



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Greg Lawrence, Chair
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. David Forbes, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Centre

Mr. Russ Marchuk
Regina Douglas Park

Mr. Roger Parent
Saskatoon Meewasin

Mr. Corey Tochor
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

Ms. Colleen Young
Lloydminster

[The committee met at 15:00.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to introduce the members here today. I'm Greg Lawrence, the Chair of the Human Services Committee. We have Russ Marchuk. We have Roger Parent, Corey Tochor, Nadine Wilson, and Colleen Young, and substituting in for Mr. Forbes is Mr. Wotherspoon.

I'd like to advise the committee that pursuant to rule 148(1), the following estimates and supplementary estimates for the following ministries were deemed referred to the committee on March 26th, 2015 and March 18th, 2015, respectfully: the main estimates are vote 37 and 169, Advanced Education; vote 5, Education; vote 32, Health; vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety; vote 36, Social Services supplementary estimates; vote 37, Advanced Education; vote 5, Education; vote 32, Health. We will be considering the estimates and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Education.

Being now 3 o'clock, we begin our consideration of vote 5, central management and services, subvote (ED01). Mr. Minister Morgan is here with his officials. Minister, if you would please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am joined today by a number of officials from the ministry. I have with me, on my right, Julie MacRae who is just starting her fifth week as deputy minister, so any problems that are there are solely her fault. On my left is Greg Miller who has gone from assistant deputy minister to acting deputy minister to associate deputy minister all within about a three-week period, so I congratulate him on his rapid transition through the ranks. And he's one of the stalwarts within the ministry and has done a superb job, and I look forward to continue working with him.

Seated behind me is Donna Johnson, assistant deputy minister; Clint Repski, assistant deputy minister; Rob Spelliscy, executive director, corporate services; Angela Chobanik who is known as the guru of formulas, executive director, education funding; Brett Waytuck, executive director, student achievement and supports — he's also new in that position so I'm hoping there's tough questions for him — Kevin Gabel, executive director of programs; Gerry Kraswell, executive director, information management and support; Trevor Smith, director, information management and support; Lynn Allan, a person with incredible skill with slide decks who is executive director, early years; Brenda Dougherty, director of early years; Sheldon Ramstead or Sheldon Bumstead as he likes to be called, executive director, infrastructure; Yvonne Anderson, director, infrastructure; Tim Caleval, executive director, priority action team; Trish Livingstone, director, business improvement; Doug Volk, executive director, Teachers' Superannuation Commission; Don Wincherauk, corporate projects group; and Drew Dwernychuk, chief of staff.

As you all know, this year's budget was about keeping

Saskatchewan strong and maintaining a balanced budget while continuing to secure a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people. As a government, even when faced with challenging fiscal circumstances, it is our responsibility to ensure that the education system is well supported and that students continue to be a priority. That is why this year's budget controls spending while maintaining important investments in our people and infrastructure, which for education means investments in our students and our schools.

These investments will also help us to reach the targets that have been set in the Saskatchewan plan for growth, targets we will work together as a sector as outlined in our education sector strategic plan or the ESSP. Along with the 28 school divisions, First Nations and Métis education organizations were engaged in the development of the ESSP to identify actions and targets to achieve the goals of the Saskatchewan plan for growth. We remain committed to these priorities. They have not changed.

In 2015-16, the ESSP continues to focus on grade 1 to 3 reading and improving outcomes for First Nations and Métis students. There are two teams leading these priorities. Liam Choo-Foo, director of education, Chinook School Division is heading the team working on the reading priority. Don Rempel, director of education, North East School Division is currently heading the team looking at improving First Nations and Métis student outcomes.

We are also working to ensure that 80 per cent of students are at or above grade level in reading, writing, and math. We are building partnerships with our First Nations and Métis population to improve graduation rates for those students, both to reduce the disparity rates in graduation for these students but also to better support their success. And we are working to see that 85 per cent of our students graduate. Reaching these goals will help us to ensure that every student has the support they need to take advantage of the opportunities available to them in our growing province.

To do this as a government, in addition to investing in education, it also means in every decision that we make, asking ourselves, does this put the student first, and what difference will this make for the student? Simply put, it means continuing to ensure students are a priority. That is why this year's budget continues to make students a priority by investing in pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] education, the early years, libraries, literacy, and community-based organizations.

I'd like to talk briefly about our operating funding. This budget does provide for increased operating funding for school divisions. While tax increases were on the table, this budget contains no increase to the mill rates that were set previously for property tax. Overall funding for education has increased by 14 per cent from 2014 to 2015. The overall operating funding for school divisions is 1.87 billion — that's billion with a "b" — an increase of 2.9 per cent over last year, which includes a \$52.8 million increase in operating funding for 2015-2016. This is in the context of the government fiscal year.

Government continues to maintain the balance of operating grant to education property tax at 65/35. We may in the future

seek to rebalance back to around 60/40, but for now there is no change. We will also begin consultations in reviewing requirements for the collection of education property taxes centrally. In terms of the school divisions' fiscal year, funding has been increased by \$81.5 million or 4.5 per cent. This includes increased funding to cover the collective bargaining agreement.

This year's budget once again continues transition funding for the school divisions that would've experienced decreases through the new model. When the new model rolled out, we had indicated this transition could take between two and four years. We also said the model would continue to be a work in progress. That is why we will be engaging in deep listening with school divisions in the coming months. The transition funding will not be at the levels they were in previous years, but we wanted to ensure as minimal impact to students and teachers in the classroom as possible. School divisions that had been seeing decreases through transition adjustments are no longer receiving this reduction, and the costs have been distributed evenly throughout the model.

I'd like to move on very briefly and talk about capital investment. This year's budget also includes a commitment of \$248.5 million in school capital funding. This was the largest budget day capital allocation ever. It is an increase of \$152.3 million or more than 158 per cent over 2014-15. Included in the school capital funding this year is \$157.5 million which includes both construction and technical costs to begin work on the 18 new schools, nine joint-use facilities in Warman, Martensville, Saskatoon, and Regina. These are areas that have experienced extraordinary growth over the past number of years, and this investment will help to meet the demands of that growth. These new schools are being designed with the community in mind, providing a community resource centre, gymnasium, daycare, and other multi-purpose rooms. Members of the community, students, teachers, and school division staff led the initial design process and continue to be involved at key points. Construction will begin this fall and the schools are scheduled to open in fall of 2017. These projects are well into the planning stage and on track to meet our target date.

All previously announced capital projects will also continue to move forward. This year's budget includes \$91 million to advance these projects, including \$47.8 million, which represents a \$3.6 million increase, to begin construction for Connaught Elementary in Regina, Sacred Heart in Regina, and St. Brieux, as well as funding to complete eight other projects started in previous years, including Langenburg, Gravelbourg, Hudson Bay, Martensville High School, Weyburn high school, Georges Vanier in Saskatoon, St. Matthew in Saskatoon, and Saskatoon Holy Cross High School.

There's also a \$31.6 million, a 32 per cent, or \$7.6 million increase for school preventative and emergency maintenance. We know that this is a welcome investment for school divisions as it allows them to proactively address maintenance issues. It also provides greater autonomy to school divisions in addressing their priorities.

We've also included \$10.6 million, which is a \$3.7 million increase, for up to 31 new relocatable classrooms throughout the province.

Traditional school capital funding includes \$12.9 million as a result of changes to the way we fund capital projects. Government will assume 100 per cent funding for major capital investments. This change was made at the request of school divisions and will take effect as of April 1, 2015. With this change, school divisions will no longer need to borrow for a local share of capital projects. This will mean less administrative work for school divisions and overall savings, at least \$25 million over 20 years, for the education sector on interest costs.

While we continue to fund ongoing capital projects, no new projects are being approved for the design phase in this year. We recognize school divisions' autonomy, and we will support them in using their existing reserves. This brings the government's overall investment in school infrastructure since November 2007 to nearly \$1 billion. The actual number is close to 948 million.

I want to talk briefly about early years. This budget also includes significant investments, more than \$66 million, for early years programs to support some of the youngest and more vulnerable in our province. This includes a \$2.14 million increase in our operating funding for ongoing costs of recently developed child care spaces. This also brings the number of licensed child care spaces in our province to more than 14,200, an increase of 4,935 or 53 per cent since 2007.

In addition we've also committed that a 90-space child care centre will be a part of each of the new joint-use schools. That's a commitment of 810 additional child care spaces for these communities when these schools open in the fall of 2017.

The \$66 million investment in the early years also includes a 1 per cent increase in CBO [community-based organization] funding, including child care centres to support the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

In addition to this funding, we've also provided \$546,000 more to school divisions to support recently developed pre-K [pre-kindergarten] programs. These programs support the social, emotional, intellectual, language, and literacy development of 3- and 4-year-olds. Since 2007 we have more than doubled the number of pre-K programs in the province from 155 to 316. Our government is proud of the investments that we have made in this area.

I'd like to move on briefly and talk about libraries and literacy. We also remain committed to supporting and developing the literacy skills of all learners in our province and recognize the role that public libraries have in supporting that. In this budget, support for public libraries will remain at \$11.09 million, and current funding for resource sharing grants will be maintained. This includes continued investments of \$114,000 in the single integrated library system or SILS, \$100,000 for the national network for equitable library service, \$100,000 for interlibrary loans, and \$2.4 million for CommunityNet for libraries. This funding will ensure that the people of Saskatchewan can continue to access information resources they need through the public libraries.

Support for literacy and literacy organizations will also be maintained at \$2.45 million, which includes 815,000 for adult

literacy, 537,000 for family literacy, 600,000 for summer literacy camps, and 500,000 for the Saskatchewan Community Literacy Fund. Included in these amounts is a 1 per cent lift in funding for family and adult literacy community-based organizations.

I'd like to talk briefly as well about the joint task force which includes ISSI [invitational shared services initiative], and I'll come to that in a minute. As promised, our government also remains committed to continued investments to respond to the recommendations made by the joint task force for improving First Nations and Métis education and employment outcomes.

We know, as outlined by the JTF [joint task force] report, that a multi-year plan is required to systemically improve these outcomes for First Nations and Métis people. That is why last year our government increased the investment in this area from 3 million to \$6 million, and the government budget will once again include \$6 million to continue this important work, which I would like to talk about a little bit today.

A portion of this investment will be made through the Ministry of the Economy. This includes \$550,000 in mobile career assessment units and transition services to support First Nations and Métis people to succeed in education, training, and securing employment. The Ministry of Advanced Education will also be investing \$375,000 in partnership with SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] for academic and career support for students.

Our ministry's investment of nearly \$5.1 million will support the ISSI, or invitational shared services initiative, which includes: \$2.4 million for 16 projects, \$1.6 million for Following Their Voices, \$1 million for Help Me Tell My Story and Help Me Talk About Math, and \$125,000 for Microsoft software licensing. These investments make a very real difference in the experience of the student. For example, the ISSI partnerships focus on supports for students in the areas of reading, literacy, graduation, early learning, as well as professional development for teachers.

[15:15]

The First Nations education organization determines which areas the dollars will be targeted toward, based upon the needs of their students in alignment with the priorities in the ESSP. Each partnership is uniquely designed to support students in that community. The partners determine how the program will be implemented. Some examples include access to a literacy coach, a graduation mentor coach, an educational psychologist, a speech-language pathologist, and a math consultant.

For instance the Good Spirit School Division partnered with the Yorkton Tribal Council. The ISSI agreement involves three schools, two on-reserve schools, and one provincial school. The partnership is breaking down barriers to help support students and build relationships between neighbouring schools, and now we're seeing benefits from the student level right to the top level of the organizations.

Through their agreement, two positions were created and shared between all three schools. One is a literacy coach. The other is a community liaison worker. This person helps build personal

relationships with students. If a child isn't in school, the worker can help to understand why and problem solve. In some cases this could be finding out how to engage a student in school or it could be ensuring the student has what they need to get to school in the morning. The schools are also sharing academic work and professional development. Teachers from the provincial school are coming to the reserve school and vice versa.

As referenced earlier, the investment in Following Their Voices is another piece of this work which is also supporting one of the major priorities of the sector plan. The working group has begun research and development of a program that meets the needs of Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis students. They are using feedback from First Nations and Métis students and families as well as their teachers and school principal or vice-principal about what works well in order to be successful as a First Nations and Métis student in school.

This feedback is being shared with our First Nations and Métis elders and knowledge keepers to develop the initiative. An advisory committee and a working group are in place to do this work. It consists of First Nations and Métis elders, school division personnel, First Nations education personnel, university professors and researchers, education stakeholders, and ministry staff. Following Their Voices, we'll use a model where in-school facilitators will work with the teachers in classrooms to meet the specific needs of these students.

This year's investment will enable the group to expand this project to 10 to 15 schools in the province, further refine and develop professional learning and development resources for teachers and facilitators, and continued engagement with elders. These investments are vital to the success of these initiatives, and they are based on conversations and dialogue. The relationships being built with First Nations and Métis education organizations are immeasurably important to this work, just as they are to the sector plan.

I would like to talk about supporting students. I also want to talk about our government's commitment to supporting students and teachers in the classroom. This year's budget includes \$4.6 million in funding to continue investments and supports for learning. This was an increase over the 2014-15 budget, and we will maintain the funding committed partway through last year. It also includes \$420,000 for English as an additional language supports to deliver on the commitments made to school divisions in the 2014-15 school year.

Let me be clear that this is not a cut to EAL [English as an additional language] funding. In 2014-15 the government announced slightly more than \$1 million which was directly allocated to school divisions for the school year. This allowed them to make decisions at a local level to determine and address the levels of support and resources required to meet English as an additional language needs in schools and classrooms.

The funding was paid out over two years of the government's fiscal year since the government and school divisions' fiscal years are different. That means that in 2014-15, \$588,000 in new funding went to expand English as an additional language supports to support funding from September to March. Continued funding of \$420,000 was included in this budget,

which went to support school divisions from April to August. Also announced was an additional \$75,000 in new funding to provide Braille and alternative format materials for students with disabilities.

Another thing I would like to highlight in this year's budget is a \$7,000 increase or \$965,000 to cover the cost of transitioning to the teachers' self-regulating professional body. This is to support moving away from the current process where the ministry is responsible for certifying teachers; and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents, or LEADS, are responsible for disciplining their members.

These changes will ensure consistency and transparency in the regulatory process. It will also provide teachers with the same authority and responsibility as other self-regulated professions in the province and enhance the integrity of the teaching profession. These changes are about maintaining public trust in the disciplinary process, protecting the integrity of the teaching profession, and improving the safety of our students.

Again, from the beginning the Ministry of Education has worked with STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation], LEADS, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. We believe they have helped us develop a framework that will serve and protect the interests of our students, teachers, and the public. The interim board of directors with the assistance of the teacher regulation transition committee will finalize the board's bylaws and prepare to begin operation in the fall of 2015.

This year's budget also includes \$379.9 million, an increase of \$39.8 million or 11.7 per cent for teacher pension and benefits.

These are the highlights of this year's budget. This concludes my opening remarks. We look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, I believe you have some questions for the minister.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. Thank you very much. Thank you to the minister. Thank you for being here today, but thank you so much to all the officials that are with us here today and for the work they do on behalf of students throughout the year and for putting up with this minister. I'm sure that can be trying at times. I look forward to our time here this afternoon.

I guess I'll focus in on sort of some more general questions. Then we'll get into some that are more related specifically to education. As it relates to the ministry, I just want to get a sense of what's going on with the FTEs [full-time equivalent] and what changes are occurring.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to ask each of the officials to state their name when they come forward. Donna Johnson is joining us.

Ms. Johnson: — Good afternoon. So the question was with respect to the FTEs. There's very modest changes in the FTEs in the ministry this year. We have a reduction of a half an FTE in our overall budget, and that is related to a net reduction of

essentially five FTEs within the curriculum unit being transferred, four and a half of them being transferred into the infrastructure branch to address the additional work that comes with the joint-use schools project.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for that answer. Are there staff being seconded to Executive Council right now?

Ms. Johnson: — No, there are not.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How many out-of-province trips has the minister taken this year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — None.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No out-of-province?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, there was none.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There wouldn't be any out of country then either?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How many staff . . . Are there plans for travel this year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't have any made at this time. There's a CMEC [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada] meeting later this year, and that's I think in Yellowknife. I don't know whether I'll go or whether somebody else will go. Likely somebody from the ministry should attend that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — As it relates to external contracting, what services have been provided by external contractors this past year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There was in total 13 contracts.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. How many payees received more than one contract?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't believe that there's any, but we can provide you with a list of them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, and I'll look forward to the list as well. How many contracts were worth under \$50,000?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll provide the dollar value of each one.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you have those here?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't. We'll provide them on the same list.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you have the number of contracts that were under 50,000?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We believe there was 76 that were . . . Thirteen of those would've been above 75; the remaining would've been below 75,000. We're using a threshold of 75.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry. Can you just go through those numbers again?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. There was a total of 76. They totalled \$4.1 million. Thirteen were above \$75,000, and the remainder were below 75.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And the ones above 75, above 50,000 will ultimately be recorded in the public accounts. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can give them all to you if you wish.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, I would appreciate that, if you could provide I guess the contract, the payee, the contract amount, and then the purpose of the contract. And the total was 4.1 million?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How does that compare to the last few years?

Ms. Johnson: — Speaking to those contracts that are in excess of \$75,000 each, as Minister Morgan said, in '14-15 we had 13 contracts in that fiscal year above 75,000. In the previous year of 2013-14 we also had 13 contracts in excess of 75,000. And in 2012-13 we had 18 contracts above 75,000.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. I look forward to the other information on the full 76 contracts that were mentioned as well. What sort of services are you receiving through these contracts?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have the ones with us now that are the ones over 75, and I can tell you what they are. One is for \$200,000 for student achievement for educational programming for students with Down Syndrome, a program called Ability in Me. Another one for 82,250 with a company called Allset Translation for providing translation services; Aon Hewitt, 88,988 for actuarial services dealing with Teachers' Superannuation Commission; Crime Stoppers, a program where they do the text messaging, which was entered into February of 2015 for 107,500; C. Fleury Consulting for IT [information technology] consulting for information management and support, 110,000; ESTI Consulting Services, which provides information technology consulting, risk management appropriate of the TSC [Teachers' Superannuation Commission] computer system. So it deals with the pension, payroll, group life insurance, work provided for teachers' superannuation. And that one is 203,163.

[15:30]

Another one for maintenance and support of a Penfax system which is a specialized computerized program for administering teachers' superannuation plan, 212,272; Junior Achievement of Saskatchewan, 900,000; student achievement supports for a new community youth development corporation for education services at Community Learners High School in Saskatoon, 200,000. I don't know if you're familiar with that school or not. It operates from a non-traditional school and has only a small number of students that have had very challenged lives, so it's

student achievement.

Another one: Sask Teachers' Federation, provide director for future curriculum development and implementation supports, 138,551; and the last one was SIEC, or Saskatoon Industry Education Council, to support myBlueprint via Saskcareers web system. That one was for 381,500.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What was that last one you just mentioned?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Saskatoon Industry Education Council. It's a computer program used by both employers and employees called myBlueprint, and it is a program where a student has a valise or a portfolio that's maintained on the computer. They can access that in development for purposes of job creation and job search, and then the employer would be able to access some of the information directly. So it's part of the education strategic sector plan.

The last two are \$80,000 for the RAP program, Saskatoon restorative action program, which is operated by Rotary Club in Saskatoon, a restorative action program. And the last one is for \$422,250 for Tetra Tech EBA, which is for part of the school bundle project technical services.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What was the last one, the 422?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That was a company called Tetra Tech EBA, Inc. I don't know what the EBA stands for, but they were providing the technical support for the school bundle project.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The P3s [public-private partnership]?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So 442,000, who's this organization?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The company that does it?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — A technical services company. The notes say there was an RFP [request for proposal] conducted, and they were the ones providing the technical services for it. They would have reviewed blueprints, the technical support for the things that would go in the building.

Ms. Johnson: — I can add to that. Tetra Tech is the company that does the geomatic and the geographical work related to the site. So they do examination of the sites and confirm what issues, if any, there are with the sites that the architects and the engineers need to contend with as they go about planning the build of those schools.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much for that answer. What other costs or contracts would be in place around the cost of the, related to the P3s then, or the bundle?

Ms. Johnson: — Within the Ministry of Education we have two prime service delivery organizations. Group2 Architecture is one of them and Tetra Tech is our second service provider.

Group2 Architecture is the group that worked with the ministry and the school divisions through the 3P [production preparation process] process last year and came up with some indicative designs and supported the development of the RFP.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what is their contract? What were they paid last year?

Ms. Johnson: — I can get you that amount. I'll just need to get that a little bit later on if that's all right.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Would it exceed 75,000?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, it did.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Was it mentioned just now in that list of contracts?

Ms. Johnson: — No, it was not listed in that. It was not included in that list.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Is there a reason for that? Just to the minister, the question was that I think it was provided that the ministry had the list of contracts in excess of 75,000, so that one is notably absent.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We will provide you with the particulars of the contract. I can tell you the contract was in excess of \$1 million so clearly should've been on the list. It's one of the things that was so huge, it wasn't caught as . . . [inaudible] . . . one of ones that was there, so our apologies.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Fair enough. It's just difficult when information's characterized as the extent of the information and then one like that . . . Now would there be others as well? Or will that . . . When I receive the information provided, are there any, I guess, jumping out to people here that weren't mentioned?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's a good question. I'm just going to ask the officials to make very sure that we've given a complete information on it. So it should have been included so we'll . . . [inaudible].

Ms. Johnson: — I understand that the reason that contract wasn't listed previously was because it is a multi-year contract that we originally entered into in 2013-14. So that contract has an effective date or a start date of January 1st, 2014, and the total amount of that contract is originally established at 5.3 million.

Now I can tell you too that that contract has gone through a couple of phases, and in the second phase, the work that was done by Group2 came in under contract. So that 5.3 would be a maximum amount payable under the contract but not the amount that will be paid because of the fact that the second phase came in under cost.

But in any event, our apologies again for not having itemized that in the previous listing. It was left out because of it having been signed in 2013-14.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for the information. Do you

have the number then available as to what sort of money flowed to Group2 out of the last fiscal year and what will flow to them this year and going forward?

Ms. Johnson: — I don't have the cash flow breakdown of that amount, but I can get that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. And Group2, who are they? Where are they from?

Ms. Johnson: — Group2 Architecture is, for the joint-use schools project, is based out of Saskatoon. They also have . . . I think it's fair to say their original office or their head office is based out of Red Deer, Alberta, but in Saskatoon is where all of the staff are that work on our joint-use school project.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — They set up that office after the contract?

Ms. Johnson: — I would have to double-check on the timing of that, but I believe they set that office up in 2013.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — As far as the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we're gaining ground on getting at numbers of the . . . So we'll have the dollar figure that flowed through last year, I think.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. We'll have that here?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Take the abacuses out.

Ms. Johnson: — So again for Group2 Architecture, the actual amount paid to Group2 in 2013-14, which you'll also find in volume 2 of Public Accounts, is 1.1 million. And then in 2014-15, we are still needing to see what the final billing is for the month of March, but at this point we're estimating the total payments to Group2 in '14-15 to be 2.5 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. And then the total that we . . . The cap or the maximum would be five point . . .

Ms. Johnson: — Three million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — In the 2.5, was that contained in the total amount that was discussed by the minister about the \$4 million for all contracts?

Ms. Johnson: — Let me check.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, it was not. The list I gave you before was for only ones that were entered into in that year, so far as I know, but we'll confirm that this was the only multi-year contract where . . . This is the only multi-year . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So the proper number then for . . . would be 6.6 million that was spent on contracts. Is that 6.6 just the projects that are more than 75,000, or does that include all 70-some contracts?

Ms. Johnson: — The 4.1 million included all of the contracts that were entered into during 2014-15. So 13 of those contracts

were above the \$75,000 level and those 13, I don't have an annual expenditure amount on. The total dollar value or the maximum dollar value of those 13 is 3.1 million. That is not though the amount that will be paid to each of those contractors throughout the course of the year. Some of those contracts that were entered into in '14-15 will extend into '15-16, so this 3.1 million covers the maximum payable on those 13 contracts.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for endeavouring to get the rest of the information together. So if we just have all the payees; all the contracts right down to the smaller amounts, there's not that many there in the actual number; and then the value of that contract; and then the flow of the money, in which fiscal year the money will flow, if it was last year, this year, next year, what other obligations we've made to them. Thank you very much.

Moving along to some general questions for each ministry around the lean process, so for Education, what's been allocated within this budget for lean or lean-specific exercises and activities?

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Since 2010-11, the ministry, school divisions, and the government's productivity have spent \$1 million for lean training and lean events up to December 31st of 2014. They would be dealing with things such as student support services, reducing absenteeism, providing supports to transient students, instructional leadership, facility use, transportation, professional learning, and information management.

So the target of the school division . . . [inaudible] . . . was to complete two lean events in '15-16. So there'd be a total of 58 lean events since we've started and development and implementation of a lean communications plan to describe how lean is adding value and eliminating inefficiencies. There's a variety of different things there, and I'll certainly answer whatever questions you have on it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry. The total amount that was allocated for the budget this year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't have a specific budget for it, but we have two staff members that are working towards developing and conducting the lean events.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. And then there'd be spending as well at the local school. So two activities for all 28 school divisions?

Ms. Johnson: — So there are two staff members within the ministry who are lean experts and lead us through lean events. As Minister Morgan mentioned, we do have a goal that each school division will deliver two lean events. And the school divisions, during the current fiscal year, had been accessing the productivity fund that was available through the corporate projects group to the extent that they made any applications to that fund.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, so if a school division is having two lean events, those dollars and the cost of bringing in,

whether it's teachers out of classrooms or consultants away from their regular duties, those dollars are recouped through another fund. Is that correct? They aren't the dollars of the division?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Those would be the expense of the division.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you have an estimate on the cost for those internal resources required for a division? At two of the events a year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, you know, you may get a different answer from the divisions, but the expectation would be that they would be able to absorb most of those expenses from within, that they would have sufficient resources or sufficient elasticity that they would be able to absorb within. Now they may in some cases have to bring in a substitute or a fill-in, but usually they know about them well enough in advance. So none of the divisions I think have approached us that they needed additional resources for it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry. The question though, not for you as the ministry proper, but for the school divisions themselves, the cost for them to . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's what I'm saying, is that we would expect the divisions, if they chose to participate in the events, would be able to absorb. None of the divisions have come back to us and indicated that they needed any significant amount of additional resources.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. But just to be clear, that's not the question I'm asking: the actual cost, the estimate for each school division, the cost that they'll be spending for the activities. So I understand you're saying that the money's not going to be provided by the ministry for the activity, that they'll use their internal resources. My question is, what's the estimate as far as the cost of each of those lean events or for two lean events for a board?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've never asked that of the divisions and we don't know that. That would be up to the individual divisions. We assume, in most cases, they absorbed it. But if there was an additional cost, we're not aware of it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, they wouldn't just absorb it because, I mean, these are the resources of the dedicating resources that are paid. So if you have, for example, 10 or 12 or 20 people from within a division that are engaged in that lean exercise, there's a cost of their time as an organization or any business that would be able to, you know . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well the people are working there on a salary, so this is one of the things they would do on their, however many days in a year that they were working. And there would not be any incremental cost other than this is sort of part of what they are doing as part of their job. But there's no doubt that they have spent and will spend time on it, but it's not, it does not appear to be at an additional cost to the government or to the divisions. It's done within their own budgets.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The point being that resources are slim

for school divisions. And any time they're either told or dictated to that they have to have two events of a certain nature, and then they conduct those activities and pull those resources, those are resources of that school division, just the same as if you had a certain project that brought teachers together for a certain purpose. You're right; there may not be an additional cost on a given day if it's focused in around professional development or something, but there is a cost of the school division focused on that activity. But you don't have any estimates from school divisions on that front?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I couldn't tell you what the divisions spend. I know some of them use Price Waterhouse for funding facilitators for the event. We provide funding through our productivity fund and those, per event, the costs are just over \$14,000 per event. But I couldn't give you a cost of what the divisions are paying.

And I think your analogy that this is like professional development is probably a good one. We don't dictate or require that the divisions participate in it. They do it voluntarily, and we're pleased that they are.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I would just urge some caution around it, you know, dictating or requesting actions for which . . . They come at a cost, both from the time and resources of school divisions, without understanding all the other pressures that they're balancing in adding something else to the divisions. And professional development is something that's really critical. It's incredibly important that divisions themselves, along with their teams and their staff, are able to make sure that the professional development they're engaging in is relevant, purposeful, and bringing value to students.

I'm interested in following up. Could you just read the portion again and provide a little bit more information about, that you provided about what the purpose of these are? And there was something about a communications plan that you mentioned about reporting out, I think it was suggested sort of to be reporting out the benefits of lean.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't think that's what I said. The priorities that they would have on these things would be student support services; reducing absenteeism and providing supports to transient students; instructional leadership, which would mean working with parents, teachers, and students to ensure high-quality instruction to support student achievement; transportation; facility use; professional learning; and informational management.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, and just continue on reading what you were before into the communications plan component that you read out.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have used lean for student supports for learning. And the program goes and it completes . . . They work through, and I can tell you some of the benefits that have come from it. We have a backlog in referrals for educational psychologists that have been reduced by 67 per cent. Backlog in referrals for speech-language pathologists have been reduced by 58 per cent. Student waits to receive specialized services such as speech-language services have been reduced from five months down to 11 days. Students whose families are highly

transient can now stay within their originating school, which helps build stability in relationships that help them be successful in school.

Maintenance requests are now filled in four days instead of 22 days, ensuring students have a safe learning environment. There have been improvements in how maintenance is managed in recognizing dollar savings, time savings, reduced wait times for repairs. For example, one school division has recognized approximately \$132,000 in savings as a result of their lean event in maintenance. Hiring processes have reduced the application time from 12 days to one, ensuring that teacher vacancies can be quickly filled. Licensing, the time to do an annual relicensing of a child care home, was reduced from 11 to seven hours, which frees up staff and client resources.

I think most of the things that they do are done for the purpose of increasing efficiency and service to the people that are using the system, using the services. So we are seeing benefit in time spent on things. There certainly will be savings, but we also hope that the staff that are using them feel that there's a benefit because it makes their work easier, more productive, and more satisfying because in fact they are actually providing better service to their students.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry, that wasn't the information I was asking. You read something just earlier when you were reading what the purpose of these are for, and you'd talked about a communications plan and some part of the exercise there. If you could just put that back into the record so I could have a . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. Part of the '15-16 plan, it plans to further embed lean as an improvement in management methodology. So the target of the divisions in ministry will be to complete two lean events in the '15-16 calendar year, so there'd be a total of 58. One of the things they plan to do will be to develop an implementation of a lean communications plan to describe how lean is adding value and eliminating inefficiencies; and to continue to engage the sector in strategic development and deployment; and to align activities in all the ministry and school divisions to achieve priorities; to develop and train supports for school divisions, networks, etc., to build knowledge and skills of lean management.

So the idea is to try and have lean embodied at a more broad level throughout the school system so we can try and improve efficiencies.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. It just sounds really, really wasteful to have your divisions engaging in a communications plan that's speaking to, in a very closed way, describing how lean is supposedly improving the efficiencies and the benefits that supposedly are occurring with it. I mean, that's not objective in any way, shape, or form, and it's being dictated from the ministry. And I'd see that as a, you know, very prescriptive and wasteful exercise to dictate to divisions to be producing new information to support the lean exercise.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I just want to restate we do not require any division to participate. It's optional. If a division chooses not to, that's entirely up to them. We think there's benefits to them. We offer it to them. And I'll let Donna Johnson give you a couple of numbers as to the benefits.

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, and just a bit further on that reference to the communications plan. What that really is speaking to is having a forum where the school divisions can share with one another the results of the lean events that they've participated in because those lean events have resulted in them going about their work in new and better ways, ways that are more effective for the students. And when one school division finds success like that, the other school divisions want to hear about it. So it really is about finding that forum, developing that forum for the school divisions to share their successes with each other.

We've also heard from many of the people who have been involved in our lean events. For example one of the students from a lean event mentioned that, at the event, "The people there are doing a good job of listening to us and putting us first and hearing about what we have to say about our ideas."

We have quotes from teachers who are saying . . . And this is related to a lean event at the Prairie Valley School Division that was related to student referrals or referring students for professional services. And this teacher is saying:

When you see that a child doesn't have to wait for services and can get help quickly, it touches you in the heart. It is hard to watch a child struggle because you don't know what level they are learning at or what is impacting them in their learning. I have had that child receive services more quickly, and you wouldn't believe the difference it can make in the classroom. How can we ever ask a child to wait? It really is moving to see a child supported and able to learn.

So that's coming out of the lean event that examines in that case why it was taking a significant amount of time between the date a child's learning need is identified and when that learning need is met. As they examined that process, they were able to cut many weeks out of the waiting process.

So it is again, you know, it's an opportunity for schools to get together and talk to each other about the successes that they've had with the lean events that they've undertaken.

[16:00]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I just think that there needs to be more genuine opportunities for school boards and for educators to connect with their government and also with one another. And to suggest that this is a forum for them to engage on lean but suggesting that they only do so by highlighting what they see as potential benefits from some of the exercise is really tilted in a certain direction and really, if anything, embedding sort of, you know, sort of a communications plan around lean and to support it as opposed to what the focus should always be: students and their learning and then the boards themselves.

So I just find, you know . . . And this is not a critique of the good civil servants that are here but certainly of the government. There seems to be so much time focused on propping up pet projects of the government and not enough time of truly focusing in on learning with educators and with school boards and with students. So I find that that's certainly not any genuine assessment of these exercises with school boards to simply say, well give us the, you know, potential

good comments that you may have of this as opposed to what's your perspective on it. But I'll move along.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think I should respond to that. I think any of the programs that we undertake, anything that we do with the divisions is worthwhile for the people that participate, to discuss and communicate on it afterwards, to look at both the successes and the things that are not so successful so that one, we don't repeat things that were not as successful as they should be but also, more importantly, that we take the successes. We build on the successes. We raise them up, and we spread them out so other people can participate in them.

I think the definition of failure is when you keep doing the same thing over and over again and wonder why you don't get better results, and this is a classic example. The division spends almost \$2 billion a year. I think the taxpayers, the students, the teachers, we owe it to them to do an analysis and share information where we have successes, and we certainly have had significant successes with the lean process. I know that it's a political issue with the opposition, but we feel we are getting significant success from it. Those that participate in it, for the most part, have found it highly beneficial and have found savings and efficiencies.

I'll just give you an example: students waiting too long to receive specialized services. I'm looking at Light of Christ had consultants, twelve five. Prairie Valley was spending another twelve five; Saskatoon Public, twelve five. Good Spirit had spent . . . [inaudible] . . . as well. So we now are seeing that the time waiting for the referrals has gone down from five months to 11 days. Now if I was a student waiting for a consultant to be referred, I would think that's helping the student and helping the student a lot.

So those kind of time savings reductions and efficiencies may seem small, and I appreciate the point that you make about stopwatches, but when we're taking things that are many months that they go by and we're now measuring things with a watch or with a matter of days, it's a worthwhile exercise to go to. If that serves our students better, then we're going to commit to it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Well just back to, like the comment was ensuring the public has sort of accountability and value. There's no accountability in torquing an input process that only collects and skims some of the good aspects of where people are connecting.

True assessment . . . I mean you are the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Education. That wouldn't cut it in any classroom across Saskatchewan for any teacher trying to evaluate their own program. It wouldn't cut it for any principal and school team, and it certainly doesn't cut it for school divisions that are setting goals and then in a genuine way assessing the pros and cons of those. Certainly it should be insufficient for the Ministry of Education to be sort of skimming along to find the stories, good news stories as opposed to, you know, authentic evaluation of the processes that you're engaged in. So I see that as nothing short of disappointing on that front.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If you're going back and wanting to tout

standardized testing, you did it last year. We're not there. We're not going down the road of standardized testing. We're not on. We're going to use the things in the system that are successful. We're going to build on the successes, and we'll leave it to the opposition to deal with standardized testing. It was part of their mantra before we formed government and appears to be continuing to, as we go forward, but I'll leave that to the opposition.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You know, you get kind of cute. You're the Minister of Education. All you're doing is tilting a process to collect good stories that you can pat yourself on the back with with your lean process opposed to any sort of authentic evaluation of that program. It's a weak public policy, and it has no place in education in the way you're . . . in the good hard-working professionals in the school divisions across this province, the administrators, the consultants, the teachers, and it's disappointing to see that here.

As far as you're little distraction here on standardized testing, coming from the government that has been pushing forward in this way, has wasted all sorts of money on this front and, you know, continues to not have trust of the teachers and the students, that they aren't still pushing forward on that front is disappointing. Of course we fought the province-wide standardized testing initiative of this government and the wasteful spending tooth and nail. It was out of place in reflecting best educational practice and certainly wasn't in the interests of the public. And we'll continue to fight that desire from this government. So let's focus back in on the questions.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — And you know, we'll continue to use what we believe is good methodology. The education strategic sector plan was something that was developed using lean methodology. There was support for that from all 28 school divisions, from the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association], from the STF. That type of methodology, to the extent that it provides good benefits and good successes, we want to do that.

The point you make about noting things that don't work as well, I think your point in that is valid. If something isn't working, we should look at it and then not proceed with it. So we'll certainly . . . The point is well taken, and I agree with you. That's something that all governments should do is look at things that aren't working well. Now you and I may disagree on what is not working well, but we believe that lean has provided some significant benefits to us, and I think we want to continue to analyze it as we go forward.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — But as I say, that's not analysis to simply say, collect good stories as opposed to asking for authentic analysis from those that are engaging in it in the school divisions. Just moving along. There's the two FTEs that are allocated to lean, so there's that cost. I guess, how many individuals in the ministry have undergone lean training?

Ms. Johnson: — We have, over the course of the last few years, 90 per cent of ministry staff have taken some level of training. So in some cases that's one day, and in some cases that would be a two-day training course.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you have a cost that you can

attribute to that?

Ms. Johnson: — I don't have a cost handy. Most of the training that our ministry staff undertook was undertaken in 2013-14 or earlier.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I think we'll leave some of these questions just now. I want to get into the heart of some of the education choices. And I see my colleague, the member from Saskatoon Centre is here, and I know he wants to focus in on a couple areas around human rights in education. Maybe I'll pass the baton to him for a little bit and then pick it back up when he's completed. If he's taking too long, I'll give him an elbow. He's got some important issues to address.

The Chair: — Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. Right off the bat, I do have some questions about early childhood intervention programs. And I know, speaking of letters, that you received a letter on November 28, 2014. We were cc'd this. They had been talking about issues of funding, and I think they may have even met with you. It seems the budget has gone up 40,000, so I'm not sure what that percentage is on 4 million but maybe like a 1 per cent increase. Do you have comments? Clearly this is a big issue.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, the ECIP [early childhood intervention program] program is a valuable program. The people there do good work, and we think it's critically important. The ECIP program is like the other CBOs that provide services to government, and there was an across-the-board increase of 1 per cent.

Mr. Forbes: — Now they felt, in the letter that they wrote you, that clearly they had been underfunded for many years. And in fact they were talking about 5 of the 13 ECIP regions are forecasting a deficit budget for the fiscal year coming up. So I'm not sure whether this will be very helpful.

What has been your communication with them? I mean part of it is that the whole fact in the CBO world has been facing recruitment and retention programs. They've missed out on some of the funding that other CBOs had the good fortune of getting in the past few years. They missed that, and now they're being caught with this budget. So what has been your message to them? How do you expect them to continue on with their work?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We value and appreciate the work that they do. The program that they provide is one that is beneficial and helpful to our early years students.

We as a government made the decision that the CBO increase this year would be 1 per cent. They are part of that. We know that this will be sometimes a challenge for them to work within that, but this is a challenging year for all our areas of government, so we're asking them to work with us for this year. Having said that, I don't want to minimize in any way the value of the work that they do and the importance of the things that they're doing.

Mr. Forbes: — Are you planning to meet with them? What has

been the extent of their conversations, or has it been simply a read it in the budget type of thing?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. I've met with them, with different groups of them, sometimes one and two at a time, sometimes with larger groups. They would have received, as everybody did, what was in the budget, and we've had some mail correspondence since. And you know, this is something that, as we go forward in a subsequent year, it's something that we know we get good value from these people.

Mr. Forbes: — Well we may have more questions on that. I just know that it's an important one. The other one, because this sort of flows into what's been happening with disabilities, is I wanted to talk a little bit about . . . And we were hoping and it's unfortunate that the disability report is going to come out after budget. I'm not sure if there's been money set aside. Sometimes we have surprises after budgets.

In Social Services last year, we had many, a few surprises after budget where estimates were done and all of a sudden announcements came along, and I'm thinking Sweet Dreams. And I don't know whether you've asked them whether there are any other surprises coming from Education after estimates are done.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There has been none that have come forward since budget. I'm not aware of any going forward. The only indication that we've made is we've recognized the importance for the school division of enrolment funding. And we've indicated, I think both the Finance minister and myself have indicated that if people start driving Hummers and buy more gasoline and fuel prices go up, that's something we would like to deal with with mid-year if that's possible or practical.

Mr. Forbes: — Well the reason I'm asking, because it is serious, you know, because we take this part very seriously, and that when we see, days after estimates are done, governments make new announcements outside of budget . . . And one of the ones that we're looking at is disabilities. I appreciate your comments but I guess I just want to register that observation that I think it's poor governance when we get through this and we see this . . . Because my concern is around the disability strategy that has been delayed outside the budget cycle. So we'll hear the report. Now I know it's not your area. But education is one of the streams of that, and it's a very, very important part, and there's people who are talking about educational issues.

So we were disappointed to hear that this final report will come out sometime I think towards the end of May, after session is done, and there can't be any public scrutiny of the report for a year, which is unfortunate.

[16:15]

But I do want to draw your attention to . . . These are the comments that were in the strategy. It was an interim report and it talks about what was happening in education and those who are deaf. And I'll read this:

People who are Deaf [and this is from page 17, *Our Experience, Our Voice*, people who are Deaf] attempted to

describe their silent world, which for many is incredibly isolating, and they told us Saskatchewan's system is failing them. Living in a world of silence makes it so much harder to learn any language, let alone communicate in a way that can be understood. Being unable to sign to your teacher, bus driver, caregiver, or classmates because they cannot understand or communicate back leaves Deaf people very isolated. Much of the discussion centred on issues such as development of language, availability and quality of interpreters, and recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) as an official language of instruction.

So I'm curious. You probably have folks in the department who have read this and they're aware of this and preparing or probably have already prepared a response to this. What is the response to the ministry to this position?

Mr. Miller: — Thank you. So certainly the ministry has committed to working with the community for the provision of services to its youth. The government recognizes school divisions are in the best place, on a day-to-day basis, to provide services to children in collaboration with parents and guardians and to identify the programming and support that's needed to meet the needs of all children, including deaf and hard of hearing children.

The services provided to individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing are basically in place to work towards supporting their independence and success, their personal well-being, and a capacity to function in and contribute to the broader community. So the delivery of services through school divisions is the model, and government of course supports the provision of services through its overall funding allocations.

Mr. Forbes: — So how does the minister and the officials feel about the services provided to the deaf community?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I met with a number of the groups earlier in the year, and there appears to be somewhat of a divide among the different, amongst the groups you talk to. Some of the people feel that there should be a return to a congregated setting for the education of hard of hearing children.

As you're aware, the facility in Saskatoon has long since closed, and we've now moved with most people with challenges that we have an integrated approach where we will try and bring the services to where the students are. It's certainly a more expensive process to try and have the integrated model, but it appears to be better for the students because they participate with other children, and it's healthy for the other children to have the interaction with them. So that appears to be the direction that's been taken.

Having said that, we look to the divisions to provide the support and to make the decisions for the students that are there, and we understand that there are different opinions as to how the services should be provided.

Mr. Forbes: — So I know you've done some good work around Braille and helping the blind. In this case when you talk about your commitment, what does that mean?

Mr. Miller: — Sorry. In terms of . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'm curious. You said your position was one of commitment, and I'm asking, what does that mean?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — In simple terms, we provide the resources to the divisions, and whether it's a speech-language pathologist or an audiologist or whatever, the divisions access those services. We provide block funding, you know, the funding, as you're aware, through the funding model, and we look to the divisions to provide those services and to come to us if there's something that is either lacking or they need to share services with another division. The feedback we have from them is that they are meeting the demand through the model that they are currently using.

Mr. Forbes: — So you don't feel any pressure to listen to the concerns that are raised?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — As I indicated, I met with groups, and we're always willing to listen. When the report comes out, it may indicate that we need to do things differently or have somewhat of a change or a refinement in direction, and we're always willing to do that. The point I was making was there's two methodologies for dealing with hard of hearing children. Most of the divisions have chosen not to use a congregated model to try to provide services to the student within the classroom, and we understand that's what's taking place.

Mr. Forbes: — So I'll read the rest of this, and I quote, "We heard that children who are deaf . . ." And when we say "we" are referring to the people writing the report had heard:

. . . that children who are deaf are not learning how to communicate. The Deaf community told us Saskatchewan is far behind other provinces with respect to Deaf education. There is no longer a school for the Deaf in Saskatchewan, so some parents are sending their Deaf children out of province or even to the United States to attend a school for the Deaf. Most parents cannot afford this expense, and are frustrated with the fact that they have to send their children elsewhere to get an adequate education. They spoke of "lost generations" since the Saskatchewan School for the Deaf closed. They fear without recognition of their language and culture, young people who are deaf will grow up without developing any communication skills and continue to be isolated and unable to be included in their communities.

And you know, I just want to say that, as a teacher myself, I found this very interesting when I met with these folks who many articulated these concerns by the Saskatchewan deaf and hard of hearing. And so it's not just a random group, but a pretty significant advocacy group.

And we were able to be at a conference in the fall that talked about the importance of ASL as opposed to Signed English, which is like an interesting way to . . . You know, you're signing the letters. You're not communicating words or emotions. You're signing. If it's hello, it's h-e-l-l-o. You're not saying, hi, or, you know, any of the forms of that. And I know as well some other members attended that conference as well.

I think there is room for some sort of accommodation here. They're not asking to go back. They're not asking for the

opening of the school on Clarence Avenue. That's silly and beyond. I mean they're not talking about that, congregating all the deaf children in one building. But some schools in Saskatchewan I think I read, I know of at least one where they are congregated and they are using ASL as opposed to Signed English. And it seems to be a pretty innovative thing.

And in just my simple research . . . Now maybe there's folks here that have done more research on it, but I looked across Canada and I see that we are truly not with the rest of the folks on this. Now maybe we think further ahead, that we're further ahead, but when I talk to these folks, they say actually we're not. And I can appreciate that there are success stories and it's a wonderful thing with cochlear implants. Nobody's saying you have to get rid of technology either. But there should be a choice and there should be . . . You know, I think we could accommodate that.

Now what they have really raised issues about this, and this is what I'm thinking about when I'm asking you, when you talk about your funding, that we are in fact really way behind other provinces when it comes to funding for people who can sign, that in fact if you want an interpreter, it's very difficult to get an interpreter as opposed to Alberta or Manitoba. And again it's the pay that people get. So they feel if you've developed that skill, you should be in another province. This is not the province to be in education if you have that skill.

So this is why I'm wondering about the commitment. I mean when people look to the province for leadership in this, that they can step back and say, so what's happening in other parts of Canada and is this a realistic thing?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think you make some fair comments. When I met with the ASL group, there would certainly be some people that would like to see the reopening of some kind of a congregated facility. I just want to put it out there right now there is no intention to reopen the R.J.D. Williams School, which is by the way on Cumberland, not on Clarence. But in any event we're not going back to a residential type of school.

I think it's probably worthwhile, and we'd asked the officials some time ago to see, when the disability report comes out, whether best practices would indicate whether we should have two models in place at the same time, or to review what is the recommended or what would be the best practices model going forward.

So that was some time ago we've had those discussions. And I know that the officials will look at the disability report when it's released and may be able to have further discussion at that point in time. But that's not the model that's currently being undertaken. So in fairness to your comment, do we commit money to ASL? Not at the present time, but it's something that maybe should be looked at, at some point in the future. We appreciate there's a desire for some families to have that.

Mr. Forbes: — Well I appreciate hearing that because I think, you know, that we can always learn from the past, and sometimes then as a teacher I think about inclusion . . . It'd be interesting to hear the new deputy minister speak on this because of her experience. But sometimes inclusion doesn't work as well as it's intended.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If she wishes to speak, if she wishes to speak now, I'll certainly let her.

Mr. Forbes: — But the point is I do think it's an important area that we take some fresh eyes to, and we look across Canada. Maybe I'm wrong about what the best practices are, but I feel that it's one that I think I've learned a lot, learning, talking to these folks about. And in fact, that if there can be a choice . . . And a congregated setting can be a small setting. It doesn't have to be a full school. A classroom can be made to work in that way, just as long it's a bit of a community.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The argument that's advanced by ASL is that it's not learning to deal with a disability. It's learning another, it's learning a different language because it's a different method of communication, and should be sort of accommodated as such. And I appreciate the point that they've made, and it's something that we'll certainly undertake to look at. Having said that, I don't make a commitment that it will be a direction of the province, but it's certainly something that there's been requests have come forward. And we've met; we've heard from those people.

Ms. MacRae: — I would just like to add that I do have some understanding of the complexity of the issues that you raise, and the differing viewpoints in the community. I also know, having worked in three other provinces, that it isn't a very easy recruiting process for folks who have that sign language. The grass may look greener on the other side of the fence, but it's a bit of a challenge sometimes to find the skilled interventionists or translators that you need.

Mr. Forbes: — Well thank you. And I appreciate the comment about how the folks who are deaf often don't necessarily see it as a disability. And I think that's an interesting perspective that we could learn from.

I want to just shift gears a bit and talk about the issues that are often in front of the news, and that's around GSAs [gay-straight alliance] and things that have been happening across Canada, and human rights. And we saw in Alberta that in fact they leaped ahead of us on March 10th, I think it was, when they amended their human rights code even further than we did and then they also introduced some changes to their legislation that would give greater guidance around supports for students who are requesting GSAs in their schools.

You were reported then on March 13th, saying that it was already an expectation and part of an education policy. And so where is that policy? What is that policy?

[16:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can provide you with . . . We'll probably get it to you within the next few minutes. Where I would disagree with you is that Alberta leap-frogged ahead of us.

We'd met with the Catholic bishops, with the different school divisions, and indicated to them that it was our expectation that, where a GSA was requested, it would be made available. Catholic schools have indicated that they may wish to develop their own alternate program. We indicated to them that that was

acceptable provided that it provided a similar level of service or a similar level of benefit for the students, but that it wasn't necessarily us that they had to satisfy. I urged them to meet with the Human Rights Commission. They in fact had already done that and were working at developing things within the schools.

So as far as I know, that has taken place. I'm not aware of any complaints anywhere in the province where a student has asked for a GSA and it wasn't there. So the comments that I had made earlier were that I didn't think it was necessary to pass legislation when the divisions were already compliant. And I don't even like using a word like compliant because I think in fact the divisions were doing what they were expected to do and were doing it voluntarily and that they had actually embraced it, and they went and they had done it.

I became more of a fan of GSAs recently. I was at an event at Bethlehem in Saskatoon and a grade 11 student who had participated spoke at the event and spoke about when he had started in grade 9, how he felt lonely, and there was only one or two upper-year students who were also gay that he was able to spend some time with, talk to, and able to feel accepted through them. Through the help and support of the GSA that exists . . . He's actually at Tommy Douglas but it was a combined event. And he certainly talked in front of grade 11 students from both the collegiates and was able to speak absolutely matter of fact, the same way that you and I are right now, about his experiences as a gay student, how the GSA had helped him feel accepted and comfortable in the school.

At the end of his remarks, which were relatively short, I thought to myself, how can a student be that open and that matter of fact? And I just thought . . . My heart went out to him, and I thought, this is a student that is a well-balanced young man doing incredibly well. He got a round of applause from the students but not one of those things that it was cathartic, you know, or whatever else. It was just routine. The students were there; they understood it. And I'm thinking, that generation of people is so far ahead of their parents that it amazed me.

I said to one of the people that were there, one of the officials within the division, I said, that could not have happened 20 years ago. And the official looked at me and said, that couldn't have happened five years ago, but it's commonplace in our schools right now. So I don't think that at this point in time we need the heavy hand of government making a statement by passing a law when there is already compliance. I think what we do is we say to the divisions: thank you for what you're doing; thank you for continuing to understand; thank you for evolving as you go along. If there isn't compliance, we have plenty of tools within, but right now I'm not aware of them not.

So I read Chandra McIvor's letter that was in today's paper, saying we should pass legislation. Well if you read the legislation in Alberta, all it says is what's happening here already, that we make it available when it's asked for. Well if that's already happening, I just don't see that there's a benefit or a need for it, and I see it as somewhat insulting and demeaning to those that are there. I know you and I may not agree on that, but that's where I think we've come. And my thought on it is, I'm glad that they're there. I'm glad that they're supporting students. And to me, whether it's a GSA or a different label doesn't matter, as long as it's doing what it's

supposed to. Anyway, sorry I went on so long.

Mr. Forbes: — No, no. Fair enough, and I appreciate that. And you're right about how things have changed in five years or even shorter and how we're moving at record speed on this in so many ways. And I think about the Human Rights Code amendment, and we did congratulate the government. You know, sometimes it seems it's rare that we do that, but we thought it was a good thing in terms of including gender identity. We are concerned about gender expression being not available, but it really raises the issue . . . And you're right about the Alberta legislation; Manitoba and Ontario very much similar in terms of . . . And if they have it by a different name. But the fact is that it's there in legislation, so while you may have had that meeting, and it's the first time I've heard of it . . . This is why I'm curious about the policy because I'm curious about, is it a policy that can be changed with a change of an executive director? Is it a policy that can only be changed by the whim of a deputy minister? Or is it a policy that can be changed by the minister? Or is it a policy that can be changed by the cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll be a little bit more specific. The policy is in the final stages of development but the GSA, the process, is already online and is available now. I'm loath to have something in legislation that may well change or may require some more specifics to be added. Right now, GSAs are gay-straight alliances. What about transgendered? What about intersex? What about different things that may come up?

So we are probably at an early stage of where that type of program might be and may require both the program itself and the policies surrounding it to change. I'm hoping that the diversity that we celebrate as Canadians will continue to extend into this area as well and that it's done by Canadians doing what they believe is right, not because they were forced to or they were directed to. Certainly if they're not doing it, then we need to deal with why they're not doing it and what the issues are, but right now I commend the divisions that have done this and we'll fully support them where we go forward. And if there is other things that need be done, we'll do it.

You made reference to the changes that were made to the Human Rights Code. Minister Wyant had met with the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission who initially gave him the legal opinion that did not feel it was necessary to add the other grounds. Over time he looked at and continued, as is his job, the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights looked at other provinces, looked at other commissions and said, no, we do have a gap, came back to Minister Wyant and said, you should amend your legislation. Minister Wyant quite properly said, well that isn't what you told me last year. Well no, things have changed. The judicial landscape in our province has changed. We think you should do it. So they did.

I don't want to be in the position with this that we have to make regular changes to legislation because there's a different program other than a GSA or something different. I think we're very much in an evolving or developing area, and I'd like to leave it to the divisions for the time being. Having said that, I don't think we should back away from wanting to make sure that those programs are available for our students, and we plan to continue to do that. And I also know that you will hold us to

account on it.

Mr. Forbes: — Here you go. But this is where really the crux of the matter is, and it's really . . . And this is what you have said. And I think you actually say this in this article. It's about the human rights aspect and about prohibited grounds and how kids need to be able to flourish, and I'll talk in a minute about some Vancouver kids that I was able to meet with.

But how it's really a case of meaning what you say and saying what you mean. And I think that we found that the Human Rights Code which we have so much to be proud of in Saskatchewan and the enforcement in that, but the fact is that there was a gap and you need to deal with it. And this is why we think an amendment to *The Education Act* would be in order to make sure that when students have questions about human rights and in particular around gender issues and identity issues, that they will be supported in their schools.

Now it is a very good thing that you've had these meetings and there is a policy, but I think that this is why we have legislation, the comfort to know that it's actually in legislation. And it is not demeaning. It's what we do here. We do not demean people by having legislation. That's never the intent. The intent is really to put what we do into words and mean what we say, and not divert from there.

But I do want to go on because I think you may want a few more minutes before. But at the latest Breaking the Silence Conference, they had a group of six kids from Vancouver who were very successful in changing the Vancouver school policy. So you're probably going to ask me, well here's a policy; isn't that a good thing? And it was interesting to hear what the kids had to say because they have moved . . . And I'm not sure if we're in the same space as Vancouver schools are at, but they were working very hard on a sort of queer kids policy. What do you do with all . . . And you mentioned the intersex and the different variants that we're seeing more and more of.

And what they've talked about, and they raised four or five issues: the four that I have written down really around confidentiality; gender-neutral washrooms; the use of pronouns, which again is becoming a more and more issue; and the bigger thing is around training for our professional development for teachers. And so they were very successful in getting the Vancouver School Board to have a really articulate school board policy on those issues.

So I'm curious to know, have you addressed any of those issues around confidentiality? It really means if a kid, if a student comes out in a school, that really there are guidelines and, even more than that, I would suspect the regulations of what a school counsellor is required to tell a parent and what they're required to keep confidential because students will say things to their counsellors that they're hoping doesn't go home right away. The use of gender-neutral washrooms and training, to pronouns — we can talk about that as well. But those are really big ones, and I'm curious if you have any thoughts on that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think what you're saying goes to the very point why we don't want to have legislation, because we're in a rapidly developing or emerging landscape in that area. We'll hear from a group of people from, you know, the

group you met with from Vancouver. We may hear different things from a different area. We know that we need to embody those things into our culture, into our practices.

I don't have a desire — and I think this is where you and I will disagree — I don't think that it's beneficial to create a law that says you must have a GSA. I would rather have the discussions of the broader issue about, okay what are you doing in this area? What are you doing in that area? The divisions, I'm pleased are as far ahead as they are. And the points you make I can certainly take forward and raise them with the divisions as we go forward. I think there's probably . . . Some of the divisions are further ahead than others, but I think we're moving forward.

Mr. Forbes: — But this is the issue though, is that here in Vancouver at least they have a school board policy. And you can see that policy; you can go online. I remember the old binders — I actually haven't looked at the Saskatoon Public School Board policy in a while — but I know how those policies are written. And I imagine many of the folks in the back have taken master classes in writing school board policies. I know I have.

But the point is those things are legalistic documents. They're not policies that are written by an executive director for guidance to a group of six people. It is policy. So when we talk about . . . So somewhere in there . . . This is why what we do here is legislation. We don't do . . . Our policy is called legislation. So we think it's best there. But we're not seeing, and I don't know of any school board that has any policy in the public domain around any of these issues. They have, may have good practices, but they haven't got their policy yet.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think you'll see it come over time. I can make, the commitment I can make to you is it's something we can raise with the divisions as we go forward, we can raise with the SSBA. We know that we're in an emerging area. I can tell you this. We are building nine joint-use schools. They will have gender-neutral washrooms.

Mr. Forbes: — Well that's very good news. I'm still not supporting those things though, the nine, the joint-use, the P3 models, if you're looking for support. I think that . . . And we could talk more about that. But I do want to get back to policy and legislation.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If we can agree on nothing else but supporting that type of washroom, that's at least a start on agreeing on something. And the point you make about those things being in policy, I agree with you. And it's something that — the officials are passing notes back — it is something that I know they're going to work with, with a vision on whether we've got adequate policies at a division level.

But I think we need to understand the fact that we are in a rapidly changing environment, and one of the good things about it is the incredible public acceptance and how fast this process is going. If you read Chandra McIvor's letter today, a year or two ago that would have been LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender]. And then you look at all the rest of the things that were behind that letter, I had to get out the book and look.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, and for what I know — and maybe I shouldn't go on the record here — but I think GSAs are now becoming gender-straight alliances, so they're sort of an all-inclusive. They don't want to give up on the GSA acronym, but I think they're changing the meaning of G.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well there you go. There's another reason not to have it in legislation, that these things are changing. But the point you're making, I think, is really valid, that we need to be aware. We need to be aware that it's a changing landscape, and that we know that our students need supports and that we make sure that we have good supports. And probably the basis of those supports will be a firm policy. So we take what you say.

[16:45]

Mr. Forbes: — Well my point, and I'll turn it over here, is that we should never be afraid of doing the right thing. And I think the right thing is making sure that people understand where the legislature — and that's who passes the legislation — stands on these things. And it was a good day when we did the Human Rights Code, and many of us do it, and I think many members can feel very proud of that participation.

But I think when you look across the country, that we should be thinking about how we can make sure our kids are feeling safe and secure and can actually flourish and really grow, as you were saying about that grade 11 student from Bethlehem. And I think by having strong legislation, we can do that. But with that, we could back and forth and see who has last word, but I think I'll turn it over to you now.

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, if you have some more questions, go ahead.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, and an important discussion as well there. I appreciate what the member from Saskatoon Centre has put onto the record, and the questions that are there as well, certainly ensuring that rights of students are enshrined, and their ability to feel safe and to thrive is so important.

And I did appreciate the comments from the minister in the introduction of, you know, sort of the discussion just around the progress that we see with young people and hopefully society as a whole on matters of sexuality and gender. And certainly I do believe there's been significant progress and a real enlightened group of leaders within our schools, but that shouldn't stop us, I believe, from — as the member from Saskatoon Centre says — of showing leadership ourselves and enshrining some of these rights and ensuring those protections are there for students across Saskatchewan. But we'll move along to some of the funding areas within the ministry.

I'm interested, I'm looking at the different numbers in the budget here. I'd be interested in knowing what the additional costs of the teachers' contract are in this budget year as a total amount and if there's any other costs in that. I don't know if the retroactive amount, would that have flowed from last year's budget? Just if you can clarify out of the operational funding, how much is attributed to the teachers' contract?

Ms. Johnson: — So if I got the question correctly, you were

wondering how much the collective bargaining agreement cost up until March 31, 2015?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry, no. In the current budget year, I'm looking at the school operating budget, and I'm trying to compare it back to last year's as best I can. So I'm trying to understand the cost, the additional costs, of the collective agreement into 2015-16.

Ms. Johnson: — All right. So I'm going to start by just describing how much of the cost is going back from September of 2013, when this new agreement begins, to March 31st. So that cost is 40 million and that has been provided to the school divisions already. They received the additional funds necessary in their March payment so that they could manage the retro pay that's required for teachers. Included also in their 2015-16 payments will be another 13.9 million that will finish the costs associated with April, May, and June of 2015 for the school divisions. And then additional funding for '15-16 is 33.5 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So a total increase in the budget, or dollars allocated for the collective agreement as increases, will be 46, \$47 million roughly, a little over 47 million this year?

Ms. Johnson: — That's correct.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — But that includes the retro pay, so that's not the amount going forward.

Ms. Johnson: — No, actually the 47 million is for '15-16, and the 40.2 million is for the prior periods.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The prior retro.

Ms. Johnson: — Yes. So the grand total there is 87 million, 87.6 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. So let's just make sure we're all on the same page, Mr. Minister. The 40 million for the retro payment flowed out of the previous fiscal year, government fiscal year. The costs that we're looking at out of the school operating, that was 40 million. The additional costs in the current fiscal year are 47 million.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 47.4 million. That's correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes. Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I just didn't want to leave you with the impression that it was really an \$87 million increase and then have it look like it was scaled back a subsequent year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And those dollars are contained simply in the school operating line, is that correct?

Ms. Johnson: — That's correct, yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So when you break out that contract, so there's \$1.2 billion, or 1.205 billion that's allocated there. When you subtract the \$47 million from that, the actual amount being spent on the school operating budget is less than was budgeted last year.

Ms. Johnson: — I wouldn't put it that way. The school divisions receive 1.8 billion and almost 1.9 billion in '15-16 this year. Of course that is comprised of the amount that you see in estimates coming from the core funding, with the balance coming from property taxes collected by the school divisions. So when you look at the total 1.9 billion that school divisions receive, they are funded for the costs of the collective bargaining agreement.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. But the point being that on the actual operating line here, the line item in the estimates here, last year it was 1.170 billion that was allocated for school operating. This year there's the additional costs of \$47 million for the contract. So I guess the point being that there's really no additional dollars here.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's not correct. The increase was over \$58 million that went into operating this year. There was a 2.9 per cent increase in operating funding this year, which was \$58 million, which brought the total to almost \$52.8 million which the CBA [collective bargaining agreement] would have been part of. So there is a 2.9 per cent increase in the previous year was where the 52.8 took . . . And then of the 52.8 — what was it? — 47 would be for the collective bargaining increase.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The increase on the school operating line here is only 35 million more on that allocation. Now there might be . . . So I guess he could describe where the other . . . Where would the other dollars be for the 52.8 million?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well a variety of other items. There would be the 1 per cent for the CBOs. There would be some additional allowance for transition funding . . . Not for transition funding. The additional funding would be operating expenses that were allotted for the schools, inflationary operating expenses that were allotted as part of the formula.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. But the total again here, we'll just work directly out of the subvote here, (ED03). And the school operating budget, this year's 1.205 billion and a little bit then, \$290, is \$35 million more than the budget last year, and just the point that the teachers' contract does come at a cost to school divisions of \$47 million. Certainly the dollars sent to school divisions are, you know, less than the teachers' contract itself, at least on the school operating budget line.

Ms. Johnson: — So as was said, the school operating funding on the government fiscal year is an increase of 52.8 million, and that 52.8 is, as you've noted from the Estimates book, 34.9 and the balance of 17.9 comes from the additional funding that the school divisions will see on a year-over-year basis from property tax revenues.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So when we break that out, \$52 million and \$47 million, which are required for the contract itself, \$5 million is very lean. This is a very tight budget, a very hard budget for funding for school divisions. When the bulk of that is for the teachers' contract, do you feel as a minister that when you characterize that there's a 50-some-million-dollar increase for education, that that may not properly represent the difficult budget that's been handed to school divisions?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think each and every school division

received more dollars than they did the previous year. They received sufficient funds to pay for the collective agreement. Somebody asked me last week whether that was adequate. I think, if I was going back to my days as a school board trustee, you would never ever say that funding was adequate because if you had more money, there was more things that you could do.

During the time that I was on the school board, we heard John Ralston Saul make a presentation that the proper class size was a little over 10 students for a class. So I think even if you got to that goal, which you likely never will, somebody would say, oh it should be less yet. So I think the more resources you put in, the more things that you can do.

The simple answer to your questions is, we feel this is a good budget. We feel that the divisions can operate adequately within this budget. It is more money than the school divisions have ever received before. In addition to the funds that are in the operating side, they will receive additional money for capital. They will also receive additional money for emergent funding, and those are substantial increases in excess of 30 per cent which will deal with some of the deficiencies that they're dealing with their buildings. So we feel this is a budget that the school divisions can work with. We know they would like to have had more. We're saying, this is the financial situation of the province, and we're asking them to work with us on it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It was just a really tight budget at a time where there's a lot of strain in classrooms across the province and at a time where divisions are experiencing growth, and we'll get into that.

But I'm wondering, could you provide at this time . . . I'm sure you have the grid. I typically get it each budget year, but I don't have it yet, this year's, the allocation of dollars to each school division. Are you able to table that here today, provide that? It allows a better conversation.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll get somebody to make a copy of it.

Mr. Forbes: — I just have one correction. When I was talking about GSAs, the acronym is gender-sexuality alliances, not gender-straight alliances. That's in some circles.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There you have the reason why you will not see it in legislation this year. And if you have a different story next week, I'll be glad to have the discussion with you again. But to be honest with you, I really appreciate the point you're making. I think you and I are on exactly the same page where we want to go with it. The issue is the method that we want to get there. So I think both of us want to continue to watch it and see where we go.

And what I would ask from you is if you hear of a situation where there isn't supports for a student, make sure we know about it right away so we can deal with it because I was overwhelmed by where the divisions are at and want to make sure that we are where we need to be on it. So I appreciate the point.

The Chair: — The time being 5 o'clock, we're in recess until 7 p.m.

[The committee recessed from 17:00 until 18:59.]

The Chair: — Good evening everyone. It being now 6:59, we'll get started. But just prior to our recess, a document was given to be distributed. I'd like to now table HUS 18/27, the 2014-15 versus 2015-16 operating funding and preventative maintenance and renewal document.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you for that, Mr. Chair. When Mr. Wotherspoon returns, we'll also want to make a clarification on some of the numbers we were giving him on the funding formula. There was, I think, some misunderstanding on whether what money was coming from property tax and what money was coming from the provincial grant. So rather than leave a misunderstanding, we'll — it certainly wasn't his fault — we'll deal with that when he comes back. But I understand that Ms. Chartier is here, and we're certainly ready to answer whatever questions that she has.

The Chair: — Excellent. Mr. Chartier, you have the floor.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'd like to start actually with a pretty simple question here. For the year ending this last fiscal year, which will end tomorrow, how many operational child care spaces will there be in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well I'll let Lynn Allan, who is the official responsible for that, answer that and most of the questions. But anyway go ahead.

Ms. Allan: — Good evening. Yes, my name is Lynn Allan, and I'm the executive director of the early years branch. So our quarterly stats for March 31st aren't yet available, but we do have the statistical information for the third-quarter ending December 31st, 2014. The number of licensed spaces in operation as of December 31st was 13,842, and of these spaces 2,016 are in 229 licensed family child care homes and 11,826 are in 296 licensed child care centres. This is an increase of 528 new child care spaces in a period of nine months.

I have been advised though that, as of December 31st, we had 675 centre spaces that had been previously approved for funding and were in various stages of development. And in the last three months approximately 300 of those spaces are now operational, and that will be reflected in the March 31 data that will be available probably mid-April or so.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, so of those 675 centre spaces that have been allocated over the last several years . . . I'm looking back to estimates from last year. I think you gave me those numbers.

Ms. Allan: — That's right.

Ms. Chartier: — So how many . . . so you said 675 centre spaces that had been committed to. And how many do you anticipate of those still to be . . .

Ms. Allan: — 300.

Ms. Chartier: — 300.

Ms. Allan: — So we're expecting approximately 350 will be in development as we go into the new year.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So your expected number at the end of the new fiscal year, what is your anticipated number at the end of this next fiscal year then if you take those spaces that will be operational by that point?

Ms. Allan: — So the 350 that we will be going into the new year with, we're expecting that most of those will become operational during this next year, during '15-16.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. So some of those spaces that were outstanding, from 2010-11, there was one space. There were 145 from '11-12, 101 from '12-13, and 464 from '13-14. Have you cleared . . . like, in terms of those spaces that had been allocated, of those that have been allocated, where are the gaps?

Ms. Allan: — So you can go back as far as '12-13 and we have 48 in development; '13-14, 239; and '14-15, 388. So that's what equals right now the 675. But as I said, you know, when we get the final data, that will be down by at least 300.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you for that. Since there aren't any new spaces being added this year and there is an increase in the child care budget, what will this mean for the existing child care spaces in terms of funding?

Ms. Allan: — So the funding formula is based on not all child care spaces are open on April 1st. So some, a certain percentage will open in the first year when we allocate. A certain percentage will open, you know, six months into the year. Some will, as you know, take a little bit longer to operate. So the money that we're getting is still for the spaces that have been allocated.

Ms. Chartier: — So the increase — I just want to make sure — so the increase in the budget simply reflects the existing spaces that have yet to be allocated?

Ms. Allan: — No, to become operational.

Ms. Chartier: — Pardon me. Pardon me, that are not operational yet. Okay. So there's no anticipated boost of extra support for existing spaces in terms of the early childhood grants?

Ms. Allan: — We also got a 1 per cent increase, the same as the CBO. So that goes to the ECE [early childhood education] grant.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. And that, is that still to be targeted to wages? Is that where that 1 per cent goes?

Ms. Allan: — That's how we've done that in the past, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — That's been five years that that 1 per cent has gone to staffing? Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're confirming the exact number of years, but it's been the last several years that it's been 1 per cent. And of course it's up to the individual CBOs whether they choose to use a larger or a smaller portion for wages, and then whether they've got other costs as well.

Ms. Chartier: — I've been told from many directors that

they're directed to put that towards front-line staff.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It would certainly be the expectation that's what they do. We don't take away from their autonomy, but certainly the expectation that that would be passed on to the employees.

Ms. Chartier: — In terms of what's been reflected back to you, what that looks like just in terms of front-line wages, we've talked I think a little bit about this last year. But I know talking to child care facilities, they say that reflects a six-cent increase for many of their staff. Would you say that that is a reasonable wage increase?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, I can tell you this. The CBOs work hard. The people that are employees in those institutions deliver an important service to some of our most important people in the province: our children. So I don't think we can underestimate the dollar value of the work that they do.

Having said that, this is a tight budget year and we made a decision across government that all CBOs would receive a 1 per cent lift this year. And we'll certainly look and see where we're at either later this year or in a subsequent year. We respect and value the work that these people do.

Ms. Chartier: — I'm curious. Obviously wages are one piece of it because of the recruitment and retention factor, but another piece of that is the operational needs of child cares which are not-for-profits or co-operatives.

So I'm wondering what your perspective is on . . . while the early childhood services grants, which we've talked about, which the 1 per cent goes to wages, but how is it expected that child cares can do their regular . . . Without jacking up fees exorbitantly for families, how can they do the work that they need to do, whether it's painting a facility that might cost \$7,000 or funding the increases that come because government has reviewed menus and has changed regulations around food.

And fair enough, you need to be serving proper food, but there are a lot of things the government does that has cost some child cares. As well we've seen utilities increase. We've seen rents increase. So I'm wondering your perspective on how you expect these child cares, where our children spend a large amount of time, to meet the needs of families?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know and understand and value the work that's being done there, not just with the workers, but the centres themselves providing care to our children. We appreciate that there will be some challenges for some of the child care operators, but this is also a difficult year for our provincial revenues. So this is a choice that we have made to go across the board with CBOs at 1 per cent. And we are continuing to . . . We haven't cut any funding. We are in fact completing the ones that are under construction.

The total cost this year that we have paid in the last year for — or in this budget going forward — for child care is \$53.2 million. So it's in the tens of millions of dollars. And of course it would be nice to have more but this is, we regard, we've done a significant amount of work, but certainly more work left to do.

Ms. Chartier: — Ms. Allan, do you have the number for the number of years that it's been 1 per cent?

Ms. Allan: — I do. Okay, so you wanted me to go back five years?

Ms. Chartier: — No. I'm wondering how many years it's . . .

Ms. Allan: — In '11-12, it included a 1.5 per cent funding increase; '12-13 a 1.6 per cent funding increase; '13-14, 1 per cent; '14-15, 1 per cent and '15-16. And in '09-10, it was at 3 per cent.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So the 1 per cent has been there for three years.

Ms. Chartier: — That's actually one of the concerns that I hear from directors actually. I just want to read into the record some comments that I had gotten from some directors. The money is tied to staff and wages, but our bills, rent, utilities everything increases. They take a look at our menu and direct the food we serve, and we don't receive any kind of funding for that. A lot of people are in buildings that need work. There are some centres that you can't find the \$7,000 to paint the entire centre or fix a ramp or the list goes on. We have to fundraise to maintain a basic quality building.

So, and I'm sure that these aren't new comments that you've heard, so I'm wondering what you think about that when directors . . . This isn't one director; this is me sitting down with many directors across Saskatchewan talking about their concerns.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We appreciate the concerns that they put forward. We look at that in the context of the capital that we provided when the daycares came on stream, and we look at the funding that goes forward. And we certainly appreciate that this will be a year of financial pressures. A number of places that receive funding from government and some of the decisions, some of the choices, they may need to or want to defer things. And we acknowledge the fact that going forward in a subsequent year we may want to do be able to do something in addition to this, but it is not something we're able to do this year.

Ms. Chartier: — Just stating here that this was a pre-budget, like a January comment. And looking back, '14-15 was 1 per cent as well; '13-14, 1.1 per cent I think you said. So this has been a sort of one point . . . Anyway this has been a consistent pattern for the last few years. And I just need you to know that child care is very concerned about their ability to provide quality care to kids in Saskatchewan because of the lack of operational funding.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I appreciate the point you're making. I also appreciate the situation that the day cares are in, the work that they do, and I've stated it is incredibly important to us. We're looking at things in the context of what funding we provide them now, and we're also looking at the needs of parents and adding additional spaces as well. So you know, we think it's important this year that we try and finish the ones that

are under way, complete those. Parents are expecting those, so it's a matter of do we do this, do we do that? So it's always a trade-off, but the point you make is certainly valid.

Ms. Chartier: — When we talk about . . . obviously we have a study like today or a news story on a particular study that says that Saskatchewan is last in the country when it comes to providing child care spaces: 7.6 per cent of children have a licensed child care space available to them. When you think about 70 per cent of women with kids under five, approximately 70 per cent of women with . . . in paid labour with kids under five or have kids under five, so that's 7.6 per cent of children well below the national average. Obviously halting the spaces is something you've chosen to do, but I'm just wondering your comments on this report.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Actually it's not. We didn't add new spaces in this aspect of the budget. But we are starting construction later this year on the nine joint-use schools. Each of those schools will have a 90-space daycare. So in fall of 2017 when those open, that will add an additional 810, which more than fulfills the 500 for this year. So those ones will be under construction through this year. They may not be completed in this fiscal year, but they will be in fall of 2010. So the reality of it is we are continuing to add a substantial number, and that will be another 810 that will come on stream a little over a year from now.

Ms. Chartier: — We've had this conversation about quantifying spaces in the past here. So adding 810 spaces in these joint-use schools is good, but it's still at 7.6 per cent of children who need licensed child care spaces. I haven't done the calculations, but I don't think 810 spaces is going to make a big dent in that number.

[19:15]

Ms. Allan: — Yes, I heard the news this morning, and we have seen a couple of reports that refer to the 7.6. I think, you know, one of the things to keep in mind is that licensed spaces, sometimes referred to as regulated, in many instances include different types of spaces in different jurisdictions.

For example, our regulated-centre-based spaces do not include pre-kindergarten spaces and a number of jurisdictions do include pre-K spaces in their licensed spaces.

Ms. Chartier: — Which jurisdictions?

Ms. Allan: — I'll have to get that for you.

Ms. Chartier: — Do you know how many jurisdictions include . . . So you don't have a list of . . .

Ms. Allan: — I don't have the report with me.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The point we're making is that you can't just take a raw number. You've got to compare apples to apples, oranges . . . Some jurisdictions include pre-K spaces. They include afterschool programs and a variety of other things that are not included in our numbers.

Ms. Chartier: — If you've got a picture of that then, to be able

to respond to that report, I'd like some information on that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can give you some examples.

Ms. Allan: — I can talk about a little bit about Manitoba. So for example in 2012 there were 12,275 licensed child care spaces for children 0 to 12 years of age in Saskatchewan as compared to 30,614 in Manitoba. While the numbers illustrate we have considerably less than half the spaces in Manitoba, over 9,000 or 30 per cent of their centre spaces are for school-aged children outside of school hours.

And Saskatchewan's numbers do not include, you know, a large number of before and afterschool spaces, and those within the licensed centre system only make up about 9 per cent. So there's a clear example right there in terms of the differences, in terms of how the different provinces license.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Just to be clear though, afterschool spaces here that are licensed are counted in that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. In Saskatchewan we do not license or count afterschool spaces.

Ms. Allan: — So the afterschool programs that are operating in schools are not licensed. We do not license those.

Ms. Chartier: — Those operating in schools like, okay.

Ms. Allan: — So there are licensed centres that yes, that have afterschool programs, and children go there. But the difference is it really only makes up 9 per cent, you know, of our total are the school-aged children. So I think there's a big difference there in terms of the fact that we have afterschool programs in school settings that aren't counted in our licensed numbers.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've focused on doing this by acknowledging that we need to have more spaces rather than saying this province has this, this province has that. And instead of saying it's a competition to see whether we match this or match that, I think we acknowledge we would very much like to have more spaces. That's why we made the commitment of adding 500 per year. We've actually exceeded that, you know, in every year, and this year, with the addition that's coming on through the joint-use, the 500 commitment will actually be met slightly later but it will be 810. So we're continuing to add. Since we've formed government, the number of spaces has increased by over 50 per cent. Having said that, if I was a parent looking for space, I would want even more spaces and would encourage the government to provide even more spaces, and we know that we want to continue to do that.

Ms. Chartier: — I just am curious around the afterschool spaces of which you're speaking, then. So can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Ms. Allan: — About ours?

Ms. Chartier: — Yes. So when we're talking about afterschool programming, what are you referring to?

Ms. Allan: — Before and after.

Ms. Chartier: — Yes.

Ms. Allan: — A number of jurisdictions have actual regulations to license before and afterschool programs. Our legislation exempts those programs that are offered in the schools because of the amount of time that they are. So they're not included in any of our licensing numbers.

Ms. Chartier: — So, I'm sorry, just to be clear, how many . . . So they're not included in the licensing.

Ms. Allan: — So we don't . . . I can't give you a number.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The number we would give you would be a guesstimate and maybe out a long ways. But then I'll get you . . .

Ms. Allan: — So we've estimated around 1,000 to 1,500 spaces in the province in afterschool programs.

Ms. Chartier: — And again they're not licensed so they're . . . I mean when you think about licensed child care spaces, you think about high-quality early learning and care. And so not to say that afterschool programs aren't valid and good programming, but they're not necessarily meeting all those expectations of what a licensed child care space should be.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — An afterschool program is something different than a daycare. It's providing an interim care for a child between the time school is out and the time that the parent completes work. So there is not necessarily the same level of programming. It's a space so the child is kept safe and secure for that period of time.

As we go forward, I think we'll probably have to look at what kind of regulation might be necessary. And I think you and I had a discussion last year about wanting to have them at a point where they're licensed or regulated.

Since I've had this portfolio, I've only ever had one complaint or one issue of concern raised regarding an afterschool program. And the complaint wasn't about a problem that they had with a program, but it was a parent inquiring as to why or if or how they're regulated and who they would go to if they had a complaint. And I said, well do you have one? And the parent said, well no, I just wanted to know. And that's when I at that point realized there was nothing.

Most of them or many of them are operated within the schools, usually by a parents group or by a volunteer group. I'm not saying that they shouldn't be licensed, shouldn't be regulated or inspected, but I don't think you'll likely find the same level of educational programming or things that you might find during an all-day daycare.

Ms. Chartier: — Well that's what I'm wondering about. When we talk about Manitoba, if their afterschool spaces are licensed, are they offering . . . They're not offering that sort of interim, making sure kids are safe and secure? Or they are offering programming so that's why they call them licensed child care spaces? I'm just trying to, when we talk about comparing apples to apples, I just . . . So you've told me that Manitoba includes afterschool and before school programming in their licensed . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can tell you we haven't done a detailed analysis or comparison of what takes place. Our focus has been just to increase our numbers. No matter what they are in other jurisdictions, we want to . . . Regardless of, you know, whether they're licensed or unlicensed, if we have a complaint, and I think we dealt with this before, we would investigate. We would treat it, whether they're licensed or not, we would want to deal with whatever issues were there.

Our goal though is to increase the numbers that were there. I think you and I will both agree that we would certainly like to have far more spaces than we do. There is the need greatly exceeds the numbers that are there, but this is sort of the capacity of our province too, to have them. And by province, I don't mean the provincial government. I just say different CBOs, different groups that operate them because we have . . . And I think I had mentioned in previous years, we set aside the allocation for new spaces and often midway or three-quarters of the way through the year, there has not been uptake on all of it. Some of them drag into the next year before they come on stream. So I think we're pushing into the system as much as it can handle. And then I heard comments from some of the operators with this budget year that maybe this would be . . . They saw this as a reprieve that would allow them to staff up or get caught up on some things. I'd rather have the other problem where we were adding capacity faster than the ability to deal with it.

Ms. Chartier: — Well and no, I'm not complaining about afterschool or before school programs, but just again having the discussion about comparing apples to apples. So we are still . . . It doesn't matter if it's 7.6 per cent and then you tack on 1,000 to 1,500 afterschool program spaces. We're still really, really short on child care spaces. When we think we've had 15,000 to 16,000 births for the last six years or so, every year, we're far below what we need.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'd certainly like to have more. I don't think my purpose tonight is to go back and do a comparison with what the numbers were prior to 2007, but since 2007 we've seen a 50 per cent increase and our goal would certainly be to like to add even more yet, and we'll continue to work on it.

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Just switching gears here yet, I understand that in recent years there's been a play yard or a play space, outdoor play space grant that had been available to many child cares. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Ms. Allan: — I think you're referring to the outdoor environment grant.

Ms. Chartier: — Yes.

Ms. Allan: — Okay. And this was a one-time grant that was part of the Creating Outdoor Learning Environments initiative that was implemented in the spring of 2012, and its purpose was to assist child care facilities to design safe and stimulating outdoor environments.

Ms. Chartier: — That would be it. Okay, so that was in 2012.

Ms. Allan: — Yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Was it a \$1,500 grant?

Ms. Allan: — I don't know how much it was individually. We can find that out for you. The total amount that we budgeted that year was 368,460.

Ms. Chartier: — 368 . . .

Ms. Allan: — Thousand.

Ms. Chartier: — 460.

Ms. Allan: — Yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. I was told it was a \$1,500 . . .

Ms. Allan: — Okay. We can get that for you.

Ms. Chartier: — Grant. So how many . . . I could do the math, just in case it's not a \$1,500 grant. How many child cares did that benefit?

Ms. Allan: — We'll have to get that for you. I don't have that with me.

Ms. Chartier: — I was told by many directors that it was, that \$1,500 grant wasn't in fact used for building or developing. It was specified to be used to hire a landscape architect to actually design the space. I just want to clarify if that's the case or not.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The money was used for a variety of things but a lot of it was for . . . The words that were in the process were to assist facilities to design safe and stimulating outdoor environments. So they may have used it for landscape planning or something else towards planning for this, but I think a lot of people used it for planning money rather than for actual purchase of items.

Ms. Chartier: — From my understanding they were directed to use it for planning. I'd just like to read this into the record:

We all received grants to develop our backyard spaces. It has to be used for an architect to design an outdoor space. And the consultant asks, "What have you done for your backyard?" Well we spent the \$1,500 on what you told us to spend it on. Now we have a piece of paper with a design on it.

So I'm wondering if you have any sense of how many of the . . . So an example here. There was one child care that ended up with a \$225,000 design, and there were some parameters — it's connected to polytechnic, so there are some parameters around the rules that they have to follow. And that wasn't including labour, I was told.

So you get a \$1,500 grant to hire an architect, and then you end up with a \$225,000 grant which people aren't going to be able to fundraise. If you've got a 50-space child care, those families and that centre aren't going to be able to raise that kind of money to develop that kind of yard.

[19:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm hoping that people weren't coming up with hundreds of thousands of dollars in proposed expenditures that this should have been for. You know, and if they did, they probably were . . . I can't speak to the instructions they gave the landscape architect or whoever they used for a consultant.

But you know, when you receive a \$1,500 grant, the expectation shouldn't be that you're going to go out and plan something for several hundreds of thousands of dollars. You know, this would have been to, at the end of the day, focus on a fence or gym equipment or something where the space that the children will play in would be safe, secure, and somewhat inspired. But I think it certainly wouldn't have been a good option to give somebody the option of saying, go and design me something that's going to come back in at a quarter of a million dollars.

Ms. Chartier: — They didn't ask for a design to come back. They didn't ask for a design to come back at that amount but . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I don't know what parameters they would have worked around, and I can't comment on what took place on an individual one. But you know, those are budget numbers that none of us are apt to use.

Ms. Chartier: — Well when you think of a \$1,500 grant to hire, to be directed to hire a landscape architect . . . And I know the comments that I'm getting from directors are that we've could have used that for sand in our sandbox. We could have used that for fencing, any number of different projects. So I'm curious if you have any sense of how many child cares have moved on implementing their plans? And first of all, did the ministry see the plans that came forward? And do you know how many child cares have moved on using those?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We wouldn't have seen the plans or given an approval. The expectation was that they were designed for, the expectation was they were doing something for outdoor approval. If there would have been, if they would have been seeking some additional funding from the province, we would have had to have signed off at that time. But we didn't receive or didn't go ahead with any funding applications for them. So if any work went ahead, it would of went ahead with the resources of the daycare.

Ms. Chartier: — Can I just confirm that that \$1,500 grant, you'd read — I'm sorry, Mr. Minister — you'd read, to assist facilities in the design. I didn't get the whole comment down, but can I just confirm here that that \$1,500 was simply to come up with a plan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The note that I have indicates that it was, the purpose was to assist child care facilities to design safe and stimulating outdoor environments. So that would be the technically correct answer and that would obviously be planning money. So if they chose to draw up blueprints or engineering papers, that would certainly fit within the scope of that, so yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, thank you for that. Do you have any . . . I mean we've heard about the \$225,000 plan, but do you

have any concern when you know that child care has been held to 1 per cent or just over 1 per cent? So you have a grant that's supposed to help with the built environment or create a stimulating play environment, and it goes to planning and doesn't go to actually implementation of any of those plans?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, I think going forward it's not the type of thing that is beneficial to do, to provide planning money where there isn't follow-up money for it. I don't think it's a productive or beneficial thing, and a better use of the money would have been to say, you must use this money for recreational equipment or you must it for fencing or painting, repairs, maintenance, or whatever else, rather than planning money. I think by using planning money, that probably was not a good use and probably shouldn't be repeated. And it appears that it wasn't.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. And again just to repeat, most of the directors that I've talked to have said that it is a piece of paper that sits on their shelf at this point in time, and that they'd like to see money to be able to implement some of those things and not have to simply rely on fundraising.

I mean you've got directors and staff at child cares who are stretched thin, and you've got parents who are working outside the home and juggling many things. And the expectations of fundraising, I think, become quite a lot on families when child care should be something that our government supports to ensure our children have safe, positive environments. But I'll move on here.

In terms of quantifying spaces, I know Mr. Miller last year talked a little bit about looking at overall community population, women of childbearing . . . or the number of people, women, in childbearing age, employment, etc. So I'm wondering if you've been, in using that analysis, if you've identified any hot spots of where there really is a lack of child care.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I want to just go back. The planning money, and I don't want to sort of . . . They could've used the money for other things as well as the design under the program. They could have used it for purchasing certain books and a professional learning opportunity, where they would have done some professional via satellite programming. And I understand some of that took place. So there was some other things; the money was not just gone for preparing plans that didn't get used. There was other things within that were used and provided some very significant benefit.

Your next question dealt . . .

Ms. Chartier: — Okay, you know what, we'll stay on that one for a minute then because I just want . . . Sorry, so it was called the outdoor . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Environment grant.

Ms. Chartier: — An outdoor environment grant. And it was used for purchases of books?

Ms. Allan: — So this follows along from *Play and Exploration*, which is our program guide. And so there were sort of three

components to the initiative. There were high-quality books that were distributed. There was some professional learning opportunities for the centres about quality outdoor play areas. And if you're familiar with the *Play and Exploration*, clearly it's an opportunity for children to play naturally and learn naturally, and so that would be the intent, both inside the centre and outside the centre as well, using things from the environment and from nature to help them learn and be able to explore.

So there was some training for the centres in that in advance of this.

Ms. Chartier: — Again though, it didn't . . . So training, but if you don't have the equipment or don't have a natural space, that training is a bit of a moot point. I'm wondering, of the 368 thousand . . . What was the total again? Sorry, my notes, my chicken scratch here: 368,460? Of that, can you quantify how much was used on architects versus some of these other expenses?

Ms. Allan: — I don't have that with me tonight.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. I think the bottom line is child care saw a grant for \$1,500 that, when they see that their facility is lacking in outdoor space, and even indoor space, that they would have liked to have seen that money directed into something practical that they on a daily basis could use. So, and again this group of directors with whom I met, all of them said the child care consultant had suggested and encouraged them to hire an architect.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the point they make, that they would rather have used the money for other things, is a point very well taken.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Thank you. My last question though, and we got diverted here. I have to . . . I flipped my page many times here.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sorry, it's my fault. I went back.

Ms. Chartier: — No, that's okay. Hot spots of lack of space. So last year I'd asked about how you decide where spaces are allocated and how that works. Mr. Miller had said:

So in terms of working with the community, the branch works with organizations to look at the availability of child care, zero to nine years of age, in the communities. We're also looking at and establishing the overall total community population and population trend growth, the proportion of the population of child-bearing age, the employment rate, as well as teen birth rate in the community. And certainly looking at the distribution of single- and lone-parent families is an indicator of needs of child care.

So I'm wondering if in looking at all of that, if you've identified hot spots in the province where there is a serious lack of child care, and what those hot spots might be?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the decision to where we put the child care was not so much a fact of where we thought there

was need or where we learned there was need, it was a matter of where there was capacity or willingness to develop one, because I think we figured, felt that the need was nearly everywhere. I'll certainly let Ms. Allan provide any further particulars.

But I know we were actually actively looking for and encouraging people to submit applications because we weren't, we weren't . . . didn't have full uptake on the ones that were there. So if somebody came forward with one, there was an analysis done. Was there need? Yes. And then they were, the applications were for the most part accepted. But I'll . . .

Ms. Allan: — So we do have a community needs assessment, and community groups do submit an application to us. And when we're allocating spaces we do go through all of those in terms of looking at the greatest need for child care in those communities. And like you said, there's a number of factors that we look at: availability of licensed child care for children zero to nine; the total community population; the population growth that's expected; the proportion of the population that is aged 15 to 39; proportion of the population that's zero to five; the employment rate of individuals over 15; like you said, lone parents as a proportion of households with children; and teen birth rate.

We also look at, you know, the readiness of the community group in terms of do they have a board established? Do they have a facility that they're going to be able to use? Is there a plan to build? Have they looked at land? So we take all of that into account when we're looking at the readiness and making the decisions when we have spaces to allocate because we generally . . . Our practice has been when we allocate spaces, we like to be able to allocate the spaces to an organization in the year that they're going to be coming operational.

Ms. Chartier: — And that's been a challenge obviously. I know I've spoken to child cares that are well respected and who have been offering child care for a very long time. And on one occasion I had one of these child cares say to me, we could use more spaces but we didn't ask for them because we can't staff them. Staffing is an incredibly difficult thing.

So again thinking about that assessment, I just think I need you to walk me through the process. So you announce in past budgets that you're allocating 500 new spaces, so then applications come in from a variety of community groups, not-for-profits, and co-operatives asking for spaces. And then take me through what happens at that point.

Ms. Allan: — So the community groups will send in an application at any time during the year. And we will look, we look at them all on a year that we're going to be allocating spaces. We will look at them all and review them according to the indicators that I went through.

If somebody didn't get spaces because they weren't as ready, generally we keep every application on file. So in the next January, February of the following year, we would ask them for an update in terms of what's happened, in terms of their readiness. Perhaps at that point they have found a building that they want to utilize, they've got their board established, those sorts of things that would help them move up in terms of readiness for spaces. So we review them annually.

Ms. Chartier: — So there's no — again that there's no measure or no . . . You're relying on requests from community organizations to determine where child care spaces are going. Or in terms of building new schools, like a new school's going up, so there'll be spaces in it, or a community organization sends in a request and you analyze that. But you don't have an overall picture of what demand is here and where the biggest demand is?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If your question is, do we do a province-wide study of where the demands are, we don't. We operate under the assumption right now that we would like to have them in virtually every possible location we could. I'd indicated last year that we would be very unlikely to build a new school that didn't have one in, which would make sense. We wouldn't need to do a study to know that there's going to be children, siblings that will be in that school, and we know the ones that have been in schools have worked out very well for us.

So we don't need to do a study or any kind of an analysis to know, yes you've got kids in a new neighbourhood or where a school is going to . . . So right now the focus has been based on a proponent coming forward saying it, and then we assess the needs: is there a need for that in that area, based on the criteria that Lynn mentioned? So that's the methodology that's used right now.

But we haven't done an overall province-wide study or analysis. I think we know where the new neighbourhoods are; we know where the rapid growth is because that's the information the schools give us. So that's sort of the type of . . . And they're usually, the proponents come forward usually reflecting that type of thing as well. I don't think we've had applications from areas where we thought shouldn't come forward, and the ones that have come forward fit, appear to fit the criteria. What we would just like to do is do a lot more of them if there was the capacity within the community to do that. I don't know if that's a fair comment or not.

[19:45]

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you. Just some concerns flagged for me by child cares, and I don't know when this would have changed, but I understand in the past there were boundaries that stipulated the distance between licensed child care spaces that could be opened from new child care spaces. And I have been told this is no longer the case, and centres are finding that certain areas of the city for example are being saturated with spaces while other areas are seeing no development of new spaces, causing enrolment to drop in some centres.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm not sure that I would necessarily agree with that analysis. And I'm not saying that there may not be some factors that are there, that people would say, I'd rather have one somewhere else. We focus on where the proponents come from. We know there's a need there, and we haven't had a problem filling the child cares up. Once they've opened, they fill up virtually immediately, so we don't think we've built any where we shouldn't. And if somebody thinks there is some that we need elsewhere, let us know and bring an application for it.

Ms. Chartier: — Was there at the . . . Do you know in the past

if there were boundaries that stipulated the distance between licensed child care spaces?

Ms. Allan: — I think a long time ago, probably over 20 years ago.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Some of these people have been in child care for many, many years. Okay, in terms of . . . we've talked about your 1-800 number last year that you had started in from the August . . . that would be August 2013. And then we had talked about that spring and you'd had 22 complaints. I'm wondering if you could give me a bit of an update on the 1-800 number now.

Ms. Allan: — So I'll use some data from '14. Between October 2014 and December 31 of '14, we received and followed up on 24 complaints respecting unlicensed child care services. That included 22 reports of over-enrolment and two other complaints which were categorized as child management as one and administration as one. And so, as you know, if substantiated, full compliance is an expectation in all cases of over-enrolment. And of the other two complaints, in one circumstance an on-site investigation was completed by our staff and in the other, information and resources were provided to the child care provider.

So as you know, we have the 1-800 number and that was set up in August of '13 for any complaints about child care centres. And so we do track all of the calls that we get with respect to unlicensed.

Ms. Chartier: — So you just gave me a three-month period there, October 2014 — October, November, three months. Since you've started the 1-800 number in August 2013, how many complaints have you had?

Ms. Allan: — We do track that. I'll have to get you that number.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Is it possible to get it tonight?

Ms. Allan: — We can try.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. I think the one thing that stands out for me in our conversation that we had last year around, I think that there were 22 complaints, and many of them, they were all unlicensed child cares. And many of those complaints, I think more than half or close to half, were on over-enrolment. And then we hear that unlicensed spaces, 22 are on over-enrolment. I think that that's sending a pretty strong message that parents are quite desperate for child care and are willing to put their children in situations where it's often less than ideal.

I know in the news story today, the director of the day home association provincially talked about a family — and I've actually had a conversation with the day home, the Saskatoon association — and heard the number 27 children in one home. And clearly parents are not choosing that because it's the best care. It's because they don't have choices. So I think that that makes the point that we have a serious child care issue here in Saskatchewan.

So in the time that the 1-800 number has been operating, has

there been complaints about licensed spaces?

Ms. Allan: — So we don't track our licensed spaces in the same way that we track the unlicensed because we have certain criteria that we have to have so many visits. And so our staff are out there, you know, for unscheduled visits as well as scheduled visits as well as doing the annual review. So if there was a call about it, we would be out there right away.

Ms. Chartier: — And we talked about consultants last year and having the right number of consultants, and I'd asked if consultants were . . . We talked about the number of visits consultants made to day homes, and child care centres, and attending annual general meetings, all those kinds of things. And I've been told, and we had a discussion that that is the expectation. And I asked if we knew that that was the expectation, and the minister said that's the . . . Sorry, I asked if that was the reality and, Mr. Minister, you'd said that that's the expectation.

But I've heard from child care directors that consultants sometimes aren't making it out to all . . . They are not fulfilling that expectation. So I'm wondering if you still think that you've got the right, in adding the child care spaces that you have, do you think you still have the right complement of child care consultants?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The consultants are conducting, we're expecting a minimum of two unscheduled visits per year and an annual review of the facility. Progress on meeting the requirements were being reviewed on a quarterly basis to make sure that the minimum requirements are being met. I can't say that they are, but we're not receiving complaints that they're not. You might be. If you become aware of a situation they're not, we'd ask that you let us know so that we can follow up and see that they are.

Our focus has been to try and add spaces or commit resources to it, but at the same time I think your point will be that we need to do inspections and make sure that the spaces that we've got are providing safe, secure environments for children. So if you're hearing things that we're not or that we're not adequately dealing with them in that context, you need to let us know so that we can focus specifically on them. So if you can provide us particulars of what you're hearing, that would be of benefit.

Ms. Chartier: — I think the safety and security piece obviously is imperative, and that's what I'm hearing. But I'm hearing from folks that in order to meet their obligations — the child care centres and day homes, to meet their obligations — they need support from the ministry.

And one of the comments . . . I've got it written down here somewhere. Just to paraphrase here. No, actually this is not a paraphrase: "We feel like the consultant is policing rather than supporting." So I think that says volumes. And the policing aspect or making sure facilities are safe and secure is absolutely imperative, but on top of that you need to be able to support the organizations that are providing care to kids. And they feel like that's not helping.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well you can't have it both ways. You

can't say, go out and inspect these things and don't do anything; just go out and be supportive. If there's too many children or there isn't compliance with fire standards or other safety standards, there must be . . . That's the purpose of what they're there for.

You know, there's certainly a training and support component to it, but the primary purpose is that they're there to ensure that they're meeting the health and safety requirements, that the children are kept safe. And if there is a situation, and you mentioned one earlier that there was 27 in one — I don't know whether that's true or not — but if there is and they're there, I don't expect that the person, the consultant that was going in, is going to be particularly supportive. I suspect that that person may be saying, these children are leaving right now or, you're going to be changing the type of licence you have, you're going to be adding fire exits or whatever else you're doing.

You know, I've got sympathy for the parents that are leaving them there, and that should be our focus is to try and find an alternative. But to say that the workers should be supportive when they go out, if they're finding something wrong, that's got to be addressed. And I haven't heard that number from . . .

Ms. Chartier: — Just to be clear, that 27 was in an unlicensed space. But the consultants, part of their job is to provide support to the child carers to ensure that they can, when regulations change . . . Say the meal, the dietitians who were here last week are helping create guidelines to provide good food or better food for kids. So one of the jobs of the consultant is to go out and ensure that the child carers have the capacity to do that. And so I think it's not having it both ways. To ensure that you're meeting the requirements sometimes requires support and guidance. Well what's new? Well what can we do to meet these new requirements?

But I'm telling you what child care directors are telling me. They want to provide top-notch care to kids and are not feeling like they've got the support to be able to do that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well if their inspections yield something where there isn't compliance, then obviously they're expected to deal with it. If they don't feel that supportive, then that's unfortunate. But that will be our primary concern, will be the safety and security of the children. And we'll certainly raise it with them that they should focus on the other portion of it as well.

But the reason that we have those people going out, there is a requirement that there's the two visits per year. There's a requirement that there's an inspection. So those are the things that we expect them to take place, and that's sort of the minimum standard that they have. If they're not doing that, then we need to know that as well. So if you're hearing things on a specific place, a specific daycare, a specific situation, provide us with the information. I'm sure you won't want to do it here tonight where it will end up in *Hansard*, but if there are specific situations where a worker is not providing the support, then provide us what you're hearing.

Ms. Chartier: — Perhaps you sitting down with the child care directors might be something even more beneficial than having me relay it second hand. I think that that might be something

that they would be very interested in doing.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I would welcome it.

Ms. Chartier: — When we talk about professional development, we had the conversation a little bit last year about professional development. And I noticed some child cares have raised some concerns with me that the professional development grant, they don't even know if they're going to get it. It's before July before they know whether or not they're going to get professional development grants. So I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about how that grant works.

Ms. Allan: — I think the question that you're asking is yes, sometimes the dollars aren't available until later in the summer. And part of that is we do have to wait until the budget is approved. And then that grant isn't in our regulations so we go through another approval process. But clearly we are aware of the fact that it is late. That issue has been raised with us and we're looking at, you know, how we could perhaps get those dollars out sooner. And so it's based on, you know, the size of the centres in terms of the dollars that are available for them to use in terms of professional development. We also have tuition funding as well for staff that are taking ECE courses as well.

[20:00]

Ms. Chartier: — I know last year we talked about this issue and it remains one that the whole staffing of child care is the recruitment and retention, the fact that it pays better to work at Walmart than it does to be an EC [early childhood] 1 or 2, on occasions. And we had a conversation about this last year and directors have flagged that again as a concern for me that they understand that polytechnic doesn't even, isn't even able to fulfill their EC, or I think it was their diploma program. There's not enough people signed up to fill that. So if we're adding child care spaces, which is important and we need to be able to staff them — obviously we have minimum regulated standards in child care — how do we expect child cares to be able to hire staff without graduating the right number of trained workers?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know that it's very much a work-in-progress. We know that we need more workers. We know that we need more child care. We inherited an enormous deficit in this area. Pat Atkinson, former minister, acknowledged the problems and the shortcomings in this area that the previous administration hadn't looked after very well.

We have made a commitment to add 500 per year. We know that will come that, with that, challenges in adding the necessary physical facilities and then adding the capacity for training staff. I can tell you that we've made progress, but we still have more work to do considering the starting point that we had in 2007.

Ms. Chartier: — Can you tell me what progress you have made when it comes to training?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think I could tell you that we've added over 50 per cent more child care spaces. We have programs that are available through SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology]. Those programs exist and we

will continue to expand and grow those programs over the next period of time because we know that that's something that we need to do.

Ms. Chartier: — You're not filling them currently though, which is . . . So you can expand and create as many spaces in polytechnic as you want, but if people aren't signing up to take them . . . And that is a concern that I continue to hear from folks who have worked in child care for many years. They say, there's nobody coming after us because it's not a desirable career, as much as you might love working with children. If you're paid poorly and the pressures of the job are there, people don't want to do it. Or you become an ECE 1 and then you leave child care and become an EA [educational assistant] or use it as a stepping stone for something else. So I'm wondering if you've got a plan or if you've been working with Advanced Education at all in terms of ensuring that we have the right . . . that the capacity is being developed in staffing.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have in our province, over the last number of years, experienced the lowest unemployment rate in the country. And a lot of workers that have mobility are able to move to areas of the province where there are extremely high-paying job opportunities.

We're moving people into the province from overseas, from other areas of the province, but right now we have a labour shortage. The labour shortage in a lot of areas continues. This is one of them. And we want to be able to develop more programs, work with Ministry of the Economy and Advanced Education to try and make sure that the programs exist and that we have suitable incentives for those people to stay here. But right now we are facing some of the most severe shortages of labour that we have had in the province. Fortunately in the last short while it's started to level out, and hopefully we'll continue to make progress in this area.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. In terms of suitable incentives and ensuring . . . Again, I know what the problem is. We know what the problem is. People don't want to enter this field and we need child care workers. So I'm wondering if you've been working with Advanced Education in trying to fill those spots or what you've done to ensure that child care, that people want to enter child care.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll have some information for you in the next while. We've had the officials tasked over the last while with developing some specifics. They are to come forward to us with a report in the next couple of months. We would expect we'll make some information public as to some longer term plans in the area, but we know that this is an area we inherited a significant shortage from the previous government. We're trying to backfill that by a number of ways, by providing the . . . [inaudible] . . . spaces, providing the capital, providing the ongoing funding, and we would encourage people to stay in the profession. It's a rewarding profession. And we think that we're making progress in this area, but we have more work to do considering the starting place that we had.

Ms. Chartier: — And record revenues that no government in Saskatchewan has ever seen, I might add, so . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the time for the budget debate was earlier as to where the money went, and I think you heard some pretty good answers from the Premier. I don't think we'll go into them here tonight. But if you want to spend the time doing that, we can certainly talk about our paying off billions of dollars of deficit, spending billions of dollars on capital infrastructure, talking about schools, talking about hospitals, talking about highways. I have the numbers if you want us to go through those tonight. But if you'd rather spend your time on budget estimates, that's fine, or if you want to go through the budget debate again, it's your call.

Ms. Chartier: — Record revenues and you still have an abysmal child care record where you can't staff child cares, you can't keep child care workers, families can't find child care, and families can't afford child care. That is the record of the last seven and a half years, with all due respect.

With respect to the report that you mentioned, could you . . . I don't need you to tell . . . You just referenced a report. Is it . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I indicated to you a year ago that we were going to have the officials do some work and present some options to us for the things that we might do in the area of child care, and I understand they're still finalizing that work. And what we'd like to do is receive that, consider what things are in there, and then come forward and make some formal recommendations.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. There had been a freedom of information request. I don't know if this is what you're referencing, but the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow had, the Legislative Secretary for child care . . . Is this report tied into that at all?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't see the FOI [freedom of information] reports. They're not done through the minister's office so I can't, I'm not able to answer that.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. But just I'm asking if the report to which you were referring is connected to the Legislative Secretary's work at all.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It may have been provided. There may have been some work that was provided. I know that he conducted extensive consultations. I've met with him. I had discussions regarding the things that he learned and I know some of those things have been shared with the ministry. And I know the ministry has been doing an analysis and, I'm sure, consulted with him as well.

Ms. Chartier: — And could you give me a bit of a timeline then with respect to this report?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Later this year sometime.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. As in the next few months, or are we talking the end of the year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can't give you a precise time. They indicated to me they might be two or three months away from having the report finalized, and then I would have to take it forward to cabinet. And then if there's budget issues, as there

likely will be, then I have to go back to treasury board before we'd be able to formally announce something.

But we know that . . . The point that you're making, the point that I certainly will agree with you on, is we would like to have more child care spaces in our province and we would like to improve the quality of the child care spaces by providing more resources to them.

We have come a long ways, but we still have a long ways to go.

Ms. Chartier: — You had mentioned the report when we were talking about Advanced Education, and my specific question was, are you working with Advanced Education around ensuring that we have the right complement of folks trained in child care?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know that training and education of child care workers is something that we want to address as part of our strategy for early years. And the answer to, are we working with the other ministries, the answer is yes.

Ms. Chartier: — Going back to the professional development grant, the grant isn't available usually before July. And one of the things that the child cares have flagged with me is that, well it's very hard to organize when you don't know when you're getting the grant. But just food for thought here, Mr. Minister, that the one thing that child cares have suggested is that perhaps the ministry could support professional development. The question was, why can't the ministry have someone dedicated to professional development? So when we talk about support of child care centres — not just policing, but supporting — that is one of the things that they would like to see, is that the ministry is not leading necessarily professional development, but facilitating and listening to the needs of what the child care community are and helping make that happen.

So that's . . . Is there any interest or appetite in the ministry to do that work?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll tell you some of the things that we're not going to do. We're not going to follow what the NDP [New Democratic Party] did in '96-97, '98-99, or '04-05 and '05-06 because in those years the NDP added zero, none. None.

Under 16 years of the NDP government, total child care spaces in the province increased by 2,856. We've added nearly 5,000. I'm not apologizing to you or to anyone else for the progress we've made. We have a long ways to go, but it is a lot better than what your government did in the past. And I want to quote to you from *Hansard*, May 9th, 2011, Pat Atkinson: "Because I agree that this has been a significant ramping up of . . . daycare."

We will continue to do that. We've made a commitment. We're going to continue to work through it, but I will not have you sit here and take apart these officials for the very good work they're doing in increasing child care spaces for families in this province.

Ms. Chartier: — I have absolutely no criticism of the officials, Mr. Minister. It's 2015. You've been in power for seven and a half years. You've had record revenue. I don't know if you've

talked to any families with young children now or know what the landscape looks like at all, but it is tough out there to find child care.

When you've got families who are willing to put kids in unlicensed spaces with way more kids than anybody can ever handle, Mr. Minister, that speaks volumes. When the complaints that have come in through your toll-free line about unlicensed child care spaces, most of the complaints being about over-enrolment, that speaks volumes about where we are today.

Child care is about economic development. It's about early learning and care. It's about security for parents to make sure that they can work and they can go to school. So to say that, when we think about economic development and you talk about labour force shortages, well one sure way to make sure that you have people who can work is to ensure that they've got child care available.

So 2015, seven and a half years, record revenue. And child care, quite frankly, you talk to families and it is not pretty out there.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well here's the numbers: under 16 years of NDP, 2856; under our government, 5,000 in just eight years. This budget provides \$78 million for early learning opportunities, \$3.9 million for early childhood intervention programs, \$4.5 million for KidsFirst, \$19 million for pre-kindergarten programs, \$51 million for child care spaces.

Since forming government, we've increased child care spaces by 53 per cent, pre-K programs by 104 per cent, ECIP program funding by 40 per cent. We've committed to 90 spaces in each of the 90 joint-use schools, so that's an additional 810. Our promise was for 2,000 in the second term; we will exceed that.

So we're continuing to expand. We have more work to do. But before you criticize us, have a look at where you were before we formed government. We have come a long ways but we still have a long ways to go. So if that's the admission you're looking for, that we have a long ways to go, yes, absolutely. But you look where we started before you criticize us.

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Minister, I'm the child care critic.

The Chair: — Excuse me. Let's try and keep it civil. And if we have to, we'll direct the questions through the Chair.

Ms. Chartier: — Mr. Minister, I'm the child care critic. My job is to point out where the shortcomings are, and this is something I happen to live. I have a seven-year-old. I still have many people who I know personally as well as through my work that tell me all about their child care experiences. So this is my job, is to hold you to account, and there is a very long way to go.

So with respect to the professional development grant . . . As you were getting some numbers and some information from behind you, Mr. Minister, one of the things child cares have suggested to me that would be incredibly helpful is if they had support for professional development in terms of the ministry having a dedicated person to professional development. Is there an appetite in the ministry to support that kind of work?

[20:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We would certainly take any comment that you wish to make as something we would take into consideration. Right now our focus has been to put the resources into the actual child care spaces, but we'll certainly take your comment into account.

Ms. Chartier: — And another comment around professional development that child cares have pointed out to me, and I think we've talked about this in past estimates, both with you and with the previous minister, that one of the challenges is getting the time away for professional development. Child cares, from my understanding, are only allowed to close on Christmas Day. Is that correct? And of course weekends.

Ms. Allan: — Yes. And on all of the stat holidays, yes.

Ms. Chartier: — So stat holidays, Christmas. I think one of the things that they flagged for me is many people who work in child care have families of their own and taking a Saturday or a Sunday away for professional development can be incredibly difficult. They have suggested, directors have suggested — and I don't know; I haven't given this tons of thought — but they've suggested that perhaps, like teachers, that there could be on the first Monday of the first September or . . . that there is a date set aside for professional development where child cares will be closed, and that will be the goal is to ensure that there is an opportunity for these folks to get the professional development that they need.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The answer that I can give you is it will depend on the facility. Some facilities may schedule replacement staff to allow for other staff to attend professional development events, as not all staff are in need of the same type of development. Other facilities may work with parents and schedule a professional development day for staff well in advance to give parents enough notice to coordinate child care.

So I appreciate the point you're making, and at the present time it's not something that's under active consideration. Right now the focus is trying to ensure that we've got our daycares operating as well as they possibly can be. And that may be something that might be considered in an out year.

Ms. Chartier: — Another concern that's been flagged for me is that when children are registered in licensed child care . . . Licensed child care is enriched learning, early learning and care, and then you've got pre-K, which is also enriched learning. And from my understanding, children are not supposed to be in a licensed child care space and a pre-K space as well. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They're not supposed to be.

Ms. Chartier: — So you're registered. You have a licensed child care space. Your parents are paying for a licensed child care space, but the child care has to ship you off at noon to go to a pre-K space. From my understanding, I've been told that that is not permitted.

Ms. Allan: — We don't have a specific policy, but we don't encourage it because in the child care centres we use play and

exploration, as well as in the pre-K programs. So pre-K, as you know, is targeted to the most vulnerable three- and four-year-olds. And so we would hope that if a child is in a child care centre, they are getting the play and exploration program while they're there so that they wouldn't need to go there.

So we've had those discussions with school divisions. School divisions, at the end of the day, are the ones that select the children for their pre-K programs. And so we have had those discussions both with school divisions and with child care centres.

Ms. Chartier: — I'm just wondering how you might be monitoring it. I understand that, I don't know if double-dipping is the right term, but that there are many child cares where 20 kids, if you've got a 50-space child care, 20 kids are heading off to pre-K, which is logistically incredibly difficult for child cares. It involves more staff, and then managing your numbers too becomes a challenge, and your ratios, and then the fact that you're paying for a licensed, possibly subsidized, child care space as well as a pre-K space.

So I'm wondering. I know you've said you've had the conversations with the school divisions, but how are you keeping track of that? Or how are you working to ensure that that's not happening?

Ms. Allan: — We do have a document maximizing spaces that's out there that we have sent out. And so clearly, you know, when the issue has been raised with us we, you know, we do have the conversations. And I'm not aware of the exact numbers in terms of how that's happening, but clearly we have sent information out and we have had conversations to try and ensure that we're maximizing, you know, the spaces at child care centres and in pre-K.

Ms. Chartier: — I know it's very hard for a child care to say to a family . . . So a family says, my kid's going to come there in the morning and in the afternoon they're going to the pre-K space. And this is what the family wants. So it's a hard discussion for the child care centres to have with the families, that hey, you're taking up a child care space and you're taking up a pre-K space. So there has to be a better mechanism, I think, because this is happening I think fairly frequently, actually.

Is there any thought on how . . . So you've sent out a document. Is there anything else you can do to ensure that that's not happening?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Are you suggesting that we should be going around checking to make sure that kids aren't in one program and the other and then removing kids from the program?

Ms. Chartier: — I'm wondering if you've got any concerns that likely, because pre-K is for vulnerable kids, so chances are pretty good that you're paying for a licensed child care space or a subsidized child care space and for a pre-K space, which means that there are some kids who are excluded from pre-K because the space is taken up.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're not aware of it being a problem, but the officials have indicated that they're prepared to look into it.

Ms. Chartier: — I think, Mr. Minister, that it would be a very good idea to sit down. I'm sure maybe these directors will send you a letter and ask for an opportunity to sit down with you because all these things that I've raised today have been things that have been raised to me by many directors.

I think one last question here. Just last year we talked a little bit, well actually for the last couple of years we've talked about the online child care registry in Manitoba. And I know, Ms. Allan, that last year you'd mentioned you'd spoken to both Manitoba and Prince Edward Island and identified some of the challenges that Manitoba had had with their online child care registry. But the whole idea of a child care registry goes to quantifying the need.

So I'm wondering. I had asked you about the benefits that had accrued and you'd said that it was early but you would be . . . So we've been following up with those in terms of how that is working and will continue to look at that. So I'm wondering if there's been any work done on that in the last year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We would not regard that as a priority at this time to look . . .

Ms. Chartier: — Even to quantify demand?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — To look at an online registry. We want to know and assess what the demand is and we want to know and assess what's there. At the present time we're still dealing with getting an understanding of what's available and what the demands are. But at this point in time, developing an online tool isn't there. It may well be at some point in the future, but at this point the focus is trying to get more spaces online, not online electronically, but in place. And I'm not saying that wouldn't be something that wouldn't be there but it's not something that's under active consideration at the present time.

Ms. Chartier: — I think it speaks to quantifying. You've talked about knowing and assessing the demand, so I'm wondering . . . We talked a little bit about how you measure applications when they come in or when you look at need, but I'm wondering how you know and assess demand for child care here in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know what we hear from parents and we know that when the daycares come on stream that they're fully subscribed almost immediately. I think this goes to the broader discussion, and it's one that you and I had had informally, as to whether we have a comprehensive licensing program where we try and license each and every daycare in the province or whether we maintain a roster where we say, yes, you're providing a service; you must therefore be on the roster, and whether being on a roster would imply a certain level of inspection or whether it implies that you're there. And you know, that's a debate and a discussion that we probably need to flesh out more fully. Maybe it's something you and I can talk about sometime.

But I think we need to know where we want to go. We want to

do things that would encourage more spaces to become available and people that are considering doing it, without creating obstacles, but at the same time trying to make sure that we've got every incentive so that good proper ones are . . . that people will come forward and say yes, I have room in my home or as a group of neighbours we can get together and we can provide 5, 10, or 15 spaces. So that's the challenges that were there. And then the broader issue is how you appropriately regulate those and I think that's a good discussion for us to have.

Ms. Chartier: — I think just around that whole idea, we know that we need more spaces, like unequivocally. Unequivocally, we need more spaces. But I again don't know how you can meet a challenge without knowing what the challenge is. So I'm not quite sure how. You know that when you create a child care, it fills up. But I don't know how you could sort of plan without knowing, trying to figure out a way of knowing what the need is. And the online child care registry in Manitoba, from what I've been told by folks there, is a tool to help assess demand. But I don't know how you can plan without knowing, having some sense of what demand is.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we're continuing to provide as rapidly as we can and as rapidly as the system can absorb the ones that were there. So right now we're going by willingness and capacity of parties to fill that need. So I think we'll continue to do that, and as we approach a better level, then perhaps we will try and develop a higher level of sophistication. But right now it's a matter of saying yes, we want to add substantially more spaces than we have.

Ms. Chartier: — Okay. Well I will pass it off to my colleague here from Rosemont. I think that that's good. Thank you very much to the minister and to your officials here tonight. I appreciate your time and your answers. So Mr. Wotherspoon.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you. I had indicated before Mr. Wotherspoon had come in that over the supper hour we had looked at some of the numbers and I wanted to clarify a point that was made.

We had indicated that the operating increase was 2.9 per cent and it was an increase of \$52 million. Of that, there was approximately \$40 million was used for the CBA, and then there was an increase of \$12 million. And then I think you had looked at some of the numbers before and I think where it appeared confusing was there was additional revenue from education property tax that was included. So the reality of it is the increase over and above the \$40 million for the collective bargaining is in fact approximately \$12 million because there's also the additional revenue that came from EPT [education property tax]. I don't know if that makes sense or you want me to have Ms. Johnson go through it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Maybe just a little bit further clarity to it because the school operating item in the subvote is 35 million more than last year, and it was suggested that the CBA, the additional cost of the CBA was 40 . . . I have all these numbers written down from before. What was it? \$47 million. And so yes, maybe if there can be a point made just . . . So there's the \$35 million increase.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There was the operating grant was part of the money that was available, and there was an additional amount of money for education property tax.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And that would have been the 17 million that was identified I think by Ms. Johnson. Is that correct?

[20:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — She's here now, and we'll let her give the numbers, and then we can both critique her together.

Ms. Johnson: — Thank you. So going back to take a look at the government fiscal year, the school operating funding is increasing by 52.8 million. In the government fiscal year as well, we have \$33 million going towards the costs associated with the collective bargaining agreement. The remainder of the 52.8 is coming from increases through the education property tax, so 17.9 coming from education property taxes.

Now going back to talk a bit about the details of the CBA, we're requiring an increment of 33.5 in the '15-16 budget year because the other 13.9 that is required for the costs associated with '15-16 is already in the 2014-15 base.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So the fiscal impact out of this budget year for the CBA isn't the 47 million as described before. It's actually 33.5.

Ms. Johnson: — The increment is 33.5 and the total cost is 47.4. The difference between those two figures is 13.9, and that 13.9 is already in the '14-15 base budget.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So that those dollars have flowed in advance of this fiscal year.

Ms. Johnson: — Yes. They're available for '14-15 when retro payments were made to school divisions.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And then the total cost that, of the CBA, there was, I believe it was stated, 40 million, and then there was the number of 47. Forty was attributed to sort of last year's expenses, the retro, and then there's 47 on top of that. Is 87 still the total?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the school operating budget that's in place here is a \$35 million increase. Then there's the dollars from the property tax that you've identified, the 17 million. And the cost of the collective, the CBA this year is 33.5 million.

Ms. Johnson: — The 33.5 million for CBA is correct. And again on the government fiscal year, \$52.8 million increase year over year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — 52.8?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the difference between those two is what you're sort of identifying as, I guess, the increase to deal

with all the other stuff that school divisions are taking care of.

Ms. Johnson: — That's correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Now was there some recognition for other agreements, some of the link agreements or agreements of school divisions? Were those built into the budget?

Ms. Johnson: — The link agreements, I think you're familiar with the component summary that we provide on the website, and so there is an amount for link agreements in the component summary. That figure has gone up from '14-15. As we move into '15-16, that figure has gone up to address the CBA increases that come with the various aspects of link that are tied back to teacher salaries.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So what are the costs of all the other collective agreements for the school divisions?

Ms. Johnson: — The costs of the other agreements that the school divisions manage will vary from school division to school division, and I don't have the details of those costs here.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you have the fiscal impact, the total fiscal impact of the additional costs of those link agreements to understand just what sort of budgetary pressure they place on budgets?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We won't know that because some of them aren't settled at this point. They're in various stages. Some had a longer . . . the agreements are. So we won't know that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So it's fair to say that school divisions in general and operating, when you set aside the salaries, they received less than \$20 million as an increase. Is that correct in total?

Ms. Johnson: — That's correct.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Certainly you can understand why there's such tight discussions going on with school boards right now with the dollars that they've received. Not only that's a very tight budget increase on a \$2 billion budget, not likely covering inflation. I haven't crunched that number but I suspect not covering inflation and certainly not covering growth.

Something that was worked hard towards and actually celebrated a lot by the government was the mid-year adjustment. I know sitting, spending a lot of time in this committee with the previous minister and others, we spent a lot of time talking about the need for that mid-year adjustment.

The reality is that many school divisions are facing significant growth, which presents significant opportunities but enormous pressure as well back into the classrooms and into the schools. And you know, certainly I remember going around the province a few years ago and bringing to this committee multiple times in consecutive years the importance of addressing that issue, and certainly I did recognize government for finally bringing forward that mid-year adjustment. It's just beyond me why a government, at a time where there's growing population, at a time where there's so much strain in classrooms, would scrap

that measure.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you it was something that was done for two years, and it was certainly something that was welcomed by the school divisions. Alberta has chosen not to do it this year. They had done it in previous years as well.

It's something we're asking the school divisions to do is to look at their ability to absorb that during the year and then adjust it later on. We've indicated to the school divisions that we know this is something that's important to them. If there's a possibility of doing this mid-year, it's something that we would very much want to look at. It would be a priority for us. Having said that, the financial circumstances of the province are dictated by commodity prices, and we've seen, you know, a 6 or 7 per cent drop in the province's revenue.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes. But with all due respect, this is a sector that has been strained for some time, and the needs and demands and pressures are there. They're real in classrooms across Saskatchewan. The growth numbers this year are significant once again, which is something we should be celebrating, not something that brings enormous pressure on to our divisions, and they really do require a partner on this front. There was some reference by yourself as minister a little earlier that maybe something might be reconsidered throughout the year, but it's really not how school . . . I mean I'm sure they'd welcome an adjustment if and when it was received, but what they deserve really is a funding commitment.

And yes, if I'm looking at the numbers of population growth for the urban boards alone in Regina and Saskatoon, they're big. I'm hearing Regina Public will be close to 500. I'm hearing that Regina Catholic will be close to 350. Up in Saskatoon Public, it'll be 600 or 650 I believe. In Greater Saskatoon Catholic, 200 students. So that's 1,800 students that aren't being funded in just those four divisions. Do you have other numbers to share with us as it relates to other divisions?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know that there's five or six divisions that are facing the significant growth in the province. Those would be Saskatoon Public, Saskatoon Catholic, the same in Regina, and then Prairie Spirit which is just north of Saskatoon. We know that the growth, it will be consolidated not uniformly across those divisions either, that it will be in a few schools. So they may have to reallocate or redeploy resources within their divisions to try and accommodate. It was something that we were able to provide for a number of years. It's something we might like to be able to provide in the future.

We did, as we went through the changes to the formula, we had provided transition funding which was supposed to continue for two to four years. We knew that taking away the transition funding would be a problem, that that would be real dollars gone away from school divisions and would require layoffs or change in employment. We chose instead to ask the divisions to absorb the employment, the enrolment increase.

Province wide, it's a difference of less than one student per classroom. We know that divisions will have to move people around or try and redeploy resources to minimize the effect of that. For the most part, we've had indication from the boards that they're willing to do this, that they will make their best

efforts to do it. And of course, they're encouraging us to look at mid-year, and mid-year is of course dependent on the financial outlook of the province.

I might add that this portfolio has seen a bigger year-over-year percentage increase than any other division, if you look at it over the last five or six years. The increase has been far more than what the enrolment would be because of the capital deficit and the deficiencies there are with the building. So we're looking at things not just in the context of enrolment increase, but in terms of capital as well.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well we'll get to the capital budget because it's a challenge of its own in the needs that are going unmet and not being addressed in the province.

I guess, what would the breakdown be for the number of those new students that would be coming in that would be relatively new to Canada and possibly newer to English?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know whether we have an accurate number on that. I suspect the point you're going to make is that the same schools that are getting the increased enrolment will be the ones that will have the higher number of EAL students, and I'm not sure that will be entirely true. But there'd certainly be a higher number of them in those areas than there would be in other ones.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well the reality if you're out there chatting with teachers and with parents and with school divisions right now is that it's a highly strained environment for providing those resources to students that are acquiring English as an additional language. And certainly those students that are requiring some additional support within those classrooms, certainly class sizes are a challenge, and they're very complex classrooms with limited supports.

Really we have a real challenge right now in education under this government where classrooms are under resourced and overcrowded, and now an important measure is being taken away from those very divisions that are taking on a significant challenge. So it just doesn't make any sense.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We appreciate the point that's being made, and we feel it's something that we've asked the divisions to co-operate with us, work with us on it. We're not saying it's going to be as easy as they want, but we believe that with some planning, they can work and they can do that. It is, as I mentioned, one student per classroom and, as I indicated, if there's a possibility of some major assistance, we'll certainly look at doing that.

I appreciate the point I'm also anticipating that you'll make that the sooner that the commitment is made, the easier it is for them to plan around it. But we don't know where the revenues of the province are going. We're being candid. That is the fiscal reality in which we're in now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well I think the reality is that if we shortchange the kids of today, we're going to be not all we can be as a province tomorrow, certainly economically and socially and otherwise, and that'll certainly speak to our long-term fiscal health. So to make these sorts of cuts at this time just doesn't

make sense. I mean there's lots of money within the budget for other areas, as in across government as a whole. I just find it astonishing that it would have been deemed acceptable to cut this mid-year adjustment.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it's a point that you and I will have to agree to disagree on. This is a ministry that has received more funding on a percentage basis than any other ministry, year over year.

We know that our long-term commitment has to be on infrastructure. We know we were left with an infrastructure deficit, so we will continue to fund infrastructure. And it is our hope and our expectation, and we're asking the school divisions, work with us for this year and absorb this expense. Nobody is going to be laid off. Each and every school division will receive more money than they did in the previous year. We've fully funded the collective bargaining increase and have provided additional money for operating for other things, as well as the preventive maintenance and emergent funding as well.

[20:45]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well it just seems to really speak to not understanding the realities of the classrooms today. And if you look at an expenditure that certainly isn't the same in size, if you think of the close to \$1 million that the additional three more MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] that your government has pushed forward in adding will cost each and every year, you just think of what that means. I mean we already are well served with the number of MLAs, and for a government to push forward saying, well we need three more MLAs to sit in that Assembly, at a time that government can't support the proper number of students and supports for our teachers and a number of supports for students, just doesn't make any sense.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think a budget that has grown since we've formed government in 2007 in the magnitude that it has, it's now approaching \$2 billion, 9 new joint-use facilities coming on stream, and we've lowered the classroom size since we've formed government. We've provided more supports for learning, EAL. And virtually everything that you look at, there is more of than there was before on a per capita basis, on an individual basis, regardless of how you look at it. We have made substantial progress.

So what we are saying this year is, we are saying to this number of school divisions, can you absorb this for one year? And we believe that they can. And we believe that there is good administrators out there, and we believe that they will make every effort and be successful in doing this. Certainly they would rather not do it, but this is the fiscal reality that we're in. And we think this is the best place that they can absorb that because it does not mean that a project has got to be cancelled. It does not mean that anybody has to be laid off.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well it means a whole bunch of things on the ground in education. And you know, you continue to highlight sort of what you boast about as being some sort of record that you might be suggesting is a proud one around education. I know that parents and certainly students and the

teachers of this province, the school boards of this province understand the real reality that's going on out there. And it's not consistent with just quoting numbers that are increasing. The reality is when you grow as a province, population-wise, there's strain on an education system. There's growth within there. We have education capital needs that certainly are evident, and we have complex needs within many of our schools.

And I guess I would just, you know, quote Diane Boyko of Greater Saskatoon schools, because you're suggesting that this is somehow, you know, a sufficient response to the pressures that are there: "However, we are concerned that provisions to address the ongoing pressures experienced . . ." Oh sorry, that's Ray Morrison, but "However, we are concerned that provisions to address the ongoing pressures experienced due to year-over-year enrolment increases have been removed in this budget." So, identified specifically by Saskatoon Public Chair, Ray Morrison. And Diane Boyko, Chair of Greater Saskatoon Catholic says that ". . . when we don't receive the resources we need for those extra students, it's a disservice to them and the future of our province."

I couldn't agree more with that statement, and I think that parents and certainly students and teachers would identify with that statement as well. I guess the question would be, you know, there's some carrot that you're suggesting you might dangle out at some point in the air as a possibility to address this mid-year adjustment. The reality is school boards have been very accurate in predicting their enrolment numbers. They deserve a commitment from you as minister and from this government. Are you willing to look at this again in an urgent way, as opposed to leaving divisions with something that will certainly negatively impact students?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The answer that I gave is one that is correct. We cannot commit to doing that year . . . that at this point in time. If there's a change in finances mid-year, it's something we would look at at that time. We can't make a commitment to doing it now. We don't regard that as a carrot being held out; we just regard that as being the fiscal reality.

You were talking about quotes that were there. This is a quote from Ray Morrison, March 27th. "We appreciate that the province made education a priority in the budget and we welcome the overall increase in education funding." Now he goes on and he raises the same concerns that all of us have with the enrolment funding not being included in this budget. And it's not, it's going to be something that they will have to work through. We're asking them to do this, and I've got every confidence in their ability to do it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I have every confidence in our school board leaders and our administrators and our teachers and our students and our parents, but there's a breaking point on these strained classrooms that you've created. And the reality is that morale is in tough shape across the profession in this province, associated directly with the pressures placed upon teachers in the classrooms. There's a lot of pressure on those divisions and those administrators with very limited resources. And you know, you can quote Mr. Morrison and suggest that maybe he's satisfied with the budget, but I don't think that was the purpose of the news release that was sent out in a joint way by the two school divisions.

I'll go on and quote from that same release that you're quoting from, and maybe just need to read it in its entirety to make sure you've grasped all of the pieces that they've left you with. But I quote:

"Our division has long understood the need to spend efficiently and has made difficult decisions, like cutting full-day kindergarten," Boyko said. "But we are close to the point where we do not have enough money to meet the expectations of our communities, which obviously causes us great concern."

I mean that's a pretty serious statement.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think if you go down a paragraph or two: "The provincial government did include several good news items for the divisions, including the decision to assume 100 per cent of the capital costs for major facility projects." So then it talks about being on track for the funding on those projects that are there.

I can tell you this: the overall education funding has increased by \$246.5 million or 14 per cent from '14-15 for a total of nearly \$2 billion. School operating funding for '15-16, including the revenue from education property tax, will be \$1.87 billion, up \$52.8 million. This year's total capital budget: \$248.5 million, the largest ever capital investment made on budget day; \$154 million increases for initial construction costs associated with building the nine joint-use schools in Warman, Martensville, Saskatoon, and Regina; \$91 million for the funding of 100 per cent of the capital projects.

Increases to preventative and emergency maintenance for buildings up to \$31.6 million, an increase of \$7.6 million, an increase of almost one-third. Thirty-one new relocatable classrooms, \$10.6 million; \$47 million for 11 previously agreed capital projects. Ongoing funding for the joint task force for a variety of First Nations' initiatives; \$960 million for teacher's salaries includes wage increases based on the recent settlement; \$4.6 million for supports for learning which was carried over from mid-year funding from the previous year, now added to the base; \$700,000 to cover the costs of the professional teachers' regulatory body so that teachers are not out of pocket for that. Money for CBOs, an additional \$420,000 for English as an additional language. So there is a substantial commitment on the part of the province for that.

There is a part of it that is not there that was there the previous year. That part is the enrolment increase. We've asked the divisions to absorb it for this year and we'll look at it in a subsequent year. And I have to be candid with you, I think that that is a remarkable financial commitment for the province to have made year over year, and if we're not providing the enrolment increase this year, we want to provide it in out years. We're not saying that it wasn't appreciated or wasn't something that was put to good use by the numbers, but we are unable to provide it in this year. And we think that the divisions should be able to accommodate it this year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Students deserve it. Boards need it. And you can pull apart a whole bunch of numbers, but the reality is known by the parents that are sitting at home, by the teachers that are in those classrooms, by students that are living the

experience, and by the administrators and boards that are making really tough decisions with an inadequate budget.

My question would be as it relates to projections around what that mid-year adjustment should have been this year. What was the fiscal impact of the mid-year adjustment this year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We made a \$4.6 million adjustment mid-year. We added money to supports for learning. We would have more money available to us if we weren't dealing with such a massive shortfall on our school buildings that we inherited from the previous administration. But I don't think that we're well served by debating budget day stuff again, but if you wish to you, we certainly can.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just really disappointed with that piece. But the question, sorry, was the mid-year adjustment. How much was that last year, and what would have been the fiscal impact that you were planning for this year? What did the cut save your budget?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're projecting that it's \$8.8 million for the government fiscal year, for the year going forward. We'll get you the previous year's number.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry, the mid-year was how much?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The enrolment increase for the projected amount for this year is for the calendar year is \$8.8 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That's how much would have been provided through the mid-year adjustment had it been in place?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Had we provided it on budget day, that's the additional.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what's the amount for the entire fiscal year because there would have been an adjustment.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 15.5.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So a total of 23 million or so?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The 15.5 includes that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And last year boards received about 19 million through that measure. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Almost exactly 20 million in the previous year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Like I've said, those dollars are required by divisions, and it's . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well that amount was, when it was provided the year before, that became part of the base so that's added in. So that funding continues on and the 8.8 will form next year's base in a subsequent year because we will recognize the enrolment as we look back at it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — But again we've gone back to a model that just doesn't, doesn't reflect the dynamic times in Saskatchewan with population. And it's just so unfortunate that

that change has been made.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, it's somewhat passing strange that Alberta came to the same method that we did because they had included in previous years and dropped it this year as well, feeling that it was something divisions could do. So the ministry officials in both provinces came to the same methodology. Now I have to be . . . the amount is, this is the estimated funding cost for this is for the year, is \$15 million or point eight per cent. So we are less than 1 per cent of the total operating cost for the school. So it's, you know, I realize it's money that they would like to have, but we believe it is a manageable reduction.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — But when you look at the very tiny increase on, once you set aside the cost of the CBA, the teacher's contract, that \$10 million-plus, well the 15 million in this year is important, are important dollars. And so I'm just not going to allow the minister to dismiss the importance of that investment and the realities and pressures in the classrooms across Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I appreciate the point that you're making and I, you know, don't think it's a matter of which one of us gets the last word. We believe that a point eight per cent change in operating is something that can be managed within the divisions. We know the divisions would prefer not to, and if the divisions had it, that they would put the money to good use.

You know, we believe this is one way of managing our budget. As a province, we will not run at a deficit. We are going to have a balanced budget, and it means some tighter measures, but we believe that this is one that should be manageable. We are continuing on with, as I mentioned, the various capital items that are there and will continue to deal with those.

I think that's the area where you and I will have to agree to disagree on this. We think this is something that is manageable, and I appreciate that your position is that it is not. But when you look at the size of the budget, when you look at the numbers in totality, I think the province sees this as a reasonable approach.

[21:00]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'll just caution the minister. I mean the people of the province are really bright as well, and those watching tonight are incredibly bright as well as far as . . . Let's not get into sort of suggestions or notions of a balanced budget. I mean we hear that song every year from your government at budget time, and then the ink dries and more than 50 per cent of the time the story has been a different one, verified by the Provincial Auditor. It's typically been deficits, and that being during the years of record revenues for the government.

This year I think most people would sort of cut through what you're suggesting here to the public when they know you're straight-out borrowing \$700 million for infrastructure and another \$800 million, with accumulated debt growth this year of \$1.5 billion. But we'll save that for the finance committee. But certainly I wouldn't . . . I think it's wrong to pretend to students and to parents and teachers across Saskatchewan, and certainly divisions, that somehow this decision was made to supposedly balance the budget, because I think we all know that

hasn't been a strong suit of this government.

I would like to get into some of the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I've got to stop you there. You go through the Provincial Auditor's records. This is a government that has ran a balanced budget each and every year. We'll continue to provide balanced budgets.

The opposition insisted we move to summary financial statements. It makes it more of a challenge because we look at fluctuations within the Saskatchewan Auto Fund, Workers' Compensation. Even bringing those factors in, we have and will continue to run balanced budgets.

If you want to take exception to the infrastructure expenditure, which we are going to incur a long-term debt attached to those specific projects, I would encourage you to put that on the record tonight that you don't want us to do those things or that you're not in favour of the P3 [public-private partnership] schools. You don't want us to do those. You're welcome to put that on the record tonight because those are projects we believe in. We think the province needs those projects and we're going to continue to go ahead with those projects as part of our balanced budget.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The auditor's reports certainly don't validate the point that you just suggested. They point out many deficits. That's not the point of our meeting here tonight. But the suggestion of suggesting balance at budget time, we know that boasting usually becomes a different reality from your government towards the end of the year and it's simply wrong to pretend to students that you're balancing, you know, the budget by making an important cut to them. And certainly that's not reflective of balanced priorities. So we'll move on to some of the other aspects of the budget here . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can certainly agreed to disagree on that point.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'd like to get an understanding of the achievement and operational support, just what's included in that budgetary item. It's down \$4.2 million. So if you can speak to what's funded out of that piece and then what's being reduced.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There was no reduction, period. I'll let Ms. Johnson explain it and then I won't have to correct myself later on.

Ms. Johnson: — All right. So your question was with respect to achievement and operational support, and that was on the estimates page showing a decline in funding of 4.1 million. The original budget in 2014-15, the budget of 34.2 million included 5.4 million for student achievement. And as you'll recall, during the course of the '14-15 fiscal year, 4.6 million of that was transferred to supports for learning. So essentially that money was moved from this line in estimates into the school operating line where it resides now in the school operating grant.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. No, thanks for clarifying that. That makes sense. So that was the standardized testing money

that was shelved finally by this government and redirected to where it should be.

But the supports for learning piece is actually a really important area. Of course it's very broad. I'm not sure at times . . . I hear a lot of school boards who feel that maybe it's too broad of a category, and I don't know if there's considerations as you're looking at the funding model, if there's ways to break this apart. I know that includes everything from transportation to those very important intensive needs and supports and some of those around English as an additional language.

But when I sit down with boards across Saskatchewan, this is one area where the shortfalls in what they received to what they require are large. And so maybe if you could just give us some clarity of what the supports for learning funding is this year, what it was last year, and then just break down the components of that.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. I'll let Donna do that. The amount of money goes out. There's line items that we provide for this. We provide for a variety of different things that are in sort of that portion of the budget.

We respect the autonomy of the school divisions, so the schools divisions often will reallocate within and say, well we feel that we have a better mix of EAs rather than teachers, or we want to do this or that instead of . . . or this fits our particular demographic. So we don't hold them to account for doing it. Although sometimes after the fact, they say, oh well, we didn't get this much for this; we didn't get that much for that. Well the reality of it is it was because they made the decision to reallocate elsewhere, and we certainly respect and don't take any objection to doing that. But I'm going to let Donna answer the specifics of your question.

Ms. Johnson: — All right. So in 2014-15, the funding for supports for learning was \$276.6 million and, as we mentioned just a minute ago, partway through the year \$4.6 million was added to that fund when we transferred the money. And moving into '15-16, the total funding for supports for learning is 286.5 million, so that difference is accounting for some enrolment growth in '14-15 and the increased costs associated with the collective bargaining agreement.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I just would be interested in hearing from the minister what he hears about the adequacy of supports for learning.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We hear that people were pleased that mid-year we transferred the \$4.6 million to the supports for learning. The divisions that received the money, we encouraged them to consult with teachers as to how the money was to be applied. We respect their autonomy, but we think that was well received. And we think the divisions valued the money that they were receiving for supports for learning.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So just to sort of put things in perspective, and we know the different shortfalls, and I look forward to hearing from the minister his understanding of the shortfalls that different divisions are facing right now with the budget that they've been handed. But you have a school division like Sask Rivers up in Prince Albert that takes in Prince

Albert and also some of the rural area, and it's certainly a diverse riding, diverse community, diverse school board. They're short for supports for learning somewhere, I think I'm safe to say, between 6 to \$7 million from what they actually require. So when you talk about an additional top-up of 4 million last year, a one-time top-up, it just doesn't go very far. And that goes across the 28 divisions. I know if you chat with the larger urban boards right now, the shortfalls are really big. So the supports for learning funding is, you know, is inadequate.

And I know that, you know, the minister suggests that, well these are then decisions of the board to make. But you control all of the funding and school boards are sort of at your mercy. And if you only provide them with enough money to pick and choose what they're going to fund, they have to make some awfully difficult cuts. And it puts school divisions in a really unfortunate spot.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, I was a school board trustee myself. During the time that I was a trustee, there was a time that I was board Chair. I don't think a board Chair would ever give you the answer that they had sufficient funds or enough funds. That's their role and that's their task to lobby and continue to do it, and if they receive more money, they put those funds to good use. The reason they're elected is because they have to make those tough choices. They have to be in touch with the community.

You raise the issue of Sask Rivers. Their 2014-15 budget was \$12.9 million So that was for supports for learning. So there is no cuts there. Their increase is \$710,000, so almost \$1 million increase on \$12 million. I don't know what the percentage basis is, so it's a substantial increase for that division.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what's their need for supports for learning?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — What's their need?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know how you would answer what their need is. Their budget in 2014-15 was 12.923. In '15-16 the budget has increased to 13,634,069. I'm sure if you ask them, they'll tell you they would like more money and I have confidence that they will work well within that budget.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So and then in Sask Rivers they had received the \$12 million for supports for learning, which left them at least \$6 million short for what their needs were within that division to meet their needs. And you know, I guess it's a bit of a different tone and a bit of a different approach that I hear from the minister, and one that I don't share. And it's your prerogative to have whatever view you have of school board elected trustees and school boards and administrators and teachers across the province, but I think to suggest that no matter how much you give them that, you know, it'll never be enough, isn't the kind of common sense leadership that I have seen in the past in this province around those tables, or right now. I think they very much are common sense leaders that work towards running efficient operations with the best interests of improving education for students and delivering

high-quality education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I believe that they do. I believe they do a very good job and I have enormous confidence in them. I suspect that most of them aren't going to tell you that they've received enough money because that's their goal, is to lobby for things, and we encourage them to do that.

You indicated this \$12.9 million budget that you felt that they were running \$6 million short on that. I don't know if that's your goal is to increase budgets by 50 per cent. I suspect that the notion that you would want to increase budgets by 50 per cent on this type of budget might explain why you're in opposition.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well I think if you go up and take a look at the needs in the classrooms in through P.A. [Prince Albert] and across the rest of the province, and if you look at the importance of education and the tens and tens and tens of millions you've had for your American consulting debacle in other ministries, had those dollars been redirected — not great big dollars but dollars into where they count — you wouldn't have had the kinds of supports gutted in school divisions across this province.

And you know, I don't know. I might be wrong on this. Maybe you're right. But I think possibly how out of touch you are on matters like this, like the realities in everyday classrooms across Saskatchewan, might start, you know, your march towards opposition. But that's for the people of Saskatchewan to decide.

All I know is students deserve an advocate. Teachers deserve an advocate. You can suggest that everything is the same now as it was when you were a trustee, and you can dismiss the rightful concerns of the elected leaders in this province and those fine administrators and directors across Saskatchewan, but I'd suggest you do so at your own peril. And I think there's a risk in doing so as well because it's compromising the education that students are receiving.

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I know things aren't like they were when I was a trustee at all. The funding that's in this province now is far greater than it was. We've seen a 30 and 40 per cent increase in operating funding. We've seen it was well over 100 per cent on capital funding. We are continuing to address some of the needs that were left behind by another government. We will make no apologies for the steps forward that we have taken.

This is something that is a priority to this government. The students in our province are absolutely important to us. These are the future of our province. These people deserve to be well educated so they can participate fully and share in the growth and prosperity of our province. I have every faith in our schools, in our teachers, and our school divisions to deliver a first-class education to them.

Of course if they had more money, they would do more things, and I have faith that they would do good things. But I also have faith that they can make do with a budget that they have received and that they will continue to make good choices for

the students that they have.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Have you had the chance to canvass school divisions as it relates to the impacts of the funding that they've been provided this year and been able to get a sense of the shortfalls that school boards, school divisions across Saskatchewan are facing?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I've met with a number of them, and I will probably meet with a number more of them in the next while. Since we've formed government, the operating grant for Sask Rivers has increased 23.1 per cent; for Saskatoon school division, 38.7 per cent; for Regina Roman Catholic, 34.8 per cent; Prairie Spirit, 30.7 per cent. These are large numbers for the period of time that we've been in government. The provincial average is 31.6 per cent of an increase. So unless you want to sit there and explain why it was 31.6 per cent less, then we should move on and answer the other questions.

I'm not going to make apologies for a ministry that has increased funding across the board 31.6 per cent and in some of those higher need ones even more: Lloydminster, 115 per cent; Lloydminster Roman Catholic, 133 per cent; Ile-a-la-Crosse, 38 per cent; Holy Family, 35 per cent; Englefeld, 64 per cent; CÉF [Conseil des écoles fransaskoises], 118 per cent. These are large increases that these school divisions have received.

They've received significant increases in enrolment, but the funding increase has exceeded the amount of the enrolment by a substantial amount each and every year. We've also provided funding to cover the collective bargaining agreement, the inflationary increases, so I won't make apologies for the amount of the increases that are in this budget.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well your management of this sector has been poor. You can boast what you want, but the reality is known by parents, students, teachers and administrators and school boards across this province. And I'll leave it for them to weigh in when you share those sorts of numbers to boast about a record that has left education in a very tough spot.

What sort of changes were made this year around funding to school divisions around maternity leave?

Ms. Johnson: — In terms of maternity leave, there were really no substantial changes made other than in the process. In the previous fiscal years, we had asked school divisions to submit to us their invoices for maternity leave, and we paid that out to school divisions based on those invoices. In the current fiscal year, we have taken that same pool of money and distributed it directly to the school divisions so that they don't have to go through the process of submitting invoices to us and waiting for us to repay them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So would there be . . . I'm hearing a concern that there is a fiscal impact, a fairly significant one with the changes in how this is being funded. I guess in the past it was dedicated to the actual amount. Will the actual amount be guaranteed in this budget year?

Ms. Johnson: — I'm expecting that there may be some minor fluctuations between school divisions, but when we look at our 2014-15 budget for maternity leave and our 2015-16 budget for

the province in total, they are the same amount. There is no reduction in funding for that component or for that part.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And in the past this was funded in a way that recognized actual costs. Is that correct?

Ms. Johnson: — That's correct in that the school divisions had to provide the invoices. We also had experiences too where school divisions would forget that there was this avenue open to them, and they would simply pay these costs through payroll, as one needs to do, and then failed to or simply did not ask for a reimbursement of the costs. So what this change in process has done is it ensures that the dollars get into each school division's hands at the beginning of the year essentially. It's part of the monthly grant that is paid out to the school divisions, and that way they don't have to concern themselves with any back-end bookkeeping or follow-up.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the commitment in the past was to fund this in the realized cost, in the actual cost. Is that commitment clear? This year you've funded it based on last year's amount. Those amounts might vary division to division for a host of reasons. Is there an assurance from the ministry that that commitment to the actual amount will continue?

Ms. Johnson: — So what we did when we put the money into the school division's budgets is we adjusted the rates within the formula, so the money is rolling out to the school divisions as it attaches itself to the funding formula rates.

Where school divisions may have differences between that change in funding that they receive and their actual costs, that will vary from one school division to another because as you build a budget and plan for the new school division year, it is difficult to guess or estimate how many of your teachers are going to be leaving to go on maternity leave. Oftentimes those become surprises for the principals and the administrators. Sometimes they are surprises for the people involved.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No. That's good. But just is there a commitment to . . . So there's an amount now that you've allocated in the past. It was on the actual. Now there's an amount that's been received. If a school division exceeds that amount in a given year or, you know, in this year I should say, will the government commit to covering that excess amount?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We don't have plans to do it at this time, but I think if a school division felt they were shortchanged or something, we'd urge them to contact us so we could have a look at it, if there was significant variance. But we weren't planning to do a reconciliation. We'd based it on . . . [inaudible] . . . based on averages, so some might be up; some might be down. If there was somebody that was significantly disadvantaged, we'd sure want to have a look at it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. I'll follow up. I won't put the information directly onto the record. I have heard from various school divisions some concern in how they're looking at these numbers, one division that's looking potentially at a \$1 million impact, near \$1 million impact. What I'll do is . . . You know, I appreciate the words of the minister here today and officials, and I'll simply have folks follow up directly with the ministry.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Please do.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Where's the renewal of the funding formula at in that process?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We met. We had some ongoing discussions that took place sort of on an ongoing basis that continues all the time, but we've asked for some input from some of the divisions so we can go through a fairly significant review over the next few months with the idea that it would be in place for the next fiscal year.

We've heard from some of the divisions that they had concerns with certain aspects of it, and whether it's a matter that something hasn't worked right for them or whether it's a matter that they haven't gone all the way through with the transition funding, I think we need to hear from them. It seems to be when you talk to them on an individual basis, they've got different issues with it. I think what we'd like to do is get them into a room, the CFOs [chief financial officer] and maybe somebody from SSBA, and develop a bit of a working group to do it.

The nature of the discussion so far: I asked the question, is the formula fundamentally flawed? Is it something that needs major changes? And most of them seem to indicate that it's more in the nature of tweaks, so I'm hoping that that's what it comes down to, but I certainly want to hear from the divisions as to what the issues are. I'll be intrigued.

The officials quite rightly apply the formula fairly and uniformly across the province, but it sometimes has the effect of creating things that give the perceptions of inequity. Whether those are real or whether it's people that are working through, we need to sort of get a better understanding of that. So that's a long answer to say it's under way now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How long have you been working on . . . So you have sort of a draft right now of a model that you've . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. No we don't. We have the existing formula which is some 70 pages long. I don't know whether you're enough of an insomniac to need it or not. I took it home some time ago and spent a weekend working through it and, you know, it's got sliding scales for some of the things, depending on the size of the division.

So we'd sort of had discussions with the divisions. People would say, what about this; what about that? We have not yet managed to develop a transportation formula. That's one of the big gaps in it. A formula was developed, but when they tried to apply it to existing data, it didn't produce the same results or good results, so they're working on that. And then we've undertaken to sort of sit down with the divisions and say, give us your thoughts as to where you see shortfalls or where you see issues. And we're sort of welcoming that discussion.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You're hoping to implement some change by budget time next year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That was the commitment I made to the divisions is, if we're relatively timely in starting a process, we should be able to have something in place for next fall that

hopefully gives a greater comfort that the needs of the individual divisions are being addressed. I sometimes . . . You know, when under the old model, about two-thirds of the thing was based on per-pupil funding. The divisions when this model was being developed were . . . that that wasn't as critical a factor as the various other factors were. So now the per-pupil portion of the funding formula is less than 15 per cent.

It's hard to look at the formula or look at what a division gets and simply divide it by the number of students and say, this is what you're getting is up or down. So I understand where the boards feel that they have an inequity based on per-pupil costs, but they also agreed that this was a better method. And the question I've asked some of them: would you rather go back to a higher per-student model? Well no they don't. They like this aspect or they like that aspect of it. So I'm looking forward to try and getting somewhere where we need to be.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So you'll have ministry officials dedicated to that process. Will you have a formal committee of sorts, or what does that process look like?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We've indicated that we would be prepared to have somebody from the outside chair the process and then have some ministry officials and then representatives from the school divisions. I would want somebody from the outside that would be an acceptable choice to all of the stakeholders or at least most of the stakeholders, hopefully that would have both a mathematic and an educational background.

That may be a bit of a challenge to find that type of an individual. I've had a couple of names suggested, but we haven't approached anybody yet, and I'm waiting for SSBA and some of the divisions to come back with three or four suggestions. I received an email, well actually later this afternoon suggesting who might be some of the individuals they wanted to put forward on a working group, and the names they're suggesting are the CFOs, which is clearly the right choice.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I always enjoy sitting down with the CFOs. They always have such a clear understanding of how the budget works or doesn't work, and typically they don't mince words. They'd be good around this table here.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Some of them are brutally frank.

[21:30]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, well that's good to know some of those pieces. What's the status of how reserve funds are going to be dealt with?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Under summary financial statements, reserve funds form part of the province's financial statement, as does debt that's carried by the school divisions. So we recognize that the reserves are in the schools, and there's a number of different situations with the reserves. Some of them are unrestricted reserves. Some of them are, for a variety of different reasons, have different restrictions on them.

We've indicated to the divisions that if they wish to use them for capital, for most cases they would require the consent of the

province, and we would certainly be amenable to looking at them. But if your questions is, are we going to take them over? No.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You mentioned as well the borrowing of school divisions. And I was pleased to see, and identified in the Assembly and in other forums as well, that the 100 per cent funding from the ministry only makes sense. I think we've had chances around this table where I've brought this forward to you over the past couple years, and ministers before that. This is an important step. What was the impetus for that change?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — When we did away with the ability of school divisions to set a mill rate, we knew that the province was essentially paying all of the things. So it didn't make any sense to say, oh well we're only paying 65 per cent and the province was . . . because it was we were really taking 65 per cent out of one pocket, 35 per cent out of another pocket. It was the provincial taxpayer that was paying it, in any event. So it was, Minister Krawetz had said, we're paying it through two sources. Why don't we just lump it into one and just pay it, acknowledge it? We also can give the school divisions the ability to borrow at a lower rate. So that was the idea.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well I was pleased to see it, as I've said. I know in meeting with school boards for many years across the province, I know that's been identified as a frustration for some time and certainly a money-waster on the higher interest that boards were forced to go out and secure dollars at. I'm pleased to see that change. I think I had the chance to bring that to the table with, I guess, yourself and the two ministers prior as well. So I guess sometimes change is frustratingly slow, but I do appreciate seeing that measure there, and I know school boards do as well.

In that interim time, because it didn't make any sense once the province took over and was the sole funder of education, have you been able to figure out what sort of money is going to be tied up in these higher interest loans that school boards have had to take on?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to let Donna answer that. She'll be able to tell us how much the aggregate debt is approximately and what the interest costs are. The caution I would put on it is that without going back to the individual divisions, we're not able to verify everything, but we can give it to you as well as we've got.

Ms. Johnson: — So I'll provide you a couple of figures. Again, they are estimates based on what we have assumed the government's borrowing rate would have been at the time that the school divisions took out their loans. And with the estimates that we've made on the government borrowing rate compared to the school division borrowing rate, in '13-14, in government fiscal '13-14, we estimated that the savings, or the difference between the two borrowing rates, amounted to about \$420,000. And in '14-15, the difference amounted to about \$630,000. And when we extrapolate these assumptions over a longer period of time, we're estimating that the savings over the average 20-year loan in total would be, you know, between 20 and \$25 million.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That tracks with sort of what we've been hearing out there. Anyways it's a good measure. I know,

chatting with one school board a few years ago that had entered into not a large amount of borrowing, but the additional cost of that 20-year money was in essence \$2 million at that higher rate. And I mean those are just dollars that can be saved and put to work, put to better use. So I appreciate seeing that change being brought forward.

I wouldn't mind getting into the area of school capital a bit and getting an understanding of where the ministry is at on its process. It's one of these areas that certainly there's a high level of frustration, it seems, in the sector with the current process of government in dealing with education capital. Is that being reviewed right now for potential changes, or where is it at?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The capital, we've added to this year as you're aware, and with capital and emergent funding we're now \$31 million. I'm not sure what you're asking what our plan is with regard to the capital. It's the existing capital and the renovations that might be necessary, or you want to talk about new schools being built?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right now we'll talk about the capital prioritization process and the changes that have been made. And I know there's many that feel that it's not a transparent process and doesn't recognize often what boards are identifying as priorities within their division.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We ask the boards every year to submit a list. Then the ministry goes through the list and, in most cases, agree with the divisions as to what the top one or two items should be, although not always. I've got an example that I'll give you. And then they do a province-wide assessment where they try and identify the top five to ten, and those are the ones that we try to attend to within a given year.

The ones that aren't on the list, sometimes there's negligible or very small variations in them and it's difficult to rank order something that's not going to happen anyway. But as long as we're able to identify the ones that are likely to proceed with, then I think we're going the right direction. The officials work with the divisions, and I think we want to try and do, if we can, a better job of working with the divisions because sometimes we're not as far off as it appears.

The example that I want to give you is Saskatoon Public. For several years they had Pleasant Hill at the top of their list. The ministry officials had Montgomery. And then I remember two years ago Ray Morrison said, well that's not even on our radar, that's not . . . You know, why would they be there? Well I think it comes down to different methodology as to when and where the enrolment growth is or who's tracking what.

All of a sudden a year later, Ray Morrison was saying, surprise, surprise. Now Montgomery has surfaced as at or near the top of their list. So not saying one's right or what's wrong, but it just sort of as time went, the lists began to merge and to meld. I think had we sat down with Saskatoon Public a year or two earlier and showed them what the methodology the ministry was using and perhaps if we'd spent a bit time looking at Pleasant Hill, we may well have come to an agreement on that.

So I think within the division, we want to work with the divisions as much as we can to try and get the lists within the

division. And then I think where the bigger issue of disagreement might be if one division sees another division getting something or wherever, but we try and do that on a non-partisan basis and done with the officials who work through them as well as they can.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What about the . . . Are you reviewing that process to change the current evaluation process?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not to a great extent, but maybe in the context of working through what the ministry has done with the divisions. I personally don't have an interest as to whether it's school A or school B that's at the top of the list, but I think it's important that the school division knows why one is or isn't at the top of the list. And as I say, it's only the one or two that are going to be at the top of the list that would be considered in any given year, so I think it's important that they identify where those things are.

We want to do a better job of identifying what the needs are in all of the buildings. And they're going through a facilities audit and developing software — and I'm going to let Donna speak to that — where they look at a particular building and say, okay this building is X number of years old, it should have a roof that's got a surface life of so many years, the boilers are . . . So that they're able to better predict what the costs are and we know that we're able to budget better and work with the divisions to make sure that the PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal] budget gets allocated where it is rather than on sort of an ad hoc basis. So we know that they're doing a lot of work on that part of it now, but I'll let Donna talk about that.

Ms. Johnson: — All right. So just to build on what Minister Morgan has said, we have in the ministry a software program called Asset Planner. I think it used to be referred to as Fame. And Fame was, I believe, the name of the company that originally established this Asset Planner software.

The software is something that we use and that each of the school divisions use. They collect information about the condition of their facilities in this software. When they are planning to do any renovations, whether they're minor renovations or major renovations, they all enter that into the software. They'll also identify the year in which they plan to undertake that work. We can then draw information out of that system to help us develop our budgets going forward and to determine the level of need that school divisions have.

The software is a product that, like with everything else we do, is improving with age. It has several modules within it, and we're using more and more of the modules. But again what we can get out of that system depends on what's put into that system. And in order to improve the quality of the information in that system, we have been doing facility audits with the school divisions on a rotating basis. So over a period of five years, we expect to have all of the schools in the province reviewed by an external auditor who can essentially provide the school division with a level of information that offers some degree of consistency from one school division to another.

Obviously, as with anything, when you have that much data and that many schools to collect data on, we can never have a completely ideal or perfect scenario because we need to be able

to balance how many different schools and school divisions have their facilities reviewed in any given year. So we will have times when we're comparing updated audited information on facilities in one school division to facility information for another school division that might be one or two years old, but it's still a great improvement compared to what we were working with three or four years ago.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think I'm going to ask so that . . . because we hopefully have more people watching tonight than the four that are in my office and the one that are in yours, to explain what a facility audit is and what it entails.

Ms. Johnson: — All right. And with the facility audits, what we have is some specialists who are hired by the ministry to go around to the school divisions and look at their schools. What they will do is they'll enter the schools and essentially do a site inspection. They don't do any intrusive examinations of the schools. They don't peel back walls, generally speaking. That is one of the things that we want to do a better job of in the future, but as things sit today . . . and the work that we've done for the past couple of years has involved having the building inspectors, for lack of a better term, going out to the buildings, identifying whether, you know, the HVAC [heating, ventilating, and air conditioning] systems or the structural systems or the foundation or whether there's any site concerns, you know, drainage issues, all of those sorts of things are examined and the data from that is entered into the Asset Planner software.

[21:45]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So a couple of pieces I want to follow up on. So I appreciate that you recognize that the software can sometimes, can produce issues and inconsistencies on how it might align with some of the realities in divisions. And I think of that example in Esterhazy just a little while ago where I think they were ranked quite high at one point and then they felt that they had basically disappeared on the ranking. Meanwhile the situation in the school was disastrous and anything, you know, certainly shouldn't . . . No student should be attending school in a spot with air quality issues like that. How does that happen?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we look to . . . and I don't mean in any way to be critical of the school division because I think they were believing they were doing the best that they could. We look to the school divisions to maintain the buildings on a day-to-day basis and to identify if they see or think of something that doesn't appear right so that you can do either an engineering review or a more extensive audit, sometimes invasive, where you've got to remove drywall or ceiling tiles or something to check for the strength of a structural component.

What happened with P.J. Gillen was the building was constructed in the early 1960s and had in-slab heating in the floor where the pipes had forced air going through the pipes in the floor. The pipes over time became mouldy and corroded and plugged up, so they realized in relatively short order they were unable to use the in-floor heating and capped it off. So that left them without any heating system, and it was something they discovered on relatively short notice.

Now what they chose to do was a series of things that probably weren't the most effective decisions. They needed to have heat.

They needed to have heat in fairly short order, so they put in electric heat. Now the problem with electric heat is (1) it's very expensive, but (2) it doesn't bring in any fresh air; it just straight heats. So they put in the electric heat then realized that they didn't have sufficient electrical service for it, so they put in a larger electrical service for a system that wasn't there. So we didn't participate in that process. And I think they were well intentioned but it wasn't a workable system.

So then they had very cold days so they were wanting to bring in fresh air, and they have a protocol in the school that they leave the doors to the hallway closed or locked. This doesn't make the most abundance of sense because they would turn around opening the windows to let fresh air in, which I don't think says much for the security of the locked doors. But in any event they were keeping the air quality at such so they were maintaining reasonable levels of carbon dioxide by opening the windows. But when you do that in January . . . So they would send a note home to the parents, have the kids bring a parka to school and the target temperature was 15 degrees Celsius which I think to any of us we would not want our children in there.

When they would close the windows, the carbon dioxide level would rise, not to an unsafe level but certainly not to a point to where it would be conducive of good learning. The children would yawn, then they would open the windows again, so it was a bad trade-off.

When we learned about it at the SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] meeting — I think you were there — we had sent somebody out right away, said this isn't going to work. We need to do it. So we went back and forth. We had some of our officials go out to try and come up with a better, longer term solution on it.

So what we've done is we will provide I think 800,000. They have some reserves and they will install in-room heating, ventilating units that will provide fresh air from the outside and it would be the same type of units that are used in new modular classrooms. They should provide a good serviceable extension to the life of that school and something that the students should be comfortable with because they will get fresh air. And the division also indicates they may wish to do other upgrades, but that we leave to them. But this was one that we felt was absolutely critical.

So the short answer to a long story is that we weren't aware that there was this process that was taking place, and I give the division credit for trying. But when we learned about it, we went through. We treated this as something that had to be dealt with through emergent funding, used a portion of our emergent funding for that project. So there's sometimes it happens where we don't know a situation has gotten as bad as it has gotten to be or the division has made decisions that they believed something was under control when in fact it wasn't or wasn't to that point.

So in any event, we've addressed the P.J. Gillen issue with that and hope that the days are relatively warm between now and then because they're not going to be able to start that work until closer to the end of the school year, and hopefully it's done quickly over the summer and that they get something that's comfortable for students next year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, it was unacceptable, and it certainly highlighted, you know, I guess the challenge sometimes of a computer system capturing the reality out there in a community. So it's going to be incumbent upon yourself as minister and as a government to listen to communities when they bring forward some of these concerns.

You suggested that we just had four folks in your caucus and one in ours watching, but I know your mom's probably watching; I suspect my mom is too. But there's obviously a few others too because I've had some messages come in and some tweets. So it says, "Aberdeen school propped up by two-by-fours, science class in computer lab. Timeline to fix?" So there's a question on that one. There's a note here about, it says, from Moose Jaw, "Two schools with roofs leaking. Not dripping, but more like moderate rainfall." In Moose Jaw. And I've got one here: "Imperial is literally falling down." And I've actually had that note sent to me by quite a few different people.

So there are different circumstances that are out there that need to be understood by government. And I think it's going to be critical that you listen to your school board partners and to the community at large when some of these are identified because certainly some of these can fly under the radar otherwise, and students, you know, certainly require these to be addressed.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Your point's valid and P.J. Gillen was, you know, an indicator that we need to look and to listen. Since that time, you know, I've decided if there is an issue that I hear about, I've chosen to go and look at some of them directly. We had, and I think it's ones that you've raised in question period in previous years, the Nokomis School. So I went to Nokomis, met with them there. They believe they have a path going forward, so we're looking at plans and looking at options that are there. And it was a gym that had had some structural issues on one corner. The roof had leaked, the wall had settled. It made the gym so it was totally unusable. They were using other space within the school. It's got 60 students, so they were making the difficult decision of whether to maintain the school or not. They're satisfied that there's reason to do it so there's tough decisions that they've made and they've come forward. But I think those are the ones that are . . . Aberdeen School is part of Prairie Spirit. We know they've got a shoring up, and we've provided Prairie Spirit I think, in capital and emergent funding, I think in the range of \$100 million in the last few years. And we'll continue to look at the various divisions and the issues as they come forward.

We've increased the PMR budget this year up to \$31 million, so that money is now being spread across the province so that divisions will be able to make choices. Once again, you know, we want to respect their autonomy as much as we possibly can, but as you're aware, the safety and the security of our students to making sure that they've got a healthy environment to be in has got to be paramount.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So mindful of the time, so I'll try to keep my questions short and concise and if you can do your best on your end as well, and I know we're . . . Actually I've got lots of areas to cover with limited time here.

It was mentioned about the intrusive investigations, and I believe that . . . Is this checking the structural integrity of

schools? Because certainly that seems to be an important piece. I don't know what kind of consistency there is. I know certainly boards do a great job of ensuring they have an understanding of their capital assets, but it was disturbing with one division that went in and did some drilling into some of the structural beams to find that they weren't structurally sound. So I'm just wondering where the ministry is at in working with school divisions to make sure that we have an understanding of how structurally sound schools are.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know that a lot of the schools that we have are ones that were built in the late '50s or early 1960s, with flat roofs, and those are the ones that tend to leak or have structural issues. So the audit will recommend that they may do additional structural work if a visual audit shows something. Once again, we're dependent on our partners to try and watch the day-to-day issues with a school. But you hate to do an invasive review of a process where you're ripping down walls because something might be there, but on the other hand you can't take a chance on a potential collapse. So if a school division asks for it, we've been sending an engineer and we try and work towards accommodating them on those things.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — As I've said in the past, I think this needs to become more of an urgent priority because certainly it's disturbing to have the reality of those schools that were inspected in the one division and now five of them found structurally unsound and propped up with temporary supports.

But I'll move along to a couple of other areas. There's been the backlog of needed for school repairs that's been identified at 1.5 billion, I guess the infrastructure deficit of sort. How was this number arrived at?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The numbers that are generally used — and a lot of them aren't done through a lot of careful analysis — was that at the time we formed government, there was an infrastructure deficit of \$1.2 billion. And that once again was not done through a careful audit, but that was the number that was generally used. Since that time we've spent \$700 million, which you would think would bring the amount down to \$500 million. But during the last seven or eight years, more schools have developed problems plus the cost of construction has gone up. So dollar for dollar, we're spending money. We're committing. But we have more schools needing more renovations. We perhaps are finding more issues that were there. So the one and a half billion might not be an accurate number. It might be more; it might be less. That's based on sort of a general collection of numbers, and I'm not sure whether it's, how accurately it's been calculated.

Ms. Johnson: — [Inaudible] . . . and I would agree with that. It isn't an accurate calculation in terms of having gone through all of the schools and having any specific sense of the exact nature of the work or the cost of the work that is flagged for being undertaken over the next several years. It is more an estimate that's been derived by looking at the total inventory of the schools that we have, estimating the current replacement value of those schools which we, you know, based on the number of square metres that we have in school facilities now, we estimate the current replacement value to be about seven and a half billion. And so the shortfall was an estimate based on the amount of money that school divisions have put into minor

maintenance and rehabilitation versus what would have gone into preventative maintenance and rehabilitation if they had followed industry standards of 2 per cent per year on the current replacement value.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And is PMR based solely on square footage?

Ms. Johnson: — Today it is based solely on square footage, yes. In the future we, again once we have more reliable data in our Asset Planner system, that gives us good comparable numbers about the condition of the facilities. A facility condition index is what we're building. Once we have good information in that system for the facility condition index, then we can create an allocation method that attaches the facility condition index to the square metres and then, you know, put the money to the areas of highest need.

[22:00]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It sounds important. Because right now it seems that the question, how you're able to account for the condition of a facility right now with the funding, with the changes where you've had the four categories before that you've taken into two, and then you have the PMR that's outside of that . . . so I guess the question is, right now, how do you account for the condition of a facility?

Ms. Johnson: — I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How would, I guess, how would the condition of a facility, if one is in a deteriorated condition and is requiring a response, requiring some funding, how would it be captured through your funding model?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They would make an application. They would do a capital submission if the division felt it should be something that should be paid for by capital, and then the ministry would make a determination whether it's something that would go on the capital list or whether they would encourage them to use the PMR funding for it. Donna might be able to give a better answer as to whether it would fall into PMR or whether it would fall into capital.

If it shows up, as P.J. Gillen did, without falling into one of the lists before, then we would deal with it through emergent funding which is sort of the emergency carry-over point. But I'll let Donna answer as to what the distinction would be, whether something would be capital or PMR.

And I know we've had divisions that have submitted, and I know it's been suggested to them, well this is something that should properly fall within your PMR budget, and then we continue to increase it. And I think we know that even though we've increased it by 30-some per cent this year, that there's still lots of divisions and lots of buildings that we would like to do more.

And then that's something that we have across the province, not just in our school system but in the universities and health facilities as well, that as our province ages, we have more older buildings that require more work. In particular you'll notice this building itself. That's not an inland grain terminal above us;

that's a dome that's getting expensive repairs.

Ms. Johnson: — To add to the minister's response, when school divisions identify particular buildings that need work, we will work with them to sort out whether their best avenue is to pay for it with their PMR. If their PMR is not sufficient to address the problem that they have, then we'll look to see if that's something that can be funded through the emergent funding program or whether it's something that should rightly go towards the major capital project.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — When we look at the P3s and the allocation in the budget right now there's — what is it? — \$160 million that's allocated to the P3 project. And you know, we're clearly on the record with concerns around excess cost and the concerns from other jurisdictions, and the local control, concern around even how the schools will operate. And school divisions have lots of questions around how contracts might work for maintenance, lots of frustration and confusion, and I still think it's very important that we take the time to make sure we get these decisions right and learn from other jurisdictions. But setting that aside and just looking at the actual . . . what these dollars represent and, from your perspective, how things unroll from this point forward.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You're likely aware that we're in the process of short-listing our proponents and I think that process is under way. The anticipated completion date is fall of 2017 so we're still on target for the timeline. The one point you made is the issue of control of the facility, and I think that's one that's been raised by virtually everyone we've talked to within the province, is that we want to know that if we want to paint a wall or move a plug or something like that, that we can do that. We also want to know that we have access to the facilities evenings and weekends. And having been a school board trustee, that's something that was absolutely critical to me, and that's certainly the direction that I've given them, to make sure that that's to take place.

You're likely aware that they have a mock-up that was developed by students and by the architects to try and get to the point where we're at. They're going to do sort of a review of it again after the proponents come in because they may make suggestions of some of the things that we need to do. So part of the process that's under way now is negotiating the various contracts with the divisions and with the different parties that are there.

I know the ministry officials and the folks that are working in the P3 division, Minister Wyant's group, are spending a lot of time. To your point, it's a very large investment and it's something that's new to this province, so we want to make sure that we get it right and that we address as many of the concerns as we can going into it. I don't have an appetite to go back and revisit this six months or six years later on. I want to get it right the first time as we go through.

So I want to come in and thank the officials for the work that they're doing on consultation, the meetings that they've had with parents and with children. But I'll let Donna give you a bit more particulars. She's the one that attends the meetings.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. And I think where I'm most

interested now is just understanding the 160 million, how this reflects the total project and when the other costs, you know, will be incurred, and how that'll be booked as we move forward.

Ms. Johnson: — So just speaking in generalities then, in our budget this year we have 157.5 million. Part of that will be going towards additional work or continuing work that Group2 Architecture is performing for us, but outside of that, the way we'll be accounting for these joint-use schools is to record the expenses on behalf of the school divisions that reflect the construction of these schools over the coming two years.

So a portion of the construction costs are included in the '15-16 budget. There'll be another portion included in the '16-17 budget and then a final portion in the year after that. And I think that's probably as much as I can say at this point given that the whole procurement exercise is under way, and we'll be carrying on with the procurement exercise obviously to getting us to a spot where a preferred proponent can be named. And we're looking towards June of this year as that time when we can identify the preferred proponent.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thanks for some of that clarity. Again I would urge, before we go down the road of other jurisdictions, other provinces that have scrapped and shelved these plans and had auditors weigh in afterwards to only record that billions of dollars have been wasted on these high cost, higher cost schemes or get into these structures where all of a sudden school boards' hands are tied around access, or all sorts of issues that weren't contemplated around maintenance and basic things like snow removal through to everything else, you know, I think that it would be prudent to reconsider going down this costly way and to get better value for taxpayers.

But I'll set that discussion aside right now, just recognizing the time, and I do know I have significant time with the minister responsible for this portfolio in estimates yet as well.

I was looking at some of the changes around some of the report that was put forward in the response to bullying, and one of the pieces is a digital citizenship guideline and policy for school divisions and schools. But school boards and schools and consultants are telling me that they don't have this yet, and they're wondering why that's the case.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're joined by the associate minister, Greg Miller, who will be able to give us some particulars. I'm going to ask Mr. Miller to tell us what it is and then give us a quick summary — I realize we're running short on time — to give a quick summary and then sort of an update. And my answer at the end is going to be it's well on in the approval stage but not there yet.

Mr. Miller: — So to begin, digital citizenship is the notion of providing students with practical learning experiences around being responsible online, behaving responsibly online, and keeping themselves safe online. The work has been initiated under Saskatchewan's plan to address bullying and cyberbullying, and certainly in keeping with promoting instruction of appropriate and responsible online behaviour.

The digital citizenship is a relatively new area in curriculum as

a phenomena and certainly reflects where we are in terms of the supports that we need to provide children in the new knowledge economy that we find ourselves in. It's not curriculum per se but rather a suite of instructional strategies so that educators have available to them something to integrate into their current practice.

So it's not seen as something that's set aside, rather something that's integrated across the curricula to make sure that students in all that they do as they interact online are safe. They are respectful, and they're certainly developing lifelong skills that begin in school and are in a safe place to master those skills and to move along.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So thanks for the update and the context. I know that it is sort of the evolving education and the world we're in, but it's an important policy to many in the province. I think we have some leading-edge educators and divisions right across Saskatchewan on this front, and certainly we want to certainly foster and encourage that, you know, that 21st learning, modern learning environment. I think this is an important policy to get out to boards.

A question to the minister: I hear from school board members concern that in the past course of time the work of the ministry has required too much of the senior administration of school divisions and been very burdensome on not only those administrators but also really pulling the resources, important resources of a school division. I guess I'd hope this is something that's been heard by you as minister, and I'd hope that there's going to be a change to this practice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I've heard the same concerns from school divisions that there is a time commitment. I think as time goes on, we probably need to recognize or understand it. We've had really good co-operation from the school divisions developing the education strategic sector plan. That was time consuming. They participated and, at the end of the day, they developed a path forward. All 28 school divisions, we know that they spent a significant amount of time on it, so we thank them for that. And we know that was time that they spent that they were not able to do their other functions, and we also know that going forward it will also take some time commitment from them as well.

We also have the school divisions that participated in the P3 schools, that some of the officials from their schools spent an enormous amount of time. And to those ones I can only say, thank you very much and, by the way, you're not done yet. These projects are under way. We need and expect them to participate. We want the schools, at the end of the day, the joint-use schools to fulfill the expectations of the community, the divisions, and the students. And we know that we need their advice and input going on, and we also know and appreciate that it's taking some time.

So hopefully as some of these projects get under way, it will use less of their time, but the point you're making is valid and real, and I've heard it.

[22:15]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Since we have such strong educational

administrators in the province and I can certainly . . . Certainly they need to be fully engaged in decisions that are made, but there needs to be a greater caution as to pulling those resources from school divisions themselves and not allowing those administrators the space that they need to have within their own respective division.

What about changes around the . . . There were the changes, without going through collective bargaining, the changes around the school hours and changes to teachers' days. And you know, it's turned out that there's a few extra minutes added here and there onto portions of days and really awkward starting times for school. I know when I'm sitting down with most boards, certainly with teachers and with students, they tell me this extra time that's been tacked on, (a) done outside of collective bargaining, just hasn't . . . You know, it doesn't make any sense if the goal is to improve outcomes. And I say that at the same time that things like mid-year adjustments aren't happening and that the government's asking the teachers to do more and more within those strained environments.

Certainly, you know, I was a teacher before being elected. I just think it just didn't make sense to not focus on the big questions about what was going to impact student engagement and the quality of that engagement, that experience, as opposed to the simplistic notion of tinkering around with time and monkeying around with schedules. Are there actions . . . Have you identified this as a mistake, and are there changes that you're willing to bring forward?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The collective bargaining agreement didn't deal with all issues surrounding teacher time, so there's a joint committee with SSBA and the STF and the ministry that are doing some work to try and identify a variety of things: what time is necessary for the various functions that a teacher is expected to do, what times would be reasonable for prep time. And we know there's variations in what those are.

I think if you talk to — I'm not an educator — but I think if you talk to any of my predecessors that were educators, which I think is just one, they will always take the strong position, as I'm sure you will as well, that the best thing that we can offer our students is increased student contact time with the teachers. I think the teachers do a great job, and the more time they spend with a student the better. So I think the changes that were made were to try and ensure that we maximized the contact that students and teachers had.

Having said that, if there's things that we need to do to make changes, we're certainly amenable. That's why the committee was struck to do that, whether those things needed to be changed or not, and where we go forward is certainly something that was there.

It's a complex issue. A lot of people, when you talk to people that aren't teachers, the simple answer that they'll give you is, I want my teacher teaching X number of days a year, X number of hours. They've got to prepare. That's sort of a stock answer that people give you, but it's far more complex than that.

And you taught, so SSBA would understand the importance of time that a teacher would spend with a student outside of class, the time that a teacher would spend with a parent of a student

that's struggling or the time that a teacher would spend in collegial relationship with other teachers or the time that a teacher would require professional development. We have to understand and realize that these things are complex, that teachers require the additional time for the things that they do that are absolutely critical so that the time they spend in the classroom is beneficial. That's a long answer to say, we're looking at it and want to continue to.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, it should be fixed because it just really didn't recognize some of the items that are now being mentioned by yourself as minister. But it's certainly, if you're looking at the resource, strained and overcrowded environments and the complex challenges that students who aren't succeeding are experiencing within life and all those factors external to the classroom that are direct factors into their success or non-success.

There's so much more to this than that simplistic one-off of a government that unilaterally, without going through collective bargaining, without engaging with the sector to say, hey, how do we improve engagement and learning here . . . There was a measure that was brought forward that was I think seen by many as way off base and demoralizing to many, disrespectful to many. And I would urge your action as minister to resolve that measure and get focus back on the real, the important things that really factor into student success.

When I'm looking at some of the other pieces here, I'm interested in some of the aspects around Aboriginal student success, and of course there's the work of the task force. I'd be interested of . . . This is a critical area to the success of any given student that's coming into the division, and it's critically important to us as a province, and I'd like to hear what measures are being advanced from that task force in the current year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure. The joint task force made a number of different recommendations. The Premier's vision for growth, our province's vision for growth is that one of the things that we wish to do is close the gap on Aboriginal graduation rate. Right now the graduation rate for First Nations students is 32 per cent. It's approximately 72 per cent for the province at large. So we would like to close the gap by 2020 by at least halfway, and I think we need to do a lot of different things to do that.

The joint task force made a variety of different recommendations. There is certainly going to be challenges to meet that because we have on-reserve schools, off-reserve schools, the on-reserve schools being funded federally, the off-reserve . . . So we've got what's called an invitational shared services initiative where we will, through a facility or an agency officer, try and identify what resources we can provide for the on-reserve students by having for example a speech-language pathologist or a specialist go and try and deal with a student.

We have to as a province recognize and understand that it's the same student, whether they're on-reserve or off or going back and forth, and those are the kids that we need to target. So having said that, I'll let Mr. Miller give you a little bit more background.

Mr. Miller: — Certainly. In regards to the joint task force, the '15-16 budget for the Ministry of Education includes \$5.1 million. Government's investment overall is \$6 million, with the remainder of the \$6 million allocated to Advanced Education and to the Ministry of the Economy for initiatives.

With respect to the Ministry of Education's initiatives, 2.4, as has been mentioned, will continue to be invested in the invitational shared services initiatives that build on the strengths of the provincial school system and the federal school system, creating a space — what's been described as an ethical space — for the two school systems to work together to provide front-line supports primarily for students and for teachers. One million dollars has been directed towards the expansion of Help Me Tell My Story and Help Me Talk About Math, which are two holistic assessments that engage the student, their caregivers, teachers, and elders in the community into a dialogue to discuss the success of little, little ones. This would be kids in pre-K and K [kindergarten], grade 1, both in terms of their oral language and mathematical development.

Oral language development, the importance there is, certainly it is the wellspring from which future literacy and numeracy skills develop. And the shared focus by having the members of the community, members of the family, and elders in the community engaged early on in the school is an invitation for success for those students in the long term, which then feeds directly into our overall desire to have more graduates in the province and so ensuring success sooner rather than later.

Point one million dollars of this 5.1 was extended to the Microsoft licensing agreement for on-reserve schools. And that was certainly in place to ensure that on-reserve students would have access to the same types of technology as students in provincial schools.

The final \$1.6 million was to develop the Following Their Voices First Nations and Métis student achievement initiative, which is one of the two priorities that's been outlined in the education sector's strategic plan and is being led by school divisions, both provincial and First Nations education authorities to ensure that there is appropriate and innovative professional development for teachers, to ensure that students across the province have a positive experience in their classroom throughout their school day.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It's an important area. I wish we could, if the minister's open to it, I'd certainly add a couple more hours of committee time to go through some of these aspects. Maybe we can discuss that afterwards. But before our time this evening concludes, I want to have a full understanding of the English as an additional language funding that school divisions are receiving, what the commitment is from the ministry in the current fiscal year, how that compares to last year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I know this came up in question period and was a sore subject because there appeared to be some misunderstanding. The commitment is for \$1 million per year, and that continues. Depending on whether you look at it as being part of a fiscal year or a school year, it depends on whether you're looking at in seven-twelfths, five-twelfths, or twelve-twelfths, but the funding is \$1 million a year. Yes, 588,000 for 2014-15, 420 for this year, for the rest of the school

year. But this will continue on at the rate of \$1 million per year, actually just over, 1.008 targeted funding. And that will continue on at that rate.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And just fixed at that amount?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It was an add-on in the 2014-15 budget year, so it's kept at the same rate for this year. And we have not yet heard back from the different divisions as to what their needs are, whether it's adequate or not adequate. These are some of the students that come in with sometimes a variety of different needs other than language. There's income challenges, transiency challenges, refugee challenges as well. So the funding and the supports, we need to know whether this is adequate or whether we need to provide additional support in this area or additional supports otherwise for the other issues that they bring.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So I guess that would just get back to some of the other points that have been made through the night. But there's no question, as I sit down with school boards this year and the year previous, that the EAL funding is insufficient as far as the response to the realities that divisions are experiencing. And this really should be again that sort of an area where a government better partners with education in recognizing some of the pressures of growth, the importance of supporting those students that are new to Canada and so many experiences, but supporting all students because when you're straining the learning environment, it certainly impacts all.

So this is an area where it's a concern that the budget is simply fixed at something — that's been communicated clearly to me, not just from school boards but from administrators and from teachers — as insufficient. And it speaks as well to that larger pool of dollars. The \$15 million cut to the mid-year funding adjustment, that certainly has an impact for divisions that are dealing with many new students and many that are new to English as well.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The point you should know as well, the \$1 million, that was additional money. That is in addition to the \$34 million that was already there. So if you're talking about the \$1 million, whether the increase was \$1 million of increase, and that's where we're going. So if you're talking to school . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thirty-four, that was this . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That was the starting number. So in addition to that, we've added \$1 million to that. So we have continued to add as the needs have gone up over the years, and we'll continue to . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Is the number the same as last year?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It is the same as last year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Was that 35 then in total, or 34 in total?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's now thirty-four three eighty.

[22:30]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, and just to note on that, it's been

highlighted as insufficient by school boards and by teachers at that level. And certainly then, that \$15 million cut to the mid-year adjustment will have a direct impact on these very same needs and these same students.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, what you should be pointing out to them is that they had money there that they didn't have under your administration. You might also point out to them in '93 and '94 the NDP actually reduced the operating grant. In 1995 they gave school divisions zero. That was at a time when there was 20,000 more students in the system than there are today. You should also point out to them that property tax as a per cent of the education budget has gone from 51 per cent under the NDP to about 35 per cent today. Under the old funding formula, the average provincial education property . . . It was increasing by about 5 per cent a year. It's gone down.

I can also tell you that since we've formed government, the education budget in 2007 has gone from \$943 million, to 2014 now is \$2 billion, an increase of 112 per cent. Capital funding, under the last year of the NDP, \$19 million. We're providing more than that in preventative maintenance funding. We're funding \$21 million. So when you're talking to people, please be candid. Please tell them what our numbers are. But also tell them what yours are. I think the comparisons are something that they will want to hear, should hear because if you don't, we will.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So just, again, you finished with . . . I thought we had a decent exchange, and then you get into this partisan sort of a rip that is so out of line with where the everyday family is at, and where they . . . I think that sometimes maybe it's being in this building too long. There's this thing that happens to a person where all of a sudden, everything they see is through, like a partisan lens of what party was this and what party was that. There's realities in education that deserve your attention. They aren't getting it. Your record has been a poor one in education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Two billion dollars, \$2 billion, that's the reality.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And I will say this. I was a teacher before I was elected . . .

The Chair: — Gentlemen, gentlemen. Being that it's past 10:30, Mr. Minister, I'll give you the opportunity to wrap it up. Before I thank everybody for being here, if you would like to do some thanks, do your thanks. We'll let the minister do his final wrap-up.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't have anything else I would like to add. I'd like to thank the member opposite and the others that came in for their attendance tonight, the other MLAs and officials that were here from the legislative staff, and in particular the people from the ministry that are here tonight. These are people that work hard on a full-year basis. And tonight is just one night in a long process, so I think on behalf of both of us, we'd like to thank everybody that participated in the process.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, certainly to the civil service, the officials that are here tonight, I say thank you much for your

time, not just this evening of course, but your work throughout the year, and to all those that provide an education to students across Saskatchewan, the prep of families getting those students ready to go in through the doors, the work of the teachers, the educational assistants, and all those supports, and of course the administrators and the school boards and the consultants across Saskatchewan that do such a fine job.

And I should say I appreciate the time with the minister. I don't always appreciate all of his statements like that last one, but we'll set that aside for now. And anyways we're focused on, should be focused on students. Nothing's more important than that, and I appreciate the work of all those that make things tick.

The Chair: — I'd also like to extend my thanks to the committee, to the members from the opposition, to the minister and all your staff. Thank you very much. Being 10:34, we will call it a night. We stand adjourned until April 1st at 3 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 22:34.]