



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Larry Doke, Chair
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Ms. Danielle Chartier, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Riversdale

Mr. Herb Cox
The Battlefords

Mr. Muhammad Fiaz
Regina Pasqua

Hon. Todd Goudy
Melfort

Ms. Nicole Rancourt
Prince Albert Northcote

Ms. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 14:59.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. I'm MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Larry Duke, and I'm your Chair for today's meeting.

I'd like to introduce the committee members: first, MLA Nadine Wilson; second, the Hon. Todd Goudy. The third member today is MLA Muhammad Fiaz. Our fourth member today is MLA Herb Cox, and we have MLA Carla Beck.

[15:00]

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — Today we are considering the estimates and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Education, vote 5, Education, central management and services, and subvote (ED01). Minister Wyant is here with his officials.

Due to physical distancing requirements in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, witnesses may speak at the stand-up microphone podium if they are required to answer questions. I would ask that all witnesses to please state their names for the record before speaking at the microphone. If the minister needs to confer with officials in private, the minister may use the hallway or the vestibule at the Chamber main entrance. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon. It's my pleasure to be here today to speak to the Ministry of Education's 2020-21 budget. With me today, certainly to help answer any questions that the committee members have, to my right, Rob Currie, deputy minister and members of his team from the ministry who will introduce themselves at the microphone should they be required to speak; and then my chief of staff, Julie Leggott, behind me. I want to thank them for all the work that they do to support me as the minister, and the work that they do to support the children of this province is certainly greatly appreciated.

My role as Minister of Education for Saskatchewan has been nothing short of eventful, and these last few months have certainly stood up to that reputation. That's why I'd like to take the first few moments this evening to review the significant developments since March as well as developments of the past year, and then embark on a clear direction for the next decade of education in Saskatchewan.

In response to COVID-19 when the Ministry of Education, under the direction of Saskatchewan's chief medical health officer Dr. Shahab, announced the indefinite discontinuance of in-class learning beginning March 20th due to the ongoing global pandemic, this decision was not made lightly. The continued support of our students, our teachers and our school staff, and communities, along with the response planning team has been

absolutely exceptional. As the response planning team prepares students and staff for a return to in-class learning this fall, with room for contingencies, I could not be more satisfied with what they have accomplished. As we enter yet another week navigating this pandemic, the Ministry of Education continues to ensure that Saskatchewan's pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 education, early learning, and library and literacy sectors are well cared for.

This budget addresses the growth in our schools while also helping to stimulate our province's recovery. This funding will not only support our students and our teachers, it will also plan for the future of education by making a significant investment in new schools. With that said, the Government of Saskatchewan has spent the last year enveloped in the progress of our education, early years, library and literacy sectors. The Government of Saskatchewan's momentum toward building stronger communities for the people of Saskatchewan is unwavering, and the Ministry of Education will continue to see this through.

After a long-year engagement process that involved contributions from thousands of Saskatchewan residents — including students, parents, teachers, educational stakeholders, Indigenous leaders, and the business community — we are very pleased to roll out the priorities that they have identified for Saskatchewan classrooms over the next decade.

The Ministry of Education's framework for a provincial education plan for 2020 to 2030 is a foundation based on having every Saskatchewan student feel that they are learning what they need for their future: that they belong, can be themselves, and that they are valued, safe, and supported.

To build a stronger Saskatchewan, the 2020-21 budget will support Saskatchewan's pre-K to grade 12 classrooms, early learning and child care, and library sectors. This includes a significant investment of \$2.6 billion into the Ministry of Education this fiscal year which is an increase of 123.3 million or 5 per cent.

We recently announced our plan to stimulate Saskatchewan's economic recovery due to COVID-19. This stimulus package includes \$136.3 million for the Ministry of Education over two years of which \$37.3 million will be invested in '20-21.

Keeping the students' needs in mind, the work of the curriculum advisory committee will continue into 2020-21 and will ensure that students are prepared for success in a 21st century economy. In addition, we will welcome a brand new group of diverse student leaders as members of the youth council to share their perspectives on education and identify important issues to them. Students have a critical voice in education and an important role to play in improving the future of Saskatchewan.

During these unprecedented times, I've seen innovations and camaraderie among individuals and organizations across the province which gives me hope that Saskatchewan education is experiencing great progression. We will continue to work together with our partners in education to address any and all challenges ensuring that we are supporting our students for successful futures within the province.

For the 2020-21 school year, 27 school divisions across Saskatchewan will receive \$1.94 billion, which is an increase of 42.1 million from last year's Education budget, including \$20 million to fully fund the new teachers' agreement, and that is an astonishing \$525 million increase since 2007.

We will also be allocating \$11.8 million in operating grants to our qualified independent schools and historical high schools, which is an increase of \$1.3 million from the previous year. The increased operating grant will ensure that all school divisions, qualified independent schools, and historical high schools are able to address changes in enrolment and in inflation, as well as further align historical high school funding to that of associate schools.

With that said, I'm proud to announce that once again Saskatchewan schools will see the largest operating investment in our province's history. Within this year's operating investment we will maintain our commitment to inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students via the supports for learning funding model. This includes \$289.1 million this year, an increase of \$3.3 million over the 2019-20 school year, to address the intensive needs of students with cognitive, physical, and/or psychological challenges, as well as vulnerable students experiencing barriers to learning success due to social, economic, emotional, and behavioural issues.

Likewise, the Ministry of Education is providing additional funding on top of the 2020-21 operating grant to support a number of mental health and wellness initiatives for students. We are also collaborating inter-ministerially to engage community-based organizations and support students in building healthy relationships and providing mental health supports and services. In 2020-21 the Ministry of Education will provide \$106.2 million to these service providers, which is an increase of \$2.4 million from last year.

While the majority of our operating grant is targeted toward K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education due to a larger enrolment, the Government of Saskatchewan's 2020-21 budget will also provide \$20.8 million for pre-K students, an increase of \$109,000. This will continue to support the 316 pre-K programs across the province which serve about 5,000 three- and four-year-olds.

For our residents in their earliest years, the 2020-21 budget will provide \$98 million in funding for multiple early years programs and supports, including \$73.5 million for licensed care, including an increase of \$1.7 million to existing child care centres with operating costs; \$350,000 for specialized programs for pre-kindergarten children with intensive needs; 4.4 million for early childhood intervention programs to help the 14 ECIPs [early childhood intervention program] across the province assist more children in overcoming developmental delays and enhancing the ability of children experiencing disabilities; \$16.6 million for the KidsFirst program, an increase of \$399,000; 2.9 million for child nutrition programs in 19 school divisions and 26 community-based organizations; and 2.6 million in continued funding for three family resource centres in Regina, Sandy Bay, and Yorkton, as well as funding provided by the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement for the expansion of seven new centres being built around the province.

I was also very excited this past year to get our new campaign Play. Learn. Grow. Together! up and running. And it's become even more relevant during this pandemic as our families are spending more time together at home. This campaign includes a new website, interactive social media presence, and a series of informational videos to get parents thinking about simple and easy ways that they can interact with their young children to assist in their development and their education. With the assistance of the Canada-Saskatchewan early years agreement, we are providing support to parents and caregivers of our earliest learners and building a better Saskatchewan for all of us.

Supporting our youngest learners and pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] students is paramount for the future of Saskatchewan. That's why we've worked diligently this past year to establish a new contract for teachers which balances the government's appreciation and respect for teachers with the fiscal responsibility management that taxpayers expect. On May 21st, 2020, Saskatchewan teachers ratified their agreement with the Government of Saskatchewan. That agreement includes a 2 per cent salary increase in 2021, 2022, and 2023, and is in addition to the 1 per cent salary increase that teachers received on August 1st, 2019, the last day of their previous contract.

In addition to this agreement, a new class size and composition committee was recently developed. This new committee is moving into phase 2 of their work as they discuss potential options to address the challenges related to class size and composition, planning in Saskatchewan's pre-K to grade 12 classes. The goal of this work will be to find solutions to better meet the needs of students, teachers, and staff in Saskatchewan's schools and to have a planned implementation by the fall of 2021. We're hopeful that together we can address the issues surrounding class complexity.

In addition to supporting the operational needs within our schools, we have also provided substantial investments in school infrastructure to ensure that our learning and working environments for students and staff are both safe and inspiring. To accomplish this, the 2020-21 budget will provide \$130.4 million in capital funding to build seven new schools and renovate three existing schools, an increase of \$34.8 million from 2019-20.

This funding includes \$8.5 million to begin planning and design on a new joint-use facility for two elementary schools in Regina's Harbour Landing neighbourhood; a new K to 12 school to consolidate the elementary school and high school in Carrot River; renovations to the Yorkton Regional High School; renovations and an addition to John Paul II Collegiate in North Battleford; a new elementary school to replace Princess Alexandra, King George, and Pleasant Hill elementary schools in Saskatoon; a joint-use facility with two elementary schools to replace St. Peter, St. Michael, and Imperial schools here in the city of Regina; a new school to replace St. Frances elementary school in Saskatoon; and renovations and an addition to Athol Murray College in Notre Dame.

It also includes \$500,000 to assess the current state of high schools in the city of Regina and Saskatoon, and determine the future high school needs for east Regina and east Saskatoon; \$46.9 million to provide ongoing funding for four major school consolidation projects under way in Rosthern, Weyburn, Moose

Jaw, and Regina; and \$10.6 million for relocatable classrooms.

Regarding the ongoing projects, I'm pleased to announce that the new school in Rosthern is just wrapping up construction, and the new school in Weyburn is expected to be completed in the spring of next year. Furthermore design teams have been selected for both new school projects in Regina and Moose Jaw, with extensive community consultation undertaken for each.

In addition to major capital needs, we are continuing to invest in preventative maintenance, renewal, and emergency funding for our schools. 62.9 million will be allocated between divisions in 2020-21, which will ensure that Saskatchewan boards of education are proactive in addressing critical rehabilitation and maintenance projects. This includes \$12 million to the new climate action incentive fund agreement between the Government of Canada and Saskatchewan, which is financed by proceeds of the federal carbon tax. School divisions will be able to access the funding for projects that align with our made-in-Saskatchewan strategy to address climate change and support energy efficiency as soon as their projects are approved by the federal government.

We're also thrilled to announce that in addition to the funding initially committed to capital projects in 2020-21, the Government of Saskatchewan has implemented a two-year capital plan to support building stronger communities while simultaneously stimulating Saskatchewan's economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19.

Over the span of two years, educational infrastructure will receive \$136.3 million, which will go to support six new capital projects, including a new francophone elementary school in the city of Regina, a new elementary school to replace Ducharme Elementary School in La Loche, a new K to 12 school to replace Blaine Lake Composite School, a new K to 12 school to consolidate the elementary school and high school in Lanigan, renovations and additions to Holy Rosary High School in Lloydminster, and renovations and addition to the Lloydminster Comprehensive High School, as well as \$16.9 million for renovation and maintenance projects around the province.

[15:15]

The Ministry of Education has also been working closely with the conseil in order to ensure that quality education is provided for francophone families. We are continuing to work collaboratively with them on project plans to determine the best options between Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert.

Since 2013 the Government of Saskatchewan has continued to fund initiatives in response to the joint task force recommendations on improving education and employment outcomes for First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan. This year the 2020-21 budget is providing \$5.1 million for those initiatives. One of those is Following Their Voices, which will be receiving \$2.1 million and focuses on changing student-teacher relationships, instructional practices, and the learning environment in order to engage and support students.

I'm proud to say that since Following Their Voices started in 2014, there have been 51 schools involved, with the participation of over 800 school staff and 14,000 students — 8,600 of which

self-declaring as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit — as well as a 12.5 per cent increase in credit attainment and a 14.3 per cent increase in three-year graduation rates.

The ministry has also allocated \$2.4 million toward the invitational shared services initiative which brings together the provincial education system and 17 First Nations education authorities to support students living on-reserve.

The ministry will also be providing \$300,000 to the continued support of Help Me Tell My Story and Help Me Talk About Math, innovative, holistic, and interactive engagement initiatives for pre-K, kindergarten, and grade 1 children and their families to promote ongoing development of literacy and math skills.

Two hundred thousand will be allocated to the continuing support of Leading to Learn, which is designed to provide capacity-building professional learning opportunities for school administrators that enable them to make a positive impact on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

To round out our funding initiatives in response to the joint task force recommendations, \$137,000 is being provided to extend the Microsoft licensing agreement within all First Nations kindergarten to grade 12 schools.

We continue to support literacy province-wide. Public libraries of Saskatchewan will receive 11.3 million, an increase of 1 per cent or \$84,000 from last year, while the provincial literacy programs will receive \$1 million. These allocations ensure that residents across the province have access to library services whether it be for hard copies of their favourite novel, free digital services for persons with disabilities, or access to shared resources.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the Government of Saskatchewan's drive toward building stronger communities for the people of Saskatchewan is outstanding. We will continue to thrive off this fortitude as we continue into the new decade of education and a new normal for everyone. My ministry colleagues and I will be working diligently with our partners in education to ensure that our students are prepared for their futures, and this year's budget is sure to maintain those efforts.

So, Mr. Chair, that concludes my opening comments and I look forward to the discussion this evening. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Move to questions now. Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to Mr. Currie and all of your officials that are here with you today. Minister, I will acknowledge the fact that it has been a very eventful term that you've presided over as the Education minister. And I know that these are extraordinary times that have asked a lot of everyone in the K to 12 sector, within the ministry and outside the ministry. And I do want to sincerely thank everyone for their efforts. They have not gone unnoticed. And I know that there has been a great deal of collaboration that has happened to make sure that a plan came together in a very fast way for a scenario that none of us could have anticipated, so thank you very much for that.

I'm going to try to organize myself. As you imagine, I have a few questions for you. I'm going to start in with just some questions around allocations and FTEs [full-time equivalent] within the ministry. Were there any increases or decreases in terms of FTEs within the ministry this year?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There were no apparent additions or reductions to FTEs within the ministry.

Ms. Beck: — Any secondments?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There were five secondments into the Ministry of Education.

Ms. Beck: — Are those secondments attached to any particular projects?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There was four that were attached to Following Their Voices, and one attached for the library work that's being done.

Ms. Beck: — I know this might be a lengthy answer, but can you describe some of the major initiatives that are being undertaken by the ministry right now? I think of Following Their Voices, as you've mentioned, the work towards a new ed sector plan goal, the curriculum renewal process.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'll ask Deputy Minister Currie to address the question particularly around the provincial education plan, which he has been leading on behalf of the ministry and doing an outstanding job. So I'll let Deputy Minister Currie speak to that.

Mr. Currie: — Thanks, Minister. A very major initiative has been the ongoing work towards a provincial education plan. In May of 2018 the minister convened a meeting with our education sector partners. This was quite a significant catalyst to start the conversation and the engagement with regards to a new provincial education plan that would guide our education structure through 2020 to 2030.

The partners that were invited, our education sector partners invited to that meeting included the Saskatchewan School Boards Association; the Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials; the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation; the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents; FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations]; Office of the Treaty Commissioner; Métis Nation-Saskatchewan; as well as the ministry ourselves were invited to that too. And the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, I think I mentioned them too.

And this group came together with representatives to speak of how we would approach a level of engagement, receive feedback from the provincial community as to how we would look at developing and ultimately implementing a provincial education plan.

So that initially started in May of 2018. In October of 2018 there was called a summit that was held and that was in Saskatoon. And what was significant of that summit was that there were 160 representatives from all across the province who came together representing 80 different organizations to provide feedback on and insights into their interests and their comments with regards

to what a new provincial education plan should include.

And what was significant about that was we were planning for the sunseting of the education sector strategic plan, which was to sunset in June of 2020. So that planning after the summit identified some key areas of focus. And from there we then spent the next number of months where our education sector partners went out to their respective constituents to solicit feedback on what would be considerations in addition to what the summit had provided, or landed upon, in terms of a focus to be considered for the development and implementation of a future plan.

Those feedback items were received. We had well over 30,000 through online, through town hall meetings, and through some email submissions that provided feedback as to what would be of interest.

At the same time that that engagement process was taking place, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation was hosting its Re-Imagine program, a project which is also soliciting from teachers and educators across the province and some other non-instructional personnel to what they would think that there would be of interest with regards to a future plan.

Of significance was the Re-Imagine project came up with 12 guidelines, and these 12 guidelines nicely aligned with the four pillars that were eventually realized from our provincial education plan framework. When the 12 guidelines were put together with the framework that was released in November of 2019, we then started to look at now what would be the components to drive down to the outcomes to which we would focus within the classrooms and within school divisions, learning as well as providing feedback and consult to the minister.

So we had the four pillars evolve from the provincial education plan framework. We are now in the process of continuing to work with our education sector partners, driving down deeper into what would be the outcomes, the measures, the governance component that would be realized in terms of addressing education in the future.

Due to the pandemic — and you'll probably hear this a few times over the course of the next number of hours — due to the pandemic, our proposed schedule has been affected with our level of engagement with our education sector partners, due to them attending to their needs, given the pandemic. We have reinstated . . . continued meetings virtually to come back and have what's called our operational structure, which is our administrative leaders within the province, our directors of education from First Nations education authorities, those who choose to participate, as well as our provincial school divisions who will be providing insights into what those measures and those outcomes specifically could be.

We are at the same time developing an education council, and an education council is a group that is representative of our provincial communities, from education to corporate to parents to education sector partners to our post-secondary entities that are coming together to provide a governance oversight to the provincial education plan moving forward and guiding in that way. So we look forward to those kind of from a governance point of view, taking shape and providing foresight for moving into the future. And from an operational point of view, we look

for the action taking place within the school divisions and within the classroom.

In the process of developing an education council, as it were, we have what's called — you know, I'm giving you another name here — the planning team. And the planning team was of the provincial education plan. And before the education council gets going, the planning team is the entity that has been in existence since the May 2018 meeting. So this is the group that came together and they've been consistent in participation, in providing feedback and direction as we continue to move forward for this provincial education plan. That's one project.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. I'm scared to ask you to detail additional projects. I do have a couple of questions about that. One with the council, one thing I didn't hear you mention, but I just want to inquire if they are at the table as well, would be representatives from the early years sector. Are they part of the council?

Mr. Currie: — Thank you. Yes, by all means they are. We have Ministry of Education representation as well as sector representatives that bring the interests and the good information and feedback with regards to early years.

Ms. Beck: — And will the council have a decision-making role or an advisory role?

Mr. Currie: — It will have an advisory role.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Do you have an estimation of the funding allocation that has gone towards this project thus far?

[15:30]

I'll maybe ask a follow-up just in case it's in a different binder. The other question I would have is — and I know we're reading tea leaves here to some extent — but the expectation of when you might have a document for public. I noted in the plan for '20-21 it contains the former ed sector plan goals. I'm just wondering when you might have a rollout of another document?

Mr. Currie: — So right now, released in November of 2019 is the framework, the provincial education plan framework, and that's our North Star. That's our guiding principle for right now and it has the four pillars in it. So that is the document from which we are working at the moment. And that is public; it's posted on our Ministry of Education website. And what we look to have constructed would be the document that would speak more specifically to our measurements, outcomes going forward. So right now it's the framework that's been developed.

And again, because of COVID here, our timeline has been pushed back somewhat. So we look to have resumption of the education sector group, the education council as well as the operational structure come together here in August and into September to lead us so that we can have those identified details, to which you've referenced, in place. Our target is for next January. And then what we would have is, the thought being that there would be implementation of those for the fall of 2021.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Just answering your initial question, there is no specific allocation in the budget for this work. The costs are being absorbed in the ministry.

Ms. Beck: — So like for events like the summit and planning like that, that is within the allocation of ministry funds?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That's right.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Do you expect to see goals similar to the goals that we saw in the former ESSP [education sector strategic plan], is the first question. And of the education sector goals that sunset, I guess, in this month, can you describe progress towards those goals that was achieved?

Mr. Currie: — In terms of the goals for the education sector strategic plan, those were originally intended to be sunset here in June of this year, 2020. Because of what's happened here over the last number of months, we've readjusted our timelines. So those specific goals will remain in effect until we've moved into the provincial education plan. And we are in the midst right now of discussions with our operational structure to craft the specific targeted outcomes. And we are right now in conversation about what specifically those can be, so they're undefined right now.

But there has been, at the beginning of March, March 3rd and 4th in Saskatoon, there was a gathering of approximately 100 leaders from our First Nations as well as our provincial school divisions that came together to talk about what could be. And because of the pandemic we are coming back to the next gathering; that would be this fall. So we are looking to define what they would be and we would look to have those known by January of 2021.

The data collection that we had become used to as part of our process with the education sector strategic plan in May and June of collecting data for reading results, as well as obviously graduation, as well as readiness for school — those were suspended, given what happened in March of school changing, as it were. So this year we won't have that same information available to us, with the exception of the graduation results.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, thank you. Is there a report that you can provide on progress or challenges towards meeting those goals as it existed pre-COVID? So for example, well I guess the exiting is a difficulty, but how much progress had you made? Of course we were in the last year of those goals. How much progress had been made and what were some of the challenges? Where were you seeing that the results that were being achieved perhaps were looking as if they might not meet those goals?

Mr. Currie: — Our specific outcomes to which we are targeting work in our strategic plan spoke . . . and I'll just walk through a couple of them right now. One of them was the graduation rates. Our outcome was graduation rates and, as you'll recall, by June 30th, 2020, this year, our target was achieved: an 85 per cent three-year graduation rate and a 90 per cent five-year graduation rate.

As of the end of last year, the end of the '18-19 school year, we had a three-year graduation rate of 77.3 per cent. We had, in the five-year graduation rate, an 84.7. The five-year graduation rate was an increase. We have seen continued increases in our five-year graduation rates for the last five years of which we have been keeping this information. In terms of our three-year graduation rate, we've seen increases. Well this last year we saw a 0.1 per cent decline, but we had seen overall an increase significantly, thus the highest over the last 20 years before that.

Our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student engagement and retention graduation rates: our three-year graduation rate at the end of last year was 43.4 per cent, and that was a slight decline from the year previous where we had a 44.5. Our five-year graduation rate for the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student engagement and graduation rate grouping: for self-declared we had 61.0 per cent, and this was the highest it's ever been. There was an increase of just over a half a per cent in the five-year graduation rate.

In our reading, writing, and math grade level outcome, our grade 3 reading rate at the end of last year was 75 per cent, and that was a slight increase over the previous number of years. So we stayed a rounded figure at 75, but it had been an actual increase that had been realized to get to that point. And our percentage of students in grade 4 writing at grade level was 62.7 per cent. That was the second year of that initiative. A percentage of students in grade 2 doing math at grade level, we had a 71.9 per cent, and that was the first year that we had implemented that measurement.

In terms of our early years outcomes, we found that children arriving at kindergarten ready to learn had remained, for all intents and purposes, somewhat static. There was a slight decline of 0.4 per cent of the number of children entering kindergarten ready to learn. That was in the fall. But then when they left, we found that there was a slight increase in their readiness to enter into grade 1, where we are at 79.2 per cent. So we've seen a jump there of 23.2 per cent from when they entered kindergarten to when they left. So they were ready there.

That was the statistical information that we realized from the assessments, and the progress of their children and students in the schools. We had targeted for early years that 90 per cent of our children would be ready entering into grade 1, and we are at just under 80 per cent at 79.2.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that, Deputy Minister. In terms of the trend for students entering kindergarten ready to learn, what has the trend line been on for those students?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — As Deputy Minister Currie said, the numbers have been fairly static over the last number of years with respect to children arriving at kindergarten who are ready to learn: a 0.4 per cent decrease between last year and the previous year, but generally steady in the high 50's. But once they've gone through kindergarten, the students exiting kindergarten that are ready to learn are just under 80 per cent. So there's some significant improvement and our target, as Deputy Minister Currie had said, was 90 per cent of students exiting kindergarten ready for learning the primary grades.

So there's been some very good work done and certainly more work that needs to be done in that area. But some pretty good progress, bearing in mind it's a half-time learning program as well — right? — for the most part.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I just wanted to check in with regard to curricular renewal. Any report would be welcome. I specifically wanted to ask about the secondary social sciences curriculum.

Ms. Nedelcov-Anderson: — Hello. Susan Nedelcov-Anderson, assistant deputy minister. I'll be pleased to answer your questions

on curriculum development and renewal. We have some very active files happening with curriculum development and renewal currently. We have three subject-specific reference committees: one in the area of practical and applied arts, one in the area of secondary arts education, and one in the area of secondary social sciences. Those reference committees have made recommendations for those specific subject areas.

And so there is quite a bit of work happening in the area of secondary arts education with finishing up the renewal in that area, as well as some brand new provincial offerings in secondary arts education. Practical and applied arts, the same process is being used there where we are renewing all of the existing documents that we have offered for practical and applied arts, as well as some new provincial offerings.

And in terms of secondary social sciences, the reference committee has made some recommendations. We have presented those recommendations to the curriculum advisory committee for their consideration as well, and we're having conversations about next steps with the recommendations.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

Ms. Nedelcov-Anderson: — In addition to those three active subject areas, we're also finishing up some of the renewal in the area of some of our language courses as well as some English-language arts elective courses as well.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Thank you for that. Specifically with regard to the secondary social sciences curriculum and the work of the reference committee, when was their report submitted?

Ms. Nedelcov-Anderson: — The reference committee has not submitted a report. We've had meetings.

Ms. Beck: — I think you noted recommendations had been forwarded.

Ms. Nedelcov-Anderson: — Yes. I'll have to just check to see if I can find a date for you.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Minister, in last year's budget there was an allocation for \$500,000 for — and now I'm forgetting the name — innovation within education. I'm just wondering if you could provide an update on activity and spending of those funds.

[15:45]

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That innovation framework included a number of the following components. The ministry established a strategic relationship with the Atlantic Rim collaborative, ARC [Atlantic Rim Collaboratory]. I think you know that. There was a development of a memorandum of understanding with the Gonski Institute for Education, and that was also to support innovation.

The collaborative planning for the Indigenous Education Symposium, there was the establishment of the Provincial Education Council. And that membership was invited . . . There was a number of people that were invited to join that organization. There was also the establishment of the Provincial Youth Council, which selected a number of students from Grade

10 to 12 to participate in that, to provide advice, to be on issues that were important to students in high school.

Ms. Beck: — Could you provide a breakdown of the costs associated, or how the \$500,000 was allocated?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We'll get that information for you. We'll send someone to look at it. We're not supposed to hold things up.

Ms. Beck: — A quick question regarding lawsuits and litigation: are there any lawsuits or litigation ongoing for the ministry? And if so, can you describe?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The Ministry of Education is involved with the consortium through the Canadian ministers of education, CMEC [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada], with respect to the copyright committee to recover unpaid tariff fees paid to access copyright. Would you like to know the status of the lawsuit, or just . . .

Ms. Beck: — Short details if you have them, sure.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well that's certainly a labour-intensive document discovery. That's the pre-trial process that we're going through now with respect to a number of school divisions.

We have, as you know, the long-standing Theodore court decision which has currently been appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. We've taken a position on that and I think you know the details with respect to that particular piece of litigation. We're waiting for documents to be filed at the Supreme Court, and then that will be heard by the Supreme Court.

There is a lawsuit, a class action lawsuit, that's been commenced against the government with respect to the provincial School for the Deaf. That was commenced in 2009.

There's currently ongoing litigation . . . Well I shouldn't say it's ongoing litigation. There has been litigation commenced by the CEF [Conseil des écoles francophones] with respect to the delivery of French language education in the province, particularly around delivery of capital projects. Last year the government, through the Ministry of Education, had negotiated a funding agreement which was part of that.

But the lawsuits that are currently under way relate to the provision of school capital for that division. Last year we had signed a memorandum of understanding which would see the construction of three new schools — one in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert — over the next six years. And earlier this week we announced our commitment to fulfill the first leg of that piece of litigation. We're also having some ongoing conversations with the CEF with regards to perhaps provision of some educational space in the city of Prince Albert. I can keep going.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, keep going.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Gotta love lawyers. There is a lawsuit with respect to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. That appeal really involves the federal government. The province wasn't involved in that, although there was an initial naming of the province, I think, in that litigation.

We were advised in early September that there was an intent to proceed with the case management with respect to the Red Pheasant day school and a lawsuit regarding the closure of the Bridge City College due to operational difficulties. And there's been no action taken on that file since it was initiated back in 1990. So that's the essence of the litigation.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. With regard to human rights complaints that have been launched that would impact the Ministry of Education, can you provide any detail on that?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We're not aware of any complaints that have been brought against the Ministry of Education through the offices of the Human Rights Commission.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm going to move a little more properly into the votes, Minister. Looking at vote 5, subvote (ED03), I'm going to move through the K to 12 allocations. I note that under achievement and operational support, there is a \$5 million increase there. Can you describe what that increase in allocation is directed towards?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — You're right. There was a \$5.305 million increase with respect to achievement and operational support. There was a \$5 million increase for classroom supports for students that are eligible to be matched by the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation]. There was a \$0.208 million increase to support the innovation framework. There was 0.173 million general salary increase to support current SGEU [Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union] increases. There was a \$50,000 increase to support the Ability in Me project in Saskatoon.

There was a \$32,000 increase in CBO [community-based organization] funding. That was offset by an \$84,000 decrease from operational savings: \$50,000 reduction as a result of discontinuance of the hub in Prince Albert and a \$24,000 decrease to transfer a half an FTE from achievement and operational support infrastructure branch to support the library accountability and administration unit.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Can you describe the CBO funding that's allocated in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Did you want the particulars of the CBOs that were funded? Is that what you're asking or . . .

Ms. Beck: — If there was direction that was provided with regard to that increased funding, or if it was allocated to a certain outcome or program.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There was a 1 per cent increase in CBOs across the board in the budget. I can go through the categories, if you like, just with respect to the number of CBOs associated with each category?

Ms. Beck: — Yes. Broad categories would be good. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well there were six CBOs that were providing anti-bullying programming. There was 43 CBOs providing child nutrition. There was three for curriculum. There was one providing support with respect to disability; 14, ECIP programs; early learning and child care, there was 262; education

of students at high risk in traditional education settings, there was one; education of students in hospitals, three; education of students with the province, there was two; education of youth in custody, there was three; family literacy, nine; federal-provincial agreement on French, there was 12; 19, KidsFirst program; scholarships for students with vulnerable circumstances, there was one; and student services and support there were two, for a total of 381 CBOs.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. So KidsFirst comes out of a different allocation? Or is that coming out of the K to 12 achievement and operational support?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That comes out of the operational support, right? ... [inaudible interjection] ... Right. Yes, out of operational support.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Moving on to school operating. There is a \$34 million lift here in that allocation or that subject line. Can you describe what that increase is meant to cover?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Sure. There was a \$10.208 million increase to roll forward in the '19-20 budget increase. There was a \$12.833 million increase to provide government portion of the \$22 million enrolment inflationary increase for the 2020-21 school year. The remaining 9.167 will be provided in the '21-22 budget year. There was an \$11.696 million increase to provide the government year-end portion of the \$20.5 million CBA [collective bargaining agreement] commitment for the '20-21 school year. And the remaining 8.354 will be provided in the '21-22 budget.

Ms. Beck: — Minister, the roll forward amount. Can you describe that? I'm not sure I've heard that described that way before.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The difference between those and the reason that it's reported that way is the five months' difference between the school year and the fiscal year.

I just want to correct the record. You asked about the KidsFirst, and I indicated that it came out of operational support. That's not where it comes out of and I'll get you the correct reference.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, thank you. And then in K to 12 initiatives, there's a slight bump there: 2.2 million. Can you describe what that increase in funding is directed towards?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There was \$855,000 that was an increase for the qualified independent schools to support increased enrolment. There was \$614,000 for the increase for Sakewew High School to support increased enrolment. There was \$469 million that was an increase for the historical high schools to increase provincial funding from 70 to 80 per cent, as I mentioned in my opening comments, to match the funding for qualified independent schools. There was \$133,000 that was an increase to CBO funding; \$119 million increase for Ranch Ehrlo to support contractual obligations. There was \$84,000 increase for Cornwall Alternative centre so that the budget reflects the contractual obligations. And that's it.

[16:00]

Ms. Beck: — Minister, overall for operations in K to 12 — and when you pull out capital, as you noted — there's about a \$42 million increase. 20 million, I believe you said and it was reported in the budget documents, for the cost of the collective agreement with the teachers, leaving 22. What is the projected enrolment for the fall, increase in enrolment?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Projected enrolment increase will be 2,087 approximately. That's based on information that we received from the school divisions.

Ms. Beck: — What was factored in for inflationary factor for the increased costs, non-teachers agreement costs, that boards will realize in the following year?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The \$22 million additional in the budget is intended to address both inflation and enrolment pressures within the school division, noting that the major driver in school divisions with respect to the budget is really the CBA increase.

Ms. Beck: — But you've booked more for inflation and growth than for the CBA increase. Okay. Broken out, how much is allocated — of that 22 million — strictly towards growth, so those additional 2,087 students?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — So \$12 million is allocated for enrolment growth, with \$10 million allocated to inflation. And again, noting that one of the significant drivers with respect to additional costs within school divisions is the CBA.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. So normally when we're in estimates, Minister, we're a little earlier in the year so we don't have access to the budget submissions of school divisions when we're in estimates. But this year we do. And I note that a number of school divisions — in fact all of those that I've had an opportunity to look at in any detail — are indicating that the amount that's been allocated has fallen short of their costs for basic growth and inflation. I think a number of divisions have had to dip into reserves this year, perhaps not as deeply as they did last year. I'm just wondering, of the budget submissions that you've received, how many of those divisions are indicating a deficit with the amount that they've received from the ministry?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — As you know, school division budgets aren't due into the ministry until the end of June. I haven't seen the budgets yet, so I can't give you an answer to that. I can certainly undertake to provide that number to you.

Ms. Beck: — I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — You bet.

Ms. Beck: — I certainly have noted a number of those school divisions that have their budget submissions online, at this time have indicated again that they have had to either find cuts — we've seen cuts to cleaning staff, custodial staff in some divisions, cuts to FTEs — or relying on reserves to maintain status quo service provision of education to students. While perhaps you don't have the formal submissions from school divisions, have you received any indication in terms of the adequacy of the amount that's been forwarded in terms of covering their actual costs?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The only information that I have is what I've read in the media with respect to potential deficits. I also note that prior to the end of June in addition to expecting to receive the formal budgets, we also expect to have school divisions advise us in terms of what their savings have been over the number of months, not having to provide in-class services.

We know school divisions have, in some cases, saved significant amounts with respect to plant operations, with respect to transportation, and other things. So notwithstanding the fact that . . . Well withstanding the fact that the government didn't reduce any of the grant funding to those school divisions so as to ensure that payroll continued to be paid through that period of time and that people continued to be paid notwithstanding that in-class school wasn't provided, we know that there are going to be some savings in some school divisions. And we're very interested in looking at those numbers in the context of the budgets that they provide before the end of the year.

Ms. Beck: — Minister, can you please provide an indication of what your expectation is for those savings within school divisions for that March to June period?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We do have some preliminary information with respect to the school divisions and what they had saved. What we were encouraging school divisions to do is to ensure that, to the extent that they could, ensure that those savings were certainly accounted for, and we knew that there was going to be some savings in a number of areas.

I can give you some numbers with respect to the school divisions, the number of school divisions in terms of the savings. But we were encouraging school divisions to ensure that to the extent that they were having savings, that they would be careful with respect to those savings, noting that there would be certainly perhaps some additional costs that would be incurred by the school divisions as a result of having to return to school in the fall. I think I've made that clear in the comments I've made.

Here's just a number of school divisions that have had some significant savings, and these are the ones we know to date: Good Spirit School Division, \$1.9 million; \$843,000 for Lloydminster Public; 1.74 for Prairie Spirit; 1.2 almost for Sask Rivers; Saskatoon Public School Division, \$3.4 million; and South East Cornerstone, almost \$2 million. So it's almost \$11 million worth of savings just from those six school divisions. So you know, we heard from Regina Public that there was going to be a savings of about \$3.2 million.

And certainly those funds will be available to school divisions as they move forward. And we're encouraging school divisions to make sure that they were accounting for those funds so that they could be available for . . . It's certainly our intention to make sure that, in terms of in-class learning this fall, that in-class instruction isn't going to be hampered. And so we know that some of those funding will be used to help offset additional costs that school divisions are going to have.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. Would you be able to table those amounts and endeavour to table the future amounts as you get them from divisions?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Sure. Yes, you bet.

Ms. Beck: — So with regard to those savings or those unspent funds to this point, Minister, how have school divisions been directed with regard to how they may or may not use those funds?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — What the deputy minister of Education has indicated to school divisions is that the savings could be used on one-time initiatives such as IT [information technology] purchase, renewals, repair and maintenance projects for buildings, and renewal of bus fleets. We were encouraging school divisions not to use those for creating or enhancing programs of an ongoing nature given the ongoing requirement for funding for those programs. So one-time savings and perhaps one-time initiatives. But we've also asked school divisions to be very careful, noting that there will be presumably some additional costs in terms of providing educational services this fall.

Ms. Beck: — So it can be used for one-time purchases and, I would presume, by the end of their fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well not necessarily. There may well be some school divisions that choose to take some of that money and put it into reserves. There's no requirement for them to spend that money. And as a matter of fact we're encouraging them to make sure that they are prepared for this fall.

So perhaps I can give you an example. I know that Saskatoon Public, who had initiated a fairly unique program with regard to online delivery, used a number of their existing computers that they had to distribute them to members of the community — students — so that they could engage in online learning. And one of the requests of us was, you know, they want to renew that inventory, not knowing how much of it was going to come back or what kind of shape it was going to be when it came back, and so those kinds of things. But certainly to the extent that that division was encouraging online learning, that was a useful initiative for them.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. So purchases, not FTEs though?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — No. These were really going to be one-time expenditures. So the suggestion that perhaps more FTEs be retained in the interim would be an ongoing cost, we were discouraging that. But it may well be that in terms of ongoing provision of education services in the fall they might want to utilize that, but obviously that's going to have some effect on future budgets in terms of their FTEs.

Ms. Beck: — With regard to those increased costs that you anticipate school divisions will be incurring in the fall, do you have an indication of, a number for what those costs will look like?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well no, we don't. It's certainly one of the challenges I think, right, that we don't know what additional costs will be. One element of that will be meeting the number of the requirements that the chief medical health officer has put forward in terms of his guidelines. Any extra expenses that are occasioned as a result of the implementation of those guidelines will have to be considered, and that may well certainly differ from one school division to another school division, if there are any additional costs at all.

And so that's precisely the reason why there was no additional funds in the budget, why there is a contingency fund put in the budget to help deal with some of the effects of COVID-19, not just within the education sector but other sectors as well. And so we're not at the present time aware of what those costs might be.

[16:15]

Certainly the response planning team, in conjunction with the ministry and with school divisions, will make some determination as to those additional costs as we get closer to school. Because we really don't know; while we have a set of guidelines the chief medical health officer has put forward, those guidelines may well change before September either for the better or not. And so it's very difficult, if not impossible, to put a cost on what those additional costs may be.

Ms. Beck: — Is there a scenario under which there wouldn't be a requirement, for example, additional PPE [personal protective equipment] or perhaps additional busing or additional funding for cleaning or cleaning staff?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I think under the guidelines it's fair to say that there will certainly be some additional requirements with respect to cleanliness in the schools. That's clear. In terms of personal protective equipment, the guidelines as they currently stand, the chief medical health officer is not recommending or suggesting that personal protective equipment will be a requirement in the fall again.

Ms. Beck: — Or plastic barriers for bus drivers, for example?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Right. That may well all change. We're certainly hoping that school returns in as normal a fashion as possible, but certainly things will be a little bit different this fall. We're hoping not significantly different, but that really depends on the circumstances. And so we need to be very kind of proactive in terms of analyzing what the situation is. And we'll be working with the chief medical health officer to determine whether or not there are any changes in those guidelines.

But the work that's being done by the response planning team in terms of how those guidelines will be implemented, how they will affect any one particular school or any one school division would certainly be something that needs to be worked on between them — the ministry, and the school divisions.

Ms. Beck: — Are there any divisions that are indicating to you that they won't require additional funding to implement those guidelines?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We've heard anecdotally through the media that there may be some requests, but we've got no official request for any of that at the present time. But there's certainly been some conversations.

We do know that Regina Public had made a suggestion, I think it was last week, that the additional costs of providing those services in the division, based on the guidelines, would be about \$500,000, and they had said that they would be taking that out of their savings. But again, it's too early to tell in terms of what those additional costs would be across school divisions.

Ms. Beck: — So, Minister, in a number of other jurisdictions in Canada, other provinces, we see that the planning for fall involves in many cases a reduction in class sizes. That isn't something that is contemplated or isn't set out in our guidelines here. Can you walk me through why that option or that scenario isn't on the table in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We know that in a number of provinces that's one scenario. You'll note — and I know you've read the guidelines from the chief medical health officer — he is not recommending that at the present time. So there may well be a change in that direction depending on where we are come September. But at the present time, as I said, our clear intention and, I think, the comments that have come from the chief medical health officer makes this very clear that these guidelines aren't anticipating reduced class sizes this fall.

Certainly to the fullest extent possible, social distancing and the kinds of other things that he suggests in his guidelines will move forward. But again the chief medical health officer hasn't recommended that, and to the extent that the response planning team may well be working on, and I know they are, on different scenarios, depending on the circumstances we'll play that by ear come September. But at the present time we're not anticipating any reduction in class sizes.

Ms. Beck: — Presumably if there were a shift to reduced class sizes, for example, or a hybrid model of reduced class sizes and online learning, that would have a significant increase in costs for school divisions. They are finalizing and submitting budgets right now. How do divisions pivot in that scenario, both in terms of, you know, reorganizing their plans and also in terms of covering increased costs?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'll let Deputy Minister Currie just talk a little bit about the work that's being done from the response planning team side.

Mr. Currie: — Thanks, Minister. So as was already referenced, we will be taking our guidance from the chief medical health officer in terms of planning for the fall. And right now we have received indications that we want schools to be as normal as possible. And as such, with our respective planning and our response planning team — which has membership and representation from the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association], STF, SASBO [Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials], the business officials, and LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents], as well as the ministry — this group is coming together and looking at what are the implications and the suggestions for moving forward to address the reality of having students begin their education journey back in the school sites.

So we have taken the leadership that's been provided by the chief medical health officer and the guidance that has provided our institution guidelines that are in the *Re-Open Saskatchewan* document that is posted on the Saskatchewan.ca website. And in that document it speaks to the resumption of class structures as we know them, with the focus on looking to minimizing, as best as possible, the distancing in a safe way with regards to the students and the staff. That planning as we know it right now, two and a half months out from when students return to the sites, is such that we have an interest and an opportunity to ensure that

we resume what we know to be normal, but at the same time be cognizant of the fluidity of the prospective change.

So right now we have so many of our students who have been working in the last three months remotely — all students have been working remotely — but with resumption of returning to the school sites, looking for a safe, engaging, and welcoming site for them to resume their education journey. So the response planning team is taking into account the direction provided by the chief medical health officer in terms of what the hygiene, the physical contact, the equipment, the sanitization processes will be, as well as transportation, in terms of what one must take into account in the preparation for these students.

In addition to that, we've also looked at the learning program for the resumption of school in the fall. And so that's been provided to the school divisions as well, who are taking these overarching considerations into account as they are planning, as we speak, for the return of students coming into their respective sites. Some have learned over the course of these last few months what might be possible. Some have learned what is considered to be returning to that prospective way of offering education, and many have learned as well the significance of pivoting, I'll call it, when a situation presents itself. So the school divisions are working with the response planning team to work under the framework of should COVID-19 present itself in any one of our respective sites, how would one respond to that, and how would one form the communication structure with our parents and our students and our staff as well.

So right now, again coming back, the chief medical officer has provided the guiding principles from which we are working. The response planning team is looking from the perspectives of their education sector partner perspective and bringing that to the table to look at, affirm what's working, to look at the what ifs if needed, and how we would actualize an action towards supporting the school divisions moving forward.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. Minister, I think there is a lot of, a lot of concern remains about who pays and where that funding comes from. Can you provide an answer to that with the already-known existing costs, increasing costs that are going to be incurred in the fall? In really the best-case scenario — let alone what happens if we have a localized outbreak or a more general outbreak or a second wave — I think that certainly a lot of the folks that I've been talking to are looking for reassurances that those costs will be covered. And that's not immediately clear, given the budget that's allocated here, how that's going to happen. I'm wondering if you could speak to that please.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I've indicated on a number of occasions the fact that there's a \$200 million contingency fund in the budget to deal with the consequences of COVID-19. That's certainly money that's available in the budget to help offset additional costs. And I've also said that there's been some significant savings in school divisions that they can use to help offset those costs. So without knowing what those costs are, certainly it's the intention of the government to ensure that classroom learning is not impacted by COVID-19, and that to the extent that additional resources will be required, having regard to the contingency fund that we do have and the additional money that school divisions have saved, those will be the resources that will be available.

Ms. Beck: — Given the guidelines as they sit now which really are, you know, hopefully and fingers crossed, this is a scenario that we find ourselves in the fall. This is really a best-case scenario in terms of a return to school in the fall. There are going to be increased costs here. If you have a staff member who has symptoms of COVID, before they're testing, they're going to be utilizing subs for example. You have additional requirements, as I've said, for cleaning, for sanitizer, probably additional supervision costs the way that schools provide supervision over lunch hour now, for example. Where are those known costs going to come from? I mean, that contingency, Minister, is not just for Ministry of Education. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — It's a contingency for executive government.

Ms. Beck: — Right.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well, as I've said before, there is some significant savings in school divisions. The Regina Public School Board has said these additional costs with respect to what has been set out in the guidelines to date are about \$500,000. There may well be some other expenses that are incurred. You're right. There could be some teachers who are immune-compromised who are going to have to be replaced in the classroom. I agree with that. But again, there are some significant savings in school divisions we're going to expect them to utilize. And they have access to the contingency fund which is in the budget.

So it's difficult at this particular point in time — and I think you agree with me — to determine exactly what the costs of any additional measures will be. But I can tell you that we will be working with school divisions, through the response planning team, to make sure that the delivery of education in the classroom isn't impaired.

Ms. Beck: — So I think what I want to do, Minister . . . I note the time. We're going to move through some of these guidelines and just ask some questions as they have occurred to me or questions and concerns have been raised with me as the critic for Education.

Reading from the primary and secondary educational institution guidelines:

As school-aged children return to regular activities, including programming and activities now allowable under Re-Open Saskatchewan [I think we've canvassed that] . . . Classes [beginning] as early as September 1, depending on local school division calendars.

Is there any additional professional development that you anticipate will be required before this reopening in this new reality?

Mr. Currie: — Again that's part of the response planning team's ongoing conversation. This last Thursday is when these guidelines were released. And given the guidelines now known, we have conversation with the school divisions and the response planning team as to what does that mean, how do we prepare our communities, from our administration, staff, students, and parents as well.

[16:30]

So as we go through what the realities may be, not only now as we know them in preparation, so there has been ongoing . . . I've heard from a few school divisions who are developing their respective plans to welcome the students back into the school sites here in September, and they are working on that. As well, it will be a fluid situation through the month of July and into early August to understand what in fact it will be. So as we know it now . . . The school divisions, as well as a continued conversation and guidance from the response planning team, appreciates that we are planning as we know the situation to be right now.

We take into account that there are ways to provide learning opportunities for our staff. And what those may be, may be dependent upon what the situation will be known to be into August as to how we address those in preparing our staff for the realities. So I don't think that . . . Our school divisions are planning, but they're trying not to get too far out in front of a situation, knowing there's significant potential change that may be realized here over the next number of weeks.

Ms. Beck: — So I guess I'll back up a bit and go back to the question that I asked previously in terms of, you know, what's been presented here is one scenario, sort of a best-case scenario for the fall. Other provinces have looked at, you know, providing guidelines or direction to boards that anticipate for the most part, three different scenarios: so sort of exclusively online return to school, should there be a second wave of COVID-19; a return to school; and then a hybrid model with reduced class sizes and online. Could you walk me through the reasons why we only see one scenario in front of us right now?

Mr. Currie: — We have been in contact with other jurisdictions across the country as to how they're approaching this, and there is knowledge and there is variation. And in all cases, there is an approach to students returning to the school sites. And so the beauty of our structure right now is that we have committed to students returning to the school sites, with each of the school divisions having contingency plans in place to address the fluidity of the situation of COVID as it may present itself throughout the province in the months ongoing when school resumes.

Other provinces have chosen and other jurisdictions have chosen to have phase 1, 2, 3 or 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, but it speaks to the same reality that students are returning. But we will respond based on the situation of the day as to whether they'd be working remotely or they'd be working in the school site and how they would be attended to.

The beauty of our structure and the strength of our structure is that we are the same as everybody else. Students are returning. And school divisions, with ongoing conversations with the response planning team, will be making plans for contingency. How do we respond to areas even within one community or areas within the province that would be . . . evidence of the COVID, and how would we respond to that. While on paper it may not show phases, our reality is students are in, but we have that planning that is taking place from a school division's perspective that will address and respond to the reality of the presence of COVID.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you for that answer. Minister, certainly within this scenario there will be wild deviation in terms of the costs and workload required of staff in those schools. And I guess I will move on, but one of the main questions, as I have asked here today and I continue to hear is, who is going to pay for those costs or where would those costs come from?

And you know, the costs, perhaps, if this is the scenario that we have, can be absorbed with some of those savings you've described, but if we move into a scenario where we have a full lockdown or a hybrid model, those will come with significantly increased costs. And I guess I'm looking for some, really, reassurances for those who are concerned about that increased workload and that the funds will be there in order to support it.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I'll just make two comments because I think the chief medical health officer has made it pretty clear that he is not expecting a further lockdown of schools in the fall. He said that publicly. And what I've said publicly is that it's not the expectation of the Ministry of Education that teachers in classrooms be responsible for anything more than their in-class learning. So that while there are some people that like to preach doom about this, the fact of the matter is it's not the expectation that teachers will teach in the classroom during the day and provide online learning to those students who aren't in their classroom.

We know that there will be children who won't be in the classroom. We will expect the school divisions to develop strategies in terms of ensuring that educational opportunities, equitable educational opportunities are delivered to children who aren't in classrooms. And so as I say, we leave that up to the school divisions to make those decisions. But as I've said, it's the position of the government that we don't want to see any impact to student learning, and to the extent that there are additional costs, we have made provisions in the budget for that.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. Who will be providing the learning to those students who will not be able to come into the classroom, either for the duration of the school year or on a school-by-school basis or a region-by-region basis?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'll let Deputy Minister Currie speak to that.

Mr. Currie: — So the response planning team has continued to look at options for students that will not be in the classroom. So there are a number of options available to one. One is we presently have a number of entities, school divisions who offer online learning, so that is a remote opportunity that's structured to address students who are working outside of the school building. We also have the option of there's home-based learning as well for students who are not in the school building. That is an option that is to be considered or may be considered by a family.

And then we also have school divisions based on student wellness and health that may structure another opportunity or another situation where they are supportive of a student who is not on-site learning that way. So those are some options that are being reviewed, discussed, and continue to be considered as we move forward in our planning for what may be in the fall.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm going to back it up a little bit again.

And with regard to the uptake of students who did participate in the supplemental learning, do you have a percentage of students who sort of initially signed up or indicated that they would participate in that supplemental learning? And what were the attendance numbers by the end of June?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The only numbers that we have currently was the uptake in April, which was about 85 per cent, as the deputy minister has just informed me. But I can tell you that what the deputy minister is doing . . . and he can elaborate on the work that the ministry is doing to do an evaluation of the participation levels and the impact that that has had in terms of the educational opportunities that were provided through the supplementary learning models.

Because what we really want to do — because this was thrust upon us pretty quickly — is we want to learn the lessons and we want to know what we learned, what was good about it, what was bad about it. Because we need to be able to incorporate those lessons into any additional supplementary work that's going to be done in the fall in terms of supplementary learning. And so we need to learn those lessons, and I know Deputy Minister Currie can comment a little bit about this.

But this is the work that's being done by the ministry right now. So we can do that evaluation, and we understand where things went well and where they didn't go so well. But we know the uptake, at least originally at the beginning of it, was quite high. We also know, I think it's fair to say, that it tailed off quite a bit. And you're probably aware of a lot of those situations. And so that's a critical area, right? Because if we're going to provide supplementary learning, we need to make sure that students are engaged, right? And so that work's being done by the deputy minister right now. So, Rob, I'm not sure if you want to make just another quick comment on that.

Mr. Currie: — We were thrust into the response to the COVID-19 in March. But the fall we see as being different in that we have time to plan for it. And as such, education — and we have affirmed this with our school communities — education will continue in the fall and learning will be provided. So our supplemental learning that we have experienced here over the last number of months will not be evidenced in the fall; it will be back to our learning.

So in terms of that, we look to see that the level of engagement, once students return to the sites, once families feel reassured that there are a number of measures taking place to address safety, not only of the students but of the staff and the parents entering the school. We look to have that supported and realised as well as reaffirm to our families all across the province that education will be continuing and will be structured in a way that will meet the health and wellbeing of our students and staff members, as well as the same time as work on ensuring that the education program continues.

Most recently, on June the 15th, we had our education sector partners come together again under the guidance and leadership of the response planning team. We had representatives come from all over across the province to talk about lessons learned, as our minister has already referenced. And we wanted to capture what we've learned from this and what we can utilize for the future and keep in mind for future possibilities, but at the same

time ensure that if there are any gaps, we address them; if there are any successes, we note them and we make sure that we continue on that path.

So I was greatly pleased with the collaborative energy and spirit of our education sector partners who came together to co-facilitate this gathering, and to have the lessons-learned information presented to us that will guide and help us understand any changes that would be of benefit should be brought in and considered and discussed.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I also just kind of want to add and just to kind of highlight what Rob's already said: the exceptional work that's been done by teachers over the last number of months to ensure that, to the extent that children wanted to participate in supplementary learning, there's just some exceptional stories and the teachers have just been remarkable.

And the collaboration between the STF, the SSBA, and the ministry in terms of what's being done at the response planning table has been exceptional work. Certainly having that thrust upon us, not really having a playbook, these guys wrote a pretty good playbook, you know, given the circumstances. And so we'll learn from that and we'll develop our playbook as we go forward so that when we get to the fall, with the work that's being done . . . And as I say, the collaboration has just been outstanding. And we've heard a lot of good things, but lots of lessons to learn. LEADS is also part of that, sorry.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Minister. And you'll have it on the record that you have my full agreement on that.

The second paragraph in the document notes that:

For younger children, maintaining physical distance is less practical and the focus should be on minimizing physical contact instead. The precautionary measures within these guidelines will be implemented to reduce risk . . . [standards, etc.]

Throughout this document there is an emphasis on younger children and the reduced risk. I'm wondering how you're defining younger children. What's the age cut-off that you're talking about there? There is a reason I'm asking.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Yes. There's really no age cut-off. I think one of the things that the chief medical health officer was giving some thought to is that, you know, children at a younger age are going to have a lot more difficulty understanding the concepts of physical distancing and those kinds of things. And so an emphasis on removing, you know, perhaps toys that children would play with that would pass around, and concentrate on some other things. So there's really no age limit that's kind of assigned to that.

It's really going to be dependent on, you know, a lot of younger children aren't going to understand why they can't hug their teacher or why they can't hug their classmate, right?

[16:45]

And so it's really just going to have to kind of play this out as we go forward. But there's really no . . . we really haven't set a time.

But there will be a point in time, I think, where children kind of understand the concepts of social distancing as they get to be a little bit older. And so as those concepts become more understandable, that's when that can change a little bit, I think.

Ms. Beck: — No, I appreciate that and certainly understand why that might be the case. I do wonder if the plan is predicated on the belief that younger children — you know, varying reports of what age, 8 and under, 10 and under — might be less symptomatic or have a reduced transmission of COVID-19. Is that a belief that underpins these guidelines?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I think that's really what the chief medical health officer has said.

Ms. Beck: — So for those who are over 15, which would be all of our staff and the majority of high school students, I don't know that there's any indication of that reduced risk of, well certainly not of transmission. And certainly a number of staff would be, you know, susceptible due to age or conditions. I'm wondering, I guess the first question would be, how many people over 15 do we have in our buildings — staff and students?

So when we're looking at social distancing, you know, limiting physical contact, I understand that for younger people that's going to be more difficult. But it does mention things like, "Wherever possible, physical distancing should be maintained." How is that going to happen in classrooms where we have 20, 30, 40, in one case 50 students? How does that happen?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I think the operative words there are "wherever possible." And the chief medical health officer hasn't indicated, I think, that the number of people in the classroom is necessarily a medical health risk, right? So we know that I can't answer the question as to how many children are 15 years or older. Presumably everyone in a high school is going to be over the age of 15 years old. I don't have those numbers. I suppose we could undertake to get them for you.

But by the same token, children over the age of 15 years old will understand the concept of minimizing contact, right? And so within schools — whether there's special pathways created, whether there's staggered entrances to the schools — those kinds of things will all be implemented to ensure that contact between individuals is minimized to the fullest extent possible. But the chief medical health officer certainly hasn't said that the number of children or people in a classroom is necessarily a medical health issue.

And given some of the restrictions that have recently taken place with regard to the ongoing restrictions, it certainly seems to indicate that that is less of a concern to him as we go forward and we continue to reopen the economy.

Ms. Beck: — My understanding . . . I mean, we sit in this building here where we have reduced the number of members to 15 from 61 due to concerns about our health and the health of those in the building. This obviously is much bigger than any classroom that you're going to find in the province, Minister. I mean, these are the concerns that are being brought forward by both parents and staff in schools, you know. If there is no risk of transmission, you know, on surfaces, in closed quarters where people are spending more than 15 minutes together in the same

room, I think that would be information that people would like to hear about.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Certainly the number of people now that are allowed under the medical health orders has significantly increased over the last little while. And so I think that to the extent that classrooms can be reconfigured to ensure that there is some modicum of distance between people in the classrooms, I think that that's something that school divisions will look to.

But again, in terms of the number of people that are allowed in any one particular place, the chief medical health officer hasn't said that come September that that's an issue. And so I think as long as he's suggesting that the number of children in a classroom isn't a health challenge, then I'm not sure, you know . . . We're certainly prepared to continue to follow the guidance that's given to them. I think if you have any specific questions with respect to the rationale or the reasoning behind the decisions that he's made, we're certainly willing to take those questions up with the chief medical health officer.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Well any of those that can't be answered here, I know that that would be appreciated. I note under limiting physical contact, there are a number of references to reducing the number of parents or encouraging parents not to attend schools, avoid activities that require clustering around a particular item or small area, procedures for entering the building, limiting pickups and drop-offs to one parent or guardian. And I quote:

Wherever possible, physical distancing should be maintained, even within the same group. Consider modifying room configurations (e.g. separating tables) to promote physical distancing.

What I'm hearing from those who know their classrooms very well that, you know — and I believe I've got the numbers right to quote, but there are many of them — I have 32 students in my classroom. I've done the math. And I think we've got a lot of teachers who have taken out the yardstick and, you know, to physically distance those students I would be able to, you know, perhaps have 12 of them in my classroom, depending on how big the classroom is.

So I guess what I'm asking, because it's not clear to me, is the expectation — especially if we're talking in high schools where almost everyone is over 15 — what is the expectation for distancing? I notice we still have to queue up in the cafeteria here at the legislature, six feet apart. Are there no such expectations for students and teachers in classrooms?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I think what the chief medical health officer intends, and I don't want to put any words in his mouth, is that to the extent that you can physically distance, that's something. And I think the guidelines speak to that. But certainly, just like any other workplace, there's been a number of initiatives or restrictions that have been relieved over the last number of . . . in fact some that were announced just recently where adults and children will be interacting — whether that's on the playground, whether that's in theatres, whether that's outdoor sports.

So by the time we get to September, certainly if things continue to progress the way they are, there will be a general return to normalcy in society. And so you'll see adults and children

interacting in areas like, well, theatres and malls and churches. And so I'm not sure that there is any different expectation with respect to schools, so to suggest that . . .

And I don't know where in the guidelines he said two metres. Certainly his view I think — and not to put words in his mouth again — that to the extent possible, we should socially distance. And I think that that's a good lesson for all of us to take in our daily lives.

But he's also said that he doesn't see the issue of class size to be a particular medical health challenge or a medical health issue, and so we will expect that children in classrooms will take the appropriate precautions, just like you and I will take in our everyday lives as we go forward.

But as we continue to open up the economy and continue to relieve ourselves of the restrictions, there will be a lot more, certainly, opportunities for people to interact with each other, with playgrounds, with spray parks. We know that children are going to be interacting with each other in those kinds of areas, and they'll continue to do that over the course of the summer. And so I'm not sure why we expect the classroom to be any different.

But to the extent that people can continue in their daily lives, whether that's in a classroom or whether that's at work, to respect appropriate social distancing, cleanliness, and those kinds of things, I think we can expect that. But as I've said, I don't think the chief medical health officer sees the number of kids in a classroom to be a health challenge.

Ms. Beck: — There's two things I want to say. One, the clarification I'm seeking is, is that because they are young children? And if so, then what do we do about those who are over 15 and the staff in the schools? The second, with regard to your example, Minister, you know, spray pads and parks, there are particular considerations with regard to the risk of transmission that come with being in close proximity with shared surfaces in a confined space for a period of time. And those are the concerns that being brought forward.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well you know, I won't repeat the last answer that I gave, but an example of kids now being able to engage in contact sports, for instance, where they will be in close proximity with each other and they will be . . . So those are good examples.

And I think to the extent we're going to be returning to as close a normal situation as possible, I think that's what the chief medical health officer has indicated. And to the fullest extent possible, we should continue to respect some of the social distancing rules, and as he said in his guidelines, to the extent possible. And so we will expect schools and school divisions to implement those kinds of protocols that will do that.

But again, I think that he's indicating that the number of children in a classroom is a particular issue. Now it may well be that by the time we get to September, that may well change. So currently, I think, just to rely on the guidelines of the chief medical health officer, who has given us excellent guidance over the last number of months. I think you'll agree. I'm not prepared to second-guess the suggestions that he's made in those guidelines.

Ms. Beck: — I wasn't asking to second-guess, Minister. It was just a clarification on the assumptions and, again, was it specific to young children and what happens? I will move on. Again, I'm still under "Limiting physical contact." I believe I'm on the third page, second bullet point:

Groups of students and the staff members assigned to them should stay together throughout the day and not mix with other groups. Staff should remain with the same group whenever possible. Strive to minimize the number of different teachers and educational assistants that interact with groups of students throughout the day.

Of course this provides some difficulty for specialist teachers within elementary schools or pod teaching or group teaching, which we have embraced. But it becomes very, very difficult when we look at high school and the changing of, you know, specialist teachers, subject area. Different groups of students move, you know, by the bell. They have five minutes to get to the next room.

How does that work with the specialist teachers? How does that work with group teaching? And how does that work in high schools?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'll let Deputy Minister Currie speak about that from the response planning team perspective.

Mr. Currie: — From the response planning team perspective, we've engaged with our school divisions on this one, on this topic here, and we recognize that there are changes afoot. And as a result of that . . . Thank you for the reference with high school, and that has been a discussion point from the response planning team. So our school divisions are putting an effort and energy into planning for, as it says here in the guideline, "strive to minimize." So if there are efforts and energies that can make the minimizing of interaction and the exchange . . . if we can minimize that, all the better.

So we have had that conversation with the school divisions when they've asked about this, as well as the RPT [response planning team] to just say, we are looking. . . Yes, we have existing structures to which we're all familiar and we are looking for ways to strive to change that to ensure safety. What might that look like in your site? And it's been encouraging in seeing the glass . . . as we have to. It's been encouraging. That said, you know, in March, we didn't envision all 180,000-plus students of our province working remotely. That wasn't even in our paradigm.

So when we go into this respective planning as we understand it and know it to be, there are challenges. What ways can we strive to overcome those challenges and have the instruction happen? We appreciate and know that there are some students who will be working through their online options, and there may be other areas within the school facility or setting that might be accessible then, given the size of a class. But we are looking for the school divisions, as well as you've referenced the high schools there, to strive to . . . how can we minimize that exchange? And we're working through with our school divisions right now to see how that can be evidenced.

The Chair: — It now being 5 o'clock, we'll recess for one hour, resuming at 6 o'clock. Thank you.

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

The Chair: — Welcome back, everyone. We'll now resume consideration of estimates and supplementary estimates for the Ministry of Education. Ms. Beck.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you again to the minister and officials. We'll pick right up again, I think, where we left off.

I do have one question that I'd like to ask about capacity within schools. I know last year there was a report that was made public that noted that there were 70 schools in Saskatchewan that were at 100 per cent capacity, and I believe that 20 of those were 120 per cent capacity. I wonder if the minister can provide an update with regard to where we're at with capacity within schools.

[18:00]

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We have 78 schools that are over 100 per cent. There is 12 that are over 120 per cent; 2 of those are being addressed through this year's capital plan. And any school division over 120 — save for the two that we're addressing with new facilities — over 120 that have asked for portables, we're addressing those too, with portables.

In a number of the schools over 100 per cent capacity, of that, 78 are being addressed through our capital plan that we've addressed this year.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm relying on my memory here. Were there 10 portables allocated in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There are 15 portables that are being provided through the budget, plus another 10 that are provided as a result of, through the P3 [public-private partnership] schools. So 25 altogether.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. How many were requested, Minister Wyant?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — 88.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Can I request a list of those portables that were allocated? And I'm also curious as to when those portables might be in place and operational.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — You want a list of the portables that have been requested?

Ms. Beck: — Requested and allocated.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Sure.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'll get that to you. What was your second question?

Ms. Beck: — When they are expected to be in place and operational.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Because of the advance that we provided to school divisions last year, those portables will be available for

the fall.

Ms. Beck: — And that's a change in practice. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That's right.

Ms. Beck: — Yes, okay. That was a big change.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Certainly if they wait for the budget, there isn't enough time to have the portables ready for the school year. So it was a change of policy which has been very helpful for school divisions.

Ms. Beck: — It has been. With those additional portables, when you increase capacity by adding portables, it's my understanding that that doesn't come with additional sinks or washrooms. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That's correct.

Ms. Beck: — One other piece, before I get back to the guidelines that I wanted to request an update on, and that is the education sector staffing profile. Do you want me to go line by line for updates, or are you able to table the most recent . . . or projections for the fall? I think the one I have in front of me here is from November. I'm not sure if that's assembled in November.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I understand the one that you have is the most recent.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. The one I'm looking at I pulled from an old Estimates. This one is from 2017.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'm sure there's another one. We can undertake to provide that to you.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. I'm going to return to the guidelines again on page 3, about halfway down, still under limiting physical contact. "Modifications may be needed for all shared spaces, including boot rooms, hallways, waiting areas . . . [looking at] visual cues and direction flow plans." I'm wondering if there are any particular challenges that are presented by the open-concept schools with regard to the open areas. I know that we have schools, particularly the P3 schools that, you know, have a number of shared spaces, shared water fountains, etc. Can you speak to some of the challenges that you've heard with regard to maintaining physical distancing in those spaces and what modifications might be made?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I'll ask Deputy Minister Currie to answer that, given his consultation and his leadership at the response planning team.

Mr. Currie: — Thanks, Minister. So in terms of this, presently our school divisions are spending some time working on what, if any, modifications would be required. Again to address the shared spaces, there are visual cues that are being considered, looking into how the traffic flow, as you will have it, will go through certain spaces. What's the existing furniture set-up? That may or may not need addressing or changing.

And so the context here is, in your existing space as you know it to be set up, do you need to encounter changes much like to

address whether it be the number of people in that space or the subject area or the activity that's taking place in that space? So this was released last Thursday, so this has now given the school divisions time to spend some time to look at it to say, given what we have, will it address our projected needs in the fall? And if so, fine. If not, what changes may be required?

Ms. Beck: — Thinking specifically of some of the shared areas and the flexible or soft seating, you know, where you might have a pod of classrooms that would all share that space and would be using the same chairs and tables, etc., would that utilization be limited? Or would it require additional cleaning and disinfecting and supervision, I guess, as well because often those are new breakout spaces for students?

Mr. Currie: — I think there are a host of considerations there with regards to the material that's in there, whether it be the furniture or plants, that type of thing, to decorate. And as is expressed throughout the guidelines here for the institutional learning environment where one is to take into account, how can we minimize touch points, high-frequency contact areas, allow for space so that the students and the staff can move about in a manner that would be enabling to them to facilitate the instruction, as well as outline the cleaning and the sanitization considerations going forward, given what space they have there.

So again that's where the response planning team is looking at. Since this has been released, school divisions are spending their time to address the realities of the space that they have, the realities that students are coming back. We are also looking to . . . They are taking into account . . . The response planning team, working with the school divisions, is limiting the amount of equipment or furniture or product that's in there that would serve as touch points for the students or the staff.

So that's where they're going to do I'll say a facility assessment to indicate whether or not they have to indeed make changes.

Ms. Beck: — I guess what I'm trying to get a sense of, you know, in terms of the physical spacing and the disinfecting, is how much this is going to impact the delivery, teaching methods, you know. We've sort of been encouraging group collaboration, small group breakouts, team teaching, you know, configuring schools within an early years pod and a middle years and an older years pod. How does that impact if we're having to, you know, keep cohorts together? How does it impact that model of teaching that we've been encouraging?

Mr. Currie: — Thank you for the question. The planning that's taking place right now will help to address those questions site-specific. So school divisions . . . And I know in our response planning team, while we have representation from the SSBA, STF, SASBO, and LEADS as well as the ministry, we have had significant commentary to enable and ensure that there is local consideration given to how one will respond to COVID in the fall. And so that's where the strength, I believe, of what's being shared here will be realized so that the site-based considerations will determine how they will respond to it and how they will structure themselves, as well as enabling instruction to still be — on a continued basis — safe.

[18:15]

So we see that that process is taking place right now. We will have school divisions who are going to be providing to the ministry their plans, their learning plans and how they will address these aspects, and that will be provided to the ministry and kind of as an ongoing how they would be working with their respective situations to ensure that a safe learning environment is provided.

Ms. Beck: — And when are you expecting those plans to be submitted from school divisions?

Mr. Currie: — As part of the learning, the return to school in the fall structure that had been provided, we were looking at those plans to be provided in what I would say in a draft form, appreciating that over the summer there may be changes, by the end of June. Because we know that the good people working on school boards are wanting to understand, as we know the situation to be right now, what would it look like in the fall when we return, knowing what we know now. And then some planning, allow some flexibility to address whatever evolves over the summer months.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. To date have you had any indication from any of the partners on the planning team, having had a chance to both contribute to and look at the guidelines, any indication of some of the challenges that they've identified that need to be worked out over the summer?

Mr. Currie: — I think that what we've had is perspectives of the members here, and I'm not citing any one individual representative group. But there was significant voice placed to ensure that there's the local opportunity to address the learning needs, as opposed to a sweeping "this is how we'll do it provincially." So there was significant voice made sure that how we will address that locally.

We've also had . . . All members of the response planning team spoke to, we want to ensure staff and student safety. And so we were looking at continuing to journey with the school divisions as they develop their plans for return in the fall. What would that look like? And so while there was no specific "this is how it will be done," there was a unified voice in terms of ensuring that we will address student and staff safety when the students return in the fall.

I would say the challenges or the opportunities presenting themselves are, again, focusing our approaches on what we've learned here over the last three and a half months. What we thought might never have been possible in terms of the remote learning, became possible. And so I'm hearkened by the membership of the response planning team saying, here might be something. How do we wrap our heads around this and how do we address it?

And so again, going back to the school divisions who are spending some time in making sure they can address this in a way that attends to their local needs, that's one thing. So number one, safety using the existing structures and facilities that we have in addressing the learning needs that we have of our students, as well as providing for all students regardless of where they are in the province.

Ms. Beck: — Did you hear any specific concerns with regard to

the ability to maintain physical distancing in schools? Was that a concern that was noted?

Mr. Currie: — Yes, when it was 2 metres. The concern was how would it be addressed if there was 2 metres distance to be maintained between all people in a building. And that was one such concern. Not unattainable, but it was considered a challenge.

So that's where I think that the school divisions are now working on the reality of planning for two and a half months from now. When we've minimized the distance between students and staff, how can we make that work? So that was one of those realities of, as the province opens up, as our phases are realized, how can we address that down the road given that the reopening of Saskatchewan will have taken place, leading up two and a half months from now? So that was one of the realities. And if that were in place . . . Or other aspects of having a sweeping approach from a provincial perspective rather than the local attending to the unique needs of that local community.

Ms. Beck: — A couple of questions stemming from that. The expectations then for limiting physical contact or social distancing, if not based on 2 metres, what are these guidelines based on? Are there still significant noting of maintaining physical distancing and limiting physical contact? What distance are we looking at then for the reopening in the fall?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — What you've heard the chief medical health officer say is, kind of use your kind of common sense when it comes to this kind of thing, right? He hasn't, as I mentioned before, dictated that sizes of classrooms need to be adjusted, but that everyone, including not just students and teachers that are attending school, but all of us, should exercise some diligence when it comes to contact, when it comes to distancing. And so to the extent possible within these guidelines, I think that's what the chief medical health officer has said.

Ms. Beck: — So is there . . . I mean I guess, Minister, I'll ask the question: if not 2 metres, what is the distancing requirement that we're talking about for the fall?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I don't think . . . It's pretty clear that the chief medical health officer hasn't set out a distance, I think. He said that we need to be as reasonable as possible, given the circumstances. And given the fact that he's acknowledged that children will be in close proximity to each other, he hasn't set a distance. There's no yardstick for this. I think people just need to be exercising some common sense when it comes to this.

And that's one of things that he's identified, that children, younger children are going to have some more difficulty doing that than older children. But certainly when it comes to high school students, there's certainly nothing in the guidelines that have said there will be 2 metres or there will be any distance at all. That people should just exercise some common sense when it comes to ensuring that there is some distance.

I mean there are a number of people around, health professionals, who have said that that's not going to be an issue. And the chief medical health officer has said that as well.

Ms. Beck: — Sorry. What's not going to be an issue?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well the fact that there's no set distance in terms of distancing within the schools. Everybody will be expected to exercise some common sense when it comes to that.

Ms. Beck: — I expect that there are different, you know, interpretations of what common sense entails. I'm wondering how, you know, a teacher in front of 30 or 40 students, what does common sense look like in that situation where you've got, you know, the 30, 40 15-, 17-year-olds in a classroom and a teacher who's worried about, you know, their exposure? Or perhaps they have immunocompromised folks at home. What does common sense look like in that situation?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — So I think the answer to the question is that there should be social distancing, or distancing wherever that's possible. And so I think that's what the guidelines say. That's certainly consistent with what a number of other jurisdictions have said in terms of how classrooms and how schools will be configured in the fall.

Ms. Beck: — So why social distancing when it's possible?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I mean, the chief medical health officer, that's what he said: "wherever possible." And in certain situations that's going to be a little bit more difficult than in other circumstances.

But I think that in terms of what the chief medical health officer has said, he has provided some guidelines and those guidelines are pretty clear and they are consistent with a number of other jurisdictions and I would point you to British Columbia and Alberta. The guidelines that came down from SickKids last week were similar in terms of what those guidelines were. And so these are guidelines to enable school divisions to be able to provide learning in their classrooms and so we rely on the response planning team and the school divisions to employ these guidelines. And in terms of distancing to the greatest extent possible, sometimes that will be more difficult than in other circumstances.

But he certainly hasn't indicated that the number of children or people in a classroom is a public health issue for him. So to the greatest extent possible. I think these guidelines are very flexible. We expect school divisions to work with these guidelines in consultation with the response planning team.

But if you're asking me to say well, it's got to be X number of feet, I'm not going to say that. Because the medical health officer has said to the greatest extent possible we should try to distance ourselves. And that's the same guideline that he's given . . .

Ms. Beck: — And so in those instances where we're not able to maintain that distance or a certain distance, then we are increasing risk. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well those are the questions that you'll have to ask the chief medical health officer. I mean he has indicated that from his perspective that there is no significant risk to children going back to school in a normal way in the fall. To the extent that we can impose and use these guidelines to help reduce the risk for children and adults and teachers in the classroom, we should employ those guidelines.

Ms. Beck: — Is there reasonably an increased risk to staff with these guidelines?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well I'm not a medical professional. I think that question is properly put to the chief medical health officer. So I'm not in a position to be able to answer that. Certainly willing to ask the chief medical health officer's opinion on that.

Ms. Beck: — You mentioned, Minister, the SickKids report, and you know, there have been varying critiques and implementation of some of those recommendations that very reasonably focused on the mental health of children. And I'm not here to debate that fact. I think that, you know, there is a lot of benefit to children returning to normal classes as much as possible in the fall. You know I share those concerns. What I'm attempting here is, you know, to bring the concerns forward that I have heard from those who will be moving back into those classrooms in the fall.

Taking those same guidelines, the SickKids guidelines, Ontario, again citing that report, has indicated that they will be returning in the fall, but with significantly reduced class sizes. Again, you know, to cover the same territory, Alberta has indicated an option for lower class sizes, as has BC [British Columbia]. I'm going to ask one more time. Was there consideration, or if not, why not, of reducing class sizes?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well again these are the guidelines that are provided to us by the chief medical health officer. Any change or the implementation of those guidelines will be done by school divisions in conjunction with the work that's been done by the response planning team. And I think Deputy Minister Currie addressed that quite well earlier on in his comments, that there will be . . . To the extent that things need to change as a result of a change in circumstances, those will be things that the response planning team will address. So I think Deputy Minister Currie's answered that question quite well.

Ms. Beck: — If there is a school division that perhaps because they have a number of overcrowded schools or because they have had, you know, increased or continuing community transmission in their area, and they decide that they want to reduce class sizes and presumably they would need to hire additional staff, what are their options there? Where are they going to find the funding to do that?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well first of all, we will continue to take our advice from the chief medical health officer, and I think that he's addressed these points in terms of how localized increase in infection rates will be dealt with. But again, the resource planning team will be planning for those contingencies.

And I've said on a number of occasions, given the fact that school divisions have saved significant money over the last number of months, given the fact that the government has a significant contingency fund to deal with COVID-19, the implications of COVID-19 across executive government, I think that what I've said is that nothing associated with COVID-19 — and we've said this publicly — is going to affect our ability to deliver equitable education to children across Saskatchewan.

[18:30]

Ms. Beck: — Okay. Minister, but also with regard to the savings

that . . . We've canvassed this. School boards won't be able to use those for ongoing costs such as additional staff.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — No. What we said was that we were encouraging school divisions not to use that money in the interim. What happens in the fall is something that we're going to have to address. And I've said that we will be working with school divisions to address any additional concerns and any additional costs that are occasioned by returning to school that the effects of COVID-19 would have an adverse effect on. We'd certainly work with school divisions.

Again, our primary concern is to ensure that students and teachers in classrooms, other professionals, and adults in classrooms in schools are as safe as possible having regard to the guidelines. And I've also said that we don't want to . . . We want to ensure that the educational opportunities provided to children in the classroom aren't adversely impaired by the effects of COVID-19. We made arrangements in the budget to accommodate that.

Ms. Beck: — Minister, you mentioned equitable education and delivery of equitable education. I'm going to flip to the last bullet, or second-last, sorry, while it's top of mind.

With regard to students with intensive needs, before I get into the particular guidelines here, you know, just establishing I think this is something that we can all agree on. The experience that students will have had over the last number of months will have varied greatly from family to family, child to child, based on their needs, their ability to engage with technology, or whether they had a parent at home or how engaged that parent is, what else was going on in their home

So reasonably, and I know that even in, you know, a typical year — and we can all agree this is not one of those — you have a summer slide or you have, you know, those students for whom the gap grows between their learning and that of their peers. Given all of that, are there additional resources allocated to help with that additional assessment that is going to be required in the fall? I mean, you're going to have students at all different levels, even more than usual. Is that allocated in this budget, and who's going to be doing the additional assessments?

Mr. Currie: — When preparing for the fall, we do appreciate that the supplemental learning over these last three months has been significantly different than the regular classroom experience. But I do applaud the staff who have made the supplemental learning option work. I do applaud the . . . As the minister stated earlier, you know, in April we had about an 85 per cent student engagement who chose to continue working on that. The lessons-learned workshop that we just had just over a week ago spoke to some of the successes and some of the challenges that were experienced.

When we move into the fall, we find that all 180,000 students in our province are in the same situation in terms of supplemental learning was part of their learning structure as of in March, that everybody was thrust into this new environment, as it were. So when we're addressing the fall, there will be opportunities for staff members to work with their individual students to understand where they are on their learning journey. So classroom teachers will be in the best position to help work with

the students, to help them understand, help the teachers understand where in fact they are and address the learning structure for them, based on where they are.

And that's similar to any other day or year in a school year calendar. When we have students transition, transfer, or start a school year, we have these teacher assessments take place to find out where in fact the students are in their learning journey. And then they construct a learning environment for them to address the needs, take them where they are, move them to where they can be in the time that they have them there. So there will be, one can anticipate that there will be more focus on that assessment in the fall: where in fact the students are, how do they respond to where those students are.

And it's, as I was sharing with the minister just a few days ago, is teachers in what I would call a regular school year do ongoing assessments of students on a regular basis. So I would see the same taking place there. And as situations present themselves for need or benefit or instructional practices, that the people within our respective school divisions would be looking to provide that and would be utilizing their respective resources to address where the needs of the students are.

If there are additional resources required, I think, as the minister has mentioned there, then that would be made known at that time, and then there would be a response to that. But we would see the ongoing assessments that are part of an everyday practice of our good people in the classrooms continuing to help understand where in fact the students are and how we can work with their position at that time and help them grow in terms of their learning opportunities.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. Minister, you don't anticipate any additional tasks or costs associated with that? You have students who have had three months . . . You know, some will have done all of their assignments and done supplemental learning in this time, and a number will have, you know, simply not engaged with the curriculum at all.

Some of these are, you know . . . I think of math classes, but a number of other classes that build one on the other in terms of skills. I'm hearing concerns from teachers that, you know, this is going to take a great deal of time and effort just to assess and get those students back up to where they need to be to take on the tasks, the curriculum of the next grade.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well as I've said before, we'll certainly work with school divisions to determine what resources are required, and as Deputy Minister Currie noted, teachers do ongoing evaluations of their students. But we accept the fact that there will be some students who aren't at a place where they can continue without perhaps some additional help. But we'll need to assess that and we will be doing that in conjunction with the school divisions and through the ministry.

Ms. Beck: — If it's assessed that a significant number of, let's say, high school math students, you know, moving from 20 to 30, need additional supports within a school division, are there additional supports for those classes, or where does that get made up?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We will work with school divisions to

determine what those additional needs may be.

Ms. Beck: — Going back to students with intensive needs, I'm going to quote a couple of places here: "Students with additional needs may require updated assessments and revised individual . . . [planning]."

So that's one piece. The other, and I've had a number of parents who have, you know, approached me with questions and concerns about this, of course the personal interactions, conditions for a safe and secure environment which may include the school setting or another appropriate setting. Can you describe what's on the list of options there for other appropriate spaces for students with intensive needs?

Mr. Currie: — So again we come back to the safety component of any resumption of education in the fall. And so we have our continuation of our very good teachers who are capable of assessing where students are and addressing where there are gaps and if we utilize differentiated instruction. And so what we are looking at — is there, I come back to, a safe environment. And so if there are opportunities to provide the safe learning environment in the school setting, that that would take place.

If for some reason that hypothetically the student presented something in terms of an autoimmune system or something that prevented them, for their safety, to be in that environment, then our school divisions would be looking at alternative measures to provide for them. And that might not be in what we would consider to be the classroom that we've known. It may be somewhere else. But that's where the response planning team spoke of having the local autonomy, the local ability to address the unique needs that students or staff will present in terms of providing a learning environment for the students.

Ms. Beck: — So just so I'm clear, so when we're talking about students with intensive needs, we're talking about students with compromised immune systems or who might be at an increased susceptibility? Or are we talking about what we more traditionally talk about as students with intensive needs, behavioural issues and such?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The conversations that are being had are children who are immune compromised, who would have some issues returning to the classroom. So that's generally the cohort of students who we're having conversations about.

Ms. Beck: — So this doesn't include other kids or students that have intensive needs. This includes only those who are immunocompromised.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That's generally the cohort of students. There may be the other individual situations that we'll address on an individual basis with particular school divisions. But generally when we talk about that cohort, it's children who are immune compromised.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. The reason I ask, Minister, is this last line, the last bullet point, "It may not be possible to support all students with intensive needs in-person due to health and safety guidelines" is causing, as you might imagine, some uncertainty and concern for parents and students. Just one more time. That refers only to students who are immunocompromised or . . .

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — So when we talk about children with intensive needs, certainly that's not restricted to children who have autoimmune disorders or who are otherwise compromised. The number of children who are in that group who need intensive needs certainly is broader than that.

I guess in terms of what I said before, this is generally to deal with children who are immunocompromised. But that doesn't exclude anyone else that has intensive needs, if there is a requirement or a decision that's made that those children would need some other kind of support, whether that's online learning or whether that's some other facility being able to provide for them.

So I'm not saying that it's restricted to that, but certainly when we talk about parents who have concerns about their children returning to school because they're immunocompromised, that's what we . . . But it's not restricted to that.

So there may be other situations where parents of children who will require intensive needs may require a different delivery model, and we're not saying that they are excluded from that. But really, generally speaking, when we think about delivering an alternative delivery model for kids who are immunocompromised, we talk about that in the context of COVID-19. But that's not to say that other children who require intensive supports wouldn't be provided the equal opportunity if that was something that was necessarily required.

Ms. Beck: — So I think this is an important point and as I said, there's a great deal of anxiety, I guess, about this particular bullet point. What would the other health and safety guidelines or issues be that would preclude someone from being in person, a student from being in person, in the fall?

[18:45]

Mr. Currie: — As we're preparing for the fall, I think this statement here speaks to there are situations where, given our best planning and best approaches, there may be a situation where we are unable to safely, again according to the chief medical health officer's guidance, provide for those students. One being we have some medically fragile students in our respective school divisions who are supported by our school divisions. Again I come back to the health and well-being. If there's a safety component, then that's something that is taken into account when our school divisions are doing their respective planning.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I think I'll just add to that. The intent of the guidelines and the work that's being done by the response planning team is to see children return to school in as most normal a way as possible. That's the goal. The goal is to see children full time in classrooms this fall. Will there need to be some accommodations made for some children? You bet. And that's the work that's going to be done by the response planning team in conjunction with school divisions to make sure that all children in Saskatchewan have access to the educational opportunities that they deserve.

But the bottom line here is that we want children to be safe. We want teachers to be safe. We want adults in the school to be safe. But we also want to ensure that to the greatest extent possible this

becomes as normal a situation as possible.

Ms. Beck: — So I'm going to state the concerns as plainly as I can, Minister. The concern is — that I have heard from parents — if my child has difficulty maintaining social distancing or perhaps has behavioural issues, is my school division going to tell me in the fall that I cannot bring my child to school because of health and safety guidelines? Because if that is the case, you know, this presents a great deal of upheaval in these parents' lives.

Mr. Currie: — Fully appreciate that at this point in time there's an element of anxiety and concern and at the same time there's an element of hope that school is resuming in the fall. So right now we have our school divisions who are committed, as well as our other education sector partners, to working collaboratively and finding a method and an approach that will enable us to meet the needs of students.

And so for parents that are concerned, you know, after the last three months I can appreciate why they are concerned. The same people that created a safe learning environment before the pandemic was here, we are hearkened by them putting their energies and efforts and resources into creating a safe learning environment when we start again in the fall.

And so I would ask that the parents stay in contact with their respective school divisions to continue to listen. As the minister has expressed, the same people, education sector partners that created these safe learning environments before we approached the pandemic and had that thrust upon us, will work to create the same safe learning environment given what's been presented to them in ways that may not have been thought of before, but through our lessons learned have come up with ideas and will resource as best they can an opportunity to provide for those learning situations for our students.

Because at the end of the day I think, as our chief medical health officer has stated and spoken to, and the minister as well, is that the resumption of . . . for the safety and the well-being of our students, families, and staff is returning to a sense of normal. And that sense of normal will be collectively the group coming together and constructing what that normal will look like in a way that addresses all 180,000-plus students of our province.

Ms. Beck: — So who should these parents contact, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well parents should be in contact with their local schools. Certainly school divisions will be giving some guidance, and as I said, we have seen some very good work being done by the response planning team. But the educational services are provided by the schools and so if parents have particular issues, they could certainly discuss that with their local principal.

And again we want to ensure that we're delivering the finest quality education to the children of this province in the safest way possible. We want children to go back to school in as normal a situation as possible. But we understand that there will be parents that have concerns, and we expect school divisions and schools to address those concerns with the support of the ministry.

Ms. Beck: — Will there be students in the fall who are told that they cannot return to regular classrooms, that they will have to

. . . that it's not possible for them to attend in person, aside from those who are medically fragile and immunocompromised?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The only children which will be prevented or who will be encouraged not to go to school are children who are sick. We expect them to stay home. If they present any health issues, colds and that kind of thing, we want to make sure . . . which is something they should do anyway. But there will be no children that are prevented from going to school in the fall.

Ms. Beck: — So I'm going to follow up on something you just said, Minister, and that is expectations with regard to either students or staff who are experiencing symptoms. Right now, as far as I understand, the expectation is that if someone believes they have been in contact or has reasons to self-isolate or they're showing symptoms, temperature, cough, sore throat, that they are to phone the 811 line and go have a test.

One of the concerns that I've heard, and this has been fairly consistent right across the province, is what that's going to mean for additional sub costs within the system. Has that been a concern that has been raised, and what plans are in place to address that?

I should clarify, both costs and availability of subs.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I can't speak to the availability of substitute teachers. That's something that's within the purview of the local school divisions. But what I can do is repeat the comments that I had said before, that we want to make sure that children . . . There will be some additional costs. We know that. Perhaps with respect to subs. We don't know that. We don't know that yet. But there are resources that will be made available to ensure that any additional costs are dealt with, whether that's savings within the school division, whether that's the contingency money in the budget which has been provided for.

So we really don't know what those costs will be. So the question of whether or not . . . It's difficult to budget for something that you don't know, but we don't know what those costs will be or whether or not there will be any additional costs. We know that when teachers are sick they stay home, and we expect that to continue, whether they're presenting symptoms of COVID-19 or any other symptoms or colds or flu, just like they would in any other school year. So I can't tell you whether we're expecting an increase in the amount of teachers that are going to be calling in sick. I just don't know the answer to that.

Ms. Beck: — So just so I have this clearly then, Minister, if school divisions are experiencing increased sub costs, that's something that they can go to the contingency fund to backfill? Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well we'll look to see what the capacity of school divisions are. There are budgets within school divisions to deal with substitute teachers, so that's the first line of defence. The savings that the school divisions have, that have been occasioned to school divisions as a result of what's happened over the last three months, is available to school divisions as well. And again we have a contingency fund within the budget this year to address the effects of COVID-19 that can't be otherwise covered. But school divisions do have budgets to deal with sub costs. And so that would be their first line of defence, obviously.

Ms. Beck: — They do. I don't know that there's a great excess in their sub budgets. And the availability of subs has been raised with me by several different folks as a concern. And then of course we have some school divisions in the province, Minister, that have chronic problems with hiring enough staff as it is. Unfortunately some of those school divisions also happen to be coterminous with areas that have currently, and I guess none of us knows what's going to happen in the fall, significant community transmission.

Are there any plans in place for those school divisions that already struggle with recruiting teachers, which is, I mean, difficult in a normal year? It's going to be even more difficult to recruit teachers from out of province. Are there plans in place to help those school divisions?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well we know that and we'll just draw your attention . . . and you're aware of the challenges that we've had over the last number of years with the Northern Lights School Division in terms of recruiting teachers. We have had a conversation between me and the deputy minister in terms of how that could be well exacerbated this year as a result of some of the challenges. You know that the deputy minister had been working with Northern Lights School Division on some opportunities to backfill over the last number of, well the last couple of years. Perhaps I'll just ask the deputy minister to make a comment on that. But certainly it's going to be a challenge.

Mr. Currie: — Thank you. As already been referenced, there may be that aspect, but there are some opportunities that have been realized here over the last couple of years too. When there are, and if there are, shortages, they're made known to other school divisions so that if there are teachers who are interested in being mobile, there are opportunities elsewhere within the province for them to consider employment and an opportunity to teach.

We also have Advanced Education and Education working together on helping to realize the teacher education programs. There are a couple of teacher education programs that have been evident over the last number of years. One is the Dene teacher education program, and I think quite successfully had 20-some graduates here just this spring who will be assuming teacher positions in the fall. And so we see the teacher education programs with our post-secondary partners are instrumental in helping people move forward in providing not only job opportunities for them but also, very importantly, connections with the community and instructional opportunities as well.

We remain connected with any school divisions that are having staffing challenges and we look for opportunities that we might engage in other ways that might address their challenges that they face. And so each year there may be a few challenges that are presented that way, but as an education sector, I'm pleased to indicate that we do have that continued conversation, not only with the ministry of which we are made aware, but then also other partners within the education sector to say, how can we address, how can we support?

And I'm quite pleased that we have the work with Advanced Education as well as our post-secondary institutions to come together to create teacher education programs that will be a valuable support for many of our northern school divisions.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. It was indicated that you work with the division in identifying ways that you can support them. What ways have they indicated that they would like support with regard to the staffing challenges that they have faced, and will most likely and most certainly face in the fall?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — One of the challenges that we've seen and we've tried to address is one of housing. And we've been working to help do that. The deputy minister can provide some details on how we're doing that up in La Loche to ensure that there are more teacherages for teachers. That's certainly one of the challenges, and a number of other things, but I'll let Deputy Minister Currie just kind of continue on that.

Mr. Currie: — We have most recently realized that teacherages . . . and there are some new units that have been approved here within the last year up in La Loche specifically to address the challenges faced by Northern Lights School Division, and we see great benefits being realized as a result of helping with the teacherages.

[19:00]

As well we also have ongoing conversations with our other jurisdictions across Canada. So we have other provinces and territories with whom we have regular meetings to indicate where our challenges are, where our needs are, where our opportunities lie for other educators from across this country who will come to Saskatchewan. And when they do, we have evidence that a number of our professionals, education professionals from across the country have come into our northern communities and served wonderfully.

And so we continue to look and listen, and this was one such recommendation that came out of our conversations with the Northern Lights School Division in terms of teacherages. How can we support and enable the recruitment and retention? And that was one such means that we were able to support.

Ms. Beck: — “Limiting shared materials and equipment,” moving back to the guidelines. “Strategically limiting the number of touch points per day on electronic devices.” Common practice in a lot of schools is to have a cart of laptops that moves from room to room to room. What does that look like in the fall?

Mr. Currie: — The planning is taking place at the moment right now. High-touch points that are identified in operations planning would be addressed in terms of how do we . . . Number one, we identify. Number two, we look at ways to clean and minimize contact, as it were. And so that's where our school divisions are presently in that situation of reviewing what that might entail. As well as again, the response planning team is itemizing an awareness, I'll call it, in terms of have your local focus on what within your school are high-touch points, and come up with an opportunity to plan on how you are going to address those.

Ms. Beck: — Another note here, “Classroom activities and recess times should not include equipment that might be touched by multiple students.” Is that a restriction on playgrounds, or what is being prescribed in that guideline?

Mr. Currie: — In our Re-Open Saskatchewan right now, phase 4, second part, there is a wonderful example of how we are going

to continue to open up playgrounds, sporting activities. And there are methodologies and constructs put in there so that there are, whether it be playing a certain sport like tennis or playing softball, as how one would approach minimizing contact of the equipment. So it's the same thing here that comes into play, where we ask that our school divisions in their planning now, in this phase 4, second part, as we know life to be right now, plan for how you would address that.

Our intent is that again, we will know more as we approach into the month of August, what school will look like. But I give our school divisions credit for wrapping their heads around, given the parameters outlined here in these guidelines, how we would do that given the Re-Open Saskatchewan phases that have been taking place. We see that there are changes happening so often and so, as I've mentioned, some of those sport activities that are taking place right now have guidelines that are speaking and address these high-touch point areas or how to do the activity with minimizing the touch point activities.

Ms. Beck: — So yes or no, to play equipment in the fall?

Mr. Currie: — Again we based it on what we have right now and what we have here right now, the planning for it. And there could be . . .

Ms. Beck: — Okay. So right now in the community, it's the expectation there's no liability assumed because, you know, parents are to be cleaning it themselves if children are using play equipment. I guess if they are using play equipment, who's going to be . . . and how are those pieces of play equipment going to be disinfected?

Mr. Currie: — Again, that would be part of our general planning right now as to how would we address that, entertain that, and enable the play equipment to be available, provided, or you know . . . I'm appreciating that school divisions will look at opportunities before them and enabling the students to play and what would that look like given the parameters that we have in place right now, but understanding that we may have parameters that will evolve over the summer months too. So there are options of what does the school provide, as is indicated here, or what do students provide.

Ms. Beck: — With regard to sanitizing playground equipment, what they're providing? You lost me there.

Mr. Currie: — I give the example right now, if one is going to play tennis, according to the rules that we have, the provincial sport organization says one can play tennis as long as you bring your own tennis balls and you are utilizing, you are only touching your tennis balls that you bring, and each participant has theirs.

So when we look at schools, there may be ways that they organize structures in the free time, so to speak, or the recess time where children are bringing their equipment if they are in the same situation that we are in right now. But again, we're two and a half months out from that. That could be significantly different too, at that time.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I think it's fair to note that as Deputy Minister Currie has said, things have changed since the release of these guidelines. We're now allowing team sports and so

things like extracurricular activities like football and those kinds of things are now allowed. And so it's fair to say that these guidelines will continue to evolve based on the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Ms. Beck: — I hadn't anticipated students bringing their own equipment. I guess immediately my concern would be, you know, the inequity inherent in that. But okay, we don't know where we're going to be in the fall with that and we don't know who's going to be doing the sanitizing.

Something that just occurred to me when I was thinking about, you know, the statements that have been made by municipalities about the parent assuming risk for playground equipment. Have we canvassed, you know, liability at all in terms of this pandemic and what that looks like for schools and what pressures they're going to be under there? Has that been part of the planning?

Mr. Currie: — As part of the conversation for response planning team, yes. Again we come back to the safety of students and staff at all times. And so there's been a very much concerted effort in all of our conversations of ensuring that we do absolutely our utmost to ensure a safe learning environment and as such, use of the word "liability" is that everybody wants to make sure that we'll be witnessed as providing as much as they can in terms of safety and actually following through as much as they can in terms of safety.

So again they come back to following the orders and the direction of the chief medical health officer. And what that looks like is such that the word "liability" was used there. I think there's more of a specific focus and assurance on, we will do all that we possibly can to ensure that students and staff will be in a safe, as much as possible, learning environment.

Ms. Beck: — And I mean I think that's something we're all in agreement here, is that, you know, the concerns I'm bringing to you are concerns that have been brought to my attention. I do see that as my role as best as possible to help move us through that process.

One thing I am hearing, you know, extracurricular, plans for extracurricular activities and other gatherings as available, you know, as the guidelines allow with the CMHO [chief medical health officer], I am hearing concerns about workload issues, something that we certainly heard pre-pandemic. You know, this extracurricular often is, you know, that happens because of the good work of teachers in our schools. So I guess I don't really have a question there. I'll just have that as a placeholder in terms of a consideration.

I've talked about configuring rooms, adequate soap and sanitizer. You know, one of the questions I had asked earlier about portables and whether there was an addition of additional sinks and washrooms there. That is a concern that's been brought up. Is that something that school divisions might be purchasing out of their funds that weren't spent, additional sanitizing products? Is that the expectation there? Sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, when we can find them; I don't know if they're available yet or not.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I can't speak to that. But it's certainly the expectation that school divisions will be providing the hand

sanitizers and the soap and those kinds of things to make sure that surfaces are clean within school divisions. And certainly I've answered this question a number of times in terms of where that money is going to come from.

Ms. Beck: — So I'll just note that I've heard concerns about lack of washrooms and sinks, or washrooms that aren't on the same level as the classrooms.

Minimizing the number of shared surfaces, does that have implications for school libraries? I know that that has been a concern that's been shared as well. Any implications for school libraries, borrowing of . . .

Mr. Currie: — Thank you. Again, I believe it's on Monday coming up here is where the libraries will be entering into phase 4 part (b). And so this is an ongoing conversation, and again, learning as to how we ensure that there is a safe learning environment and a safe opportunity for students to utilize library resources. So we will continue to plan as we know life to be right now. We will look for the work that's being processed within our public libraries to see how they are addressing the utilization of resources in a safe manner. And I would anticipate that the good people who work at our school divisions will look, learn, and listen from the example that's been set out by other libraries in that manner.

Again, back to the safety of the students in terms of what is a safe learning environment and what would be the necessary means to realize that safe learning environment, utilizing those resources.

Ms. Beck: — The next bullet I have highlighted and underlined and a star beside it, because it's one of the most frequent concerns, a frequent concern that has been raised, and that is throughout the guidelines document, there are frequent references to increased cleaning and increased duties, wiping down surfaces, wiping down desks. Is there an expectation about who is going to be performing those roles?

Mr. Currie: — So on this one, I would say historically we've had some learning opportunities. So when H1N1 was here in the province, I know the school divisions addressed that in terms of learning expectations and learning procedures. So on this one here, again we have the conversation with the response planning team that will talk about roles and responsibilities from our education sector partners' perspectives. And we want people to be utilizing their skills, their strengths, and their responsibilities as is set out as best we know it here.

So taking the learnings from when we've had other health issues presented in our schools, we will take from that. At the same time we also know that there are roles and responsibilities and expectations within our school divisions, and we look to honour those. And so you know, our conversation with the response planning team and then those further conversations with our school divisions and education sector partners is ensuring that we collectively address our respective responsibilities in ensuring a safe learning environment while attending to our respective roles and responsibilities.

So we see that there are people whose responsibilities there are in terms of ensuring a safe learning environment and we look for them to have those conversations, discussions, and attend to their

respective roles and responsibilities to ensure that that environment is evident.

[19:15]

Ms. Beck: — So in the defined roles of a teacher, cleaning is not in those defined roles, and disinfecting of desks.

Mr. Currie: — In our conversations with the response planning team, we've had those roles and responsibilities as part of a conversation. And so ongoing we see the good people who are teachers in our classroom, you know, continuing the learning. We see the other education partners having their respective roles and responsibilities too. So we don't place a strong expectation on this: it's solely your responsibility.

We know that there are options and opportunities where we look to kind of defined roles and responsibilities. That's an ongoing conversation with that. And at the same time, we don't want to preclude anybody that, thou shalt not, when somebody takes it upon themselves for their own safety or for those of the people in their area. So I see it as a collective responsibility and I believe that the RPT has had significant conversations with regards to whose responsibility is it while addressing our respective roles and responsibilities in our mandates.

Ms. Beck: — I have to tell you I haven't heard many express concerns that they're concerned that they'll be told that they can't clean. But there has been a lot of concern about the increased duties that are, you know, remembering of course the context here and, you know, looking at the increased number of students, corresponding number of FTE increases, crowding in schools, you know, number of students with intensive needs.

Pre-existing before the pandemic was a fairly loud and sustained concern about class size and complexity. I know that you heard, Minister, the concerns about workload already before the pandemic. So I think, you know, we'd be missing an opportunity if we didn't look at these guidelines within . . . you know, I guess just to be real about things, if we didn't look at what's being asked here within that context as well. Is that a concern? I mean, I guess it's a roundabout way to get to a question, but one of the existing concerns as I see it — and certainly as it's been relayed to me — is the work level that was there already prior to the pandemic.

When a teacher or someone working in a school looks at this document what they see . . . And maybe we can put their fears to rest, but what they see is an increased . . . an asking of them to do more again. And I'm just wondering if you have any concerns about that or any thoughts about that, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well that's precisely the reason why at the beginning of, you know, when school was suspended, the decision to put together the response planning team so that our partners in education between the STF, the SSBA, and the Ministry of Education can work out protocols in terms of how education was going to be delivered in the interim and now how education is going to be delivered come the fall. And so those are precisely some of the conversations as Deputy Minister Currie has indicated that are happening.

Everybody wants — everyone in the schools, we all share this —

to be as safe as possible, students and teachers, but we also want to make sure that children return to school in as normal a situation as possible. But this is precisely the conversations that have engaged our partners in education.

Nobody is dictating anything. And I think the collaborative work that's being done . . . And I congratulate the partners who are on the response planning team, the STF, the SSBA, and the ministry, for all their collaborative work because we all understand we have a role to play in ensuring that children return to school in a safe way and as normal as possible. And so I continue to encourage these ongoing conversations that they are having at the RPT. Certainly having the STF at the table is a valuable partner. Nobody is dictating to the STF what this will look like in the fall. The fact that they are having a collaborative conversation is a way to get to the end of this.

And so I think everyone has a part to play, and I think that's exactly what's happening as far as the work that's being done. And again I want to thank them all for their very, very good work and their collaborative work, not just in the interim but as we plan to return to school.

Ms. Beck: — Well I certainly would join you in the thanks, and I agree that, you know, everyone has their role to play. However I think the reality is that it's going to be, you know, the staff, the teachers, who are going to actually be putting themselves in the schools, who are going to be delivering not only the curriculum and all of the other things that we have asked them to do, but now with additional duties. And I don't know that I can, you know, do justice to all of the emails that I've had if I don't at least express that that is a very big concern.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That's fair enough. But again we have great confidence in the response planning team and our partners to make sure that we get the results that we want. And as I said, everyone has a role to play and we will all participate to the fullest extent that we can. And so especially having the STF at the table and having a very, very co-operative and collaborative approach to the conversations that Deputy Minister Currie is leading on that team have been very, very . . . I've been very encouraged by those. And so we'll continue to allow them to do their work.

I certainly appreciate the fact, and I think you've heard me say this on a number of occasions: we recognize the concerns that teachers have had in classrooms in terms of issues of class size and complexity. That's why we have a committee — which is now fully represented by the STF and the SSBA at that committee — to work on some of the challenges. I think I've also said in my opening notes that we expect to have some things in place by next fall in terms of how we're going to deal with class size and complexity. We've had some great conversations. Deputy Minister Currie, who sits on that committee, can certainly comment on some of the work that's being done on that committee to deal with some of the very real challenges. Because nobody's saying that there aren't.

Ms. Beck: — No, we definitely agree there. Since we are in estimates, I guess it would be a good place to ask, what allocation has been set aside, either towards the committee, the class size and composition committee, or to address issues of class size and composition, in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well the costs associated with the actual committee work, in phase 2 of the work that's being done now, are all costs which are being absorbed by the ministry. They're not significant. I mean there's meetings that are going on and those kinds of things.

But in terms of having resources set aside in the budget to deal with whatever recommendations come forward, we don't know what those recommendations are, so it's very difficult to be able to provide any budgetary support for recommendations that haven't come forward yet. But we're hopeful that some of the recommendations that come forward . . . and we know that they are going to have an effect on the issues that are affecting teachers in classrooms especially around the issue of complexity, because we think that's the real issue in how we deliver public education to certain children, certain cohorts across the province. We know where the challenges are, but we rely on our partners in education to help us prepare and deliver the kinds of results that we need and the kind of solutions we need to start dealing with that.

But as I say, I think I said in my opening comments that we're expecting the report and recommendations to come out next fall. So we'll be looking at that. Certainly having conversations with Deputy Minister Currie about how those conversations are proceeding may well allow us to start to be able to plan a little bit in advance. But those meetings, as you know, in terms of the second stage of this committee, have only recently started, essentially since the settlement of the teachers' contract.

Ms. Beck: — Well there was a committee before that as well.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — There was, but the committee that set out some basic parameters for where we go, that information has been provided to the committee for their consideration. There's a number of people that were on the original committee. They continue to sit on this committee, but with equal representation from the STF and the SSBA and the ministry and the two deans of education. We're expecting some good work to come from there based on the initial work that was done by the committee.

Ms. Beck: — Okay, I appreciate that. But if I heard you correctly then presumably, you know, the hope around class size and complexity, that both would be reduced, or you know, the workload would be reduced. Anything that you can point to in this budget that addresses the issues of class size and composition in the classroom today? I note that, you know, I'm hearing from school boards that there is a small increase that "does not fully cover enrolment growth and inflation."

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well we've had conversations earlier on with respect to the budgetary increases that were provided in this budget. The other thing that's in this budget, I think, that goes to address some class size issues is the significant investment in capital that this government is making in terms of the building of new schools. Not just the 10 new projects that were announced preliminarily in March, but the additional projects that we just announced just the other day. So those projects are significant in terms of ensuring, or at least to some extent reducing class size in some areas.

You stood on your feet on a number of occasions to talk about Harbour Landing, and there's two new schools in Harbour

Landing to deal with the class size issues in that particular neighbourhood. And so looking to see where we can alleviate pressure by building new schools, I think, is one way of helping to deal with that.

Certainly issues on complexity are another issue, and we're expecting some recommendations to come from the committee with respect to those issues as well.

Ms. Beck: — I mean, I think we're talking about two different things. If we're talking about capital and we're talking about class sizes, I can think of one class in the province for sure where there's 50 children in one classroom because that's, you know, how it has to fit with two teachers in the front. But if we're not adding FTEs, we're not reducing class sizes. Doesn't matter how many classrooms we've built. If we don't put teachers in front of them, we haven't reduced the class size. We've reduced crowding perhaps.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — You know, we're aware of a situation in Regina where there's 50 kids in the classroom, but we also know there's two teachers and an EA [educational assistant] in that classroom. And so to suggest that . . . If that's the example that you're using as an example of overcrowding, I would suggest that it's not a particularly good one.

We do know that there are some challenges with respect to class size. We know that. We deal with that in one of two ways. One of the ways is to build new classrooms. And so you'll see once those new classrooms are built in Harbour Landing that there will be a significant impact on class size in those particular schools. And so one of the ways to deal with this is to build more classrooms. That's one of the ways to deal with it.

Ms. Beck: — Minister, you're going to have to walk me through this. How does that reduce class size if you're building classrooms but you're not adding more teachers?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well as a function of building more classrooms, you have to have teachers to fill those classrooms. We're not going to build two new schools in Harbour Landing without the school divisions having to engage teachers to teach in those classrooms.

Ms. Beck: — I guess I asked for, you know, measures in this budget that address the conditions in the classroom today. You know, hopefully we will staff those classrooms. But you know, it's been successive years that we haven't seen the funding for teachers match growth in inflation, and that is an ongoing concern that's not new to me. It's not new to you. Boards have expressed that time and time again.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I don't want to leave this point because I think it's important. Since I assumed the responsibility as Minister of Education, I've been speaking about the issue of class complexity. That's no secret. I stand on the floor of this Assembly not quite every day but most days to talk about that issue.

And so putting the committee together that I put together last year to start dealing with this issue . . . I think you'll agree that this is not an issue that you can solve overnight, and it is not an issue that you can solve just by simply throwing a bunch of money at

it without having a concerted plan to help deal with it.

[19:30]

And whether or not that's how you deliver educational opportunities to children with intensive needs . . . that's part of it. But you need to have a plan, and so part of the work that was being done by the committee was to help set the framework for the development of that plan. And not to put words in anyone's mouth, but I think they'll agree — that everyone sitting on the committee that's doing this very good work now will agree — that you can't just simply solve this problem overnight, that you have to have a clear and present plan for being able to deliver those educational opportunities. And that's precisely what we've asked this committee to do. It's precisely what we asked the previous committee to do that has laid the foundation for the work that's being done now.

So we recognize the fact that this is a challenge. I recognized that from the first day that I was the Minister of Education and sought to ensure that we had a process in place to address that issue. And we have that process now and that committee is populated by all our partners in education. And I know and I am confident that we are going to get the same collaborative work done on that committee between our partners in education that's being done at the RPT. Because we all recognize the fact that class complexity is an issue, and it has to be addressed. And it needs to be addressed with concrete plans that deal with the issue in the long run, as opposed to just simply putting on a band-aid and fixing it for a little while without having a clear plan for the future for the children that need the quality education that they deserve in this province.

And so I think you'll get agreement from everyone on the committee that that's the goal. I think you'll get agreement from everyone on the committee, because I've talked to them, that understand that you just can't simply fix this matter overnight. But the fact that it's been recognized and the fact that there's a committee in place now to deal with it, I think is an excellent step.

Ms. Beck: — And, Minister, I know we can . . . We've had this back-and-forth before and I certainly, you know, appreciate the efforts towards addressing this issue. But you can't expect teachers who have been struggling under the increasing class sizes and decreasing supports for years and years — prior to your becoming the minister — for successive years, and they've watched committee after committee, side table be struck, people having conversations and saying they're going to fix things.

What we're hearing from teachers, and I know that you're hearing it as well, is teachers are saying they can't do more with less. And so every year that goes by increases that burden and stress. And now we've added, to no one's fault, a pandemic on top of it and these guidelines are adding additional stress to those teachers, and worries that their workload is going to be increased. And what they're looking for is answers and they're looking for a commitment — I think school boards as well — that if those additional costs are there, that they will be covered by your ministry and, you know, in something more concrete than a contingency fund.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I think I'm going to ask Deputy Minister

Currie to talk a little bit about workload intensity and some of the work that's being done in the ministry in conjunction with the school boards on that issue. That might be a little bit helpful in the conversation.

Mr. Currie: — We typically have ongoing, regular meetings, about four or five of them per year, with our education sector partners from an administrative point of view. Our executive directors meet with the ministry and come in. And we speak to elements that you've referenced here, one being workload intensity, others in terms of providing for the students, is that the learning environment is what it potentially could be. And we've had those ongoing conversations to speak to these elements, to surface them and raise them.

And that's where we've had respective conversations on how can we address them collectively. While no one entity is overly overall responsible for it, we look at, is there a collective way of recognizing our legislated responsibilities as well as our policies and regulations that help us get to where we are.

So we have those ongoing conversations that are taking place and identifying the issues, as it were, within the school divisions or within the education sector. We have had examples of where we've been able to address, because we've surfaced those issues at that table, we've been able to address them, look at ways that we can understand how we're going to move forward in responding to them.

The second thing we've had is that that has provided a table, I will say that for the class size and composition committee, that has the potential to be different than other tables previous to it because of the ongoing conversations, because of the ongoing understandings, workings that have taken place. So with this class size and composition committee that's come together, we have many of the same individuals who have served in other capacities talking about these respective issues.

We also have new people who have come into this table, this class size and composition, who are bringing resources, i.e., thought processes, thinking options, that are bringing a different lens and perspective to it, but from an education point of view as is evidenced by . . . The minister mentioned we have our deans of the Faculty of Education from Regina and Saskatoon who are serving on this committee. So we are looking not only from a pre-K to 12 perspective, but we're also looking beyond at the development and the education for our staff and future teachers.

So the difference here is, for the class size and composition committee, is building off of what's already been established in terms of our co-construction, collaborative approaches, minding we do have respective mandates, roles and responsibilities, as well as bringing those to the table when we start this. And we've initiated this conversation. But how do we deal with complexities in the classroom?

And there is recognition from our representatives who sit at that table that there are challenges. But there's also an expectation and a voiced interest that we will address these, and we will be productive and proactive in solution finding and resolution seeking to address them in the future.

Ms. Beck: — I don't want to not get to transportation, so I think

I'm going to move to transportation. On the last page: "The following transportation protocols could be considered for implementation." It won't come as a surprise, Minister; you've heard me mention it. It did I guess in some ways. As a parent, it came as a surprise to me.

You know, in some school divisions we're assigning three children to a seat at times for busing. This is suggesting here that students should be assigned seats, and a record of the seating plan must be kept in order to assist with contact tracing, with the provision that students who live in the same household can be seated together. Partitions around drivers could be considered. I think that's reasonable, but will come at a cost.

We know that right now in order to save on busing costs, buses are doing double runs sometimes, so there's not a lot of room in between. This is suggesting that cleaning and sanitization of buses is required between each run. I would assume that taxis and other ways that children are being transported would be included in this. No field trips. Do you have any indication of what the increased cost is going to be associated with these, implementing these protocols in transportation, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We don't have any estimates of that. I understand that Deputy Minister Currie and the response planning team are looking at this issue. Again, these guidelines have been issued by the chief medical health officer. There may well be some, but we don't have any idea of what those might be at the present time.

Ms. Beck: — Have you heard anything from school boards about what . . . I mean, the reason that we're doubling and tripling students is to reduce transportation costs. I know there's been a number of pushes to reduce transportation costs. That's been identified over a number of years. If we're having to move to one student per seat or only family per seat and, you know, eliminating double runs of school buses, presumably there would be a significant cost associated with that.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — We're going to have to assess those costs. You may know that prior to these guidelines being released, there was some conversations about whether there were going to be restrictions in the number of kids on buses, which would have added significant costs to the cost of transportation.

So I know the number of school divisions that I have talked to have looked at these transportation guidelines, and they're quite happy with them in terms of the fact that there may well be very little in terms of additional costs in transporting kids. And again we rely on the advice of the chief medical health officer as it relates to ensuring the safe transportation of kids. We do have as part of the transportation protocol, we are asking that parents, to the extent possible, transport their own kids to school. That's fair. But to the extent that they can't, school divisions will just simply continue to provide bussing as they have whether that's through their own bussing or whether that's through the contracts that they have.

Ms. Beck: — Is there any modelling or expectations in terms of uptake for parents to be providing transportation for . . .

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — That's just simply a suggestion that the chief medical health officer has made. There's certainly nothing

obligating parents to transport their own kids to school. It's simply a suggestion that they made.

Ms. Beck: — Have school divisions been asked to, you know, when they're coming up with their plan at the end of June, to model or to provide any projections about what their anticipated cost is associated with implementing that plan?

Mr. Currie: — Right now, as this was released last week, I think we've given the school divisions time to develop their plan. I think that there's a sense of understanding now what the parameters are in developing that plan because before that point it was not defined. And so we're needing a little bit of time, and our school divisions are needing a little bit of time to understand, what does it mean? What are the implications? And help relay that information to the response planning team as well as to the ministry who is also part of the response planning team.

We have also asked that the school divisions continue to track their costs related to COVID so that we have a better understanding about that too. So I believe, to directly answer your question, there's just time needed now that the parameters have been outlined to do the respective planning. And we'll continue to track costs through the fall and their quarterly forecasts of school divisions as well.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Minister, what portion of the \$200 million contingency fund is allocated to Education?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The contingency fund has been allocated generally to executive government, and there's been no specific allocation to any one particular ministry.

Ms. Beck: — Are there any projections for how that might break out between various ministries? I mean, that number was arrived at somehow.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — No, there's no projections in terms of how that money would be allocated. I'd need to have a conversation with the Minister of Finance as to how that number was arrived at, but certainly there's no allocation specific to any one particular ministry.

Ms. Beck: — Okay. With regard to teachers and staff in schools who might, for reasons of safety either of themselves or their families, feel that they're unable to report to duty, what accommodations or what plans have been made to deal with those employees if they're refusing to report?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Teachers in particular?

Ms. Beck: — Any staff within schools.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well staff within the schools are employees of the school divisions, and so whatever arrangements will be made pursuant to those contractual arrangements is between an employee and their employer. So that would be a conversation which . . . questions that are better asked to school divisions in any one particular circumstance.

Ms. Beck: — There won't be any direction or any expectations that the ministry would have for those staff members, those teachers?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well no. Not particularly. I mean these are . . . They're employees of the school divisions and so those relationships would be managed by the understandings between those employees and their employer.

Ms. Beck: — In just looking through some of the logistics of, you know, when people become ill or are symptomatic, many teachers are not only parents but they're also, for whatever reasons, teachers often are in two-teacher households. You know, if you have families that are isolating and the children that are isolating . . . I guess I don't have a question as much as that's been something that's been presented. You know, if you have one teacher who's in a school of 1,600 and they're married to a teacher who's in a school of 600, you know, the number . . . What does contact tracing look like in this? What provisions have been made for contact tracing come fall?

[19:45]

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well as you know the chief medical health officer has protocols in place with respect to how contact tracing takes place. I don't have the answer to that question. I can certainly engage the chief medical health officer to get some more information as to how that would happen in this particular circumstance. But certainly they have protocols in place as to how they do contact tracing in any one particular instance. And so I would venture to guess that he would have protocols in place in terms of ensuring that proper contact tracing would be in place in that particular circumstance as well.

Ms. Beck: — There are no specific provisions, plans for contact tracing within schools?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — I would have to consult the chief medical health officer.

Ms. Beck: — I'm just noticing the time here. I know the question I want to ask. What are the projections this year for the number of EAL [English as an additional language] students in the K to 12 system?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — The projected number across the school divisions is 16,181. I can break that down by school division if you like.

Ms. Beck: — Could you table it, Minister? That would be much appreciated.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Yes, we'll undertake to provide that to you.

Ms. Beck: — One of the reasons I wanted to ask that question, it's always an important demographic question. But there's a specific question I want to ask and that is in regard to the Newcomer Welcome Centre. As you'll be aware, that funding from the federal government for that well-used and much-loved, I think I can say, centre was cut. And I'm just wondering if the ministry has been asked to or has provided any additional resources to sort of backfill the important work that that centre was undertaking.

Mr. Currie: — We had received notification that . . . When we heard the same as you have referenced there that school divisions were informed with regards to the Newcomer Welcome Centre

and that the funding arrangements had been changed from the federal government. And so there was a solution sought to how we would be able to address it. So as a result of that there was communication made with regards to that, and through the federal government, there are other financial supports provided for it and that were put in place to continue to support newcomers to our respective school divisions.

Ms. Beck: — When was that communication? How far back did that happen?

Mr. Currie: — We can get you that information.

Ms. Beck: — Just trying to gauge my time. I do want to ask some additional questions about supports available in this budget or specific allocations for students who require EAL services. Can you speak to that?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Do you want specific numbers or generally speaking?

Ms. Beck: — Number of supports, specific allocations within the budget that would support those learners.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — So in the '20-21 fiscal year in this budget, the Ministry of Education allocated half a million dollars for school divisions for compensation for initial assessments of newcomers to support learning needs of English as an additional language, or EAL, learners. That initial assessment funding is distributed based on the number of initial assessments of newcomers, learners completed in the previous year.

There were 53 projects that were developed between 2012 and 2019, and they're all housed on the EAL, Immigration and Languages Blackboard organization that the school divisions have access to.

Ms. Beck: — Thank you. Okay. I don't know if this is a short question, but I think this will get us to the end of the night. And it's one that keeps occurring to me to ask as we were going through the guidelines, and I didn't. In the fall, the universities have indicated that they will be engaged in online learning and remote learning. Of course, K to 12 system will be going back into classrooms. It's a question I've been asked, and I wonder, Minister, if you have a response as to why we see the return to K to 12 classrooms in the fall but not the return to university and post-secondary institutions.

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Before I answer that, I just will point out that the letter that was referred to in the previous question that came to us . . . Sorry, I thought I had the letter that we were referred to in the last question, and I don't. That's fine.

I can't answer the question. You'll have to pose the question to the Minister of Advanced Education in terms of why the decision was made by the universities in respect of online learning. What I can tell you is that from a K to 12 perspective certainly — I think I've said this before — online learning has a role to play in the delivery of public education. But there's certainly no substitute for children being in a classroom in front of a teacher.

And so while we'll be able to continue to provide and augment education and online learning as a tool to provide educational

opportunities to kids, there's no question in anyone's mind, and I'm sure you agree, that there's just simply no substitute for children being in a classroom. And while we'll continue to augment online learning, providing digital supports for classrooms whether that's in the way of programming and technology, I can see no time in the future where we will be substituting classroom learning for online learning.

And we learned lots of lessons with online learning through the interim period here since classes . . . And certainly that's the position that the Ministry of Education takes, and I know school divisions support that. So while we'll continue to support online learning as a tool, classroom learning is certainly the way to continue to provide educational opportunities to children in this province.

So you'll have to ask the Minister of Advanced Education with respect to why the universities made the decision that they made. It's certainly not a decision that school divisions are making, nor would that have any support by the Ministry of Education.

Ms. Beck: — Do you anticipate a situation in the fall, Minister, where teachers would be asked to provide instruction to students in the classroom, in addition would be asked to provide learning or online resources to students who, for whatever reason, are unable to be able to attend the classroom?

Hon. Mr. Wyant: — Well that's a difficult question. I mean I think I made some comments earlier that it's not our expectation that teachers will deliver twice in a day, so to speak. That they won't be required to deliver their classroom learning and then kind of go home or at some time during their break provide online learning to the kids who aren't in their class.

We expect that school divisions will cohort those children into some kind of other opportunity to kids that aren't in the classroom. There may be an opportunity for children to participate in classrooms from a remote location through technology. That certainly might be an opportunity. But it isn't the intention, and I don't believe that the resource planning team is having any conversations around doubling the workload of teachers so as to enable them to provide educational opportunities both in the classroom and outside the classroom.

But as I say, there may be some opportunities for children to participate from a remote location in a classroom setting. We do that all the time now. But to expect a teacher to teach during the day and then somehow have to provide those educational opportunities to children who aren't in the classroom at a different time, I just think that's an unreasonable expectation. And we know that school divisions, through the great work of the response planning team, will be addressing those kinds of situations.

The Chair: — Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of our business today, the committee will now adjourn consideration of estimates and supplementary estimated for the Ministry of Education.

Thank you, Minister, and your officials. I don't think we need any closing remarks tonight because we're going three hours again tomorrow So I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Cox has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until June 25th, 2020 at 3 p.m. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 20:00.]