



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Hon. Colleen Young
Lloydminster

[The committee met at 17:00.]

Chair Weger: — Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Mike Weger. I'm the Chair, and today we have on my left Noor Burki, Joan Pratchler chitting in for April ChiefCalf, and Ms. Jacqueline Roy chitting in for Brent Blakley. On my right I have Barret Kropf, Kim Gartner, and Kevin Kasun chitting in for Ms. Colleen Young.

Today the committee will be considering the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Education. We'll take a half-hour recess at 7:30 p.m.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

Chair Weger: — We will now begin with consideration of vote 5, Education, central management and services, subvote (ED01). Minister Hindley is here with officials from the ministry. I would ask that officials please state their name before speaking and please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the committee members for being here and for your time this evening. I am pleased to be here today to talk about the Ministry of Education's 2025-26 provincial budget. I'll do a few brief introductions before I get into my opening remarks and talk a bit about the education budget for this year.

Pleased to be joined today by my chief of staff, Mitch Graw; deputy minister, Clint Repski; assistant deputy minister, Sameema Haque; assistant deputy minister, Jason Pirlot; assistant deputy minister, Charlotte Schriml. Saskatchewan Distance Learning CEO [chief executive officer], Darren Gasper, is here as well. We have several other officials from the Ministry of Education and from the Sask DLC [Distance Learning Centre] with us as well to try to answer any questions that may come up here this evening.

So, Mr. Chair, and committee members, we're making some fairly significant investments into education in the 2025-26 budget to advance the learning success and well-being of Saskatchewan children and youth. The Ministry of Education budget is \$3.5 billion to support pre-kindergarten to grade 12 schools, early learning and child care, and libraries and also literacy. This is an increase of \$183.5 million or 5.5 per cent over last year.

In addition to a significant operating funding increase for school divisions, this year's budget continues to support an investment in early years. We continue to manage transformational changes in the early years sector in Saskatchewan and expand the number of regulated child care spaces available at \$10 a day.

This budget also supports libraries and funded literacy groups and the services they offer in communities around the province.

School division operating funding is the largest portion of our budget in education. The province's 27 school divisions will receive \$2.4 billion in school operating funding for the 2025-26 school year. This is a record increase of \$186.4 million, or 8.4 per cent, over last year. This investment will provide school divisions with the resources to hire more teachers and also more support staff.

Included in the budget increase to school divisions is \$130 million to fund the new teachers' collective bargaining agreement and to address the pressures of growing student enrolment and other challenges facing today's classrooms. There's \$54.4 million to address inflationary pressures including non-teacher salaries, transportation, and to implement the first 50 of 200 specialized support classrooms in the province. This will build on the eight specialized support classrooms already in place to help assist school divisions in designing school-based approaches to help address challenging classroom behaviour.

Initial outcomes from the specialized support classrooms included reduced classroom disruptions so that teachers can focus on teaching and the students in those classrooms can focus on learning. Long term, the program will offer successful targeted intervention methods and will also build teacher expertise and capacity to manage complex classrooms.

With this year's budget, there's also an additional \$2 million to advance early years literacy across the province. To improve early literacy, the ministry will explore the use of common screeners that will identify students' reading levels and provide comparable provincial data, renew kindergarten and grade 1 to 3 English language arts curriculum to reflect current reading research, and also identify supports to build expertise in early literacy.

Across our schools, mental health of students and staff continues to be a priority. Education has a \$4.6 million budget within the budget to deliver the mental health capacity-building program, a school-based community mental health promotion and prevention program helping students develop coping skills to address mental health concerns. Now this is an increase of \$1.6 million over last year, with work under way to further expand the program to more schools in the province. This funding used to be part of the Ministry of Health budget but is now included as part of our budget in Education. This budget also provides \$616,000 to support initiatives related to bullying prevention, positive mental health, and student safety, and this includes funding to support student access to the Kids Help Phone.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration and to help support the Ministry of Education, is also providing four and a half million dollars to fund the Homebase project. The government is partnering with the John Howard Society of Saskatchewan to coordinate Homebase, which was formerly known as integrated youth services, to meet the needs of youth aged 12 to 25 and their caregivers with rapid access to youth-targeted supports. The Humboldt Homebase hub opened in September of 2024, Moose Jaw hub in November 2024, and Regina hub in December 2024, and a hub in Sturgeon Lake First Nation will open in 2025.

This budget is continuing to support online learning across the

province. Grant funding for the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre, or the Sask DLC, will be \$18.5 million for the 2025-26 school year. This is a \$470,000 increase over the last school year. Sask DLC is funded through a combination of tuition fees from local school divisions and schools based on the number of courses that students enrol in, as well as a grant from the province.

Sask DLC continues to offer high-quality online learning opportunities for kindergarten to grade 12 students no matter where they live in Saskatchewan. Online learning provides students with flexibility and the choice to learn online full-time, or for high school students to supplement their in-class learning with unique electives and career-focused programs that offer hands-on learning.

As of the end of February of this school year, Sask DLC had served more than 12,000 students taking more than 30,000 courses, with enrolments continuing to come in. And that is well above enrolment in their first year of operation, in '24-25, and we expect this to continue to grow in future years.

The school infrastructure is again a significant priority in this year's budget. In 2025-2026, we are investing \$191.3 million for safe learning environments and to respond to enrolment growth.

There were five new major school capital projects in this budget in addition to the 21 new or consolidated school builds and three major renovations already under way around the province.

The new projects include the replacement of South Corman Park School; preplanning for a new joint-use public and Catholic elementary in Saskatoon northeast, known as the Aspen Ridge area; and preplanning for a new public and Catholic elementary schools in Saskatoon west, known as Kensington.

The ongoing projects include new joint-use elementary and high schools in the Regina east neighbourhood of The Towns, and a new joint-use elementary school in Regina's Harbour Landing neighbourhood.

Work is also under way towards a new Saskatoon east joint-use high school in the Holmwood neighbourhood, and new Saskatoon east joint-use elementary school in the Brighton neighbourhood, as well as a new francophone elementary school in Saskatoon's Kensington neighbourhood.

There are four consolidated school projects on track to be ready for students this coming fall, and that includes a new K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] school to replace and consolidate the elementary and high schools in Lanigan; a new elementary school to replace St. Frances Cree Bilingual elementary school in Saskatoon, which I had the opportunity to tour earlier this winter; a new joint-use elementary school to replace Sacred Heart, St. Mary, Empire, and Westmount schools in Moose Jaw; and a new joint-use elementary school to replace St. Peter, St. Michael, Imperial, and McDermid schools in Regina.

Other ongoing projects include a new K to 12 school to replace and consolidate the elementary and high schools in Carlyle; a new elementary school to replace Princess Alexandra, King George, and Pleasant Hill elementary schools in Saskatoon; a new francophone pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12]

school in Prince Albert to replace École Valois; and a new high school to replace Minahik Waskahigan High School in Pinehouse.

The ongoing major renovations include significant projects at Greenall High School in Balgonie, renovations to Campbell Collegiate in Regina, and a significant renovation to the Swift Current Comprehensive High School.

There is \$15.3 million for minor capital renewal projects this coming fiscal year to allow school divisions to address structural repairs and renovations. New minor capital projects this year include a roof and exterior repair project at Canora Composite, a renovation project at the Barr Colony School in Lloydminster, and a roof replacement project at St. Olivier School in Radville.

There is also \$28.5 million for the relocatable classroom program to help alleviate space pressures in schools across the province. Since 2008 the government of Saskatchewan has committed over \$2.8 billion towards school capital.

We also want to support school divisions in being proactive in addressing critical rehabilitation and maintenance projects. The ministry's 2025-26 budget includes \$65 million for the preventative maintenance renewal, or commonly referred to as PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal] program, an increase of 30 per cent from last year. And this will bring government's total commitments to over \$551 million since the PMR program began in 2013-14.

PMR funding allows boards of education to strategically maintain facilities. The increase of \$15 million from last year will help school divisions with infrastructure projects to meet the needs of their educational facilities, such as repairing or replacing building components, improving energy efficiency, or addressing accessibility needs. The PMR funding formula has also been updated to distribute funds more equitably in 2025.

This budget also supports the province's youngest learners. Our government is committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders to build a community-based system of quality regulated early learning and child care. The 2025-26 budget provides \$413.3 million for early learning and child care, and this includes an increase of \$3.5 million for federal-provincial child care agreements. The funding will continue to support child care at \$10 per day for children under the age of six.

From April 1st, 2021 to December 31st, 2024 over 14,300 child care spaces have been created, which represents a 46 per cent increase. New child care centre spaces have been allocated to 98 communities across Saskatchewan, so this means that as of December 31st, 2024, there were a total of approximately 32,000 child care spaces in the province, of which almost 25,800 are operational in homes and centres, and more than 6,200 are in various stages of development.

In addition a further existing 6,744 early learning program spaces that support the development of a child's early years are recognized as contributing to the overall target set in the Canada-Saskatchewan Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. What this all means is we have achieved 75 per cent of the space target included in the agreement.

The 2025-26 budget will support us in adding more regulated child care spaces in the province, which in turn will support parents to live, work, and also get an education. We are committed to attracting, retaining, and growing a strong and skilled workforce of early childhood educators, also known as ECEs, as the province expands regulated child care spaces.

The province has implemented a made-in-Saskatchewan approach that supports recruitment and retention to the ECE profession. This approach has resulted in a 29 per cent increase in the number of individuals working in child care centres across the province. This includes a 26 per cent increase in the number of certified ECEs and a 45 per cent growth in the number of ECE level 3s who work as leaders in providing developmentally appropriate programs for children in their care.

We continue to offer valuable workforce initiatives such as tuition-free post-secondary education and bursaries, and we're working to increase public awareness of the benefits of pursuing a career as an early childhood educator.

The Canada-Saskatchewan Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement is in place until March 31st of 2026, and as I've previously indicated, we are prepared and ready to negotiate and sign an extension before it expires. We look forward to continuing conversations with our federal counterparts to make sure that this is a program that works for Saskatchewan families, works for child care operators, and works for everyone in this province to make sure that we have a long-term, sustainable, affordable child care system.

[17:15]

The ministry also continues to support several programs that provide services to our youngest learners and their families. This budget will provide \$5.7 million to the early child intervention program, an increase of \$166,000; \$18.6 million for KidsFirst, an increase of \$543,000; \$8 million for early years family resource centres, or an increase of \$234,000; and \$2.7 million for the current provincially funded child nutrition program which is an increase of \$80,000.

Of note, our government also recently signed on to the federal government's national school food program, which is in addition to Saskatchewan's child nutrition program. Saskatchewan will receive an additional \$15.8 million over three years from the federal government for that particular program.

Now in support of the provincial public library system, the 2025-26 budget continues to provide \$11.6 million, and there is also \$1.1 million for funded literacy organizations.

In conclusion, I thank you for the opportunity to highlight this year's investment in pre-kindergarten to grade 12 education, early learning and child care, and libraries in Saskatchewan.

I appreciate the work of all of our sector partners, including teachers, early childhood educators, librarians, and all the staff across the sector for all that they do to support the learning success of Saskatchewan children and youth. And that's something that will continue to be a priority for this government and our officials in the ministry in the weeks and months and years ahead.

Thank you as well to the ministry team that is here tonight. They're a dedicated team of officials, not just here this evening but who put in this work each and every day to help support the education system and everything that it represents right across Saskatchewan. Simply would not be able to do it without the amazing support of the great team and the officials within the Ministry of Education, so I extend my gratitude to everyone there. And I look forward to our continued collaboration in support of education, early learning, and literacy in this province.

So to the committee, we would be welcoming any questions that you might have here this evening. Thanks again.

Chair Weger: — Thank you, Minister Hindley. I will now open the floor for questions. Okay, Ms. Roy.

Jacqueline Roy: — Yes. Thank you. So thank you first to Minister Hindley, and I would like to join him in not only welcoming but saying thank you to the ministry team that is here tonight. We know that you have families at home that you would like to be home with as well, and we absolutely appreciate that this is a late hour. We will try and be as efficient and effective when we are asking questions on this side to make the best use of everybody's time.

I would like to acknowledge first of all that I'll be asking questions on behalf of Matt Love, our shadow minister of Education. Beside me I have my esteemed colleague Joan Pratchler who is the shadow minister of early education, and behind me my colleague Noor Burki. Later on tonight we will be joined by my colleagues Darcy Warrington and Aleana Young for some other questions. And we also have hon. members from the other side of the House present here with us tonight, so thank you for all caring so much about the future of our students.

Personally my background is francophone affairs, so we will start out with some questions around the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, and you will see our questions will vary from a little bit broad to a little more granular. Then we will be handing it off for some questions about early education from MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Pratchler and later on this evening some more questions, broader questions to the sector as a whole if that makes sense. Excellent.

So first starting off then with some Conseil questions. How many years into the future does the ministry project enrolment numbers for the CÉF [Conseil des écoles fransaskoises] and can you provide the projections for the CÉF over that time span, perhaps broken down by the school council areas?

I will note if there are questions that we cannot immediately answer in about five to six minutes, I will be asking that we perhaps table those questions and get the answers for the April 7th meeting, just in everybody's interests. Thank you.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So the September 2025, so this coming September projection is 2,188. That's the total projection. We don't have with us just the school-by-school breakdown. If the member is looking for that we can provide that. Is that what you're . . . Would you like that level of detail, or just a overall projection good for you?

Jacqueline Roy: — The overall projection today is great. So is

September 2025 the most recent one? We don't have anything further into the future than that?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, my understanding is that these are the numbers provided to us by CÉF, and that's as far as we have. Yeah.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, for now that's no problem. Perhaps if we could get tabled for April 7th, broken down by school council area and just projections perhaps for the next four years, possibly the next seven if possible. Thank you.

Clint Repski: — Clint Repski, deputy minister. In terms of the enrolment projections, those are provided to us by the school division. They're not our independent enrolment projections. So I don't want to commit the CÉF to something they're not ready to provide quite yet.

So we do have what we have for received information, which is the enrolment projections for next September. We don't collect information beyond that. So I would hate to commit to something that we can't deliver for next session.

Jacqueline Roy: — All right. I would ask that we still at least try. As the shadow minister, I have been in contact with the CÉF, and I have been in contact with a few third-party organizations that have made projections going forward.

So we do know that with the schools, we have a 23 per cent target that we are meeting with the number of francophone students that should be in those schools right now and that we need to find capacity for the other 73 per cent going forward. So I would ask that we do table something on April 7th, working with the CÉF at least around a four-year projection if possible . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Thank you.

Okay. Moving on with some of these questions. When it comes to tariffs, which obviously are on the mind of everybody right now, and capital and operational funding going forward, I know we mentioned several of the projects that we have. For example I could point to the new francophone school, for example, that's set to be built in Prince Albert. I know we had halted that project because we were waiting for some capital funding estimates. But not only estimates; we were looking for Canadian suppliers.

Could we get a brief update on where we are at with finding Canadian suppliers and where we might start to see those projects move forward?

[17:30]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Okay, so on the Prince Albert school project the update that we have is that a parcel of land has been identified and the officials and the teams are just working through finalizing the actual purchase of the land. So that's the current status of that specific project.

With respect to tariffs and the prioritization of Canadian suppliers and that sort of a thing, so that is an initiative being led by SaskBuilds on a project-by-project basis, so whether this would be happening in education, be happening in health care, be happening in all the various ministries and agencies. So SaskBuilds would be working with the individual project or

specific project managers on each of these particular projects and dealing with that, as I said, on a project-by-project basis in terms of who's being utilized for that particular project, whether it's suppliers or firms that are involved.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you for that answer, and it definitely makes sense. Would it be possible to get from SaskBuilds and Procurement, for our next seating around April 7th, at least some ballpark idea in terms of months until completion for those projects and those retrofits that were mentioned?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, I think SaskBuilds will be able to provide that information at their estimates. I don't think they've been up yet, so that would be a question they'd be able to answer then.

Jacqueline Roy: — Perfect. Thank you very much for that. I guess moving on — one thing that I did notice when we mentioned schools that are due for major retrofits and we were talking about roofs — have we considered the situation of Bellevue? I know for 10 years they have been facing a leaking roof. It has been professionally recommended that they do a \$1 million retrofit and install on that roof to prevent mould in the child care area and in the gymnasium and in several corridors. Is that project being considered as well?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. And I'll ask one of the officials to talk a bit more specifically about this particular project and how projects are scored and ranked, knowing of course that there's, you know, a number of projects around the province, schools around the province, divisions that have priorities. And of course they would rank them and submit their priorities to us for consideration as part of the overall provincial list.

I'll touch on maybe just a little bit around one of the things that I mentioned in my opening remarks, which was around the preventative maintenance and renewal funding pot, which is increasing this year up to \$65 million with the \$15 million increase.

And you know, that was one of the things I think that I had heard in my fairly short time since being appointed as the Minister of Education and talking to school boards and school divisions, was one, the importance of — in addition to — the overall major capital investments that we're making as a government, but two, the importance of the PMR program.

But the next part of the conversation was also that while, you know, PMR has been an excellent program, also the demands on it — so therefore the increase in the budget towards it as well — I touched on a little bit, about the changing of the formula for PMR this year going forward to help better equitably distribute those funds for projects that qualify for the PMR program.

That's just kind of at a high level how that works, but I'll maybe turn it over to our assistant deputy minister Charlotte Schriml to talk a bit about more about this specific project and then just the overall kind of scoring and ranking of projects. So, Charlotte.

Charlotte Schriml: — Thank you. Charlotte Schriml, assistant deputy minister. So as the minister said, I can just speak a little bit about the process for how we assess and guide and evaluate

the minor capital program.

So this particular school, my understanding is that they have submitted a proposal for next year. So we're currently in the process of reviewing those. And I can just speak a little bit about what that process looks like for reviewing our programs.

Number one, the first thing that we look at is the health and safety and any concerns in that school. They will submit specific . . . In this case if it's a roof replacement, they will describe what the impacts are, how long they've had it, whether they've had patch work done or, you know, kind of so on. We will also look at the efficiency, whether or not the work that's being done provides for any efficiency for that particular school.

We will also look at whether or not there's functionality in contributions to programming. And in addition to that . . . And this is one where, you know, the CÉF often has a community contribution in their schools and they have community spaces in their schools, so we also look at that. And we also just look at the overall condition of the facility, as well as looking at provincial priorities. And often we will work directly with the CÉF to determine what their priorities are for their school division. So that's just kind of a quick outline on how we will, you know, go about doing the prioritization exercise for next year.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you. And when it does come to that pot of money — and I am definitely in agreement with the minister that that's definitely a priority for schools and just having a separate fund — how was the decision made to calculate that extra amount that was allotted this year, percentage-wise? So what factors and what stakeholders were considered when the increase to the PMR was decided?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So on preventative maintenance and renewal, like I said in my opening remarks, it's been about \$551 million in total since that program began in 2013-2014. The increase this year, the \$15 million, represents a pretty significant increase to that budget, from 50 up to 65 million. So it's roughly a 30 per cent increase. We would've had, you know, feedback from a variety of sources within the sector, boards of education, school divisions of course.

[17:45]

On the impact of PMR and where it's been beneficial, I think just in terms of the number itself, you know, we as a ministry go through the budget process for all of our programs and all of our various buckets of funding. And this was the amount, I think, that we were able to accommodate in the budget this year. Certainly would be wanting to try to increase that whenever we can and as much as we can.

So I think, you know, it's a positive news story that we're able to increase the amount of funding and it's for PMR in this year's budget. And we'll continue to have those discussions with school divisions, with the boards about what the priorities are for repair and replacement and renovations and you-name-it within school divisions and take that feedback each and every year as part of the budget development process.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you for that response. And in terms of that 30 per cent then — you know, just talking to people about

their improvements even around their houses, the cost of lumber going up, a lot of those things — what part of that 30 per cent is accounted for just in terms of year-over-year inflation that we're going to see?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So in terms of the PMR increase, you know, I think what we looked at was inflation can be difficult to predict. And certainly there has been inflationary pressures on school division budgets whether it's from a variety of factors, and in particular on the capital projects we're seeing, again, not just in Education but I think every ministry and even obviously those in the private sector are as well.

So when we were looking at trying to build upon this, the program and the funding, again we were, as part of the budgeting process, really trying to see how much we could increase that in terms of what we had available for funds to us as part of the budget process.

So again I think, you know, the \$15 million presents a pretty significant, a 30 per cent, increase compared to last year's funding for PMR. And you know, it's our hope that that would help address some of the inflation that's been recognized and felt by school divisions on their projects and on their facilities, I should say. And maybe just touch on — and again I know this is not news to any of us here — but a lot of uncertainty of course in the economy these days and where things are going to be at. So that also makes it difficult to predict as well.

Maybe just touch on a bit on the funding change that I spoke of a little bit in my opening remarks . . . Not the funding change, I guess, but the formula, the change to the formula for preventative maintenance and renewal.

So what the program does, as the members will know, is provides annual funding to all 27 school divisions. It's based on total square footage of their schools. What we've done — and this is part of the feedback that we had heard, I think, at the officials level and also myself as minister and previous ministers as well and MLAs across the province — was about how can you make that program better if you make changes to it, in addition to just not only increasing the pot of money that's available, but how do you perhaps identify and address some of the challenges or inequities that might be seen out there in school division land.

So effective April — so yesterday, April 1st — the method of calculating the PMR funding will change to exclude the gross area of schools less than seven years old, and a location factor will also be applied to recognize higher cost for schools outside of Saskatoon and Regina. So that's the change to the formula. I think that this is taking effect now.

But again, based on feedback that we heard from the sector in how do we — again in addition to not only trying to increase the level that's in the total pot for PMR funding — but how do we use that funding and target it as best we can to really be able to stretch those dollars as far as we can, but targeted to schools and to school divisions that truly need it. Again, knowing that there's an ongoing list of requests for replacements, renewals, significant renovation projects, but also again to extend the life of existing schools and facilities around the province.

So I think that again will be addressed by both the 30 per cent

budget change and the increase to the PMR overall budget, but also in the method for calculating the PMR funding and how that gets distributed to schools across the province.

Jacqueline Roy: — Thank you, Minister. And that definitely is something that we appreciate and understand in terms of some of the higher costs with some of our more rural schools.

And that actually brings me nicely into my next question, and the last that I will burden you with when it comes to francophone affairs. Simply that the division is a little bit half-urban, half-rural, and that can cause some huge financial stressors, especially when it comes to planning and preparedness. What methodology is your ministry using when we compare its funding system for the CÉF to the basic urban versus rural layout? Thank you.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I'll get the deputy minister, Clint Repski, just to talk a bit about some of the specifics as to how this works. You know, this comes from the funding manual, which is publicly available in terms of how the dispersion works. At a high level I can say that there is a francophone factor applied to the calculations, as the member, I'm sure, likely knows. But Clint, maybe if you just want to get into a bit more of some of the specifics as to the numbers and how that is calculated and is put out there.

Clint Repski: — So yeah, thank you for the question. And it's actually a good question because there's a sense sometimes that we look at funding on how many students you have times a factor, that's the amount of funding that gets rolled out. There's actually a lot more that goes into it. And it does get hard sometimes to compare funding level by funding level on a very straight-line basis because there are so many different factors.

There's 27 school divisions in the province, and they all have a bit of a uniqueness to them, almost every single one. And so we do try to find those common factors, those cost drivers, and recognize them through the funding distribution, which is largely unconditional for boards to be making allocation decisions.

With the francophones, they're particularly unique because of, as you indicated, they're both urban and rural. So the funding model works, in very, very simple terms, of the sum of the parts. We look at each individual school and look at where it is geographically and looking at the enrolment composition. We also look at things like a small school of necessity. So where a school is outside of the next like school by 40 kilometres, we know that it costs additional funding to recognize those typically low-enrolment schools. And so they're provided a factor for what's called small schools of necessity, and they get topped up to make sure that they have adequate staffing to make sure those schools can continue to function.

You're not going to have the same pupil/teacher ratio as you would in a large urban school because those kids simply don't exist in those areas, but the school still needs to operate. So with the CÉF funding, we provide a francophone factor of between 1.3 and 1.8 times the factors that go across the board.

[18:00]

In addition to that, we do give recognition to their geography. We take into account the number of kilometres that their buses need

to travel because with a francophone school, oftentimes they do need to pick up kids from further away to make sure they get to school.

So from that perspective we do recognize their kilometres. And the other additional piece that we provide to them is a \$3.9 million cultural and language amount on an annual basis to recognize the unique minority language status of the CÉF.

Jacqueline Roy: — And that 3.9 million coming through the feds, right?

Clint Repski: — That's a provincial amount. Not part of the federal.

Jacqueline Roy: — Okay, thank you. Okay, thank you for those questions. On the last one I do have a few more questions. I will submit those though via email. They're not immediate or urgent, and they're just slightly more granular level. So thank you very much for your time. I am now handing it over to colleague Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you, Jacqueline. I would also like to extend warm thanks to the committee staff and to the minister and his deputy ministers and all the people that are working in education, and the members across the aisle as well. Education is big work, hard work, and very important work. And I thank you for that.

One of the questions, of course — tariffs on/tariffs off, big/little, in/out, who knows? — have you anticipated any challenges with tariffs for funding, particularly in the child care portion of the ministry? And if so, how have you been navigating that?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. Just consulting with the team, and at this time we're not aware of any impacts. Of course as the member had said in her question, it kind of changes day by day, hour by hour, but we're monitoring it. You know, should there be an impact to specifically the child care sector, again certainly I'm sure we'd have it brought to our attention or officials would be made aware of it fairly quickly. So we're monitoring it but it's just not something that we're aware of having a specific impact on the child care sector as of this point in time.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. The \$10-a-day initiative is much more than about reducing parent fees. It's a comprehensive, long-term public policy to build a universal, affordable, high-quality, and inclusive child care system across Canada. And of course the current agreement is contingent upon — especially in Saskatchewan — it being non-profit. How does your government respond to this statement in being part of this initiative, and whether this is good public policy from your government's point of view?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. You know, I think, I hope I've said publicly before just, you know, number one, our appreciation to the sector, to all those child care operators on behalf of, you know, the Government of Saskatchewan and the work that's being done in this very important area.

In reference to my opening comments at some of the significant

expansion that's happened in Saskatchewan, some of the other advances we've been able to make to help support early childhood educators and centres right across this province regardless of whether they're, you know, in big cities like Regina and Saskatoon or smaller communities, regional centres like my own in Swift Current and rural communities as well.

I think as we're, you know, we're grateful for the opportunity that we've had as a province to be part of the \$10-a-day child care and we want to see that continue. We want to ensure that we are working collaboratively with stakeholders right across the sector. And that includes not just the operators but the families as well, communities. We know how important this is to everyone right across this province.

Again, we want to be able to ensure that we do have, you know, a quality child care system here in this province. We want to make sure that it's affordable as well for Saskatchewan families. That's something that clearly that we've heard, I think, on both sides of the Chamber as elected members. I know that our team has when they've been in consultation. I know when I've spoken to groups like SECA [Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association] and individual child care operators as well, the importance of an affordable child care sector that's also sustainable as well for everyone, whether it's governments provincially, federally, and for the operators too.

So I think, again just to reiterate, we do recognize how important this is to families right across Saskatchewan, and so that's why we've been gathering feedback through the life of this program thus far and really trying our best to negotiate on what the next version of this looks like and how we can make sure that we do identify some of the . . . And every province is a little bit different, right, in terms of the agreement that they've signed with the federal government, either the initial agreement or on the extensions perhaps.

But we want to ensure that we do everything we can to get the best possible deal that we can for Saskatchewan families, for child care operators, when it comes to making sure that we do have an affordable, sustainable, long-term child care program here in this province.

Joan Pratchler: — And it seems to be quite important that it's non-profit. Is that also fit into that picture as well?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — The vast majority of the operators in the province, a significant majority, have been non-profit operators. So that's the history of what we have here in Saskatchewan. And again I would just say that I think it's our goal that, as a province, that we continue to add more child care spaces in the province as part of the agreement that we currently have — that is a requirement — but again, that we expand what is, you know, a long-term, sustainable, and affordable child care sector for families right across this province. And that's what our goal is as a provincial government, to help support that.

Joan Pratchler: — So do I hear you saying you're going to move into for-profit more often?

[18:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So budget information of the

allocation is for, you know, for the non-profit sector, which is in accordance with the current, with the existing agreement that we have with the federal government. It's difficult to anticipate what any sort of future agreement may or may not look like. And like I've said before, we have been open to negotiating with the federal government on what the extension looks like for the province of Saskatchewan. We always have been willing to be at the table to have those conversations with them. But in terms of, as I said, the existing funding allocation, that is specifically tied to the parameters of the current agreement.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Every year certain amounts are allotted to be expended in the agreement, and sometimes for a variety of reasons that I've read they, you know, maybe didn't all get spent every year especially at the beginning because it's such a big new thing that's being rolled out, and that's understandable. It also said in the agreement that the allowable . . . It was about 10 per cent that you could roll over from, you know, one year to the next and that was sometimes typical. And I understand there was some agreement early at the beginning that maybe we had to roll over a little bit more than 10 per cent at the outset.

So I'm wondering if you could help me understand what the percented rollovers have been from year 1, 2, 3, and 4? And then what those amounts would have been when they were rolled over, as well as the percentage? If you could help me understand that. Thank you.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So just at a high level in terms of the carryforward, that is an amount that, as I understand it, is negotiated with the federal government, and it's not a set level or a set percentage I don't believe. It's negotiated each and every year so that's how it's calculated.

But I'll turn it over to the assistant deputy minister to get into a bit more of the detail to the question that you're asking specifically.

Sameema Haque: — Good evening, I'm Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister in the Ministry of Education. I'm very pleased to meet you in person, Ms. Pratchler.

So I can give you a little bit of detail in regards to the process. What you stated in your question is absolutely accurate. In the terms of the agreement, they had mentioned carryforward, but it was subject to discussion and negotiation with the federal government in anticipation of how the implementation of those agreements will roll out, and there might be changes that might be necessary.

The carryforward amount for each of the federal-provincial agreements has to be negotiated in the annual action plan negotiation with the federal officials and is subject to approval by the federal minister. Once the minister approves at the federal level that's when we have the set amount for each year. So it's subject to negotiation.

Now we have multiple federal-provincial agreements under child care. We have three different agreements and three different action plans that have to be negotiated and three different carryforwards. So I can give you the carryforward percentage as well as the amount for the last year and for this year, for each of those agreements.

For the Canada-wide agreement, which is the largest agreement under child care, we had allowed carryforward was 35 per cent from '24-25 to '25-26; 35 per cent which is equal to \$85.2 million . . .

Joan Pratchler: — You said five . . . or 85?

Sameema Haque: — Thirty-five. Three five. 35 per cent, which is \$85.2 million in dollar amount. So that is allowed carryforward. But as you mentioned, as you implement the different initiatives under the agreement that is the allowed amount, but that does not mean that that is what we carry forward. So our expenditures as we've expanded the sector continue to increase year over year. So this was our allowed carryforward, but as of our December forecast we only estimate that we'll be only carrying forward 12 per cent, so only 27 point . . . million is what we anticipate we'll be carrying forward once we do a year-end closure based on our forecast.

So that is what is being carried forward from the '24-25 to '25-26. Under our action plan that's been approved for the next year, we are allowed to carry forward 10 per cent from '25-26 onwards, and that equates out to \$29.6 million. The carryforward amount has to be expended first. That is also a requirement.

So that is the first agreement, and if you'd like me to I can go into the next two agreements as well.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah, that would be nice. Thank you.

Sameema Haque: — Under the infrastructure fund agreement the allowed carryforward was 50 per cent from '24-25 into '25-26, and that 50 per cent amount equates out to \$3.3 million. Similar to the other agreement, our December forecast estimates that we will be expending \$10.5 million, which would only leave us about 0.5 per cent, which is \$31,000 to be carried forward into the next fiscal year. Our approved allowed carryforward under this agreement is 10 per cent for '25-26, which is \$858,000.

Our third child care agreement is the bilateral agreement, and under that agreement the allowed carryforward is 10 per cent from '24-25 into '25-26, which comes up as \$85.2 million. Based on our December forecast we only anticipate that we'll be carrying forward 2 per cent, which would be about \$18.9 million into the next fiscal year. And our allowed carryforward for '25-26 is 10 per cent based on our approved action plan, and it comes out to \$1.8 million.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. How much of the federal grant was returned because the ministry did not meet its spending requirement, itemized for any of the past years?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So we haven't returned any dollars, any federal dollars. We've spent all the dollars that have come through thus far. And I'll just maybe turn it to Sammi to get into a bit more detail in terms of the tables and the details that we have there.

Sameema Haque: — Sure. So although initially the agreement specified a minimal amount as carryforward, we've been very strategic in negotiating carryforwards in our action plan discussions with the federal officials and the minister. What we've done is we've looked at all our initiatives and made

projections in regards to our expenditures. And also not just for one year, but overall through the term of the agreement and being strategic and anticipating what kind of carryforward we might need to the max amount so that if we are actually under that, that means we are not leaving any federal dollars on the table.

So what we've done is we've initially, at the start of every agreement, we've had very high carryforward amounts that we've been able to negotiate and then slowly decrease that. But we always attempt to negotiate a carryforward amount that is significantly higher than what we anticipate our expense will be. That allows us to ensure that we spend all the dollars that are allocated for our province under the federal agreement.

And then like once we have that approval, we are very strategic in expensing it out so that the carryforward expenditure stipulations under the federal agreement are also met. So that's the strategy we've used. I can give you an example. For example, for our Canada-wide agreement, which is our largest agreement, in our first year we had a carryforward amount of 60 per cent in the agreement. But we were able to negotiate it to 64 per cent. This allowed us to carry forward about \$63.4 million, which ended up being 56 per cent. So the agreement was 60 per cent; we negotiated to 64 per cent. In the end we only needed 56 per cent, which allowed us to have some safe room there.

For the next year, '22-23, the agreement only allowed for 30 per cent of carryforward, but we were able to negotiate 45 per cent. And in the end, we only needed 42 per cent, which was about \$72.2 million.

And in '23-24, again, the agreement only allowed for 10 per cent. And this time, with significant time and effort into negotiations, we were able to negotiate 45 per cent carryforward. We ended up only needing 32 per cent, and that allowed us to carry forward \$66.5 million.

And in 2024-25, again we only had 10 per cent carryforward under the agreement, but we were able to successfully negotiate 35 per cent carryforward. And we've only needed 12 per cent, and we anticipate that's going to come up to be about \$27.9 million.

So a similar strategy has been used in other agreements. Our infrastructure agreement was signed close to the end of the fiscal year last year, and we were able to negotiate 100 per cent carryforward for that one. Similarly for our food program agreement that was just signed, we've been able to negotiate 100 per cent carryforward.

So we are using the terms of the agreement and negotiating the best deal for Saskatchewan so that we are able to utilize all the dollars that the federal government is allowing under these agreements.

Joan Pratchler: — So what would you describe as some of the challenges for spending that money when you have to roll over those, you know, fairly large amounts from one year to the next?

[18:30]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So I think we recognize that these are long-term investments, a long-term initiative. And that's what,

you know, as we're making investments into expanding child care across the province, we need to be cognizant of the sustainability — as I've said earlier on — of the investments and of the initiatives.

So that's part of it, you know, in terms of where we kind of strategically make those decisions and how we make sure that we're always looking not just at the pressures that we're facing today in trying to address the needs of families and communities right across the province but what does that look like down the road years from now to make sure that it is a sustainable program.

The other part of this that is significant as well is that, you know, we want to ensure that we're working closely with communities and with the sector to make sure that we're able to plan out how we're going to not only grow and increase the number of spaces, but again how we're going to make sure that they are viable for years and years to come.

And maybe just turn it over to Sammi again for a bit more detail as to how that works and what that's going to look like.

Sameema Haque: — So under all of these agreements there are negotiated actions plans and there's a variety of initiatives under those action plans. The funding is further divided into federally defined pillars: access, quality, accessibility. Like there are . . . I mean access and affordability. So what I'm getting at is from the perspective of expenditure, we need to make sure that within this agreement, the money is allocated to all of these pillars, all of these buckets and initiatives, and is also there to ensure that these initiatives . . . These are multi-year initiatives. These are not per year. Many of these projects are not going to be completed within one year.

So we have to look at that and ensure that funding is not just available for the first year but also the second year and the third year and the fourth year of that particular project. Whether it's education for our workforce, we're not just going to have tuition-free education for just one year or bursaries for one year. We have to have the same for the next year or possibly expanded and more the following year and the following year. So we're looking at incremental costs for existing projects. We are looking at ongoing projects such as education and bursary initiatives and make sure that money is available for that.

We're also looking at another factor that I just want to make sure I state is that, you know, this is a new sector that's being developed and it's rapidly being expanded. So there are always going to be emerging costs that arise, and we're constantly listening to our stakeholders and listening to the pressures that they're experiencing and making adjustments accordingly.

So even in our existing cost structures for grants, we have ensured that every grant is increasing at a certain pace year over year, so we have to allocate funding for that. The federal government agreement does not have inflation built into it in the way the funding is allocated. So in our structuring of that expenditure we have to build for those incremental costs year over year, so we are able to increase those grants year over year, and we are also able to address any emerging or new pressures that come up.

And we've been able to do that and have received some very

positive feedback from associations such as SECA and our large operators that we've been able to kind of look at those emerging needs and address them through that initiative.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. So I see that the federal allocation last year was \$265 million. This year, '25-26, it's more than \$316 million, an increase of over 50 million. Why would the increase for child care, in this budget that I see, is less than \$4 million when it could have easily been 50 million plus whatever the rollover would have been? And that's a bit of a funding riddle for me. How is that accounted for? I'm a bit unclear on that.

Clint Repski: — You had identified the \$50 million increase was Canada-wide. Saskatchewan's share of that, which is a census based on 0-to-12-year olds, is \$5.8 million. That is offset by a reduction of 1.95 million for the infrastructure fund. And the reduction on that infrastructure fund is simply due to a timing difference. Last year there was multiple allotments, so it looks like a reduction. So the net difference is \$4 million.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. So I've been talking to a lot of stakeholders over the last few months and they've got a couple of burning issues that they'd like me to ask. The first one is, what criteria have you considered . . . And maybe before I go there, going forward I'm going to use the phrase "legacy centres." So those are the ones that have been around 30, 40, you know, 50 years. And then we've got the new ones coming on board and I'll call those the new ones, and I'll call the other ones the legacy centres so I won't be tripping all over my words.

So what criteria has been considered in formulating an equitable funding model to recognize the disparity of input costs that currently exist between legacy and new ones? There is a lot of angst out there and worry. Could you help me understand what those criteria would be? Because they're waiting for this funding model.

[18:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So around the funding model and just the member's question around equitable funding and the legacy versus the new child care centres, I think, you know, important to note that there would be specific cost drivers that the new facilities would experience that others wouldn't, the legacy centres wouldn't. And of course that factors into the numbers that we're currently using.

So the current method of funding child care facilities is based on specific grants, and that's allowed the ministry to be able to quickly target the needs that are out there. For example, such as providing a \$19 million one-time operational support grant. That was in '23-24.

As has been referenced here this evening, we are meeting with individual facilities. I know that the member has said that she's been talking to them too to understand their current pressures, reviewing their historical payments. So that's part of the work that we're doing right now at the officials' level to look at, you know, what's been happening in the past. This work is providing some additional data to help guide the development of a funding model as we go forward.

In addition to that, you know, I think I'd also say that we are reviewing existing models in other provinces and other jurisdictions to understand how that might potentially work here in Saskatchewan, knowing that of course we're not always comparing apples to apples. But I think we can learn from our partners in other jurisdictions, other provinces and territories to see how they perhaps are maybe addressing or dealing with existing challenges, and perhaps they've found some solutions there. So we're hoping to learn from best practices from other areas and then how we might be able to implement that here in Saskatchewan.

There have been working groups established, is my understanding, to not only hear about the concerns but the pressures, but also to better understand what the cost drivers are out there in various parts of the province, again recognizing the uniqueness of different areas of Saskatchewan. What might be a cost driver in one part of the province might look a little bit different than another part of the province. So those working groups are helping to provide some of that context for us at the officials level as we work to make, you know, potential changes here.

Finally there has been some work to engage with MNP, Meyers Norris Penny, to collect some financial information to further understand and analyze from an accounting perspective what the cost drivers are in the sector. So I guess all that to say that there has been a lot of work currently being done, that has been done previously but currently being done to help inform how we're funding it right now and how we can again best make changes to it to improve the funding for everyone that's involved in the sector.

Joan Pratchler: — Well with all due respect, it's not working very well, and it's very much more pressing than doing more research. The legacy centres are telling me that they were told they couldn't raise fees when they joined on to the agreement, while new centres can set their fees at whatever levels they need to, to a certain cap. And I've heard that that's changed over time.

So what's happened with these legacy centres is that they're chewing up their reserves and they're on the verge of bankruptcy. And in Regina alone the estimation is that there's almost 800 spaces that will be non-existent within the next 6 to 12 months in areas where there is no other child care available.

When I talk to some new centres who've done their bake sales and all these things and got their boards and their non-profit boards and all these things together, they're ready to start getting their centres up and running, and now they need to go to the bank to continue on. Because this agreement hasn't been signed, the banks are very hesitant to give them money, because they only have guaranteed one more year of funding, which has put many of them on the precipice of stopping.

So there is urgency for some of these legacy centres, not only here in Regina but around the province, and they need funding. And they need urgent funding now. And if they could raise their fees, that would be awfully helpful.

And so that's the concern they have. And I want to know how you're going to address them because it's very worrisome to families, the workers, and the communities that they're in. What

is your response to that?

[19:00]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So we too are, as I've said before, hearing the concerns from operators, both new operators and the legacy operators in Saskatchewan. You know, I've heard it when I talk to groups like SECA, when I'm hearing from an individual, whether they're operators or families, you know, the operators of child care centres who are writing to me or speaking with me and the team in the ministry about some of the challenges with the existing arrangement.

Which again, that's why I've said before, I don't think it's responsible for us to be . . . And I understand, you know, the pressures in the system, but I don't think it's responsible for us to be jumping to quickly sign an agreement when we know that there are improvements that need to be made. That's what's being asked of us. And again I think for me, that's the frustration from our perspective. We know this is number one, that this has been a very good program. There have been successes within the \$10-a-day program, but that being said, we know that it's not been perfect either.

And so that's why, as I've said previously, I think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we are taking that feedback that we're getting from the sector, that as we work to renegotiate the extension of this agreement and what the next version of this looks like, that we are not just acknowledging but also addressing the concerns that have been brought to our attention.

So that's where I think, you know, it's been a bit of frustration for us as a government. On one hand we're hearing that we've been given a very short timeline to negotiate an extension, frankly with pretty much no negotiation, I think, from the federal government. But also at the same time understanding that we're having concerns brought to us as to where this isn't working as well as it should be.

So you know, there was a meeting of federal, provincial, and territorial ministers and officials back in late November, I think it was. And this was touched on very briefly on the agenda, I think. And at that point it was about just, you know, the program itself, but there was no indication given as to when renegotiating of the next version of this agreement would occur.

So on February 6th when we received the letter from the then federal minister at the time, that was the first indication that they wanted to begin negotiating again. Again you know, I'm looking at the minister's letter right now. It says that officials, Employment and Social Development Canada officials have been instructed to begin these negotiations with your officials at the earliest opportunity with the aim of concluding agreements by February 21st of 2025.

So beginning negotiations on a long-term multi-million-dollar agreement that requires some area of improvement, I would argue, but under a very, very limited time frame. Our officials were in consultation and did reach out and talk to the federal counterparts about that to raise our concerns from Saskatchewan's perspectives, based on what we're hearing from SECA and operators across the province and families as well. And you know, to my understanding there was essentially no

room for negotiation.

As I've said before publicly, you see other provinces who have now stepped forward to say, you know, we signed this in haste; now we're looking for some changes to that existing arrangement. We want to be able to consider what other provinces have perhaps had included in their existing agreements. Again I think, as an example, Manitoba, that's kids under the age of seven. Here in Saskatchewan it's kids under the age of six. We think that's something that's reasonable that should be considered for our province. We haven't been provided that opportunity, as far as I understand, to even have that very, very basic conversation.

But anyway, that's again just my (a) acknowledging that this is an important program, but (b) that we want to make sure that the next version of this builds upon the successes that we've already achieved and addresses some of the challenges with the current version of that.

But maybe turn it over to either Clint or Sammi to talk a bit more about the funding, and again acknowledging the member's concerns that she's raised on behalf of operators and just specifically in Regina and in this particular area. But I'll ask Sammi to get into a bit more detail about how the program currently works and some of the challenges that have been identified with its existing parameters.

Sameema Haque: — Thank you, Minister. To use your language, the legacy, existing operators, we do collect a lot of financial information and did some analysis; even through third parties the information was collected. And what we found, that prior to this agreement coming into effect, of course these operators, the only source of revenue they had were fees. And they were setting their fees in accordance with their market conditions.

So the trend that we saw at that time was the fees, on an annual basis, were increasing by 0.7 per cent. In 2019, 1.9 per cent. In 2020, 1.6 per cent. So anywhere from 0.7 to 1.5 per cent is the trend that we saw in fee increases when they were completely at the discretion of the operators and the sole source of revenue for them.

Over the term of this agreement — over the last four years — the fee increases that have been allowed by the ministry are 11 per cent, which average out to be more than 2 per cent per year. So what happens is the parent fee is capped. The parents only pay \$10 a day, but the centre can increase their fees by that percentage, which means the grant that is given to the centres to make up for the total is increased. So what the ministry has been paying to the operators on a per-space basis for parent fee reduction grant has continued to increase. We have allowed 11 per cent increases over this term.

There are centres who maybe missed . . . Because these increases have happened on an annual basis, sometimes they missed applying that increase to their fees, and they have come back to us and said that they've had problems. And we work with them and we've made adjustment and allowed them to increase that. So we've allowed them to catch up and be able to increase to the allowable increase over the term of the agreement. Even at times applying it is slightly retroactive, a couple of months back where

we've kind of provided them funding. So that's how the fee structure has increased. So it's not that they have not had any increases. These increases have been happening, not for the parents but for the operators.

For the new centres that are coming on, again they don't set their fees. They don't get to set their fees as they so wish before the agreement, because we want some level of equity and standardization in the sector. So what we do is, again through a third-party analysis as well as a lot of financial data that we have continued to collect, we look at the average fees across the province for each category — you know, children, toddlers, and for those infants, toddlers, for each of those categories. And new centres that are coming on board set their fees at 80 per cent of that average. So it's not whatever they so wish; it is within 80 per cent of that.

And that is to recognize the start-up costs that these operators will have because they are coming on board. They're just starting a business. They are getting into a new lease. They might have equipment and other pressures related to starting off a new business. So that's where — and you know, again in discussion with large operators — that's been seen to be a very reasonable approach. And so we've continued to increase the fees as well.

I would also add that now this is not the sole source of revenue for the operators because there is multiple other grants that are provided to the operators beyond the fees. And many of these grants have continued to increase year over year — you know, nutrition grant, equipment grant, wage top-ups for the employees. So all of those other grants are also continuing to see increments, so that is also funding that's flowing to the operators.

But as the minister indicated, we recognize the pressures in the sector, but we are continuing to address them and make adjustments. As you can also . . . We just talked about the funding allocations. We continue to expend more and more and more. And also at the same time we have to comply with the terms of the agreement where the funding is allocated not just for core operations and affordability but multiple other initiatives, which include inclusion, accessibility, and programs related to special needs and, you know, also the workforce development — training and those kinds of initiatives. So all of those are seeing an increase.

Joan Pratchler: — Those centres that are most at risk of closing right now are the ones that take more of the intensive-needs children. And their reserves are not able to cover that, and they are very, very worried. And perhaps it might be a point to revisit how that funding could go for those people and those families and those centres that are under severe pressure that might close within . . . well now it's going to be five months.

I'm really worried about it, and I wouldn't want to be on the front page of the *Leader-Post* having to explain that as to why those children have no place to go. So I hope that that could be looked at. And another question. Well actually I'd need an answer. Would you look at it then because they're very, very worried. I can't overstate this.

[19:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So inclusion is one of the pillars of

not just this agreement but I think, you know, for us as a government as well. The provincial government funds a number of programs that do address and benefit children with intensive needs, and that would include in our child care centres.

So 2025-26 investment for early years inclusion programs is a little over \$25 million. A number of these programs have been around for some time. I believe most are provincially funded, if I'm not mistaken, but there may be some federal dollars perhaps attached to some of this.

But in that \$25 million overall, early years inclusion program funding would be \$7.9 million in the budget for early learning intensive support program. There's funding there for Children Communicating, Connecting and in Community, the 4Cs program; specialized pre-kindergarten; ECIP [early childhood intervention program], of course; child care enhanced accessibility grants; child care individual inclusion grants; inclusive practices initiatives; supports for medically fragile children. And I think there's been a number of increases in various different buckets here as part of that.

It does speak to this again though being a priority for us as a provincial government, and recognizing that it has been identified with us by child care operators and by families too that there are some, I would say, probably some growing needs when it comes to these particular children in Saskatchewan.

And that's why, I think, again it speaks to not just an extension of the current federal agreement, but this would be an area that we would want to have a renegotiation on to say, is there a way to better support and to better target perhaps some . . . whether it's the existing funding or additional funding for children with intensive needs? So again, I think that again speaks to some of the dollars that are put towards this particular area. But why this is important again, this has been identified as an area where we wanted to make improvements wherever we can.

I don't know, Sammi, was there anything you wanted to add just about some of the feedback we've had from the sector? I guess from maybe not the sector, but whether it's operators or families about the investments that have been made thus far and how that's been working.

Sameema Haque: — So I can give three very recent examples of, you know, inclusion-related measures that we've taken based on feedback from our stakeholders. We have an enhanced accessibility grant that allows for operators to hire staff members to support children with higher needs. We've recently increased the amount by \$2,000 per month. This has been very positively received. Essentially our enhanced accessibility grant now covers on a per-space basis equal to ECE I wages per month. So we've provided that grant, and very well received by large operators. This is a feedback item that we had heard on a regular basis.

The other initiative that I'd speak to is we've rolled out accessibility rating, wherein we are providing funding to operators. And they can have professional assessment done of the centre, where there's barriers to accessibility, and determine what kind of barriers exist and how they can be addressed. And we are further looking into providing some support and funding to those operators to actually address those barriers so there's

accessibility to the building and there is appropriate equipment available for them to support the children.

So there are multiple programs. Of course one of the conditions of the federal-provincial agreement is that the provincial funding, it cannot be displaced with federal funding. So many of these programs are dually funded by federal dollars as well as provincial dollars. Many of our legacy programs that have existed through provincial funding are very, very well received and are appreciated across the nation, and we've continued to build and enhance on those existing programs through providing additional supports and spaces.

Joan Pratchler: — Well what's not in your control was the prorogation of parliament, the writ, and now the election. So I can understand that finalizing those negotiations because you want to get it just right is important. It'd be silly to suggest otherwise.

However what is in your control is giving peace of mind to the sector. Is there any way you could please consider internally reallocating some kind of funds to help these people and these centres that are so at risk of closing? Five months is a very short timeline.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. Just to reiterate a couple of things and then touch on the specific question. Again, I think we've been pretty clear that both myself and the Premier as well, that we fully intend to sign, to renegotiate this agreement. We've been saying that for some time now. And I would hope that that would provide some assurance to the sector and to those who are asking questions and have concerns that that's what this government will be doing.

And again, recognizing that there remains to be a year left in the funding, to March 31st of 2026, we believe that there is time to be able to negotiate the next version of the child care agreement, one that works for continuing the affordability of this program, makes it long term, makes it sustainable, and really does try to help families right across this province.

So I think, in addition to stating it publicly — whether I've been interviewed by media or been answering questions here in this Chamber or elsewhere, letters that I've received, meetings that I've had with people involved in the sector in various different ways and forms, whether they're operators or providing the child care, whether they're families that are benefiting from it — I've tried to be very, very clear about our government's intention to do so.

Again, when we received the letter on February 6th, I had not only a virtual meeting with the then minister at the time to talk about Saskatchewan's interest in renegotiating an agreement, and never said at any point that no, we're not going to sign. I said we want to. This has been a good program; we need to address some areas where there's some gaps if you can make some improvements, but we want to be able to do that. Followed that up with a written letter to the minister as well again to reaffirm our commitment to our willingness to renegotiate.

And then when there was, you know, a short, very kind of a quick cabinet shuffle, again immediately sent a letter to the new minister and just said again, just reiterating Saskatchewan's

position — as I've said to the previous minister, to your predecessor — this is important for us.

So again, I think we've been very clear about what our intentions are here to make sure that we continue this program but in a better, an improved fashion going forward.

But to the member's question about how do we help these centres that, you know, that she's been talking to that are perhaps at risk here. I know that our team, we receive and have contact with centres across the province all the time. I think it's happening on a daily basis with our great team at the ministry where centres do reach out and say that they might be . . . You know, they have a question. Are we missing something here? Is there something that we're — we're having trouble perhaps covering this cost pressure — is there something that we're missing?

And it is a complex and evolving sector. Frankly sometimes I think operators are reaching out and aren't aware of all the variable grants that might be available out there. And I think our team has been doing a really good job of being able to as quickly as possible communicating with them and trying to say, okay, have you applied for this grant? Yes, no. You know, and what about this one? Tell us where are your pressures. And sometimes I think it's been identified that there are areas, sources of funding that have not been accessed that the operator just might not have been aware of because of how evolving the sector is and how complicated and complex it can be.

So, I think, credit to our team that's been doing that. But certainly if any of those are reaching out to the member, I'd offer to have them to be in touch with us. And we can certainly have our ministry team follow up and make sure that we are talking to these operators individually and doing everything we can, within the existing parameters of the agreement and the funding we do have allocated, to make sure that they aren't missing anything. And we can do everything we can to support them.

[19:30]

And again, the longer term goal is to make sure that we have an even better program with an agreement with the federal government so that we can identify these needs and provide support where it's necessary.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. And it sounds to me that you do want them to keep in operation.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — That's right. Certainly, of course.

Joan Pratchler: — Thanks. So the next section I'd like to go on is the remuneration for workers. So it's time now . . .

Chair Weger: — Joan. Joan. Ms. Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Oh, I'm sorry.

Chair Weger: — It's 7:30, so we have an agreed-upon time to take a break.

But just before you do that, as we take this break I would just ask you to consider, as far as the questions being directed towards the estimates, a little more precise. We are here to more or less talk

numbers, I think, rather than philosophical opinions.

With that being said, the committee will recess and we'll return at 8:00. Thank you.

[The committee recessed from 19:31 until 20:01.]

Chair Weger: — Welcome back, committee members. We will now resume consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Education. I recognize that Ms. Aleana Young is now chitting in for Noor Burki, and we have Darcy Warrington chitting in for Brent Blakley.

I recognize Ms. Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. I just want to know how much funding has been set aside now for the salary grid and for pension benefits for child care workers in this budget.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. Just pulling together some numbers here: total federal and provincial investments into ECE initiatives for the budget year, 41 million, if I have that number correct for this particular sector. Just some other detail and some of the work when it comes to incentives to recruit and retain ECEs and some of these that we've talked about previously. But I think it's just important to mention as well some of the work that's being done to support these very valuable early childhood educators working across the province.

Wage enhancements up to \$8.50 per hour for licensed ECEs; free and accelerated and remote ECE training and professional developments; some tuition-free seats we're providing as well; grants for child care facilities to hire substitute staff while regular staff attain their ECE accreditation; a number of other workforce enhancements and additions to increasing ECE wages that have happened in the past number of months as well here.

But yeah, to the member's question, overall, federal and provincial investments into ECE initiatives of 41 million.

Joan Pratchler: — Well I guess I didn't ask that question very well, did I? The picture in my mind of a salary grid is how much we're paying people for every year they've been working, what their levels of credentials are. So the longer they're in the, you know, in the sector, the more they get paid. The more education they have, you get paid. And you kind of just make it on a little grid and then, you know . . . I think I should have asked that better but I didn't.

So when's that happening? Because the predecessor said that that was well on the way and I just want to know when they'll get it.

[20:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Some numbers here for average hourly wages of full-time ECEs by certification levels. So there would be obviously three different certification levels, and just looking back over the past I think it would be four-ish years that we're looking at here: ECE certification level I, percentage growth in average wage up 31 per cent; ECE certification level II, percentage growth in average wage up 35 per cent; and at ECE level III, percentage growth in average wage up about 33 per cent

in the past four years, I think that is.

Additionally our numbers indicate that our most current calculation I think is that average wages for all certified ECEs in all positions is approximately a bit over \$25 an hour, and again in the neighbourhood of north of 30 per cent wage increase just in the past number of years.

So there's pretty significant increases in the wages that are paid to early childhood educators here in the province. And I'll maybe ask Assistant Deputy Minister Sammi Haque to talk a bit about the different certification levels and just sort of how that works in collaboration with other benefits that ECEs might be able to qualify for and what they're looking for.

Sameema Haque: — So when we consider the grid by definition, like the grid is providing a differentiation in wages based on experience and level of education and training.

So in the ECE sector there are three levels: ECE I, II, and III. So there is a differentiation of wages based on their level of certification. The top-up that's provided by the ministry is slightly different, but all of these levels have actually seen an increase in their wages as the minister indicated, significant percentage increase.

The other thing is if they are workers within a particular operation. Because these are private businesses, many of the certified workers will call themselves directors or assistant directors because they're owner and operators. If they are certified, they're still getting the top-up irrespective of what their actual title is, whether they're working as an, you know, ECE or their administrative position. As long as they have certification, because of us considering this as a wage differentiation based on education and experience we continue to provide that top-up.

The other thing I would say is we have increased the bottom up by increasing the wages of the lowest workers up to a provincial average.

And I would say as to the benefits — that was your second question — we respect the rights of the employer being employers. These are private businesses, are owners and operators often, and they determine what the employment contract looks like and what kind of benefits that they want to provide to their employees. So we've left them that autonomy. We provide a workforce enhancement grant, which allows the operator to determine what kind of employment incentives that they want to provide based on their market conditions.

We did do a survey to see if there is a particular trend. And we got feedback from the ECEs across the province looking for a variety of things, depending upon the age and location of the workforce. Some were looking for paid vacation. Some were looking for training opportunities. Some were looking for mentorship and leadership training opportunities. Others were looking for pensions and benefits. So there were different needs that the workers identified based on where they were in their career.

And so we left that autonomy to the operators to determine what kind of employment contract structure that they wanted to ensure so that they can have recruitment and retention. We do provide

the funding for that, and in the sense of it's a workforce enhancement grant, we've always provided that every year. And that allows the operator the flexibility to determine the employment contract as the employer.

Joan Pratchler: — So if I understand right, in that salary grid there's no recognition for five years' experience and then more for 10 years or anything like that. It's just the salary as is for each classification. Okay.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. The wage grid is, as we said earlier, based on the three different certification levels. And that's, you know, how that is calculated. But any additional, whether they're wage increases or benefits, would be at the discretion of the employer, the individual business.

Joan Pratchler: — One last question because I don't even want to hear my voice anymore tonight. I did not write my notes very carefully about the question, and I'm just going to say it again and then I'm going to try and write it properly. If not, maybe you can send it to me.

The federal allocation last year was 265 million, and this year it's 316 million. And that's an increase of about \$50 million. So why is the increase for child care in this budget less than 4 million when it could have easily been the 50 million plus, you know, rollover if there was any?

And I didn't quite write that down as clearly as I should have, and that's my problem. But if you could help me, that would be good and we could just call it a day then.

Sameema Haque: — We just needed to confirm the source of the 316. Just to give you a little bit of a context, the 316,567,960, that's the number you've shared. That is in the agreement. When the federal government signs the agreement they actually provide an allocation based on what they anticipate the funding will be. Within the agreement — all of these federal-provincial agreements — there's a clause that these allocations are subject to probation, of course, but also subject to adjustment based on census of zero-to-six population in that province in June of each fiscal year.

So these allocations and anticipated amount, they are not the actuals that we get from the federal government. So every year there is an adjustment that's made based on census of how our growth of zero-to-six-year-old children is across the nation. Every jurisdiction, they do the same calculation. So adjustments are made across the nation for allocations for everyone, based on that. That's the same clause that exists in every agreement.

So the 316 number, that was their anticipated number. That's not the actual that we'll get. Based on our census right now, in 2025-26 we anticipate getting 295, not 316.

Joan Pratchler: — It's still not quite the same math at the 50 million. So that would even be a greater variance, then?

Sameema Haque: — Pardon me?

Joan Pratchler: — That would be even a greater variance than not.

Sameema Haque: — No, you're not going to get 316 million from the federal government on this agreement. We will get less than that because our zero-to-six census is much lower than what they anticipated when they actually drafted the agreement.

Joan Pratchler: — But our population has increased.

Sameema Haque: — The population can increase. They look at it across the nation as to percentage increases across the nation and make an adjustment based on that for all jurisdictions.

Joan Pratchler: — Hmm. So it's not provincial population.

Sameema Haque: — It's provincial population for each jurisdiction. So every June they do it. And they do that for all of the agreements. All three agreements, including the new nutrition agreement, that adjustment happens. So the amount that's written into the agreement is not the actual amount that we get every year. That's an anticipated amount, subject to adjustments.

Joan Pratchler: — So it will be less than . . .

[20:30]

Sameema Haque: — It has been less. Now it could be . . .

Joan Pratchler: — It wouldn't be down to four million, would it?

Sameema Haque: — It's been down. That's what we anticipate based on our talks, and we will get a letter by mid-year. After June we get a letter in regards to our actual allocation for that year. Once they have the data for all the jurisdictions, they do the calculation at the federal level and indicate to us what our allocation for this year would be. So it's not based on the amount that's written in the agreement. It's subject to that adjustment. So what we anticipate we will get is 295.782.

Joan Pratchler: — And one last thing. Being a math teacher for a million years, could you show that work and send that to me so I can fully understand it?

Sameema Haque: — Absolutely.

Joan Pratchler: — By next week would be good. Well thank you very much, and I want to thank you for your patience. And I turn it over to my esteemed colleagues over here.

Chair Weger: — Ms. Young.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. Great to be here tonight with so many familiar faces from the education sector. I want to start off by thanking my colleague, the MLA for Saskatoon Eastview, for trusting me with this as well as, Minister, yourself and all of your officials for being here tonight as well as the viewing public at home and my colleagues across the aisle and the Chair.

Given the importance of this sector to the province and our future, I think I'll just jump right into some questions and apologize in advance for being just fairly straightforward with the questions, and hope being we can get some fairly straightforward answers.

My understanding is the school divisions would typically have their operating grants by this point. Understanding they do not have them, I'm wondering if, Minister, you can table the operating grants for each school division here tonight.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. So when the budget was being developed, we didn't have the arbitrator's report back obviously, but since that point in time we do have that back. So school divisions don't have those numbers yet. The CBA [collective bargaining agreement] has yet to be ratified. There were some meetings last week, I think, between the GTBC [government-trustee bargaining committee] and the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation]. And we anticipate that things will progress fairly quickly.

And then once the new CBA has been agreed upon, then from that point forward, as I understand it, the process is that the final calculations will then be developed for the school divisions. We expect that should not take terribly long.

A little bit later this spring, we'll have those numbers. Those'll be provided to the school divisions, at which time they'd be available to anyone who's wanting to know what those numbers are. But yeah, we don't have those numbers as of right now.

Aleana Young: — When will the school divisions be receiving those?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — As I said, you know, it should not be a long process. We expect in a matter of weeks, this spring, they'll have those numbers as quickly as possible.

Aleana Young: — Is there a reason then, looking at the fact that we're in Education estimates tonight, that these were scheduled so early in the process instead of later in the estimates schedule so that, you know, the committee might actually be able to ask some questions at the specific school division funding level?

Chair Weger: — Ms. Young, I don't think that's a question that relates to the estimates that are before us.

Aleana Young: — Sorry, Mr. Chair, can you clarify? The operating grants for school divisions in the education sector isn't relevant to the Education estimates before the Assembly?

Chair Weger: — I think you were asking a question about the timing of this meeting.

Aleana Young: — Sure.

Chair Weger: — Yeah, and I don't think the timing of this meeting relates to the material in the estimates.

Aleana Young: — Were any changes made to the funding formula this year? And if any were, can you speak to what those were and why?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So prior to the arbitrator's report, there were no changes to the funding formula, to the model. But given that both sides right now are working on just finalizing the terms of the CBA and then having it ratified, we do anticipate there could be some adjustments based on what the arbitrator's ruling was and how that will impact things going forward.

Aleana Young: — Sounds like there's a lot in flux at the moment with school divisions not having their operating grants because of the CBA. The entire education . . . Well, I shouldn't say the entire. A significant portion of the education budget being impacted by the outcome of the CBA, and there's additionally unknown but potential changes coming to the funding formula, also related to the outcome of the CBA.

As we look at operating funds, what is the projected per-student funding for next school year in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — School operating funding is increasing a record amount this year, \$186.4 million as I've stated before, compared to last year's budget day. The increase does include the funding for the new teachers' collective bargaining agreement. The '25-26 average per-student amount is expected to increase by approximately \$800 compared to '24-25 budget.

So our estimate — and again this is just an estimate right now; the actual allocation of funding will depend on the conclusion of the CBA contract negotiations, so that amount might fluctuate a little bit — but it is, yeah, approximately about an \$800 increase per student. So roughly \$12,700 estimated per-student funding amount.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. To be crystal clear, that's per student not per capita?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Per student.

Aleana Young: — Great. Thank you, Mr. Hindley.

Darcy Warrington: — Hi, I'm Darcy Warrington. I'm the MLA for Saskatoon Stonebridge. It's a pleasure to be here. I'm a 17-year teacher and it really is truly an honour, and thank you to the ministry and to the minister for your work on your portfolio. It's a very important one.

Minister Hindley, what is the percentage enrolment increase that was experienced this year and what is projected for next year?

[20:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Sorry, just had to clarify a couple of numbers here. This year the enrolment increase . . . And I think the member asked percentages, right?

Darcy Warrington: — Correct.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, 2.6 per cent. And for the next school year, projected increase 1.2 per cent increase in enrolment.

Darcy Warrington: — And how is in-year enrolment growth funded in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Historically there would be a rebalancing or recalculation as of September 30th when we've got calculations in, in actual numbers, right, of students. And that's what we've typically done for years and years in Saskatchewan.

But the last couple of years my understanding is that, you know, because of significant enrolment growth, we've then taken a second point in time I guess later on in the school year, kind of mid-winter, to be able to have a look at that number again for potential rebalancing. But that's a relatively new phenomenon I think for us in the ministry as to how we address those pressures.

But I'll maybe turn it over to the officials to get into a bit more detail around kind of the second adjustment/recalculation.

Clint Repski: — Sure. So as the minister indicated, the enrolment and the school division funding packages or operating grants are calculated based on their estimates for the upcoming September. When September 30th rolls around and we get an actual count is when there's adjustments made for who's higher, who's lower from their estimates.

But what we've seen over the past few years is historically September 30th was the high point of enrolment. Being a teacher for a long time, you would have seen those numbers spike — and there's a lot of butts in seats on September 30th — but they tended to trickle down. They come back up in second semester. But with the growth that we've seen in the province on enrolment, September 30th is no longer the high point. And we've seen numbers of students coming to the province and that number increases where historically it certainly hasn't.

And so we were working with the school divisions over the past few years to determine, what does that calculation look like? So we landed on an approach over the last couple of years where if you've had significant in-year growth, there's a mechanism to recognize that enrolment piece.

You want to talk about the formula for doing that?

Angela Chobanik: — Sure. Angela Chobanik. I'm the executive director of the education funding branch.

So as the minister and deputy minister said, with the recent enrolment growth we did look at adjustments to the funding formula to recognize that significant growth had happened after September 30th, primarily driven by immigration. And we saw this impact mostly in our urban centres. We have a standing committee that reviews the operating grant formula, the operating grant advisory committee, that has a number of stakeholders from our education sector. And we work with this group to review various items of the funding formula.

So traditionally the funding is updated based on September 30th enrolment counts, but with this, we call it post-September 30th enrolment growth. We also look at enrolments on January 31st and we use that to then project forward what enrolment growth might be for the rest of the school year.

In order to focus the money at this point on where significant growth is, we try to estimate significant growth using an eligibility threshold of 125 students and 0.5 per cent growth, and then we take those projections of what enrolments will be for the rest of the school year and apply a per-student rate. This recognizes the salaries for the remaining months of the school year, essentially semester two. This formula was first implemented in '23-24 and provided an increase of 2.9 million in the middle of the year. And '24-25 it was performed again. An

increase of 1.67 million was allocated in '24-25.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. Sorry, just one follow-up question to Ms. Chobanik's answer. There you mentioned the 2.6 growth earlier as well, 2.6 growth for the year as well as you . . . How much of that growth — either by percentage or student numbers, whichever is easier, Minister, for yourself or your officials — comes after that September 30th date?

[21:00]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — February 1st numbers here in the charts. Enrolment, so the checkpoint there for February 1st of this year, province-wide enrolment, student enrolment actually went down 605 total students, and there were decreases in just about every school division except for two.

Aleana Young: — I'm sorry, Minister, those two were?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Regina Catholic and Saskatoon Catholic. Yeah. And just, sorry, another . . . just a point of clarification as well, or maybe not a point of clarification but just some additional information. That doesn't mean that from those other divisions that there was funding pulled back as a result of their enrolment reductions. So just to be clear on that.

Chair Weger: — I recognize Mr. Warrington.

Darcy Warrington: — I'm new. I keep raising my hand like I'm a student. Sorry.

So this next question is somewhat overarching. There'll be additional follow-ups, but just to keep it reasonable to answer in a timely fashion. Your budget documents and materials referenced \$54.4 million to address non-teacher salaries, inflation, transportation, and specialized support classrooms. Can you break that category down to each of those items and the investment that was included for each? And I'm willing to repeat that if you require.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Okay, so the increase — and this does tie a bit as well to the CBA as well, so that's going to have an impact — the increase, the overall increase, to the operating budget for the school divisions, that will stay the same. So the 186.4 million increase, there's not going to be any fluctuation to that. That is the number, and that's what the increase will be and is.

But within that, as the members identified, there would be for example the 54 million identified for non-teacher salary increases, transportation, inflation, some other factors, as well as specialized support classrooms. But that number may fluctuate slightly. We don't have that breakdown yet because until the CBA, the details, are worked out, finalized, ratified, then we'll have that exact, specific calculation, which then will be communicated to school divisions. And then we'll have a more specific breakdown of what those actual numbers look like.

So I guess short answer is there will be some minor tweaks, but we won't know that until the CBA is completed and concluded this spring.

Darcy Warrington: — So could you still provide the breakdown

of what you have, regardless of the tweaks that are going to need to occur?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, again the numbers that we had were pre-arbitration report numbers. So those would have been numbers that would have been built into the budget before the arbitrator released his report and recommendations, which are then going to lead to the final contract that again hopefully will be concluded here fairly shortly. So I don't think it'd be appropriate to share that because that's now going to change based on what the implications are from the arbitrator's report on what that does to the various buckets of funding as part of the 186.

Aleana Young: — Sorry, Minister. I'm a few years out of this sector, but can you explain it to me like I'm dumb and just help me understand? Appreciate the significant impact of the CBA on education funding here in Saskatchewan, but in the budget documents provided to the legislature, as my colleague pointed out, there's the fifty-four and a half million dollars for non-teachers' salaries, inflation, transportation. And those numbers are not available to the committee because of the CBA. Can you help me, can you be really clear about why the teacher contract is going to impact, for example, transportation costs in the fifty-four and a half million dollars?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Okay. So trying to explain this as clearly and succinctly as possible, but I guess the best way to do it is to say it this way.

In the budget we committed to a number of things prior to the arbitrator's report. One of those items that's included in one of these buckets is the specialized support classrooms. So we've publicly said that we're going to be adding 200 more of these across the province over the next four years, and the initial budget allocation was for the first 50. So that is a number that we are committed to, is the 50.

[21:15]

That being said, that's where the arbitrator's report comes in. The arbitrators report then impacts the CBA, which of course impacts how much the teachers in these specialized support classrooms are going to be paid. So therefore we anticipate that amount is going to go up.

So as a result of that, in order to make sure that we still hit our commitment of 50 specialized support classrooms in this budget year, that might mean that some of those other buckets of funding within that 50 — well in this case within that 54 million — might have to move around.

Now again, not major. We don't expect major fluctuations, based on what the arbitrator was saying, but still it's a calculation that has to be determined. And then of course from there, then we'll have the actual breakdown of what each of these specific amounts will be. Does that help?

Aleana Young: — Yeah, it does. I'm just trying to square that circle with the communication that went out around the \$130 million specifically for the teachers' contract, which I took as an indication — and please tell me if I'm wrong — that your government was going to be fully funding the CBA, which is

positive. I hear the minister saying that's correct. Great news. And that there was also communication around what was impacted by the CBA and what wasn't. But I suppose we don't need to hammer that too much tonight.

What I would ask, Minister, then is that as those numbers shake out, as you get that clarification around the CBA, if you could commit to providing that to the committee in a timely fashion.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah. Certainly. You know, we have every intention of trying to get this finalized as quickly as possible. Meetings happened a couple of days last week around finalizing the language around the agreements. And my understanding that there was a lot of progress being made and hopefully we'll have the CBA finalized here in relatively short order.

And then once that is done, then certainly then our ministry team, our officials, then work . . . And we've committed to the school divisions because we understand, you know, they're just looking for some clarity, looking for some certainty.

Typically they would find out their numbers on budget day. This year we sat down with them, a number of them were here in Regina earlier in the morning to have an embargoed briefing, some in person, some on Webex and Zoom. But having to explain to them we don't have your specific numbers yet, it's a bit of an anomaly this year. And so they're looking for that clarity as well.

So we'll get that process done as quickly as possible, provide the specific numbers for each of the 27 school divisions. And then from there of course that would be publicly available information, so we could provide that to the committee. So yeah.

Aleana Young: — Thank you.

Chair Weger: — All right. Yes, Mr. Warrington.

Darcy Warrington: — Thank you, Minister Hindley. My next two questions are knowledge-based questions, the type that should be known or not known. They're the lowest level of questions. So anyhow, the reason I say that is that I would expect that someone would know these off the top of their head.

Minister Hindley, what rate of inflation were you factoring into the budget as it was being developed, and what inflationary costs does your government now recognize in the education sector?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So to the members, a question. Just conferring here with the officials and the team. We don't use a specific inflationary number, the reason being though is that because 80 per cent of what makes up the education budget is salaries. So not to say that there aren't some costs, but not the same sort of inflationary costs that would typically impact, you know, perhaps other sectors, I guess I would say.

Certainly when it comes to capital projects — you know, our new school builds, renovation projects, costs of materials — that has increased and impacts our Education projects just as it does in any other ministry or in the public sector, and of course in the private sector as well. But again the vast significant majority of the expenses in the Ministry of Education are salaries, so that's

why we don't build in an inflationary number.

Darcy Warrington: — Okay. Thank you for your response, Minister Hindley. I think you could still go beyond what you said in terms of infrastructure and new builds. What inflationary costs does your government now recognize in the education sector beyond new builds, as there would be more than one?

Clint Repski: — So within the operating grant of funding — and as we've talked about, the specifics are going to be determined hopefully in short order once the collective agreement is finalized — the things that are factored into the budget deliberations and ultimately the allocation of school divisions would be things like non-teacher salary increases, transportation fuel, cost of bus purchases, non-salary inflation, and general items like that.

Aleana Young: — So, Deputy Minister, we're hearing there's not a standard rate of inflation that is used by your ministry on those items, like to calculate estimated costs for, say, school buses or transportation. There's not?

Clint Repski: — There's not.

Aleana Young: — Okay. A couple of very specific questions, then I'm going to throw it over to my colleagues. Where are we currently sourcing relocatables from?

[21:30]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. Just to preface the answer, the province, the Ministry of Education, doesn't procure, find, or source the relocatables. It's done by the school divisions. They obviously go through that process too to find them. My understanding is that the vast majority of the relocatables are sourced from a Saskatchewan company.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. Is the ministry intending to provide clarity or expectations for divisions as they move forward in putting out tenders for repairs or procurement?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Could you repeat the question, please? We thought we heard two different things, so we'll just ask the source. Yeah.

Aleana Young: — Oh, I'll happily take both answers.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Both answers.

Aleana Young: — Will the ministry be providing clarity or expectations for divisions when they're putting out tenders for repairs or procurement?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Okay. Sorry, just had to find the letter that we had sent earlier in March. So March the 5th I had sent a letter under my signature to board Chairs and directors of education and CEOs across the province, and in that letter indicated that . . . It referenced the pending and current situation with tariffs with the United States. And then in the letter it indicated that as part of these measures, goods and services procured by the Government of Saskatchewan must prioritize Canadian suppliers with the goal of reducing or eliminating US [United States] procurement.

And so that was sent out by myself to the school divisions. That was then followed up by the deputy minister. I'll maybe ask Clint just to talk about that step there as well.

Clint Repski: — So following the minister's letter to the school divisions, we had a call with the directors of education across the province. And in that call we reiterated the contents of the letter. And what we had asked at that point in time was for school divisions to take a look at their purchasing, where they're sourcing their goods from — Is it an American company? Is it Canadian? Are there different alternatives? — with the goal of prioritizing Canadian purchases.

It was fairly straightforward in what that message was. And that was a follow-up a couple of days after the letter had been sent.

Aleana Young: — Thank you very much. So the short answer is, yes. March 5th. Great. One final question and if, Minister, just recognizing the time, your officials don't have this information at their fingertips, like to indicate off the top, very happy to receive it at a later date so we don't burn the clock here.

Does your ministry specifically have any contracts with American vendors? And if yes, what are they and what steps are being taken, if possible, by the ministry?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Just checking with the officials here. The Ministry of Education has two agreements with US vendors. One is with — and these are both IT [information technology] providers — one is Blackboard, Inc. and the other is Jaggaer, spelled J-a-g-a-e-r, Inc.

Brittney Senger: — Hi. It's great to be here tonight. Really excited just to be here, asking questions for the first time at budget estimates. And fantastic to see so many folks out late this evening.

Recognizing that we are short on time, I'm going to jump straight into my first question, which is, what amount did you budget for each of the new 50 specialized support classrooms? And also again, recognizing that we're burning through time pretty quickly here, if you don't have that number right now, we can table it and you can provide it at another time.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. Based on the pilots, the amount that we had budgeted for the specialized support classrooms was approximately \$300,000 per specialized support classroom.

That being said, as I've had to reference a couple times earlier tonight with some of the other questions, that is also impacted by the CBA. And once that's finalized because of — I feel like I'm repeating myself — the arbitrator's final report on the teacher contract situation.

So yeah, estimated amount pre-arbitration was 300,000 per specialized support classrooms, but subject to some fluctuation once the CBA is finalized and ratified.

Brittney Senger: — Great. And just for clarification, this brings the new total of specialized classrooms to 58?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Correct. Yeah because there's 50

additional. The eight pilots are annualized and then we're adding another 50 in this budget year.

Brittney Senger: — Awesome, thank you. And what type of students is this program intended to serve? Is it a program for students with behavioural challenges or is it a program for students with intensive needs?

[21:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. So the goal of the specialized support classroom model — and you know, both with not just the pilots but the initial pilots, of which we had some very good feedback and results from both teachers and families, and students themselves — but the goal is to provide short-term support for any number of students that might be able to be helped through this model, to help with self-regulation whether that's challenging behaviour or for any reason. So I don't think it's . . . You know, again it's really meant to be used for any of the students where they might be able to benefit from that particular program.

But again, I had the chance actually to visit one of the pilots in North Battleford as a matter of fact and talked to the teachers there and the principal about the positive impacts of the specialized support classroom. And really good to see the work that they were doing with the students there.

The reports back have been very positive in terms of . . . And each school is doing this a little bit differently in terms of what they're using their resources for and how they use it to best support the students in that school that can benefit from those supports. But again, it's really meant to be utilized for any student that can be seen to benefit, that might need some additional short-term support to help get them back on track and then of course get them back into that classroom with the rest of their classmates as soon as possible.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you very much. And what school divisions will these specialized classrooms be in?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Specialized classroom support, the expansion, annualizing the initial eight. So I'll try and go through this as quickly as possible.

So the initial eight in the pilot were one in each of these divisions: Light of Christ has one, Living Sky, Prince Albert Catholic, Regina Catholic, Regina Public, Saskatchewan Rivers, Saskatoon Public, and Saskatoon Catholic.

With the expansion of the additional 50, every school division will have at least one specialized support classroom. And some will get multiple just based on, you know . . . And thanks by the way to the ministry team who had reached out to school divisions. And by the way, there was a lot of interest as well from school divisions in being able to be considered for a specialized support classroom. By the time this year's expansion is complete, every school division will have at least one specialized support classroom.

I'll maybe just list off the ones who will have multiple specialized support classrooms. So you know, for example, Chinook's going to receive one. Christ the Teacher will receive

one. Light of Christ will have two. Living Sky will have two. Northern Lights School Division currently don't have any, but will have three specialized support classrooms. Prince Albert Catholic is going to get an additional one, so they will have two.

Regina Catholic will get an additional four, so they will now have five specialized support classrooms. That was Regina Catholic. Regina Public will receive an additional seven specialized support classrooms, so they'll have a total of eight. Saskatchewan Rivers will receive an additional one, so they will have two.

Saskatoon Public School Division will receive an additional eight, so they will have nine specialized support classrooms in Saskatoon Public. And Saskatoon Catholic will receive an additional six, and so therefore will have a total of seven specialized support classrooms.

So again, every school division will have at least one added to their roster this year, and several of them will have multiple. And of course this is the first 50, and we'll add the remaining 150 specialized support classrooms in future budget years.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. What criteria is given to school divisions to be approved for this funding? And can you table the criteria that's provided to school divisions?

Jason Pirlot: — Good evening. Jason Pirlot, ADM [assistant deputy minister] with the Ministry of Education.

So primarily the allocation of the support classrooms was determined through two main factors, those being enrolment — so school division enrolment — and the second one being vulnerability. We do have a policy and procedures document that we've put together. It worked for school divisions through the implementation of the pilot. We will be finalizing that. We can table that with the committee once we have the opportunity to finalize our conversations with school divisions.

As you'll appreciate, budget day kind of just hit us, and we're still working with school divisions on quite a few things as we've talked about a little bit tonight.

School divisions are aware of their allocations for the upcoming year. I would go back to a little bit earlier, I think, from a parameters approach, our conversations with directors of education. It's been very clear that the pilot approach model, which provided a great deal of flexibility to school divisions, has been appreciated, recognizing factors that, you know, might change from one part of the province to the other.

And so in my conversations personally with directors, I've heard a great deal of support for that approach. It's our intent to continue that approach. Having said that, also sticking to principles for the program of student-centred, ensuring safety for students and teachers, ensuring parental involvement, inclusion, and flexibility.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. I just have a couple of quick questions about temporary exclusions in Saskatchewan schools, also known as assigned-to-home or deferred enrolment. But it's different than a student who just has a medical exemption or is engaged in home-based study. Essentially this is when a school simply does not have resources to safely accept a student and

they are denied access to an education on a part-time or even full-time basis.

Are you aware of how many students in Saskatchewan are being denied an education because adequate supports do not exist?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — The Ministry of Education doesn't have those stats centrally. We don't have them. School divisions, I anticipate they would though. They make the individual decisions. So school divisions would have that information but not the ministry.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. I appreciate you looking into that. I do want to follow up though. Is your ministry now tracking these instances? And if not, why not?

[22:00]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Again, just to the member's question, it's the school divisions that have the responsibility to make the decisions around the funding that's provided to them by the Ministry of Education, by the government. So the divisions make these decisions at the local level on an individual basis in terms of how they allocate that funding and how they use it to support the students that they have within their division. So again that's something that's determined upon at the division level. And I would assume that they would track that.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. So have any divisions communicated their numbers of students that are excluded from attending school or expressed any concern about the trend?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Not that I'm aware of. I'm just conferring with the officials here. But again, to the best of my knowledge I don't think we've had that information specifically provided to us by school divisions and school boards and individual schools.

That being said though, you know, when I've been meeting with, whether it's the school divisions, the directors of education, their senior administrative team, and often at the same time in conjunction with the school board trustees, we'll talk about a number of issues.

And that will include, you know, specifically within whether it's the school division as a whole or for example, you know, and I'm thinking of when I've met with both Regina Public and Catholic and I've also met with Saskatoon Public and Saskatoon Catholic as well in addition to some other school divisions — I haven't had the opportunity to meet with all of them yet but working on my way to doing that — but for example, meeting with Saskatoon Public and talking about supports for learning, talking about the need for expansion of the specialized support classrooms model.

When I was in Saskatoon and meeting with Saskatoon Public, had a chance to have them tour me through John Dolan School as well to see the work that this . . . the amazing work that's being done there for some very high intense-need students there in that environment.

So again, I stand to be corrected, but I'm not aware of any specific numbers that have been brought to our attention by the school divisions. But again, we do speak when I meet with them,

with the boards, with the divisions, when I talk to directors of education, you know, when I'm talking to the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] and LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents] and other groups, the STF, we do talk about how do we best collaborate to address the challenges in the classroom around some of these complexities and making sure that we're providing support to those students that require some additional supports in order to help them to best succeed.

Brittney Senger: — Thank you. And are you concerned that there might be a human rights violation happening with students on temporary exclusions?

Chair Weger: — Ms. Senger, I'll just caution you. We're referring to the estimates here. I'm not sure how that question relates to the estimates, if you could clarify that.

Brittney Senger: — Yes. So, sorry. Just for clarification on, you know, the number of temporary exclusions and given that education is a human right, and since there are students that are not being able to attend school, I was really just looking for some clarification.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — If the member's question is, you know, am I aware or is the ministry aware of any specific human rights violations or specific complaints? No, not to my knowledge. We're not aware of that, you know, but that being said, you know, as I commented I think earlier in some of my other answers, you know, it's our expectation that school divisions are.

And they receive funding to provide education for students within their division. And so, you know, it's our expectation as a government and as the Ministry of Education that they would be using that funding to provide an education to the students that reside within their boundaries, and recognizing that that might look different for certain students depending on their needs.

And again that's why, you know, I think we have these conversations. That's why we, you know, are making the additional investments in the specialized support classrooms into, you know, specific funding buckets like the supports for learning. And always open to collaborating in how we best provide that support to school divisions, to teachers, to EAs [educational assistant], to all the professionals that work within the school system to make sure that they are doing everything they can to provide an education, as I said, to the students that reside within their school division boundaries.

Aleana Young: — Thanks. I want to bring us back to the provincial CBA. Minister, are you able to share with us what the estimated cost of teacher salary and benefit increases for '24-25 and '25-26 school years are? And how is this reflected in the budget?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — CBA salary estimates, so factoring in the 4, 3, and 2. I think the member asked, it's '24-25 and '25-26?

Aleana Young: — Correct.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — '24-25, so that's the 3 per cent increase, approximately \$42 million. That's on the school year.

And then for '25-26 at the 2 per cent increase on the school year, about 29 million.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. And the budget documents highlighting the \$130 million, does this include retro pay for teachers? And if yes, how much?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yes, retro pay is included in that. And I will turn it over to Jason to get into the details.

Jason Pirlot: — So one of the fun things about school divisions' budgets is we have school years and government years and never the two shall meet, except they do sometimes and sometimes they don't.

[22:15]

Short answer to the question is, up to the point of March of this expiring fiscal year, so just recently expired fiscal year, school divisions have received payment for the full retro costs going back. And then in this current upcoming April to August of 2025 period, the additional dollars required to meet the retro payment commitments is about \$40 million. And yes, that is included.

Aleana Young: — That is part of the \$130 million.

Jason Pirlot: — Well no, because the \$130 million gets into a school year for the next fiscal year. So in short the retro pay has been, up to the point of March of '25, has been provided to school divisions, and an additional amount of 40 million will be provided up to August. And that would be in our 2025-26 government budget. But when you're talking about the \$186 million, we're actually talking about school year for next year, to make it super clear.

Aleana Young: — Okay, '25-26 school year.

Jason Pirlot: — Yeah.

Aleana Young: — Okay. Are you funding increased cost to LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] agreements resulting from the CBA? I'll give you a specific example. Top of mind would be sub costs, sure, of course expected to increase.

Clint Repski: — So a quick point around the example of the substitutes. Those are a part of the local agreements, and they're not directly tied to the collective agreement as they are negotiated locally around the province for the 27 LINC agreements.

But the quick answer to your question is yes, the teacher amounts in the LINC agreements are going to be reflective of the 4, 3, 2 per cent of the new collective agreement.

Aleana Young: — So yes, the government will be funding all increased costs to local teacher agreements, or just specifically the ones you referenced?

Clint Repski: — So as I indicated, the LINC amounts are going to be increased by the collective agreements as it pertains to the teacher salaries. There are going to be other components that may or may not be covered through the other increases in the overall operating funding agreement. I can't say specifically if they're

going to be covered, simply because there's a various state of collective agreements across the province. Some are in negotiations; some are set; some may have negotiated things that we may not have contemplated yet. So I can't say for certain whether they'll be covered or not.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. What's the cost for additional teachers required in the new CBA, and how many teachers need to be hired to ensure the contract is fulfilled?

Jason Pirlot: — Thanks for the question. Jason Pirlot, ADM, Education. So at this time again, until the collective agreement is signed between the two bargaining committees — the GTBC and the TBC [teachers' bargaining committee] — it's difficult to predict with certainty how many additional teachers that's going to lead to.

Aleana Young: — So I'm to understand there was no estimate, there were no figures that you used in producing the budget for the education sector this year? There's no consideration of what the costs would be for additional teachers contemplated by the CBA?

Jason Pirlot: — So you know, certainly we've done high-level work inside the ministry. It would be premature to release those estimates right now before pen has gone to paper on that collective agreement, and I wouldn't want to jeopardize that process.

Aleana Young: — Okay, thank you. Since 2010-2011, the ratio of students to educators in provincial schools has gone up every single year — save 2020-2021, the school year of course following the beginning of the pandemic. And that ratio has increased from 14.4 to 16.7 since 2010-2011, which is an increase of 16 per cent.

I want to be clear. I understand that this is a decision that local boards make to meet their staffing needs. I'm also well aware of the diversity of schools across the province, so I don't need that explained. But what are the expectations for the PTR [pupil/teacher ratio] ratio in this budget?

[22:30]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. Just conferring with the officials here. And based on the budget estimates that we do have — you know, the amount of funding that is being increased to school divisions for an increase in operating, looking at all the factors we have that we've talked about earlier this evening, enrolment, and again just with the additional dollars there for school divisions being able to hire more teachers, you know, in the coming period of time here — we do expect that the PTR, or pupil-to-teacher ratio, for provincial school divisions is estimated to go down compared to the previous year.

So that's again just based on our best calculations right now. We do expect that that number will be decreasing.

Aleana Young: — Thank you. And recognizing the time I'll ask questions, simple yes/no. As in years past, is the minister willing to provide tabled documents to update data on the two following issues? The number of students requiring intensive supports,

broken down by school division, as well as the number of students requiring EAL [English as an additional language] support at various levels, also by division.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Sorry, what was the first part?

Aleana Young: — Students requiring intensive supports by school division, and EAL at any level by school division, as has been provided in years past.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, we can agree to table those. We can get those to you. Yeah.

Chair Weger: — Thank you. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Education. I just want to thank Legislative Service, committee members, Minister Hindley, and your ministry officials for your attendance and great work on this matter. Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just brief closing comments. Thanks to the committee, the Chair, the committee members for your indulgence tonight. Those that are here and those that were here previously asking questions, thank you for that.

And thank you most specifically to the ministry team, those who have joined me up at the table here this evening trying our best to answer the questions from the members opposite, all those that perhaps didn't get called upon but are doing some amazing work within the ministry each and every day and I'm sure can think of far more exciting ways to spend — or maybe more restful ways to spend — a 10:32 at night on a Wednesday evening.

So thanks for being here and thanks for the great work that you do day in and day out, recognizing your passion for the education sector and making sure that we're all remembering that — as much as we're trying to make improvements and support our teachers and our educational assistants and other support staff and other professionals in the education sector, and recognizing those that have experience in the sector as well — always remembering that it's students that we're trying to keep at the centre of all of our decisions and making sure that we really do give them every opportunity to learn and to learn from ourselves where we can make improvements upon the system we currently have.

So on behalf of myself and my office — and thanks to my chief of staff, Mitch, and others in the minister's office — a thank you to the ministry team for your committed work and to all of the committee members here for your time this evening. Thank you.

Chair Weger: — Ms. Young or any other committee members, have any closing comments?

Aleana Young: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, on behalf of our side, we'd like to extend our thanks, to start with in particular, the ministry officials here tonight as well as the minister.

For the people watching at home, they likely can't see there is a stack of binders here in the room that do appear to be about 11 inches high prepared by the hard-working civil servants here, and

I would love to just FOIP [*The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*] an entire binder. But the amount of work that's clearly gone into preparing for tonight and the care shown to this critical sector in the province is evident. So you have our thanks for all of that work, as well as the people behind the scenes who aren't sitting here in the Chamber with us tonight but no doubt contributed to the countless hours that go into not only preparing for the budget, but the estimates process which is so important for accountability and democracy.

In addition I'd just like to quickly thank all those people who are watching at home. As the minister pointed out, like the care and love that people have for the education sector, be they education workers currently on the front lines working with students, working with families, retired educators, directors, bus drivers. I really can't throw a stone in this province without meeting somebody who is somehow connected to the education sector. And it's always actually incredibly, I think, encouraging for all of us to know how much people care about education, about the process that happens, even at 10:30 at night on a Wednesday.

So just on behalf of the official opposition, my colleagues up here as well as those who have come before us, and the Education critic, the member from Saskatoon Eastview, our sincere thanks as well to you, Mr. Chair, and the members opposite who have joined us here tonight.

Chair Weger: — Thank you. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 22:35.]