second language. The remaining \$6.4 million goes to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and there it's a 50-50 split between French as a first language and French as a second language.

This recruitment and retention strategy, which is done in partnership with the government of Canada as a funding partner, aims to build awareness of the French-language opportunities in teaching and of the teaching profession. It aims to reduce barriers to the teaching profession and teaching programs. It aims to increase flexibility in these programs, as well as to create more supportive teaching environments once teachers are hired, to make sure that they don't leave the profession.

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So what have we done specifically? Four areas of interaction: (1) in terms of teaching colleges—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to just reclaim my time, as exciting as this is.

I do want to point out that the plan has only produced 417 teachers in the first three years, which leaves you more than 1,000 teachers behind in the first three years.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute left in this round.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Yes. I will come back to the teacher shortage in the French system later because I think it's incredibly important to get right.

Since I only have a few seconds left, I just want to end this round by saying I think it's a problem if a cabinet minister in this government doesn't actually understand what inflation is and how it impacts the value of money over time. We're not talking about an abstract financial concept here. We are talking about something that is actually taking resources out of the classrooms of our children, who need more supports now following the pandemic, not less; who are struggling with mental health challenges, with a violent environment in school; who deserve to have small classes and caring adults around them. When the funding provided by the government doesn't keep up with inflation, that is a cut, and that is taking resources away from our children, and that is wrong.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll move to MPP Clancy. You have 10 minutes for your round of questions and comments.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm happy to be here today. I also want to recognize your new appointment. I'm glad to have you here today and to meet the wonderful staff who support you in your new role.

I'm also pleased that you took the time to reach out to our union partners. These are the biggest unions in Canada, and they represent important partners. I think that's something that was missing in the past few years, so I appreciate that you got that memo and have built strong relationships with our union partner groups.

I do appreciate a lot of the increases in funding. I know, when it comes to literacy, when it comes to some of the focus on cellphone bans and infrastructure, there's a lot of money that has been put into this budget that was really important.

I do want to echo my colleagues over here to just reiterate the gap between inflation and the per student grants. The stat that I found was that since 2018, it has equated to a \$1,200 cut per student.

I'll just give a few numbers. I'm hearing from partners across the province that there is a desire to address the funding formula and some of the areas where it falls short. Windsor is looking at a deficit of \$6.4 million; the Greater Essex board is at a deficit of \$9 million; Hamilton, \$1.8 million; Thames Valley, \$7.6 million; TDSB, \$66.5 million.

My first question is, what is your response to these school boards that are facing these massive gaps in their budget this year?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Overall, school boards are in good financial health, with an accumulated surplus of \$1.3 billion. Some 41 school boards, or almost 60%, are projecting to have a surplus or a balanced budget based on

their 2024-25 budgets—and those are estimates. Oversight of school board finances and adherence to balanced budget requirements under the Education Act are key responsibilities of the school boards.

Before I pass it to the deputy, I want to also include that school boards are accountable to parents and to students and the taxpayers for the quality of educational programs, student performance and the prudent management of their financial resources.

Deputy?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much, Minister.

As the minister said, school boards are in good financial health overall. School boards are projecting in-year positions for 2024-25. We see 36%, or 26 school boards, reporting an in-year surplus, with a total in-year surplus of \$11 million; 21%, or 15 school boards, are reporting a balanced in-year position; and 43%, or 31 school boards, are reporting in-year deficits, with a total deficit of \$200 million.

I'm pleased to have Doreen Lamarche join us back at the table to talk about this issue in further detail.

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: Thank you for the question.

When it comes to school board financial position, I think it's important to note the change in the reserve position. That's how much money school boards are sitting on, which is unspent funds from the government.

If we look back to 2002-03, school boards were sitting on approximately \$1 billion. If we look to the 2024-25 school year, school boards are actually sitting on \$1.9 billion. So this does show that school boards have a fair amount of reserves that they have available to them to help support their expenditures.

Oftentimes, we just inherently think that a deficit is a bad thing, but a deficit just means that it's money that's set aside for a future purpose. Because of how the school boards account—they follow public sector accounting standard rules—the only way they can access these reserves is by incurring an in-year deficit. So it's a bit of a complex accounting exercise, but it is no different than you and I putting money aside into a savings account, for example. And when you draw from that savings account, it is actually an in-year deficit that a school board incurs.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to challenge that. I think there are certain envelopes of funding where there is a gap between the amount of money they spend and the amount of money they get.

One of my local school boards—two of four, anyway, that I've spoken to recently talk about millions-and-millions-of-dollars gaps just in transportation, for example, between the amount that they're funded for and the amount that they pay. It doesn't cover taxis. It doesn't cover small minivans that we use for special education students. They talk about a cut in the amount that they get for gas.

So, with all due respect, I think I'm not hearing that from directors of education. They're quite stressed about the situation they're in. I don't think it is just an accounting error.

At least for transportation, can you comment on the gaps that are being shared with me in terms of the amount that they end up spending—because it seems it's very significant in the people that I've talked to.

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: I'll just start with an opening remark, and then I'll invite one of my colleagues up to chat specifically about transportation.

The core education funding model is built on the concept of average cost structures and, therefore, school boards have flexibility within the funding model, as the costs will differ between school boards for different lines. Therefore, as all of the funding is not necessarily enveloped for a very specific purpose, school boards have the flexibility to use those funds to address the needs on the ground that can vary from one school board to another.

Specifically about transportation, I can invite my colleague up to speak to that piece.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Is it fair to say, then, that maybe we can take a more nuanced approach, depending on if it's a northern board or an urban board, to look at different gaps that each board experiences? Definitely, I hear from your numbers that different percentages of school boards have different financial situations, but I hope that we can recognize those that are struggling and look at why.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Before we pass it to the ADM, I just want to talk about school bus transportation in general. We saw an increase this year of \$80 million. We spend \$1.3 billion in school transportation each year, so what this accounts to is a minimum 3% increase for all school boards across the province, with many school boards actually receiving double-digit funding. So there has been an increase.

I will pass it now to our ADM.

Ms. Didem Proulx: I'm Didem Proulx. I'm the ADM of the capital and business supports division of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Thank you for the question.

As the minister noted, there has been a significant increase in year-over-year funding for student transportation this year.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to mention that the student transportation funding model was new last year, and upon its introduction, it paid for a wide range of activities, from buses to local priorities. What is new this year is, following the release of the model last year, one of the things that came up was the smaller vehicles like minivans and specialized transportation. We worked with the sector throughout the course of last year, and this year's funding model actually does include funding for specialized vehicles. So I just wanted to—because you mentioned that you're hearing that some boards are pointing to that as a pressure, and I just wanted to say that in this year's model, we have already addressed that. It is fully funded, and that is why some boards are seeing the double-digit increases that the minister was referencing earlier.

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I also wanted to take this opportunity to reassure you that at least for the student transportation funding model,

where there are differences in costs like cost of fuel and some other operational realities in the student transportation funding model, there are differentiated rates for the northern boards.

With respect to your question of the new funding model, in order to ensure equity has some common reference standards—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got one minute remaining in this round.

Ms. Didem Proulx: —and some common elements— but ultimately, school boards that make decisions with respect to the policy parameters, like their own walk distances, the programs that they run, the transportation that they provide—so, every situation, every school board will be unique in the sense that they make decisions in terms of what they spend the money on and how they spend it, and we work closely with both boards and consortia on those—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'll interrupt you, because I just want to say one comment before we close: It was reported that there was a cut of 56 to 58 cents per litre. That was a statistic that was mentioned. And while we did talk about inflation being 2.6%, we know that in certain sectors like transportation, inflation of buying vehicles, paying for gas, paying for maintenance and the wages of school bus drivers have gone up beyond the rate of inflation.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move to the government's 20-minute rotation. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to Minister Dunlop and her significant team. It's a pleasure to see all of you after a summer that was never long enough.

I share the minister's deep interest for the future success of our students. I'm a mother. Like so many, I'm a member of a family, and I truly care about our kids' future. We have a growing population. Our government needs to continue to build schools so that students can prepare for the life and job skills that they need.

In Thornhill, I represent a significant community, and we have a very large growing population. I was very fortunate because just prior to Minister Lecce leaving education, he announced not one but two new schools, which is wonderful because we've got a growing population.

To that end, we need to ensure that children have access to state-of-the-art schools in communities so that they can get to back to basics and focus on reading and writing and math.

I know that this government is investing in schools like the VMC, as well as homes and hospitals and highways, but what is the government doing to support growth in Ontario, to ensure children who are attending schools can get so closer to home?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, MPP Smith.

On the first day back to school, I visited a brand new Catholic school in Toronto, Holy Angels, and it was very exciting. We had a tour with some of the staff and the principal. Going outside and talking with the students and their parents before they came in was amazing. These kids

were so excited to have a chance to see their new school, and they couldn't wait to see the gymnasium.

So it's good to see these brand new schools popping up everywhere.

Congratulations on the schools in your riding.

Ontario's population is projected to increase by almost 6.6 million over the next 24 years. As we grow, families will need state-of-the-art schools close to home and in their local communities.

While the Liberals, propped up by the NDP, are known for their track record of closing 600 schools across the province, it's this government, for the first time ever, that more than doubled the annual Capital Priorities Program funding to build and expand schools by 136%, from \$550 million to \$1.3 billion. This investment means 60 capital projects for new and expanded schools have received approval across the province. This will create over 27,000 new student spaces and over 1,800 child care spaces.

On a personal note, I also want to mention that I was just in southwest London to visit a new elementary school that is being built that will provide capacity for 800 students in a growing part of the province, and it was fantastic to see the progress that has been made since Minister Lecce was there in the spring.

Each year, the Ministry of Education invites school boards to submit requests for funding consideration to the Capital Priorities Program to address their highest-priority capital needs. Through this program, we provide funding for capital projects that address the need for new or expanded schools to address local accommodation pressures, address the needs of underserved French language rights holders, replace schools due to their condition, and create new licensed child care spaces in schools.

As the member mentioned, we have more than doubled our investment in capital funding, investing a historic \$1.3 billion through the 2023-24 Capital Priorities Program to support the construction and expansion of 60 schools across the province. This means that through one round of funding, we are supporting more than 27,000 new student spaces and almost 1,800 child care spaces. In July, the ministry launched the 2024-25 Capital Priorities Program, and the deadline for school boards to submit their priority projects is September 16, with an anticipated announcement in spring of 2025.

As Ontario continues to grow, we also recognize the importance of ensuring that school board capital assets are used effectively and efficiently to support the needs of those growing communities and ensure value for taxpayer dollars. This includes working closely with school boards, municipalities and other key partners to transform the education capital system to build modern schools faster, better utilize school capacity, and enhance accountability and transparency.

We are now requiring greater collaboration between school boards and municipalities to plan for the early and integrated development of school sites and the establishment of child care centres within schools to meet current and future needs, supporting school boards to use space more effectively, where appropriate, through joint-use

facilities—where schools of two or more boards in the same building and shared-use sites where a school is part of a larger building with multiple users, such as a school with a mixed-use condominium, and also streamlining and standardizing the identification and sale or lease of unused surplus school board property at fair market value, by implementing a new surplus disposition process to help support effective land use for complete communities now and in the future.

To help ensure that students at our existing schools continue to benefit, we are continuing to invest \$1.4 billion each year to renew and improve schools. We also have introduced time limits on spending this renewal funding to help ensure that it is used in a timely way and that students, staff and school communities benefit from improvements.

Taken collectively, these initiatives reflect a significant change in our approach to meeting the needs of students, families and communities. We all want more students to benefit from modern schools close to home.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for your presentation earlier and sharing your insights on how to build more schools closer to home.

In my community, we are very thankful for this government's hard work and the minister's leadership to build schools. Actually, there are two schools announced in my riding, and I'm looking forward for them to be built in the very near future. We know that children need a place to learn and cannot wait, like they did under the Liberals, forever for a new school. They need in-class learning and the full school experience of extracurricular activities, sports and clubs—a place where they can get back to basics, boosting their skills in writing, learning and math.

So now the government has more than doubled the funds to build schools—as MPP Smith asked earlier, about more and closer to home; now my question is how to make it faster.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Pang, for your work as my parliamentary assistant. It's much appreciated, and I'm learning a lot.

For the first time in Ontario's history, school boards are being encouraged to use standardized designs to build their approved projects. In fact, 81% of the new school builds our government announced this year, the 2023-24 capital priorities, are using standardized designs and speeding up the process to build schools faster for Ontario's families.

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This government is reducing construction timelines by 50%. And one of the things I believe parents will be most excited about is the fact that we are prioritizing projects that are shovel-ready and will be used for joint projects such as subsidized child care. Under these changes, Ontarians can expect to see school boards build schools faster and better utilize school capacity, enhancing accountability and transparency for taxpayers.

As previously mentioned, we introduced new measures that will cut school construction timelines up to 50% to

meet the unprecedented pace of growth across the province. These measures include:

- reforming the Capital Priorities Program to allow schools to request land priorities funding to support site purchase at the same time as making their capital priority submission;

- prioritizing shovel-ready projects and encourage the use of standardized designs; and

- reduce red tape with streamlined approval and reporting requirements.

Approximately 80% of ministry approvals are now completed in half of the time that it used to take.

We're also responding to the changing needs of the province by making it easier to have schools in mixed-use buildings like condominiums and requiring greater collaboration between school boards and municipalities to support complete communities.

To enhance accountability and transparency, the ministry has launched a new risk-based accountability framework for capital projects. We've also implemented project commitments for capital priority projects, which outline a clear budget, schedule and scope for each project. Project commitments facilitate streamlined approvals and help ensure timely correction if construction projects encounter issues.

Taken collectively, these initiatives reflect a significant change in our approach to meeting the needs of students, families and communities. We all want more students to benefit from modern schools faster.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Scott.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Minister, to you and your team, for your opening remarks and information.

I think we're on a roll: I've just had two new schools open this fall, obviously, last week, in Omeme and in Beaverton, so we're very excited. That has taken a few years to come about—so I was excited to hear about the increase in construction timelines so that we can build them faster.

I think what I have heard over the many, many years is getting back to the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic—but we call it math, I guess, now. I've heard that from parents, and I've seen it in my own nieces—they're in their late twenties now. You can see the difference between them getting not a great math experience and having to make amends and the fact that we are now changing our curriculum. So, the way the math is taught is very important.

We've got over two million Ontario students in reading and math, and I just wondered if the minister could expand a little bit on what we've been seeing on the ground and what our plan is and has been rolling out.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Scott, for the question, and congratulations on your two new schools in Omeme and Beaverton. Considering they were built in a couple of years and building faster—I hope you had a chance to visit during the construction phase as well as opening, and I hope to visit there myself with you soon since you're my neighbouring MPP.

We've been clear that students need to stay in class to succeed. And for the first time in a generation, our government achieved that, successfully reaching a deal with all four teacher unions here in Ontario. This deal means that all of Ontario's two million-plus students will receive uninterrupted in-person learning for another three years. We're the first government in a generation that has been able to avert all strikes, signing a deal with every teacher union in this province.

This government is providing stability for families across the province and ensuring students in Ontario schools look forward to a full in-class, uninterrupted learning experience that emphasizes life and job skills. Without interruptions due to labour strikes, students will get the full benefits of our investments across the education sector. Four years of uninterrupted learning means that kids in schools can excel.

I'd like to take a moment to highlight some of these investments. The ministry is investing over \$72 million in math and over \$95 million in literacy supports in 2024-25. Ontario's math achievement action plan provides \$13.5 million for one math lead per board to drive curriculum accountability and improvement; \$34 million for over 300 math facilitators in priority schools to work with teachers and students; \$15 million for digital math tools for all students in grades 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9; \$4 million to subsidize educators completing additional qualifications in math; and \$6 million for one-on-one virtual math tutoring services through TVO's Mathify and le Centre franco's Eurêka! The ministry also established a math action team during the 2023-24 school year that will continue to support boards with evidence-based strategies to improve math achievement. The focus will continue to be on teaching the math curriculum, building teachers' math knowledge, understanding the needs of math students and measuring results to improve math achievement.

As a result of these investments, more than 11,000 educators have completed additional qualifications in math since the subsidies were introduced in 2019-20. Over 18,000 students participated in Mathify in 2022-23, and over 4,000 students participated in Eurêka!, the French-language math tutoring platform, that year. While other jurisdictions have seen fluctuating results in math coming out of the pandemic, Ontario's results are stabilizing and moving in the right direction. Ontario's 2022-23 EQAO results in math showed some gains, with math achievement trending upward across all grade levels in both English and French, two to five percentage point increases in grade 6 and grade 9 math. EQAO results for 2023-24 will be available this fall.

These investments support the continued implementation of Ontario's modernized math curriculum, including the grades 1 to 8 math curriculum implemented in fall of 2020 and the grade 9 math course implemented in fall of 2021. Ontario's students now begin learning about financial literacy and coding beginning in grade 1 to prepare them with the knowledge and skills to work in a rapidly changing world, to strengthen their math competence, and

to improve their achievement in class and in provincial assessments.

With respect to literacy, the ministry will invest over \$95 million in 2024-25 in continued funding for literacy supports, including continued funding of \$12.5 million for evidence-based early reading screening for all students in year two of kindergarten to grade 2, and a continued funding of \$12.5 million to enable school boards to purchase licences, resources and professional learning to support the provision of systemic, evidence-based reading programs and interventions for struggling readers, including but not limited to students with reading disabilities, and also an investment of \$68.68 million for reading specialist education staff with specialized expertise in evidence-based systemic and explicit instruction focused on foundational reading skills to provide reading supports to students in kindergarten to grade 3. Last year and continuing in 2024-25, the ministry partnered with education and literacy experts to provide resources and training opportunities for classroom educators and principals, focusing on key aspects of the revised curricula, including scientific evidence-based reading instruction to support planning and implementation.

In addition, in response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report, Ontario has introduced early reading screening for all students in year 2 of kindergarten to grade 2, to identify students who may have future difficulties with reading, in order to provide intensive supports. All kindergarten to grade 3 educators will be trained in a new approach to reading instruction. This will provide a strong foundation for our youngest learners that is critical to their success in every other subject.

On July 28, 2023, the ministry issued Policy/Program Memorandum—or PPM—168, reading instruction and early reading screening, which came into effect on September 1, 2023. The focus of the policy is to ensure that the foundational reading skills required for reading proficiency are being measured using ministry-approved, evidence-based early reading screening tools.

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The policy also outlines a requirement for school boards to allocate uninterrupted time for explicit and systemic instruction in foundational reading for a minimum of 150 minutes per five-day cycle.

Students who require further supports in reading will be identified early and will be supported within the classroom by receiving the appropriate targeted instructional supports needed to prevent or address difficulties with reading.

We're excited for the year ahead, where students can look forward to uninterrupted learning, extracurriculars, and a back-to-basics, modernized curriculum that will set them up for success.

The ministry also updated the provincial code of conduct as part of the government's comprehensive—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There is one minute remaining in this round.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, Chair—plan to reduce distractions in classrooms and improve the health of all students in Ontario.

We have heard consistently from school boards, public health units, parents, students, and community members that vaping and electronic cigarette use is a significant concern, and the extensive use of cellphones and social media is resulting in a distracted learning environment. We've heard these concerns through formal engagements with a range of education stakeholders, including teachers' unions, trustee associations, and principals' associations, and they've been widely reported in the media and are reflected in the correspondence the ministry has received.

Our government is committed to supporting students to achieve their full potential, while keeping them safe and healthy. To do this, we have introduced new provincial restrictions on cellphones and social media in schools, and mandated new requirements to keep schools free of electronic cigarettes, cannabis and tobacco.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): We'll now move over to the official opposition. MPP Armstrong, 20 minutes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Chair, and congratulations on your position as Chair of the committee.

I also want to congratulate the minister and thank all the ministry staff for being here today to try to get through some of our questions around finances so we can get some clarity around spending when it comes to, in my particular case, the child care portfolio.

And I want to say hello to all my colleagues. I hope you had a safe, healthy summer and are ready to get back to work, as we all are here to serve our constituents in our ridings.

I was happy to hear that the minister talked about wanting to reach out to all people involved in the sector, from workers, to teachers, to parents, to owner-operators—child care providers. That actually is good to hear, because I find that many of the decisions made by this government—there is not consultation in this sector, Chair, of when they create, for an example, a funding model that was just released a week ago.

I have heard in the past, when the government has proposed funding models—back in March 2022, it was a flawed model, and operators, child care providers, parents and workers alike were on pins and needles wondering how they came up with that funding model. Now we're at a new stage here where another announcement has come into play and it's not going to be active until January 2025, and people are still asking questions about that funding model. One of the biggest questions that I had in the Legislature and that I continue to have is about who the government consulted to come up with that funding formula, first of all, in March 2022. And then, as that unfolded, we discovered that funding model was not going to work, and they had claimed that the ministry was doing consultations in the community and with partners etc., but never revealed who those community partners were.

I can tell you first-hand, in London, there were child care operators who actually were supposed to be consulted on that funding formula workforce and they were never

called to meet about this funding formula. I asked about that in the Legislature and never got a straight answer. So it's always a bit of a concern.

The government wants transparency and accountability from people in the community, agencies and government organizations, and rightfully so, but then the people of this province want the same respect. They want transparency and accountability from the government, in this particular context, in my portfolio of child care.

It has been a bit of a hodgepodge kind of file. The government has been announcing things, with the hopes that it's going to solve the issue of complexity, challenges and obstacles that operators have been facing, but it hasn't really rolled out that way, because we're still seeing there's so much concern around—and the minister mentioned it herself—attracting and retaining workers. We can build all the spaces we want, and how fancy they are, but if we don't have the workers to deliver the child care—the high-quality skilled trade that it takes to give our children, our youngest citizens in this society, the best start—then we are failing.

I really feel very passionately and intensely think that we need to do so much better when it comes to child care. That is the first stepping stone before they get into the early childhood education in schools. Early years family centres are doing a great job. If we don't get that right, it doesn't make any sense. Everything has to be connected to each other in order to have the outcome of success that the minister is trying to achieve.

I recently found out that there was a memorandum that was sent out to municipality service managers—and I understand that Holly Moran, the deputy minister of the early years and child care division, is here, so she may be the one to address this to. The memo was sent out to municipalities about child care funding, and while, again, I raise my concerns about child care funding in the Legislature on an ongoing basis, I never really got any transparency.

So one of the big questions we need to have clarified here—because this is such an important national program, you can be champions, along with partnerships with the NDP, because we already called for affordable child care before it was a thing. We can be champions together in making sure that this actually unravels the way it's intended and it works for parents and workers and child care providers, ultimately making our children the stars of that whole movie that we're trying to create here and put in production.

The breakdown in that memo talks about certain pieces of it being allocated for funding, as on the horizon we're seeing a new funding model that's going to be rolled out in January 2025. The federal government has promised funding for child care, and it's unclear if the province has used that excuse to reduce their own allocations in child care. People have been talking, so if the minister is serious about listening to people—we've heard this before: that people feel that the provincial contributions to child care have been flatlined, or actually decreased. They can't tell, when they release these numbers, what of the federal

contributions is being spent compared to the provincial contributions being spent.

So today my question is, can the minister clarify the breakdown between the provincial and the federal funding for child care—and onto that, I would really appreciate that transparency and clarity that we're all here and expected to give to our constituents.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question.

I also want to thank the ECEs who work in our child care centres. The same day I was visiting the new school in the London area, I also stopped by the child care centre, and it was incredible to see the work that they were doing. There were children in that class who were moving on to kindergarten the next week, who were very excited. They're so empathetic, and the work that they do with children is so important.

Something I wanted to point out, before I call the ADM to come and talk more about the memo, is that the new funding approach was designed based on extensive input of child care providers and sector partners that prioritized a simple and easy-to-administer system that funds operators based on the true costs of operating a child care centre or home child care agency.

I think it's also important to note, when you're asking about the provincial contribution for child care, that it's estimated to be—the province is investing \$33.4 billion in early years and child care and full-day kindergarten.

I'll pass it to the deputy.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much for the question.

Having had the privilege of spending a number of years working in the child care and early years division of the ministry prior to this role, it's definitely a really important area, as you said, from EarlyON right through to child care and before-and-after-school programming.

I'm happy to have Holly Moran, our ADM of the early years and child care division, come and speak a little bit more specifically to your questions around consultation and some of the funding pieces.

I think really critical to us, from the ministry perspective, is those partnerships, working closely with our municipal service system management partners, First Nations, educators as well as the—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you. I want to reclaim my time, just for a moment.

The crux of the question is, could I please get a breakdown between the provincial and federal funding that has gone into this CWELCC program?

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Hon. Jill Dunlop: I need to clarify what I said. It's \$33 billion since the beginning of the agreement, which is three times what the federal government has given. So the feds were in for a \$13.2-billion commitment and the province for \$33.4 billion over that same time period.

I will now pass it to ADM Moran.

Ms. Holly Moran: I'm Holly Moran. I'm the ADM for the early years and child care division at the Ministry of Education.

Thank you for the question.

Specifically, when you think about the consultation for the funding formula, we had a minister's advisory group that was struck in 2023 to develop that new funding formula. It involved services to managers, those municipal leaders who administer programs at the local level. We had them from the large municipalities, the small municipalities, the urban municipalities, and the rural and remote northern municipalities. We also included several child care providers, including two from the London area. The Licensed Child Care Network was represented on the minister's advisory group. We met several times, with several iterations of that funding approach, to make sure that it would reflect the true costs of operating child care—whether you're northern, whether you're remote; whether you're rural, whether you're urban; whether you're east, whether you're west, whether you're north or whether you're south. So it involved quite a bit of consultation, and London was directly involved there.

In terms of the CWELCC Agreement itself, in addition to the federal government's investment, the Ministry of Education is investing \$395 million to make that program work. Those amounts were approved by Treasury Board at the time of signing of the agreement, so that was there since 2022, by the term of the agreement.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Of that \$395 million that has been allocated, how much of that provincial funding has now been utilized and what's left?

Ms. Holly Moran: It has all been utilized within the program. The federal government's agreement gives us a generous carry-over period so that we can keep the funding running until the end of 2026, when this current term of the agreement is renewed. But all of the funding is spent; there's no funding held back or in reserve. It's all out in the allocations.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: So \$395 million is earmarked to be spent, along with the federal funding. Can I ask for a written breakdown of that? Is that possible? Because it's not in the memo, I would like to have that in writing, if I could, Chair.

Ms. Holly Moran: We'll have to take that back.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay.

There are some other questions that I have around the file when it comes to spaces. The minister has cancelled—and maybe not this minister, per se, but the previous minister cancelled 3,500 child care spaces that were allocated in schools, when we're far away from a target of 86,000 spaces that the government has promised by 2026. I wanted to ask this minister—and probably some of her staff has some history on the file—that if they think the funding allocated in these estimates is enough to get us on track to the 86,000 spaces that they have, why was the money not allocated to fund the 3,500 spaces, when families—I know in my London area, we're called the child care desert because there's such a long wait-list. So why haven't we actually provided that funding there?

I think it's page 87—no, 99; I think it's on vote 1004, the child care and early years general vote item. It includes both operating and capital.

I just want to know why those 3,500 spaces were cancelled—and is the funding that's there now going to actually make up the spaces that you're going to promise us in 2026?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I think the key here is that those spaces were not cancelled; they're actually being reallocated.

I'm going to ask the deputy, who will want to speak on that, and I'm sure the ADM will want to further clarify that as well, as how that spending—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I appreciate that piece of it. However, those were shovel-ready allocations that were made, and I wanted to find out, if you're reallocating them, why? If there was a need for them in the first place when they were allocated to the right locations originally, what precipitated reallocating them, and are they going to be fully funded by the government when it comes to building capital projects? Many school boards were saying that they were only offered 25% of cost to build new spaces, and it was far greater than that cost, and because the government—there were such long delays, costs of building new spaces increased: wages, construction material etc. So some of those school boards, and Toronto specifically, were very vocal about that. That wasn't going to allow them to build the spaces unless the government stepped up and actually came up with some more funding in order to make that happen.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I think it's important to note they were given the 25% top-up because they sat on funds. Clearly, the projects were not shovel-ready for them to move forward, so that's why they were reallocated.

I will ask the ADM to jump in—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I do want to rebut that, in a way, because in the articles that were written, there's a lot of bouncing back and forth on blame.

Ultimately, I just want the spaces built, and I'd like to know how they can get built with regard to the estimates that we have today so that we can have the spaces for kids.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: The 25% is available as a top-up when projects have gone over the time frame. The fact is, they weren't shovel-ready, and that's why the allocation was necessary.

I'm going to pass it to the ADM to talk further about those projects.

Ms. Didem Proulx: Ontario funds child care spaces in the schools through two separate streams. One, our goal is to make sure that all the new builds have the spaces, and that stream continues, and in the past, there were allocations made for what were called stand-alone—so putting child care spaces in schools that did not have child care spaces, and these are the projects that we are talking about.

The projects that we reached out to school boards on were allocated in 2016-17, so most of them were allocated years and years ago, with no movement on those projects. That's why the ministry reached out to all school boards with these outstanding stand-alone child care projects, recognizing that time has passed and construction costs have gone up. We did offer school boards, "If you'd like to still continue with those projects, you can take the 25% top-up; however, the school board needs to, if costs go

beyond that 25%, fund the balance." Some school boards did choose to proceed, so where a number of school boards that had these projects also chose to decline and cancel those spots—or cancel these school-based projects.

I would like to be unambiguous about the fact that even though they will not be built in schools, these child care spaces have already been reallocated through the municipal-based operators, so the communities will get to have these—so the projects that TDSB and Toronto Catholic chose not to proceed with are being reassigned in Toronto through the municipal community-based stream. So spaces will be created; they just won't be in the school setting, and that actually will mean that they kind of come online faster.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: If I could add one more thing before—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: If you could make it quick, Minister. I have another question.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes, I just wanted to add that obviously we all want more child care spaces to be built. During AMO, of my 20-something meetings, most of them were around child care spaces, and I want to thank the municipalities that have put motions forward, but also AMO for supporting us as we work with the federal government for flexibility with the auspice ratio. It's currently 70 to 30—profit, not-for-profit. But working with the federal minister, we've seen changes in other provinces, so we're hoping to see that here, to be able to unlock more child care spaces.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad you brought that up. The government boasted about how they took so much care and time about getting a really good agreement on the child care file when it was first proposed as a national child care program. Obviously, when that agreement was put into place, 70% of child care spaces would be not-for-profit and 30% would be private.

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So, again, with transparency and accountability, there are many loopholes, I feel, in the private sector when it comes to public funds. Those loopholes have to be closed. And I don't agree with expanding the private sector of child care; I think the government should focus on making it easier for not-for-profit to create more spaces and build that area of child care as a strong, transparent and accountability—and quite frankly, wages are usually better under the not-for-profit sector when it comes to child care, which leads me to my question about the wages.

Again, I have to say, every day I wake up, I'm expecting to hear some new—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You've got about a minute, MPP Armstrong.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Oh. Sorry.

Can the government explain how they are going to compensate our ECEs—and all child care workers, really—fairly to the cost of living, and will they agree to a wage grid so that we can retain and recruit new workers who are so needed for the child care sector?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Well, we are addressing child care deserts, and I know you mentioned that your area is one of those.

We just saw the pay increase drastically for ECEs. Retention and recruitment of a high-quality child care and early years workforce is critical to the successful implementation of the CWELCC system and will help achieve system growth and ensure increased access to high-quality licensed child care in Ontario. Under the CWELCC Agreement, Ontario is currently supporting recruitment and retention of registered early childhood educators through improved compensation—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Minister. We've concluded this round, so we're going to move to the independent member.

MPP Clancy, you've got 10 minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to draw our attention back to recruitment and retention. I think there are various layers to that. I know it's the number one concern for principals. But I think the root causes have to do with how the kids are doing.

In my riding, there are massive wait times, especially for children with developmental disabilities. If you get your diagnosis—if your child has autism, for example, they say early intervention, but then it can often be years and years of waiting. Some of those unmet needs, whether it be mental health supports in the community, developmental services, end up landing on the schools and I think affect the well-being of staff. I know we use the word "absenteeism," but I do think it has to do with staff well-being and how that affects their recruitment and retention of staff.

ETFO did a survey, and if you're in special education, you've been directly impacted or witnessed an aggression towards you—77% board-wide.

So I do hear from teacher friends, and as a school social worker, I've experienced this and I keep in touch with my colleagues about this. Burnout is very real, and I think that has a lot to do with how the kids are doing.

Can you speak specifically about the efforts that will be made to recruit and retain educational assistants? This is the main category where there's a struggle. Often, it's cited as a gap in pay, so, \$24—they tend to go elsewhere, because it's not a full-time position and it's not across the school year. The ratio I have for support staff to students is 1,000 to 1, whereas OSSTF recommends 250 to 1.

I know I'm kind of going all over, but I do think student well-being ought to be a primary focus, and how we can ensure that we match the staffing and the well-being of staff who work with students who are struggling.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Well, let me be clear that equal access to top-quality education in Ontario is a key priority for the government. As minister, I'm committed to the safety and security of all children, including students with special education needs. That's why the ministry's Special Education Fund is projected to be over \$3.49 billion in the 2024-25 school year. As a result of this investment, there are almost 3,500 additional EAs in school boards across Ontario, compared to 2017-18. Let me give you a

breakdown on some of those numbers before I pass it to the deputy.

The Special Education Fund supports positive outcomes for students with special education needs by funding the additional costs of the programs, services and/or equipment that these students may need—so an increase of \$117.2 million, or 3.5%, over 2023-24, and \$651 million, or 23%, since 2017-18. There's also an additional \$10 million being invested for the 2024-25 school year to support students with extraordinarily high special education needs as part of the modernization of the special incidence portion component.

Deputy, do you want to add further numbers to that?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Yes, absolutely. Thanks very much for the question.

As the minister said, this is a key priority area for us as a ministry team. We provide annual funding through the core education funding for special education, which includes funding for educational assistants who support students and teachers in the classroom in our publicly funded schools. While most of the funding for EAs is provided through the Special Education Fund line, funding is also provided through the Classroom Staffing Fund at a per pupil allocation.

In addition to these investments made through the Special Education Fund, school boards can either use core education funding or responsive education programs to meet their responsibilities to support students with special education needs. While the ministry is responsible for the policy that directs the allocation of funding to school boards, school boards have the authority and responsibility to use this funding in a way that provides programs and services with special education needs as they need to—including educational assistants.

I'm happy to invite Clayton La Touche to come and speak further to this really important issue.

Mr. Clayton La Touche: I'm Clayton La Touche, ADM of student support and field services division in the Ministry of Education.

Thank you, Deputy.

Through you, Chair: In response to the question, I just want to build on what the minister and the deputy have said. A number of priorities have been addressed in relation to your question. You asked about educational assistants. You asked about special education. You also spoke about staff well-being.

I think that in asking the question the way that you have, you speak to the complexity of the delivery of education services in Ontario, in terms of the students who come into schools and what it takes to make sure that their well-being is addressed, to make sure that their achievement is addressed, and to make sure that staff who are responsible for their education and their well-being are also well taken care of.

In terms of educational assistants, since 2017-18 to now, close to 3,500 EAs, educational assistants, have been hired additionally, much of that through the Special Education Fund, and as the deputy mentioned, through other

allocations as well. That represents about a 14% increase over those years to the current levels.

The deputy also mentioned that through the modernization efforts in the core education funding and the Special Education Fund in particular, there are a number of things that have been done. In addition to the overall numbers and the increase of about \$117 million year over year from last year to this year, an additional \$10 million was allocated to support for in-class supports. This is actually allocated through the special incidence portion allocation, which is intended to address the needs of the highest-needs learners in schools, those who require more than two staff—many of these are EAs—to make sure that they're safe and to make sure that the staff can also be working with them safely.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Can I ask what the strategy is to—because I appreciate the 3,500. I think sometimes numbers don't always translate into board-wide—if you look at the whole province, how that translates.

I know some of the concern is that EAs need that time to get their extra training.

I've also heard that maybe we could work with our MCCSS team on what's available for kids with special needs in the community—there's a massive gap there and it lands in schools—and also with our labour minister.

I hear that college graduates leave the province of Ontario to go to Saskatchewan and other provinces that give international students, for example, more points so that they can get their permanent residency.

I hope that we can look at some of these labour categories with our Minister of Labour, to see how we can improve the retention of recent grads. For EAs—they were looking for additional training etc.

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One of the concerns I have is that the funding that boards get to pay for sick days and LTD doesn't match up with the availability under collective agreements. I wonder if you could speak to the gap. A recent stat in one of the boards in my riding was that they're funded for four paid sick days, whilst under the collective agreement, teachers—and this is just teachers; we're not talking about EAs, because I think the EAs end up coming from a pool—are allowed to take 11 sick days. We're struggling to meet the gaps, when we know that our staffing is really struggling with the impacts of the pandemic etc.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Let me start off by saying that absenteeism has been on the rise in the education sector, and attendance support programs, or ASPs, are a best practice that we want to ensure are in place. For this reason, the ministry issued a new—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There is one minute remaining in this round.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you—Policy/Program Memorandum 171, attendance support programs, in June 2024, requiring school boards to review, update or put an ASP in place if one doesn't exist by June 2026. This will help to promote greater consistency of such programs across school boards in response to the Auditor General's 2017 value-for-money audit on ministry funding and oversight

of school boards, and to support employees' regular and consistent attendance at work.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I do want to say that in the board that I left, I quit because they used to have 500 occasional teachers in the pool and now they have 30. So I appreciate the issue of creating a code, but I think there's a bigger problem at bay.

From what I'm hearing, principals are spending their time in kindergartens because of inadequate supports in those classrooms, and so they aren't able to do their job, and a lot of special education students don't get their targeted interventions because those teachers—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, MPP Clancy.

The next 20 minutes, Minister, is the government members. MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I wanted to ask you about the recent changes through the Ministry of Education around cellphones and vaping in schools.

The data is clear: A UNESCO report has found that students take up to 20 minutes to refocus their attention after they've been distracted by their smart phone. We also know that about 35% of secondary school students are spending five or more hours a day on their electronic devices. Public health also shockingly reports that one in four students vape in Ontario. I've heard from a lot of parents in my riding—and from across the province, as well—who have made it clear that they want the government to take action to end these kinds of distractions in the classroom.

Not surprisingly, we've seen other provinces, east and west, follow Ontario's lead with similar packages to tackle this issue head-on.

Minister, can you outline Ontario's plan to protect students from these kinds of distractions in the classroom?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'd love to talk about the new cellphone ban.

I'm extremely excited for the school year ahead, where students can look forward to uninterrupted learning, extra-curriculars and a back-to-basics, modernized curriculum that will set them up for success.

To ensure that students are focused on their reading, writing and math, our government is investing \$47.5 million to support safe and healthy learning, along with implementing new provincial measures to directly counter the alarming rise of vaping and cellphone distractions in schools.

For cellphones, the plan is simple—out of sight, out of mind—and there is overwhelming support from parents and educators across this province who support this necessary and common-sense plan.

I can tell you, I was doing my own little internal poll since becoming Minister of Education and talking to parents about what they were hearing, what they were thinking, as well as educators, and everybody was in favour of it.

I had Minister Bethlenfalvy in my riding on Wednesday, and we were at a very famous burger spot, Webers, along the highway, and late in the afternoon, that was

filled with high school students who were there working their part-time jobs. So I had the chance to ask them what they were feeling about it, and they all understood. I actually had one young girl say, “Both of my parents are teachers, so I already wasn’t allowed to”—good for you.

Now, if an educator finds a student distracted on their phone, they will have to surrender that phone, for the instructional period, to the educator. Students who refuse to hand over their device will be sent directly to the principal’s office to be dealt with accordingly. Students in junior kindergarten to grade 6 will be required to keep phones on silent and out of sight for the entire school day, unless explicitly permitted by an educator. For students in grades 7 to 12, cellphones will not be permitted during class time unless explicitly directed by the educator. But, as always, teachers will have the authority to allow these devices to be used when necessary for educational purposes.

For vaping and e-cigarettes—under our updated guidelines to boards, we are toughening restrictions on tobacco, vaping, recreational cannabis and nicotine products in schools. Specifically, we are implementing new restrictions on student possession, which require immediate surrender—not to be returned—and parental notification, with additional funding for schools to purchase and upgrade security devices such as vape detectors.

I want to stress to educators across the province that I recognize this is a huge culture shift in our schools, and I want you all to know that this is a government that has your back. We will be there to help address any issues that arise as this policy rolls out across the province.

To support the implementation of the updated provincial code of conduct, the government is investing \$17.5 million in new wraparound supports for student mental health and parent engagement in the 2024-25 school year. This includes \$15 million to provide supports for students at risk of addictive behaviours. School boards will receive \$5.88 million in one-time responsive education programs—funding to support the implementation of the updated PPM 128.

Our ministry will work with the Ministry of Health to provide up to \$7.06 million to support three Ministry of Health-led initiatives that promote healthy behaviours and reduce addictive behaviours; \$200,000 to provide programming for the mental health and addictions nurses program. Some \$1.26 million will fund knowledge mobilization and training to enhance consistency and access to bilingual supports and resources for all students and families. A \$600,000 investment will strengthen mandatory learning on vaping, cannabis and digital citizenship within the health and physical education curriculum—\$1 million to partner with School Mental Health Ontario to develop webinars and resources targeted to parents and students across our province, to learn how to talk about the adverse effects of vaping and excessive cellphone usage; and \$1.5 million to school boards to work with their parent-involvement committees and students to run local prevention campaigns to help deter vaping and cellphone distractions.

The government also announced a \$30-million investment in the 2024 budget for critical security infrastructure funding that will provide boards with the resources to address and prioritize safety-based infrastructure needs such as security cameras, safety lighting and other security upgrades, including vape detectors. This investment will be flowed over three school years: \$10 million per year, for 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27.

This policy update, the funding supports and the guidance from the implementation task force will ensure that these issues are treated seriously and addressed consistently in all school boards across Ontario.

The updated provincial code of conduct provides the following minimum requirements that all school boards must introduce in their local codes of conduct: Students in grades 6 and below may not use cellphones or other mobile devices during the school day, and students in grades 7 to 12 may not use cellphones or other mobile devices during class time.

There are exemptions to these rules. A student may use their device only under the following circumstances: for educational purposes, as directed by the teacher; to support for health and medical purposes; and to support special education needs. If a student does not comply with the rules, they must hand in their device when requested by the teacher. If the student does not hand in their device when requested, they will be sent to the principal’s office, and the principal will review each situation and decide the appropriate response using a progressive discipline approach.

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The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister, for that presentation. You covered a lot of ground. Congratulations on your new portfolio.

Also, I’d like to thank your predecessor for his great work for the parents and the students in this wonderful province.

Minister, my questions and comments regard getting more students interested in the skilled trades.

As you know, our government is putting people first by helping tradespeople and employers better meet the needs of the rapidly changing economy through faster and easier access to the skills needed to find a job in the skilled trades. Training our children and young people for the trades is extremely important, so we passed a good bill a couple of years ago, not only bringing young people into the skilled trades, but giving hope and optimism for a lot of young people. They are facing a lot of economic and social challenges.

Could you tell me what action has been taken to ensure students are provided with the skills training to prepare them to succeed in the workforce?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you so much for the question.

A key priority for our ministry is to ensure we’re continuing to invest in key job skill programs and ensure that those are available to high school students across the province. A few key examples:

We have the Specialist High Skills Major, where over 64,000 students focus their learning on one of 19 sectors and obtain certifications while working towards their high school diploma, and 13 of these sectors are actually in the skilled trades, including construction, food processing, manufacturing and transportation.

We also have the Dual Credit Program, which you may have heard about in your communities. Here, we've got over 26,000 students who take college courses and apprenticeship in-class training that counts towards both their high school diploma and a college diploma, degree, certificate or certificate of apprenticeship.

Another great example is, through co-operative education courses, we've got more than 68,000 students who took at least one co-op credit in the 2021-22 school year. These students earn secondary education credits while completing a work placement.

Lastly, I would highlight that we've got the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. This allows students, the summer before they enter into grade 11, to participate in a co-operative education workplace experience with a skilled tradesperson while earning their high school diploma. Some students transition this and become formal apprentices by registering a training agreement, and some students we also see participate in level 1 apprenticeship in-class training delivered by a delivery agent.

I'll just speak to one other piece, and then I'm sure the minister has some pieces she'd like to also speak to on this front.

It's important to note that in March 2023, the government announced the development of an accelerated apprenticeship pathway. Starting in grade 11, students can enter their skilled trades faster than ever before. Last fall, the ministry invited over 110 organizations to provide their input into a consultation on the implementation of this new pathway. We also were informed through these consultations in our partnership in working with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, and we're working to create a new accelerated stream of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program called Focused Apprenticeship Skills Training—FAST is the acronym, in case you hear that thrown around—to allow students to participate in full-time apprenticeship training through co-op credits while pursuing their high school diploma.

I'm happy to turn it back over to the minister.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question, and my apologies for leaving. It's very dry in here. I've had a lot of water and done a lot of talking. Also, I wanted to be respectful of the opposition's time.

As you know, the skilled trades are very important to me personally. My grandparents Glen and Marie Dunlop started a family plumbing business in my hometown of Coldwater in 1956. For over six decades, they provided their services throughout our town and the surrounding area. From there, I learned the value of hard work by watching my grandparents, and I saw how pivotal both small businesses and the skilled trades were to building up our communities.

In my previous role as Minister of Colleges and Universities, I used this first-hand knowledge to ensure that young people were aware of how fulfilling careers in the skilled trades are. I also worked to open up pathways and make it easier for students to pursue this work.

I know how vital the skilled trades are to the health and growth of Ontario's economy.

As the Minister of Education, I want to make sure that students get exposed to the skilled trades as early as possible.

One of the changes that our government has made that I would love to highlight is the new technological education credit requirement for high school. All students must take a tech ed credit in either grade 9 or grade 10. Earlier exposure allows students to make informed decisions about pursuing senior courses and supports under-represented students, including women, to pursue the trades.

We've also implemented a new tech ed curriculum, beginning with revised grade 9 and grade 10 courses, called technology and the skilled trades, that launched just last week. The revised tech ed curriculum reflects advancements in automation across sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and construction, which has increased the need for a highly skilled workforce.

These revisions will help prepare students for high-paying and rewarding careers in communications; the construction industry, as electricians and plumbers; and the manufacturing sector.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair: I want to thank the minister for allowing me to have this opportunity.

I'm going to talk about a very sensitive issue, but a very impactful issue that really deserves attention. Students and families in my riding have been negatively impacted by escalating violence, of anti-Semitic hatred and discrimination, whether in the schools or public settings. These students—and, once again, I'm a parent—deserve the opportunity to learn free from hate and discrimination, especially the kids in my riding. They've been through a lot. To take meaningful action in combatting what's happening today, we have to ensure that young people in this province are aware of the past, and this includes Jewish history, culture, perspectives and contributions to Canada.

Could you speak to some of the achievements our government has made to combat anti-Semitism as well as other forms of hate in the educational system?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her continued efforts and commitment to fighting anti-Semitism across Ontario.

Hate has no place in Ontario, especially in our classrooms, and as Minister of Education, I take this very seriously. You will know, in my previous role as Minister of Colleges and Universities, we passed Bill 166, the anti-hate law. So I do take this very seriously in both of my roles.

If you're a student who is facing hateful comments because of your culture or nationality, I want you to know that I'm here for you. If you're a student being bullied or

treated unfairly because of your skin colour, I want you to know that I'm here for you. If you're a student who is facing slurs because of your sexuality or gender, I want you to know that I'm here for you. If you're a student who is experiencing threats at school because of your religion, I also want you to know that I'm here for you. And if you're a student who feels isolated or like you don't belong, I want you to know that I'm here for you. Everyone deserves to feel safe, supported and included in Ontario's schools.

To address your concerns about anti-Semitism—unfortunately, it has been reported that one in three students in Canada believe the Holocaust was fabricated or exaggerated, and 42% of students have explicitly seen an anti-Semitic incident in their schools. These are startling data points for any government, and we are absolutely committed to confronting this hate through education, to improve the lives of everyone and to make sure kids are in schools where they are respected for their inherent dignity, not because of their difference.

This is why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are taking action—because those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. That's why we're mandating, for the first time in Ontario's history, mandatory learning within our elementary schools on the Holocaust to ensure that students understand the gravity of the greatest atrocity in modern history. This work is critical.

Again, I want to affirm my commitment, as Minister of Education, to ensure our schools are hate-free in every corner of this province.

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Ms. Laura Smith: How much time is left?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): You have two minutes, 15 seconds.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the—there are no words that I can say to really emphasize how strong you've been for the community, and I say that heartfelt.

But I'm going to ask another question, because I'm a mother first. You talked about the rise in vaping and cellphone use in schools. It's clear that systematic and cultural change is needed to refocus the use of phones. I'm wondering, just because I was actually very interested in some of the details of the system, if you could reiterate them—like the progressive chart, so to speak, for the principals when it gets to the vaping issue, and the teachers and the parents, that will be available in the future. What supports have been put in place to deliver on this plan?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Minister, you have just a little over a minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. Obviously, it's quite timely with back-to-school starting last week. I know the big conversation for the couple of weeks leading up to it was, "What is this new ban going to look like for cellphones and for vaping?" I talked to teachers at the end of the week, just asking, "How did it work in the classrooms?"

Actually, I mentioned earlier on that I visited the new Holy Angels Catholic School in Etobicoke. It was

interesting, because the principal at the time brought out a lockbox, and the media was so excited about this lockbox and understanding what that school was going to do.

It's quite simple, because students in kindergarten to grade 6—cellphones are out of sight, out of mind for the day. You don't need a cellphone. For grade 7 to grade 12, students can use a cellphone during their break, if they've been asked to put it away. If a student has their phone out during a time when the teachers have asked them to be put away, they can be taken away at the front of the class and put in a safe space. If a student objects to that, they could be sent to the principal's office—the same as if there's any other distraction in the classroom.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): That's it for the government's time. We'll now move into another 20-minute rotation for the official opposition. MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Minister, I'd like to know what the current total amount of the school repair backlog is. I'm not looking for a list of what the ministry is doing on the school repair backlog; I'm not looking for policies. I just want the number of the total amount of the repair backlog.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: We've consistently allocated \$1.4 billion—let me finish. I'm going to get to a couple of things here, and then I think you'll better see, and then I'll have the deputy and ADM step in as well—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: All I'm asking for is the number of the total repair backlog. I don't need the context. I don't think Ontario parents need the context. They know that their children are in crumbling, sometimes flooded classrooms. They just want to know, what's the total repair backlog in Ontario?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I want you to understand that we provide \$1.4 billion each year to school boards to renew and improve their school facilities.

Let's talk about the real issue. We're seeing that boards are not spending all of the money that my ministry is providing, leading—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Chair, I'm going to reclaim my time. That's not the question I asked.

What I'm hearing from boards is not that they're not spending the money, which falls so far short that we're talking about less than 10% of the repair backlog that we knew existed before the pandemic—which is the last time the Ministry of Education actually reported on the board. One of the reasons why they're not able to spend that money that they are getting as fast as they want is because they are sitting on approvals from the Ministry of Education. Perhaps one bit of homework to take away from this meeting today is that you could go back to the Ministry of Education and approve all those requests, so those repairs are getting done.

Will you offer the transparency and accountability that your predecessor refused to give to Ontario parents and provide the total amount of the school repair backlog?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I would like to note that in your school board alone, they were allocated over \$63 million and have close to \$55 million unspent. I think that's important for our taxpayers to realize. The money is going—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: That is not the amount of the school repair backlog.

Parents would like to know, are you going to provide that amount—yes or no—and if not, why do you think parents do not deserve to know that amount?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I think the real issue is, the money is not being spent. There's \$1.4 billion going out the door.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: No, no, that's not the real issue. The real issue is, are you going to provide that number today? Yes or no?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I have numbers here showing allocations and unspent funding by the school boards on those allocations.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: If you don't know the total amount—which I know the ministry knows, because school boards are reported; they're required to report that number to the ministry every year—will you have the ministry provide that number to the committee in writing?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: We can bring that back.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

I'd also like to talk about some areas of other structural deficits in education funding, which are areas where the government knows what the costs are but is not providing funding to cover the actual costs.

The most glaring example of that that I think is on the minds of Ontario parents across the province right now is student transportation. We are obviously seeing the most extreme example of that in Renfrew county, where the school buses are not running for the English boards and parents are either seeing their kids walk to school in unsafe conditions or they are having to pay out of pocket and take time off work to drive their kids to school themselves. I realize you didn't come up with the new funding formula. That was your predecessor—or that was Deloitte, who was hired by the ministry. I know that the ministry knows that the funding formula is broken, because I did a freedom-of-information request and I saw all the school boards writing in to say, "This funding formula is broken. It does not work." In every single component of the formula, the government is providing less than the actual cost of student transportation. The money for buses doesn't cover the actual cost of a bus. The money for wages and benefits doesn't cover the whole amount of time that a driver is in the bus driving. No person in Ontario wants to work for free. The amount for fuel doesn't cover the amount for fuel.

By government mandate, student transportation is being provided by private bus companies that need to at least make ends meet in order to continue in operation, which means that school boards are in the position of needing to offer contracts that don't cover costs. And then we are seeing operators walk away, which is what happened in Ottawa, which is what's happening in Renfrew county—or they need to take resources out of the classroom, resources that our kids need to learn, in order to pay for student transportation for kids to get to school.

Minister, are you going to fix that broken funding formula so that our kids can actually get to school and can actually learn once they're at school?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As a parent, I understand the difficult position that disruption has caused for students and parents in Renfrew. You've talked about Renfrew and Ottawa.

As I've said, our priority is to provide predictability and stability for the boards, which is why every single board received a minimum 3% increase. That equates to \$80 million this school year alone for school bus transportation—\$1.3 billion.

In Renfrew county, the Catholic school board saw an almost 15% increase, and the county district school board saw an 11% increase. In Ottawa Catholic School Board, a 9% increase—Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 7% increase.

So I'm not sure where the numbers you have are coming from, because they're not correct. There has been an increase across the board.

In fact, School Bus Ontario worked with this ministry on the funding formula every step of the way, ensuring that it is correct.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, Minister, I suggest that you meet with School Bus Ontario. Nobody is angrier with your government right now than School Bus Ontario. They say they had no idea what was going into this new formula, and if they had, they would have had a lot of information to share. A 3% increase across the board doesn't make sense when, first of all, inflation last year was 8%, but, secondly, we're looking at actual expenses that need to be paid. The price of a new bus went up 71%. The price of bus parts and tires and brakes and things that need to be used for maintenance went up 50%. They don't get to negotiate with the fuel companies over what proportion of fuel they're actually going to pay. The formula needs to cover the actual costs, or there is a deficit and you are either asking a private company to cover the deficit—which no private company is going to do—or you are asking the school boards to cover the deficit. And you know the only option for a school board to cover the deficit is to take that money out of classroom resources.

Will you fix the formula so that it actually works, so that our kids can actually get to school?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Before I ask the deputy to talk further about the funding formula, I want to reassure the member. I met with School Bus Ontario—second week on the job, I had them into my office. We talked about their concerns. They were also part of the ministry's advisory board for the funding formula. So they were there every step of the way, as a partner.

The minimum 3%—that is a minimum. As I gave the example for Ottawa and Renfrew—they saw 9%, 11%, 15% increases. So many boards did receive double-digit increases in funding, to a total of \$80 million for this school year alone.

I'm going to ask the—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to reclaim my time, actually, Chair.

I'm not hearing you say that you're going to fix the funding formula—which is what I asked.

You may have met with School Bus Ontario, but then after they had that meeting with you, they have still released a press release saying the funding doesn't work. You can see that the operators in Renfrew haven't come back to the table. The evidence on the ground says your formula is broken. As the minister, you need to take responsibility for that and do something and not get into an argument with the operators about whether or not this is working when it clearly isn't.

1510

Another area where we're seeing the same problem with structural deficits is CPP and EI. Your government only provides half the funding to cover CPP and EI. Those rates are set by the federal government; they're legally required. No school board can choose not to pay it. We know what the amounts are. You know that the only solution, again, to cover a deficit is to take money out of classroom resources and front-line supports. And yet, the government is only covering half the cost. So, in your tenure as education minister, will you commit to fully covering those costs?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm going to ask the deputy to assist on this one and speak further to this.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much for the question.

Compensation is obviously a very key area of our budget, and I'm really pleased to invite Doreen Lamarche to come and speak to this area further.

Ms. Doreen Lamarche: Thank you for the question in regard to employee benefits.

The majority of employee benefits are provided through our Classroom Staffing Fund. You mentioned that school boards would have to take resources outside the classroom to pay for employee benefits. They're actually part of the same funding envelope, so the school boards have the flexibility provided within that same envelope in order to manage these costs from within the funding that's provided.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I would suggest, then, that the minister meet with the public school board associations and the council of directors of education in Ontario, because they are the ones who are raising this concern about statutory costs not being covered. They deserve to have those costs covered. Again, the rates are set by the federal government; we know what they are. There's no excuse for the government paying only half of them.

Another area where there's a structural deficit is that—sick leave is set through central bargaining. It's not up to the individual school boards to decide what access workers have to sick leave; it's not up to them to determine who has access to sick leave. And yet they are not being fully compensated for sick leave. It also doesn't cover really crucial positions like principals and custodians. If the custodian is sick, we can't simply not clean the school for a couple of days. Schools have to provide that replacement, but they're not being compensated. So will you commit to fully covering these costs during your term as education minister?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Well, all 2022-26 collective agreements include a provincial task force on sick leave, with representatives from unions, from school boards and from the ministry. The task force will explore sick leave data and best practices relating to absenteeism initiatives, including return-to or remain-at-work practices, and gather and review information on the utilization of the sick leave plans.

Deputy, would you like to further comment—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to reclaim my time, because, again, that wasn't an answer to the question I actually asked.

Since you seem to have a better relationship with the education unions than your predecessor, I do encourage you to have this conversation with them, because I'm really disappointed to hear this language of "absenteeism" come up again. We know that violence is a huge issue for teachers and education workers. You are not showing an absenteeism problem if you are not coming to school because you have a concussion or because you got kicked or bitten. We are also seeing burnout among teachers because of the conditions in which they are being asked to work—the level of unsupported needs in schools. I don't think it's fair to suggest that teachers and education workers are abusing sick leave. These are also negotiated benefits. You can't simply take them away, so the government needs to cover the full cost. So I encourage you to have that conversation with the teachers and education worker unions.

The next area of structural deficit is special education. Students with special needs are supposed to receive additional supports in schools. In fact, schools develop individual education plans with parents, with specialists, to say, "These are the supports that a kid needs." Students also sometimes have safety plans which say, "These are the supports that a child needs to be safe at school." Often, these include additional supports. It could be access to an EA; it could be full-time, one-on-one support for that student. Right now, a lot of IEPs and safety plans are existing on paper only, because school boards don't have the staff, don't have the resources, to actually make them a reality.

We are seeing incredibly dangerous and unsafe situations in the province—a student who eloped last year, and nobody even noticed he was missing for 35 minutes. He was found in the middle of a four-lane intersection. We have already seen the worst tragedy in the province, which is a student with special needs dying, which no parent wants to see happen in this province.

And yet, to get us to this level of completely insufficient special education, our boards are running a massive deficit in special education. You mentioned an additional \$115 million in special education funding this year. That's equivalent to the deficit of just four school boards in the province. Four school boards in the province are paying \$115 million more in special education than what they are getting from the government, and that is for a level where our kids are going unsupported and they are unsafe. Parents are sending their kids to school in the morning just

praying that they come home safely, rather than worrying about whether or not they will learn.

So my question is, are you committed to fixing that special education funding gap and making sure that every child in our province is safe at school and has the opportunity to learn at school?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As minister and as a mother, I want to ensure that every child is safe at school—and not just the children; the educators and staff, as well.

That's why we are investing \$3.49 billion for this school year for special education. This is a \$117-million increase compared to last year's school year, and nearly \$651 million more than 2018. So we do take this very, very seriously. The number of EAs has increased by nearly 3,500 since 2017-18.

In addition to the core increase that I mentioned, with the \$3.49 billion, we've also announced an investment of \$18 million more in special education—\$8 million to dedicated resources to help students with special education needs to navigate the school system, and an additional \$10 million for increased in-class supports.

We've also announced a three-year pilot program, backed by \$6.2 million in targeted supports for students with disabilities to pursue co-operative education opportunities, that's designed to connect students with special needs to good-paying jobs.

We're also continuing to provide funding for the Geneva Centre for Autism, of \$4.5 million per year over three years.

I'll pass to the deputy to speak further—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to reclaim my time, because, again, there was no answer to the actual question I asked, which was, are you going to fix the gap?

Minister, if I could suggest a little more homework after this meeting, I would suggest that you actually meet with parents of special-needs students, with the Ontario Autism Coalition, with some SEAC committees. Maybe visit a school like the Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education in my riding. What we are seeing and hearing on the ground is that our kids with special needs, with disabilities and with learning exceptionalities are not being supported. They are not safe. Their parents are scared for them. Whatever your briefing book says—it is not contributing to the kinds of results on the ground that we need to see for some of our most vulnerable children. So please listen to these parents and meet with these kids. They deserve better from the province, and I hope that during your tenure as education minister, they will actually get better.

I also want to talk about school violence. I don't have a lot of time left here. The allocation for student safety and well-being in the core education funding amounts to only 14 cents per day. That's 14 cents per day in a situation where we have classrooms being evacuated daily, violence becoming normalized for students, and teachers and education workers who have to go into classrooms wearing full bodysuits—Kevlar, in Ontario classrooms. And yet, the only proposal your government actually has on student safety is security cameras and vape detectors.

I'm wondering, how is a security camera that is recording violence actually going to do something meaningful about stopping the violence, when you're not investing the funds and you don't have the personnel and the resources in the school to actually do something about it?

1520

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for that question.

We are investing in student supports. The violence in schools is obviously very important. We're investing \$58.56 million for the student safety and well-being allocation as part of the 2024-25 core education funding. In your school board alone, that equates to a million dollars for the student safety program. This funding supports a whole range of programs that are focused on promoting well-being and inclusive education, including strengthening positive school climates; supporting suspension and expulsion programming for students; and supporting student engagement, participation and leadership skill development.

You mentioned the money that we're introducing for the vaping ban—the \$30 million. That's not just for vape detectors; that's for other security measures in the schools, as the boards see fit.

So this is a priority for us, and this is why we are making these investments of the \$58.56 million.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I don't think that 14 cents per day per student actually suggests that it is a priority.

Similarly, mental health—we have a serious crisis, with many children in Ontario struggling with mental health challenges. Some 95% of schools in the province say that they're not getting enough support for mental health; only one in 10 has regularly scheduled access to a mental health professional, and half of them have no access at all. Last year, your government was putting 27 cents per child per day towards mental health; this year, it's 22 cents per child per day, so there's a cut in funding at a time when the crisis has never been this bad.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute left.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I realize, again, you weren't the education minister when that decision was made, but are you going to commit to increasing funding for mental health so that our kids are actually getting the supports they need and there is actually a mental health professional available for every school in Ontario?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: This school year alone, mental health funding increased to a historic level—nearly \$118 million. This represents a 577% increase in funding since the government first took office.

Additionally, our government invested \$12 million in the summer of 2023 and an additional \$14 million this past summer for further supports for students.

So we are taking this very seriously—a 577% increase for mental health supports.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I think if you were taking it very seriously, 95% of schools in the province wouldn't be saying they need more mental health support than what they're getting, and you wouldn't have fewer than one in 10 schools with regularly scheduled access to a mental

health professional; it would be every school in the province having regularly scheduled access.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As well as increasing the supports, we're also—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): That concludes this round for the official opposition.

MPP Clancy, you've got another 10 minutes for your round.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to talk about student mental health and well-being, as well.

As a school social worker, I've seen an explosion of need and more serious mental health challenges cropping up at younger and younger ages pretty much across the board. I think the quote that captures the worry best is, "Inclusion without support equals abandonment."

We had an education town hall at my office with different partner organizations, parents' groups, education worker groups all discussing some of the challenges that they're seeing and worried about in schools. Staff and parents have equally shared that because there are students in classrooms who aren't getting adequate supports, the impact is being felt in the whole school community. When a child is in an inclusionary model without support, that dysregulation, which can be on a regular basis, really affects all the other students in that classroom, and the teachers.

I do hope you'll follow up with the partners in our unions and education workers on the request to have a committee look at this issue specifically. We measure what we value, and we change what we measure. I think the unions have kind of measured this impact of dysregulation, but I hope that the government—is that a possibility, do you think, in this next year, to find a way to look at this issue of child well-being, specifically?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Absolutely. We work with partners in developing the mental health programs—the work that we've done with SickKids; the work that we're doing introducing more mental health into the curriculum and the modules, too. So it is a priority, and I'm proud of the work this government has done. We have, frankly, been a champion of funding for mental health supports because we recognize the need for it.

As an educator, as a mom—I know many of us here are parents—you see it first-hand in your own kids or in their friends, too. This is something that I know we all take very seriously.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I just want to say, as a mental health worker in schools, that I don't know if we're keeping up.

It's not on you, I don't think, completely, but I think those school boards that are taking our social media giants to task—will that be something that you can commit to, going forward? I know Minister Lecce was saying he would meet with these tech giants to hold them accountable.

We've seen not only an increase in online gambling at a younger age; pornography is also being accessed at a rampant rate. We haven't even talked about pornography, and we know that kids are bringing their cellphones to

school and it's on their phones. Trafficking—the average age is 12 to 13.

I found, as a school social worker, that not only do staff need targeted time away and paid time to get their training up to speed—not just something in their free time—but also, our communities are totally lagging when it comes to cellphone use and the impact that has on mental health.

I hope that you'll be able to partner with our MCCSS minister, because as a practitioner—there is almost nothing in our community that is targeted around tech dependence, and I think it's a cultural issue, widespread.

Do you think you can commit to that work with social media giants, on holding them accountable for the harm they have done to our young people?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: You'll be happy to hear that we were just talking about that before I left the office to come up here this afternoon—that we would be meeting with some of our social media companies, but also, the fact that we've banned social media in school boards. Students will not have access under the school's WiFi system, to be able to access those social media apps, which I think is really important. You kind of brought that to light—about, "Well, then, what about after school?" I want to meet with these companies because I want to understand what it is that they're also doing to protect students. I think that's really important. We can only do so much during the school day to protect the students, but then what happens when they go home? That's something I think we're all concerned about, not just as parents, but, frankly, as Ontarians.

You mentioned a lot about human trafficking and what you were seeing in your former role.

I think some of those ideas are great—professional development suggestions for school boards, for their teachers to learn more and to address these. It's really our education staff, front-line workers who are able to acknowledge and understand mental health needs of students, and then, from there, be able to refer them to further services within their school.

I think it's a really important fact that you're bringing up. And I will be meeting with the social media companies to address these concerns.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Just to let you know, I am grateful for the added layers of empowering teachers and staff—I would encourage more money in future.

What I've heard from teachers, especially, is that they didn't feel robustly consulted or consulted at all, so I hope that, going forward, when these new policies come out, there will be a really collaborative approach. We've talked about how teachers have great ideas and how they're working on different systems to help students from these distractions, but I think it has to be done really intentionally, that our unions and our education workers are seen as partners when we create new—and that we pay.

I'm sorry, but too often, we create a mandate—like anti-hate or cellphone bans—but we don't give staff paid time to learn the curriculum and get the training materials and time set aside where they can learn. I know if you want me to change what I do for my work, I need time to do that

and I don't need that to pull into my time. I'm a mother, too, and if I'm required to do something in my free time, it isn't free time, right? We need to pay for that.

So just a bit of feedback from the educators I've talked to is that they need the funding and support to be trained on these new policies. They need the collaboration and partnership—to partner with you when you create any new policies going forward.

I do think we've had a major culture shift, and I think parents are feeling out of the loop. What can you say to parents who are feeling the impact of students' well-being on the classroom community? What is the commitment you can make to them, feeling like partners, in how to talk to their kids about what's going on at school—but also that there will be an investment in supporting those kids who are, I think, left behind by the gaps in developmental services and mental health supports in communities?

1530

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As I mentioned, it was a 577% increase in mental health funding in our schools, so this is a priority for us—to ensure that students have access to those supports, whether it's in the school or referrals within their communities as well, but it's also the work that we've been doing to integrate mental health supports and understanding mental health into the curriculum.

I was very excited for the grades 9 and 10 business programs that now have mental health built into that—to understand when you're feeling stressed, how to understand if you're feeling overwhelmed, where to go to for supports for those within your community, other modules that have integrated more mental health as well. I think it's something that we recognize as society—we need to support mental health concerns.

I'm going to turn it to my deputy to further speak about some of the programs we're offering in schools.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Just building on what the minister said, we've introduced mandatory mental health learning in grades 7 and 8 as well, which is aligned with the health and physical education curriculum, and, as mentioned, introduced a mandatory mental health module in grade 10, which will start this fall—lots of great work done to introduce new mental health modules developed by School Mental Health Ontario, along with the support of SickKids, that provides a tool kit of practical knowledge to manage stress, to keep kids safe, focused on school and beyond.

We've also launched the One Stop Talk virtual counselling program for youth and their families, which significantly expands the number of youth wellness hubs across the province, so that it can be faster and easier for youth to connect with primary care, mental health—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute remaining in this round.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to interrupt you; I hope you don't mind.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Of course.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I hope you can have a real good sit-down with Minister Parsa.

What I'm hearing from a local community organization is that by providing free transit and free recreation, kids' behaviours and criminal activity almost went to zero in Iceland—so that's a good example.

I just want to share that as a school social worker, my caseload was about 120 students a year. And we are seeing the need: Usually by February, I was maxed out and was just trying to fight fires—after COVID, that was November.

OASW has a school social worker convention; it's one day, and I hope that you can make yourself available to hear what the mental health practitioners in schools are seeing.

School Mental Health Ontario does great work, but it's really brief and it's really surface, and it doesn't reach the needs of the complex care that our students require, especially—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, MPP Clancy.

The government now has 20 minutes. MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister, for the long day.

My comments and questions are in regard to strengthening the math and science studies in our schools.

When we formed government, I was shocked to see 50% of students in Ontario failed in math and science; I didn't know that during my councillor time. Our children are bright. We know the problem. We didn't fix the problem. Some 50% of the students couldn't reach the provincial standard; they failed—so we changed that one, we changed around.

I know your predecessor Mr. Lecce took a decisive step by introducing groundbreaking legislation to transform the educational system, to empower the students and parents in our province.

Can the minister please elaborate on how our government is strengthening math and science studies? I know our report card is impressive. We are moving towards the right direction. We are not perfect, but we've come a long way. Could you elaborate on our report card? It's very impressive. Markham is the most ethnically diverse riding in all of Canada. I hear from parents about our success rate in math and science, and I'd like to hear from you.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Kanapathi. I know you have a recent graduate who is an engineer, so he must be very good in math and science.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you. I have to tell you, my son graduated as an automotive engineer. He didn't study coding in high school or in elementary school. He went to university to study coding.

Now we're starting to teach coding in grade 1. That is a success story. I want you to elaborate on that.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As a government, we have been committed to getting students back to basics with their learning, and that includes reading, writing and, of course, math. We need to have the right tracking in place to ensure what we're doing is working and to make adjustments as needed.

That's why we now require every board to submit, three times a year, their math achievement action plan, with

metrics used to hold the directors and school boards to account, to lift outcomes and improve the pathways of young people into STEM careers—like your son.

I'll let my officials speak to the math curriculum changes our government has made to improve math education for students throughout the province, but first I want to highlight a crucial change we've made to ensure young people have necessary, real-world math skills.

Starting in 2025, students must complete a new financial literacy graduation requirement as part of their grade 10 math course, to demonstrate practical skills and knowledge in financial literacy. This will ensure students graduate with an understanding of budgeting, awareness of financial scams, and saving for big investments such as a car or a home or university or college. As a mom, I tried to impart these real-world skills to my daughters. Formalizing this learning for all students is an incredibly important part of math learning that will set young people up for success in their lives.

The ministry is supporting math through major investments. Building on the investments from the 2023-24 school year, the government will invest over \$70 million—again, in the 2024-25 school year—to continue providing supports to school boards through the math achievement action plan. Ontario's math achievement action plan provides school boards with supports directly into the classroom, focused on the curriculum; increased consistency in the use of evidence-based, high-impact strategies; and improved system accountability. These supports include:

- \$13.5 million for one math lead per board to drive curriculum accountability and improvement;
- \$34 million for over 300 math facilitators in priority schools to work with students and teachers;
- \$15 million for digital math tools for all students in grades 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9;
- \$4 million to subsidize educators completing additional qualifications in math; and
- \$6 million for one-on-one virtual math tutoring services through TVO's Mathify and le Centre franco's Eurêka!

The ministry also established a math action team during the 2023-24 school year that will continue to support boards and evidence-based strategies to improve math achievement.

The focus will continue to be on teaching the math curriculum, building teachers' math knowledge, understanding the needs of math students and measuring results to improve math achievement. These investments continue to build on other important changes we have made to support math learning and ensure our students are prepared for the future.

Deputy, did you want to add some of the other math programs?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Yes, I'm very happy to.

I want to just highlight our board math leads. Each school board will receive funding for an FTE—full-time equivalent—to hire a board math lead, who will be able to inform, monitor and provide timely reporting of progress

toward math achievement improvement targets and lead board-wide actions to meet these targets.

We are also providing funding for school math facilitators. These are focused, using the 2021-22 EQAO results, to identify over 1,250 priority schools as the lowest-performing 20% in grades 3, 6 and 9. Each priority school will receive funding to really support and have a math facilitator work directly with students who require additional support, as well as to work with teachers, often directly in the classrooms, to strengthen math teacher knowledge.

Lastly, before we go into a bit of an overview on the curriculum, which I'll invite our ADM Yael Ginsler to provide, I wanted to highlight math teams. Math action teams continue to work with school boards to enhance accountability through the math improvement action plans. These are submitted to the ministry three times throughout the year to really help ensure that boards are monitoring and reporting on progress on math achievement throughout the school year.

I'm very pleased to welcome Yael to provide an overview on curriculum.

Ms. Yael Ginsler: My name is Yael Ginsler. I'm the assistant deputy minister of our student achievement division, and I'm pleased to tell you about some of the work that we've done on curriculum.

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The investments that the minister has spoken to and that our deputy has spoken to build on the work that we started in 2020, when we released the province's new elementary math curriculum, followed by the new grade 9 math course that we released in 2021, to better prepare our students for work in a rapidly changing world, strengthen math competence and improve grades in math. In revising the curriculum, we wanted to ensure that it was evidence-based and informed by expert knowledge and leading-edge research in math. The overarching goal was to help develop a curriculum that would prepare students for their future. To achieve this, some of the big changes that we made to the curriculum include:

Beginning in grade 1, as part of our algebra strand, there is now mandatory learning about coding. Students learn about coding right through every grade in elementary school, right until the end of grade 9.

We added a new financial literacy strand that also begins in grade 1.

We added a new strand on social-emotional learning. This is taught in the context of the other strands, and this learning is really to help students approach problems positively, learn from their mistakes, persevere and build their identity as a math learner.

The new curriculum is also much more explicit about students learning fundamental math concepts and skills like fractions and multiplication, and it was updated to use relevant and current examples so that students can connect math to their everyday life.

The elementary math curriculum includes, as I said, social-emotional learning, a number strand, an algebra

strand, a data strand, spatial sense, and, of course, financial literacy.

In the number strand, students develop those fundamental skills such as understanding basic number facts—as I mentioned, multiplication; how to solve mathematical problems that they encounter in everyday life. This learning also aims to increase students' confidence with different types of numbers: whole numbers, fractions, decimals, integers. They build these skills so that they can use these numbers for a variety of purposes in their real-life applications.

In the algebra strand, they analyze real-life situations using patterns and algebraic expressions. For example, they can model the cost of a lunch program. They can look at costs of designing other real-life situations, like a playground, and we can connect this to things like the skilled trades and other high-demand jobs. In algebra, as I mentioned, they're coding for the first time.

The data strand also lets students learn how to collect and organize and display and analyze data in order to make convincing arguments, to make informed decisions, to make predictions; and, in particular, they learn how to recognize if data is being misrepresented. This is important—learning about infographics and learning how to tell stories in data. They become critical thinkers and critical consumers of data, which is, of course, very relevant in today's world and in their future.

I mentioned the spatial strand. This is where they're making connections between measurement and geometry—again, very relevant for things like the skilled trades.

Financial literacy: This was a brand new strand in math, and I know that this continues to be a very important area. The minister mentioned our new financial literacy mandatory graduation requirement. In this strand, which begins in grade 1, students build their skills and knowledge about the value and use of money, they learn how decisions impact their personal finances, and they understand global and local economies—again, of course, developmentally appropriate as they progress through that learning journey. Students learn about important financial concepts like saving, credit, investing; how to make informed financial decisions, and developing themselves as critical consumers.

With these important changes, we are continuing to be committed to math improvement across the province.

I'm happy to turn it back to the minister.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Building on my colleague MPP Kanapathi's question, I'd like to ask you some questions about curriculum updates and additional supports for students.

Parents in Ontario know that children need to be in classrooms with their teachers, learning the life and job skills that they need to succeed. We know how important it is to have students in class, surrounded by peers and educators to support their well-being, their mental health and their academic learning.

I know that our government is committed to making sure parents can expect their children to receive a stable, uninterrupted school year; by doing so, children can focus on what's most important, which is learning the foundations of reading, writing and math.

Can the minister elaborate on what steps our government has taken to ensure that children receive the world-class quality education they deserve, free from interruptions, and tell us a little bit more about how the government has updated and modernized learning?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for that question.

Our government is committed to modernizing the Ontario curriculum to ensure that students graduate with real-life job skills and knowledge that they need to succeed both in the classroom and their day-to-day lives. We have been focused on foundational skills in reading, writing, math and STEM, with curriculum continuing to be updated and modernized to ensure students have these critical skills. Some of the important curriculum updates we have made are about increasing mental health literacy, which we've heard a lot about today; STEM; financial literacy; and digital literacy.

I'll take a moment to speak about some of the changes to mental health before I turn it over to my officials for more details.

Our government has made a concerted effort to weave mental health literacy into the curriculum for both elementary and secondary students. In August 2019, the Ministry of Education issued the updated elementary health and physical education curriculum. As a result of the updates, Ontario's elementary curriculum has a more comprehensive approach to mental health literacy. In each grade, learning about mental health is integrated with learning about overall health in a developmentally appropriate way. Some of this learning includes identifying and managing emotions, recognizing sources of stress and coping with challenges, maintaining positive motivation and perseverance, building relationships and communicating effectively, and developing self-awareness and self-confidence.

The ministry also updated the mandatory grade 10 career studies course to include additional mandatory learning on mental health. Students will learn ways to be resilient in the face of challenges, learn about recognizing signs and symptoms of stress and common mental health problems, and explore sources of support in how and where to ask for help.

Since this is a committee devoted to numbers, I really want to take a moment to highlight the substantial investments that our government has made in student mental health—\$118 million, representing an increase of 577% since we took office. Students are at the heart of everything we do in the Ministry of Education, and I am proud that our government has taken such concrete steps to prioritize their mental health and wellness.

I'll talk a little bit about the new STEM curriculum. Recent updates to STEM-related curriculum and courses include the revised elementary mathematics curriculum, which was implemented in 2020; the science and technology curriculum in 2022; new destreamed grade 9 math-

ematics and science courses, in 2021 and 2022 respectively; a new grade 10 computer studies course in 2023; and new grade 9 and grade 10 technological education courses that are being implemented beginning in September 2024, or last week. These curriculum updates will help ensure students have critical life and job skills.

Ontario students also learn about STEM-related concepts and skills from kindergarten to grade 12 through the study and application of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in real-world contexts. This helps students develop transferable skills, such as critical thinking and collaboration, to meet the demands of today's society and global economy. Through recent and planned revisions to disciplines including mathematics, science, computer studies and technological education, and the introduction of a technological education graduation requirement, the ministry is modernizing learning and increasing opportunities for students to have more experiential hands-on learning; supporting educators, students, parents and partners to enhance teaching, learning and achievements in STEM; and reinforcing that STEM learning is for everyone.

I'll now pass it over to my deputy to further talk about digital literacy and financial literacy.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you very much, Minister.

Building on what the minister has outlined in terms of STEM, we have also introduced mandatory financial literacy into the Ontario curriculum, with dedicated strands in the grades 1 to 8 mathematics curriculum, the grade 9 destreamed mathematics course, and the grade 10 career studies course. This is to really focus and strengthen students' financial literacy skills. In addition, the ministry released new financial literacy learning modules for grade 9 and grade 10 students. Building on this commitment, the ministry is investing an additional \$6.75 million over three years to ensure students have access to practical, hands-on opportunities related to financial literacy, such as modules, activities, skills competitions, career fairs and other, similar types of initiatives.

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In addition to that, the ministry has committed to keeping students safe online and ensuring our learning environments are safe—so a real focus on digital literacy. Students learn about online safety, cyber security and privacy throughout the school year, through the health and physical education, language, English and guidance and career education curriculum. This has also been a real focus of the K-12 Cyber Awareness Month campaign.

In terms of language curriculum, we've spoken about reading and writing a fair bit this afternoon, but I also just wanted to note again that in response to the OHRC Right to Read report recommendations that were released in February 2022, the ministry revised the elementary language and français curriculum and grade 9 English and français courses for implementation beginning in the 2023-24 school year. The revised curriculum here aligns with scientific and evidence-based approaches that emphasize direct and systematic introduction in foundational literacy skills, and includes learning about digital

media literacy and transferable skills—again, really looking to see those interactions across the curriculum.

The ministry worked closely with key stakeholders through the development of all of our curriculum, but certainly with respect to the language curriculum, with conversations with the Ontario Human Rights Commission, Dyslexia Canada and International Dyslexia Association Ontario.

We've also really focused on Indigenous-focused curriculum revisions and ensuring that First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, histories, perspectives and contributions are reflected throughout the province's curriculum.

In addition—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): There's one minute left, Deputy.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Is that the final minute?

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): They're going to get a round, too.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: I will just wrap up quickly to note, really from a summary perspective, in the 2023-24 school year, the grades 1 to 3 social studies revised curriculum was introduced—grade 6 social studies, grades 1 to 8 language and français, grade 9 English/français, and grade 10 computer studies.

For the 2024-25 school year—we've talked today about the mental health learning in the grade 10 career studies course as well as the destreamed grade 9 Exploring Canadian Geography course, new grades 9 and 10 business studies courses, new grades 9 and 10 technological education courses, and a revised grade 9 English course for French-language schools.

We'll look to continue building on that for the 2025-26 school year, as well, introducing new mandatory learning—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Thank you, Deputy.

Minister, the remaining time for the official opposition is just under eight and a half minutes, so that will be your final round of consideration. Then, we'll move to voting on the different sections.

MPP Pasma, you have just under eight and a half minutes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I promised I would come back to the French teacher shortage. This is a yes or no question. The working group on the shortage of French teachers, which I recognize predates your time as minister—but the ministry was a part of the working group and of creating the report of the working group. That working group came up with 37 recommendations to address the shortage of French teachers, and the cost identified to fully implement those recommendations was \$91 million over five years. Your predecessor only half-heartedly implemented some of those recommendations and only committed \$12.5 million, so less than 20% of the funding recommended by the working group. Will you show more commitment to this crisis and actually invest the full amount and implement all the recommendations of the working group?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes, it predates my time, but I also—this was a conversation Minister Lecce and I were having while I was at colleges and universities, and

something that we did to increase the number of French-language teaching spaces at that time, recognizing that there is a shortage in Ontario, but there is a shortage across Canada. Minister Mulroney has been speaking with us quite frequently, as well, and was following up after her FPT.

We have invested more than \$23 million in implementing Ontario's French teacher recruitment and retention strategy, with the support of the government of Canada. As part of this strategy, our government supported the creation of an online recruitment portal for internationally trained French-language teachers.

I'm going to pass it to the deputy—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to reclaim my time because, again, it was a yes or no question, and I haven't heard a yes or a no in there.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Because we have made investments. It is a priority for us—and I have said \$23 million since 2021-22.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But the working group recommended \$91 million. They had 37 recommendations. So you've fallen far short on both those counts.

You've also fallen far short on the number of teachers actually produced in the first three years of the plan—the working group said 500 additional French teachers on top of the ones who were already being educated or hired every year. Even if we charitably include every student who is in a French-language teachers' college position, the plan has produced only 417 teachers in the first three years. This isn't me making this up. These are the government's numbers. So we're running 1,083 teachers behind in the first three years of the plan.

We have a constitutional obligation to provide an education that is equivalent in quality to that of the majority—in Ontario, English. We have a constitutional obligation to ensure that these kids in francophone schools have qualified teachers, and we are not doing that. The problem is getting worse every year instead of getting better.

So are you committed to working with our French-language partners—the school boards and the teachers' union—and actually making sure that we are addressing this shortage of French teachers?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Before I turn it over to my deputy to talk more about the recommendations from the report that you are citing, just a little bit of facts on the online recruitment that we were doing and the results that we've seen as a result of that—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to reclaim my time again, because it was a yes or no question—so a yes or no answer, please.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I wanted to have the deputy speak further to the recommendations from the report.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. But are you personally committed to addressing the teacher shortage by fully implementing the recommendations and putting the full amount of funding that the working group recommended?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm happy to take that back.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

There's one other thing I'll just note quickly, because my time is ticking away, and that is that last year, the presidents of AFOCSC, ACÉPO and AEFO wrote a letter to your predecessor stressing the urgency of this crisis and highlighting the constitutional rights of Franco-Ontarian children. Your predecessor took eight months to respond to that letter. So I would just say that I hope, under your tenure, the response times will be better when education partners are raising concerns about constitutional rights being infringed on.

I want to save a few minutes to talk about provincial schools in Ontario, because they fall directly under the control of your ministry. There is no school board that operates in between you and these schools. There have been serious allegations of abuse and discrimination at these schools. They are underfunded. They have serious teacher shortages. Students are being sent to the library or are going home for the day. There are teachers who are supposed to be doing assessments for these students so that they actually get the resources and supports they need, and instead, they're being pulled away from those to provide classroom coverage. There are crumbling and unsafe buildings—I can show you pictures; so can the teachers who work in those buildings, if you're willing to meet with them. There have been two lawsuits that have been settled, and three current or pending lawsuits. So will you do what your predecessor refused to do and call a provincial inquiry into conditions at these schools?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm looking forward to the opportunity to visit some of the provincial and demonstration schools in the province.

We have maintained the year-over-year funding allocation despite declining enrolment, which means the per student funding has actually increased to \$143,000 in 2023-24. That funding supports wraparound services for students, which also includes student health services, which includes staff positions as well as contracted health care professionals.

I'm going to ask the deputy minister to talk about the regulations—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry; again, I'm going to reclaim my time, because it was a yes or no question for you. Are you going to call a provincial inquiry into conditions in these schools?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: We can take that back.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

With regard to the list you were offering of what your ministry has done for these schools—in the past few years, your ministry has also paid out \$23 million for class action suits. As I mentioned, there are three current or pending lawsuits that I'm aware of; there could be more. Do you think that's the definition of success for these provincial schools?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I want to ask the deputy to talk about the regulations under the Education Act—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry; it's a question for you, Minister. Do you think that is the definition of success—the \$23 million in payouts that have already happened, and three lawsuits?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm not going to speak specifically to that.

I'm talking about the investments that we've made. And I would like the deputy to speak to the regulations that we have surrounding our provincial and demonstration schools.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm not asking about regulations surrounding the schools. I'm asking you if you think repeated lawsuits and millions of dollars going from the taxpayers of Ontario to class action suits is a sign of the success of your ministry's policies around these schools.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I will be visiting the provincial and demonstration schools and speaking with staff and students about the work that's being done in those schools.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm glad to hear that. Your predecessor actually ran out the back door rather than speak to parents and staff who were at a school. I would really encourage you to meet with them—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): A minute remaining, MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —because it's very important.

At one of these schools, E.C. Drury, which is a school for deaf students which also has deaf faculty and staff members, a cowbell was being used as the emergency response alert system.

Do you think it's appropriate for a school for the deaf to be using a cowbell as an emergency alert in Ontario in 2024?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I would like to ask the deputy to speak to the regulations that we have surrounding the schools through the Education Act.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Minister, this should be an easy one to answer. Yes or no—do you think a cowbell is appropriate in a deaf school?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I am not familiar with this. I have not heard about this, so I'm not going to make claims.

But I think that the deputy—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It should be an easy question, as a parent—that no, a cowbell is not appropriate—

Interjection.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —for deaf students who can't hear it.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: That is not something that I'm aware of that has happened—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And I'm surprised to hear that the parliamentary assistant for education also doesn't think that this is an easy question—

Mr. Billy Pang: I'm not saying that. Don't put words in my mouth.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —because if faculty and staff and students can't actually hear the emergency alert system, then it is not an emergency alert system—

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): That concludes our three hours of consideration for the Ministry of Education.

I want to thank the minister and the deputy and all the staff from the ministry for being here today for our consideration.

Standing order 69 requires that I, as Chair, put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are members ready to vote?

Shall vote 1001—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Recorded votes, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Recorded votes are called.

Shall vote 1001, ministry administration program, carry?

Ayes

Kanapathi, Pang, Pierre, Scott, Laura Smith.

Nays

Armstrong, Clancy, Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Motion carried.
Shall vote 1002, elementary and secondary education program, carry?

Ayes

Kanapathi, Pang, Pierre, Scott, Laura Smith.

Nays

Armstrong, Clancy, Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Motion carried.
Shall vote 1003, community services information and information technology cluster, carry?

Ayes

Kanapathi, Pang, Pierre, Scott, Laura Smith.

Nays

Armstrong, Clancy, Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Motion carried.
Shall vote 1004, child care and early years programs, carry?

Ayes

Kanapathi, Pang, Pierre, Scott, Laura Smith.

Nays

Armstrong, Clancy, Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Motion carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Education carry?

Ayes

Kanapathi, Pang, Pierre, Scott, Laura Smith.

Nays

Armstrong, Clancy, Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Education to the House?

Ayes

Kanapathi, Pang, Pierre, Scott, Laura Smith.

Nays

Armstrong, Clancy, Pasma.

The Chair (Mr. Steve Clark): Motion carried.

Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes the committee's business for today. The committee now stands adjourned. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1604.

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