



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Travis Keisig, Chair
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Noor Burki, Deputy Chair
Regina Coronation Park

Brent Blakley
Regina Wascana Plains

Terri Bromm
Carrot River Valley

David Chan
Yorkton

April ChiefCalf
Saskatoon Westview

Barret Kropf
Dakota-Arm River

[The committee met at 15:30.]

Procedural Clerk: — Good afternoon. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Nadine Coderre, and it is my duty as Procedural Clerk to preside over the election of a new Chair. I'd like to remind members of the process. I'll first ask for nominations. Once there are no further nominations, I will then ask a member to move a motion to have a committee member preside as Chair. I will now call for nominations for that position. I recognize MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Bromm.

Terri Bromm: — I nominate MLA Keisig to the position of Chair.

Procedural Clerk: — MLA Bromm has nominated MLA Keisig to the position of Chair. Are there any further nominations? Seeing none, I would now invite a member to move the motion. I recognize MLA Bromm.

Terri Bromm: — I move:

That Travis Keisig be elected to preside as Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services.

Procedural Clerk: — It has been moved by MLA Bromm:

That Travis Keisig be elected to preside as Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services.

All in favour of the motion? All opposed? I declare the motion carried and invite MLA Keisig to please take the Chair.

Chair Keisig: — Well thank you, everyone. Good afternoon. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name's MLA Travis Keisig, Chair. We are joined today by Noor Burki, Deputy Chair; MLA Terri Bromm; MLA David Chan; MLA Barret Kropf; and we have MLA Matt Love; MLA Joan Pratchler; and MLA Noor Burki joining us here as well.

Pursuant to rule 148(1), the following 2026-27 estimates and 2025-26 supplementary estimates no. 2 were committed to the Standing Committee on Human Services on March 26, 2026 and March 18, 2026, respectively. 2026-27 estimates: votes 37 and 169, Advanced Education; vote 5, Education; vote 32, Health; vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety; vote 36, Social Services.

2025-26 supplementary estimates no. 2: vote 37, Advanced Education; vote 5, Education; vote 32, Health; vote 36, Social Services.

I would like to table two documents from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. These are lists of regulations and bylaws filed with the Legislative Assembly between January 1st, 2025 and December 31st, 2025 which have been committed to the committee for review pursuant to rule 147(1). The documents are Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: 2025 bylaws; and Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: 2025 regulations filed.

The Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel will assist the committee in its review by submitting a subsequent report at a

later date identifying any regulations that are not in order with the provision of rule 147(2). However the committee may also decide to review any of these regulations or bylaws for policy implications.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

Chair Keisig: — Consideration of estimates. This afternoon the committee will be considering the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2 for the Ministry of Education with a recess planned from 6:30 until 7. We will begin with consideration of vote 5, Education, central management and services, subvote (ED01).

Minister Hindley is here today with his officials. I would ask the officials to please state their names before speaking for the first time. And please do not touch the microphones. The *Hansard* operator will turn on your microphone when you are speaking to the committee. Minister, please introduce your officials, make your opening remarks.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Congratulations to you on being successfully elected as the Chair of the committee after a long and arduous campaign. Well deserved.

I'm pleased to be here to talk about the Ministry of Education's 2026-27 budget. I'm joined today by chief of staff, Caelan McIntyre; deputy minister, Clint Repski, to my right; assistant deputy minister, Jason Pirlot, to my other further right; assistant deputy minister, Sameema Haque, who's behind me; assistant deputy minister, Charlotte Morrissette, to my left; Saskatchewan Distance Learning CEO [chief executive officer], Darren Gasper, who's out in the crowd there; as well as a number of other officials from the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation and various officials from the Ministry of Education that support the good work that is happening in the education system across Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chair, we are making some significant investments in education in the 2026-27 budget. This budget protects our children's futures through strong investments that respond to the needs of our growing province and strengthen the supports in today's classrooms.

The budget also invests in education infrastructure to continue to provide students with safe, modern learning spaces. Several new school builds and major renovations are advancing across the province, ensuring that students today and for generations to come can learn in environments designed to support their success.

The budget also continues to support Saskatchewan families through affordable, high-quality early learning and child care, helping children get a strong start while ensuring stability for child care operators.

With these investments in education, child care, and libraries, we

are securing a strong future for children and families across the province and ensuring we are giving Saskatchewan kids their best start.

The Ministry of Education budget is \$3.6 billion to support pre-kindergarten to grade 12 schools, early learning, and child care and libraries, and also literacy. This is an increase of 2 per cent over last year.

Under the category of school division operating funding, pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 school division operating funding is the largest portion of our budget. Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive \$2.5 billion in school operating funding for the 2026-27 school year, an increase of 62.2 million or 2.6 per cent over last year.

Our government has increased school operating funding by approximately 20 per cent over the past three years. This investment funds salary and benefit increases, classroom supports, inflationary pressures, and enrolment growth.

Specialized support classroom model will grow by an additional 50 classrooms through this budget investment, bringing the total number to 108 classrooms. We welcome the partnership we've had with school divisions in implementing the model in schools across all 27 school divisions. The expertise, commitment, and innovation within divisions has been absolutely instrumental in bringing this model to life. We know this approach is supporting calmer classrooms, fewer disruptions, and more instructional time for kids. We look forward to the continued expansion of the model over the coming year.

Improving early literacy also remains a key focus for this government. This budget again includes a \$2 million investment to support the work of improving reading for our youngest students through renewed curriculum, teacher development, and provincial literacy screening.

In the area of mental health, supporting the mental health and well-being of students and staff remains a key priority across all of Saskatchewan's schools. Education has \$4.6 million 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.

Just this past fall we again expanded the program to Creighton school division, encompassing the communities of Creighton and Denare Beach, in the wake of the wildfires affecting northern Saskatchewan. That was something that I heard as the minister, when I was up in that area this past fall and meeting directly with community leaders and asking about the impacts on our students in northern Saskatchewan. The mental health capacity building program provides staffing and school-based supports to help students build resilience and also build well-being, and it's now operating in 20 of our 27 school divisions.

The Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation. This budget is protecting students' and families' access to choice-driven education by continuing to provide sustainable funding to Saskatchewan distance education centre, or the Sask DLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre] as it's more commonly referred to. In the 2026-27 school year, Sask DLC will

receive grant funding of \$25.4 million. This is a nearly \$7 million increase in grant funding over last school year to support demand for online learning.

The Sask DLC is funded through a combination of tuition fees from local school divisions and schools, based on the number of courses students enrol in, as well as a grant from the provincial government. This allows for students in local schools to access the wide range of high school courses available through Sask DLC, including options to explore future career opportunities in agriculture, business, trades, technology, and our newly announced health careers 20L course that we were talking about just last week.

These options are available to students no matter where they live in the province. The Sask DLC supports students and local schools in ensuring that students have access to the courses they need to ultimately reach graduation and to also make informed decisions about their future in post-secondary and in the workforce, while supporting, growing, and developing our skilled workforce here at home.

As of the end of February of this school year, Sask DLC has provided online education to more than 13,000 students taking approximately 40,000 courses, with enrolments continuing to come in. Now this is higher than the same time at this period last year, and we project this growth to continue into the next school year. And we will continue to support flexible, choice-driven learning for all Saskatchewan students.

On the capital side of things, we're continuing to respond to Education's infrastructure needs in a fiscally sustainable manner. Our Education capital budget is at \$123.8 million this year. There's \$20 million allocated for relocatable classrooms to give divisions flexibility to manage local pressures.

For 2026-27, new major capital projects include a new joint-use middle and high school in the cities of Martensville and Warman. The public and Catholic schools in a joint-use facility will address growth in the Martensville and Warman communities.

Another significant project moving forward is the replacement and consolidation of Shellbrook's aging elementary and high schools. This initiative will bring W.P. Sandin high school and Shellbrook elementary school together into a single, modern pre-K to 12 facility, serving that community and surrounding area.

With existing schools now more than 60 years old, this investment will provide students and staff with a safe, contemporary learning environment for decades to come. Consolidating the facilities will also reduce the overall infrastructure footprint resulting in long-term savings through lower operating and maintenance costs.

Also approved to begin moving forward is a major renovation to Esterhazy High School. Now this project will add decades of life to the building and address important issues like the HVAC [heating, ventilating, and air conditioning] system and moisture-management problems. The renovation will include work on the building as well as classrooms, office space, and washrooms.

We continue to support 20 new or consolidated school builds and also three major renovations that are already in progress. This

includes: a South Corman Park School replacement; a new Saskatoon northeast joint-use elementary school in the Aspen Ridge area; new Saskatoon west public and Catholic elementary schools in Kensington; a new Saskatoon east joint-use high school in Holmwood; a new Saskatoon east joint-use elementary school in Brighton; a Saskatoon elementary school to replace Princess Alexandra, King George, and Pleasant Hill elementary schools; a new Regina east joint-use elementary school in The Towns; a new Regina east joint-use high school also in The Towns; a new Regina joint-use elementary school in Harbour Landing; a new Carlyle K to 12 school to replace and consolidate the elementary and high schools; a new Prince Albert francophone pre-K to 12 school to replace École Valois; a new Saskatoon francophone elementary school in Kensington; a new Pinehouse high school to replace the current high school in that community; renovations and addition to Greenall High School in Balgonie; renovations to Campbell Collegiate in Regina; and renovations to Swift Current Comprehensive High School.

Now these ongoing projects are in varying phases of planning, design, and construction, and we continue to work closely with our school division partners and the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement to deliver on each of those.

[15:45]

As part of our broader commitment to protect Saskatchewan, we will ensure that when construction proceeds, projects are delivered efficiently, responsibly, and with strong value for Saskatchewan residents. All approved projects remain fully supported and we are committed to working together to deliver them.

There's \$18.5 million in the 2026-27 budget for new minor capital renewal projects as well to address structural repairs and renovations to prolong the life of schools across the province. The six new projects for minor capital are a project at Christopher Lake to demolish and rebuild a portion of that particular school, a project to convert oil heating systems to propane in six northern schools in the Northern Lights School Division, a roofing project at Laird School, a renovation project at the Estevan Comprehensive high school to replace the HVAC and electrical systems, a roof replacement project at École de Bellegarde, and a roof replacement at Spiritwood High School.

Work continues on the following minor capital projects: Canora Composite School roof and exterior repairs, renovations to Barr Colony School in Lloydminster and a roof at St. Olivier School in Radville, a renovation and roof repair at Waldheim School, completion of the gym at the community school in Jans Bay, renovation at Medstead Central School, and renovation at École St. Margaret in Moose Jaw.

Since 2008 the Government of Saskatchewan has committed approximately \$2.9 billion towards school capital. This includes 77 new schools, 32 major renovation projects, and 17 projects approved through the minor capital renewal program.

For 2026-27 the ministry's budget maintains \$65 million for the preventative maintenance and renewal, or PMR, program. Now since its introduction in 2013-14, the government has invested significantly in PMR to help ensure that school facilities remain functional and well maintained. PMR funding enables boards of

education to strategically plan and complete essential facility upkeep such as repairing or replacing building components, improving energy efficiency, and addressing accessibility requirements. This continued commitment supports school divisions as they manage ongoing infrastructure needs.

In the area of early learning and child care, this year's budget strengthens our continued commitment to ensuring that Saskatchewan children and families with support for early learning and child care. In 2026-27, the Ministry of Education has allocated \$425.5 million to early learning and child care. This includes an increase of \$12.3 million to support both the federal-provincial child care agreements and also provincial investments. These funds will help maintain the progress achieved under these agreements.

This year's investment focuses on stabilizing and sustaining the rapid expansion we have seen in child care over the past several years and in the first iteration of the child care agreement with the federal government. Now this work is essential to keeping Saskatchewan one of the most affordable places in Canada to live and to raise a family.

Key components of the budget include continued funding to provide regulated child care at \$10 per day for children under six and, beginning April 1st of 2026, extending eligibility to children who turn six on or after that date while enrolled in kindergarten, until the end of the school year in June or until they turn seven, whichever comes first; operational funding to support child care facilities with core expenses; ongoing support to meet the child care space target across the province.

Our progress to date demonstrates the success of these efforts by the way. Nearly 19,000 child care spaces in homes and centres were created between April 1st of 2021 and December 31st of 2025. And in addition to that, nearly 7,000 early learning program spaces are recognized as contributing to the space target under the Canada-Saskatchewan Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. So all told, as of December 31st Saskatchewan has achieved 92 per cent of the agreed-upon space target.

Our made-in-Saskatchewan approach to supporting the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators has yielded very strong results. Since 2021 we have seen strong increases in the number of individuals working in child care centres, along with a 52 per cent increase in the number of certified early childhood educators.

The ministry also continues to support several programs that provide services to our youngest learners and their families. This budget will provide \$5.8 million to the early child intervention program; \$19.1 million to KidsFirst; \$8.2 million for early years family resource centres across the province; \$12 million for child nutrition programs, including \$2.8 million for the provincially funded child nutrition program and \$9.2 million for the continued rollout of the national school food program.

When it comes to public libraries and literacy programs, libraries and literacy remain essential components of our portfolio. The budget provides an investment of \$11.7 million, an increase of \$175,000 to support the provincial library system. This funding includes library grants as well as support for in-province shipping

of library materials, internet access, and services for individuals with print disabilities.

The Provincial Library and Literacy Office continues to deliver critical services to public libraries, including multilingual collections, an Indigenous languages collection, and cataloguing services. In addition, \$1.1 million is being provided to funded literacy organizations to advance family literacy initiatives across Saskatchewan.

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

I am grateful for the commitment of our education partners including teachers and school staff, early childhood educators, librarians, and so many other across the sector whose work helps protect and strengthen the learning success of children and youth across the province.

My thanks as well to the ministry and the Sask DLC and the dedicated teams there. I look forward to continuing our shared work to strengthen education, early learning, and literacy in our province, and we welcome the committee's questions today. Thank you.

Chair Keisig: — Well thank you, Minister, for those informative opening comments. I will now open questions from the floor. I recognize MLA Love.

Matt Love: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. And I'll take a moment just to express my thanks to all the public servants who spend their days working on behalf of Saskatchewan students, teachers, education workers, and families. Thanks for all that you do. I've been in this position for a number of years and there's many familiar faces and new faces around the room. But on behalf of the official opposition, thanks for what you do in support of children and youth especially in this province.

Minister, I'll have a number of questions along with my colleague, MLA Joan Pratchler, this afternoon and this evening and later tonight. So thanks everyone for a long day of work here in the legislature. We're going to focus our questions on a number of topics that I'm sure you could predict around school capital, PMR, school operating funds, distance learning, early learning, child care and a host of a number of other issues this evening.

My first question for you, Minister. You spent a good amount of your opening comments talking about school capital projects. So we also heard in the days following the announcement of the provincial budget that several projects would be delayed. Can you provide a list of school capital projects being delayed for the committee this evening?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks, Mr. Chair, and to the member. So maybe let's go through a few things here. Number one, just for clarity, there are no school projects being cancelled. Everything that's been announced is going to be completed and work is under way and continues. We continue at a record pace when it comes to investing in school infrastructure in this province.

You know, I talked about in my opening remarks the 123.8 million dedicated in the budget this year. Now there's a number of projects that are part of that that are in various stages of preplanning, design, development, construction. Of course some projects are being sequenced differently — and that's what I said previously — to align with, you know, a number of factors. Sometimes it's construction capacity, sometimes it's labour availability, the cost pressures in an active market. But all the projects that we have announced, they're approved, they're funded, and there are dollars flowing towards and making sure that the work continues on these projects.

Now in terms of adjustments to timeline, there have been some adjustments to Campbell Collegiate and Carlyle. I think we've discussed those previously. We've had some conversations with school divisions and through the officials have been connecting with the school divisions with respect to those two particular projects.

Joint-use schools in Regina, they are in early design phase. Still quite some work to be done on those, continuing throughout the '26-27 year.

In the case of Carlyle, for example, I would say that I, you know, had the opportunity to speak to the mayor and to the school board Chair and Vice-Chair recently where we talked about just some issues they've identified with the site there. This was leading to some . . . I guess just a second look at what's happening in terms of the timeline with that particular project. And we've managed these through not just Education through our officials, but through the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement.

[16:00]

I will maybe run through a number of the projects that are under way right now in the education sector and just provide some update as to where they're at. So Regina, Harbour Landing, the new joint-use school there, currently in construction phase. You know, you can see it happening as you drive by the site. That's a joint-use school that will accommodate 500 Regina Public and up to 350 Regina Catholic students from pre-K to grade 8, plus a child care centre with 80 spaces on it.

Saskatoon City Centre consolidation, that one is well under way with respect to replacing — and I talked about it in the opening comments — Princess Alexandra, King George, and Pleasant Hill, accommodating 350 students there with the ability to expand and accommodate up to 400 students. So everything is proceeding at Saskatoon City Centre.

Construction projects starting in the new budget here include the Balgonie Greenall High School renovation addition, currently in the design phase right now. And we've been clear with the division and we're working closely with them and the community as well, as a matter of fact. You know, I was out there some time ago to meet with the locally elected leadership at the community of Balgonie to talk about that particular project. That's a renovation and an addition project that will address some of the structural issues at that particular school, and we'll create some renovations there — a larger gym, increased capacity for students.

The other one that is going into construction is the Swift Current

Comprehensive High School. That's going through the design phase, but we'll be ready to go replacing an end-of-life HVAC and electrical system there. That was announced I think probably two or three budgets ago when we first made an announcement with respect to that particular initiative.

Others that are continuing through various stages of project delivery: Regina southeast joint-use high school. That's the shared facility between Regina Catholic and the Public School divisions, with space for up to 1,600 grade 9 to grade 12 students and the ability to expand up to 2,000 students. Regina, Campbell Collegiate, a renovation project there.

Regina southeast joint-use elementary. That is a new facility between Regina Catholic and the Regina Public School divisions, with space for 1,000 kindergarten to grade 8 students, 400 Catholic and 600 public, with the ability to expand up to 1,400 students. It also includes 180 child care spaces.

There's Saskatoon Brighton joint-use elementary school there, that facility, and work continues on advancing that project. We've talked about it before, providing a facility between Saskatoon Public and Greater Saskatoon Catholic, providing space for 1,650 kindergarten to grade 8 students. So 900 public and 750 Catholic, and the ability to expand to 2,050 students and plus 90 child care spaces.

Saskatoon Holmwood joint-use high school continuing through with the project delivery phase. That is a very large school that will provide space for 2,900 grade 9 to grade 12 students — 1,450 public and 1,450 Catholic — and the ability to expand up to 3,600 students.

Saskatoon Aspen Ridge joint-use elementary school continuing through project delivery, again another very large school; Saskatoon Kensington public and Catholic elementary schools; the CÉF [Conseil des écoles fransaskoises] schools in Saskatoon and in Prince Albert as well. And just a couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to — it's been open for some time now — but to mark the official opening of École du Parc here in Regina. But we'll be working very closely with our partners at the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises on the two projects in Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

Pinehouse, the high school there continuing through its design phase as part of everything that occurs to lead up to construction. That will accommodate up to 175 students between grades 7 to 12 and replace the existing high school in Pinehouse in northern Saskatchewan. South Corman Park replacement school, and as I mentioned earlier, the Carlyle pre-K to 12 school.

So that is a list, I think, of all the projects that are currently under way. Again some full-on in construction, others in design, pre-design, preplanning, various stages in advance of the construction phase.

Matt Love: — Thank you, Minister, for that lengthy answer. Early on in your response you said that there are adjustments to the timeline for Carlyle and for the Campbell renovation. Now to be clear, those adjustments to the timeline aren't speeding them up; it's delaying the timeline. So my question is, why have you and the Premier of Saskatchewan continuously said that there are no delays when tonight in this committee you said there's

adjustment to the timeline that will be pushing those projects back in time?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So in the case of, and I speak to the example of Carlyle, that particular project, again had some conversations with the community and with the school division where there were some issues identified with the site. As part of the work that's done by the Ministry of Education and by SaskBuilds and Procurement, you know, it's incumbent upon us to make sure that the teams are looking at those concerns before advancing to the next step of that particular project.

As I said earlier, I had the opportunity to speak to leadership in the community, and through the MLA as well, and reassure them that everything will continue to advance. There's money in the budget this year to continue to advance all these projects. So nothing is paused as we continue to work forward on the next steps and identify challenges that might be identified in the project.

Again there can be a number of things that can impact a project, whether it's this particular case of some questions specific to the land and work that has to be done there. If it's specific to availability of labour and costs, we need to be mindful as we're advancing these projects, the money that's being used to bring them on to the next stage.

And as projects are completed and move from construction to opening, that frees up capital and allows for further advancements into projects that are under way and in various stages of design and development. We'll move these projects ahead as quickly as we can. Projects will continue to move ahead with the money that is allocated to them in the budget this year, to ensure that they advance and get them into the construction phase when it's time to have them go to tender.

Matt Love: — Minister, do you think it creates confusion for the public, for families who are depending on commitments made in the past, when the Premier of Saskatchewan, the Minister of Education put forward a different opinion than the province of Saskatchewan, and then school divisions have to come out and set the record straight on how these projects are being delayed? Do you think that that creates confusion for families in Saskatchewan? Do you think that they expect better?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We continue to monitor the progress of our projects, all the projects in the education system. We're in regular contact with the project teams. And I would say that, you know, whether it's through Education or through other ministries and projects as well — not even just in the public sector but, I would say, probably in the private sector as well — that there will be issues that arise as part of the design of the project. It can even start before that in terms of the procurement of the piece of property for a particular project. But through the design there may be issues identified.

You know, there's a number of partners that are involved in all of these projects on the public school side, on the Catholic school side. When you're dealing with and talking about joint-use facilities there, that adds an extra layer of complexity to the project.

But I think it's important for us that, as issues are identified, that

we make sure that we take those seriously: we consult with the project teams, hear what they have to say and make sure that we are taking those into consideration. And if there are adjustments that have to be made, that we make the right decision around those projects. And again we work to be clear with the communities and those impacted about what that might look like. And that's done through, you know, officials at the ministry level — whether it's the Ministry of Education or through SaskBuilds and Procurement as well — and you know, at the elected level as well, I would say, to provide those updates.

But ultimately we've communicated on all of our projects, and not just these ones, but along the way. We've built a number of new schools across the province since 2007 — whether they're brand new builds, whether they're major renovations or some of these other ones we talked about, minor capital projects. And so we work very hard to make sure we're communicating to the public that are impacted by these decisions, what stage they're at to make sure that they get delivered.

And in the case of the projects that are under way this year and in previous years, we work very hard to make sure that we're providing that clear communication to communities and through to school division partners. But ultimately, these are all projects that will get done in a timely fashion.

Matt Love: — Minister, do you think that you personally have been clear with the public when last week you said that there will be no delays, and tonight you've said that there will be adjustments to the timeline? Is that clear?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Well you know, we continue to advance these projects along. And as I said there will be, you know, issues identified as part of the process, as part of the construction, design, and planning. And so when that happens — again through the officials level and through myself at the elected level — we communicate that things are advancing and they are.

I mean no projects are paused and no projects are cancelled. And you know, these are all projects that have had significant dollars and had time and effort dedicated to them and that will continue until we see them through to completion. And that's going to happen on every one of these projects.

Matt Love: — Minister, you said that there's money in this year's budget for all of these projects. What money is there in this year's budget for the renovations that have been planned, and planned for, at Campbell Collegiate?

[16:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So the funding for each of these projects is included as a part of the global \$123.8 million amount. Now we don't communicate and specify how much is allocated to each particular project because the budgets at this stage aren't finalized.

And so once the budgets are finalized . . . And then we don't finalize them until the construction tender is completed, essentially is what happens. So until the construction tender occurs, we're not in a position to share what that specific amount is on each of these projects. It can compromise the bidding process as we send these projects to tender.

But there is, just to reassure the committee, there is funding allocated for all of these projects — the ones that I listed as part of the ongoing major capital. And then again just because the budgets aren't finalized at this point, they're part of that global \$123.8 million dollars.

Each major capital project is in a different stage of completion, requiring different amounts of funding each fiscal year. So there's some flexibility that way. The ministry actually, they try to do a forecast of the amounts that needs to be provided for funding for each project based on their circumstances. And then afterwards they, with those forecasts, then come up with the overall combined budget amount for all these capital projects. But it allows for some flexibility. And so we actually get to the construction tender phase and through the bidding process, at which point we have more finalized numbers for each of the specific capital projects.

Matt Love: — So, Minister, you indicated in my previous question that the renovation project at Campbell will be delayed. It's not going forward this budget year. And so my follow-up question was, well then what is in the budget? You said, there's dollars for everything there; there are dollars in the budget for Campbell. So I guess if you can't give me a dollar amount — which I think is fair to expect that you could — but if you can't, then what are the dollars in the budget going to do at Campbell for a project that isn't happening this year?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Campbell Collegiate, that is in the design stage and is intended to . . . We'll have design completed this year. That's what the funding that we have as part of the overall 123 million on that project is going towards with that particular project. So we'll complete design this year. And then after that, you know, as all these projects move on to their next stages, then a determination is made at that time as to the next step for these projects.

Further to that I would just say as well that SaskBuilds and Procurement is also leading on these projects as well across government and would have . . . And that might be a question for that round of estimates with that minister just overall. But SaskBuilds and Procurement does have some involvement when it comes to the status of these projects and next steps too.

But on the case of Campbell Collegiate, the money is intended to complete the design this year.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. In the last number of days and again tonight you've explained that one of the reasons for delaying these projects and the sequencing that you speak of is due to increasing costs for construction — certainly something I hear from school divisions who have been waiting years in some cases. I mean you can use Saskatoon Holmwood and Brighton as a great example there. So school divisions are concerned that, due to your reasoning, that future projects could be at risk too as costs continue to escalate.

So my question for you is, can you explain how delaying these projects further, as costs continue to go up, is going to not lead to escalating costs in future years?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. I'm just going to reiterate something I said previously, just to remind the

committee that we're not cancelling any school construction projects. As I said, 123.8 million dedicated in the budget this year and trying to be able to manage those projects based on construction capacity, labour availability, cost pressures in a very, very active construction market right now, in addition to the . . .

[16:30]

And this is just, you know, we're talking today about the projects in the education sector. There will be other ministries that will be coming before committee estimates this spring as well. And they're going to be talking about their projects too, as is the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement, who oversees all of the capital in the province. And that's just on the public side of things.

Like the Premier's indicated and talked about, the 60 or 62 projects in the private sector, \$60 billion of capital investment. So that's in addition to everything that's happening in the capital sector across the province — public side of things, private side of things, and being able to manage all of that through the budget allocation and make sure that, again, that these projects do carry on, they do go ahead, and they are going ahead. That's why there's dollars allocated in the budget this year to make sure that we get them to the next stage, and then we will get them into construction and built and open.

Matt Love: — Okay. Thanks, Minister. I'm not sure that I really understand your answer there. I think that what I'm trying to say . . . You know, we've got a number of communities in this province that have been waiting for a school for a long time. And if we look at the requests coming from divisions, they've been asking for these schools for, you know, up to a decade in some cases. And the wait has added to the cost.

And I guess my question is, won't continuing to wait and delay these projects continue to add to those costs? I mean I think that that just makes sense as a concern that's out there in the province. Continuing to delay projects will continue to add to the costs that are already escalating.

I'm going to move on here, Minister. And I'd like to ask, one of the concerns . . . And let's use The Towns project as an example here. I understand that you didn't put that in your list of projects that are being delayed, but we can look at the commitments made by this government before the last election. We can look at, you know, comments made on the record, and we can look at a very different opinion coming from the school division about a delay to that project.

But here's my question for you. This is a project that I think the school division was hoping would see doors open in 2028. Due to this year's budget, those plans are being delayed. It's a project that I understand to be planned. It's ready to go through the RFP [request for proposal] process. It's ready to go to tender, and delaying it is going to add to costs to the school division, in particular transportation. It's the school division that will have to pay to transport students to other communities to go to school. It's going to add to costs for the school division.

So my question to you is, what is the plan of your government to support divisions who will see increased costs due to the delays

in this year's budget?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question on The Towns, the Regina east elementary project. Still a ways to go on that particular project. Maybe just back up a little bit prior to that. We're just working very closely to make sure that we're delivering all these schools, announcing schools, and funding them in a fiscally responsible manner. I think we had seven schools we opened this past year that dropped off tens of millions of dollars in funding that was going towards construction.

So certainly there is, you know, communities around the province that are looking for new schools for a variety of reasons — enrolment growth, community growth, occupational health and safety, schools that are just simply, in the case of Shellbrook for example, schools that are beyond their useful life. But trying to manage those expectations with our school division partners and identify, you know, the priorities for each of the divisions and then work within the ministry's envelope of funding.

But specific to the Regina east joint-use elementary school project, design services on that particular initiative began June of 2025. Currently the school design is approximately 15 per cent complete, so still very early on with respect to that particular initiative.

You know, we're very careful when talking about opening dates for new schools because we don't publicly announce those until after the construction tender process is complete. That's what establishes a more specific and direct timeline when it comes to construction timelines. In the case of this one I have had the opportunity . . . I've spoken to the board Chair about any concerns that the board may have with respect to timelines and decisions they are needing to make as a board with respect to, you know, how they're addressing some of the pressures and the students in that part of Regina. So I've had that conversation with the board Chair.

In addition to that at the officials level there have been I think a number of conversations, regular ones, with the director of education for Regina Public, and as we do for, you know, for all of our education partners in all 27 school divisions to make sure that we have the ability to pick up the phone and vice versa. They can reach out to us when they have questions.

But we've made that commitment to the leadership, both the director and the board Chair, to say that, you know, we'll work with them on the project. And like I said, this one still has quite a ways to go and will be managed. But we'll continue to move ahead, and looking forward to the opening dates when that project is done.

Matt Love: — And as far as additional supports, the extra costs that they'll incur due to the delay, have you made any commitments to support those additional costs? Example given, transportation.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Again there's no delay in any of these projects. They're moving forward at varying stages. Again this one, as I said, is 15 per cent complete on the design side of things. But as I mentioned we'll continue to have the conversations with the board Chair and the board for Regina Public as well as the

administration, and work with them closely.

Matt Love: — Okay. Minister, I've got a question about preventative maintenance and renewal. You and I, I think, can both agree that Saskatchewan School Boards Association says that industry standards outside of education would be a PMR budget somewhere between 2 and 5 per cent. They've specifically requested a PMR budget of roughly 2 per cent of insured asset value for Saskatchewan schools.

So in Saskatchewan we have over 140 schools in poor or critical condition, and yet our PMR line in this budget remains about 0.5 per cent of insured asset value for Saskatchewan schools. So that's about 25 per cent of what Saskatchewan school boards say they need.

So can you provide justification to the committee this evening for providing Saskatchewan schools with 25 per cent of the funds they need to maintain aging buildings?

[16:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. On preventative maintenance and renewal . . . And I'll maybe get one of the officials to talk a bit more about some of the other funding envelopes we have for capital projects in the province. And I think the member talked about industry standards, I think was the term, or just questions, you know, numbers there that had been quoted.

Just to be clear, I've had the opportunity on multiple occasions to talk to the president of the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] and others as well — directly with school divisions, directors of education boards — on the significance of PMR and about how much is put into that particular program. This was one that this government created in the 2013 year. 2013, 2014 we started PMR.

In Saskatchewan since that point in time, \$616 million has gone into preventative maintenance and renewal. We made an increase in the amount for PMR last year, from 50 million with an additional 15 million last year, bringing it up to 65 million province-wide for PMR, so maintaining the amount that was the increase in last year's budget. Recognizing of course that it is a very well-received program and an envelope of funding for school divisions. So we're pretty proud of the 616 million that the government has put into this program since its inception in 2013.

Again we need to be able to manage, and there's lots to manage in the education sector on the capital side, operating side, making sure that with the funds that we do have available that we are managing those pressures across the province. And that can be done in a variety of ways: through major capital, new builds, major renos; in this case, PMR.

But I'll maybe just ask Charlotte to speak about one of the other . . . in addition to PMR we also have a minor capital program as well. That's relatively new in nature, in terms of that particular envelope of funding. But I'll maybe ask Charlotte to talk about the minor capital side too, another benefit for school divisions.

Charlotte Morrissette: — Sure. Charlotte Morrissette, assistant deputy minister. So as the minister mentioned, it's a fairly new

program, but just wanting to recognize that the dollars that go towards this program are for maintenance and renewal as well. This year with 18.5 million for this program, that represents a 21 per cent increase compared to last year for this program.

Just a few words about the program. The minor capital renewal program provides funding for minor projects that are between 1 million and \$10 million that don't get addressed through other existing capital funding programs. Projects that focus on the revitalization or the prolonging of life for aging school facilities are really prime candidates for this program, so similar to the needs that are also met maybe on a smaller scale through PMR.

And this program as well . . . I won't go into great lengths unless you'd like me to on the prioritization on those. But certainly prioritizing health and safety and any risks are of the highest priority for that program as well.

Matt Love: — Thank you for that information. Just a quick follow-up, Minister. If a school division doesn't get as much funding in PMR as the needs of their aging buildings are, where do they get the funds to maintain their buildings? Where does the money come from if they're not getting enough from the government?

And you referenced bringing this in as a government. Well of course, you know, in the years prior to that, school divisions were able to set their own mill rate to generate income that they needed for their local needs. And of course, you know, over a number of years that's . . . promise from this government that the funding would be adequate coming from the provincial budget to supply those needs. So if a school doesn't get enough to maintain their aging buildings, where does the money come from?

Chair Keisig: — I'd just like to remind members that we are here tonight debating about the importance of the budgetary restraints and not talking broad policy discussions on moving forward. So just keep the questions about our budgetary estimates that are in tonight.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. You know, this is a government that takes the investment into our schools — the capital, the operating, you name it, but we're talking about capital right now — very seriously. You know, we have a very, I would say, a very strong record when it comes to what we've invested to in terms of new schools in the province, major renovations, as I said, minor capital, the addition of that particular program, the creation of the preventative maintenance and renewal program — \$616 million since the institution of that particular program.

But very, very significant capital budgets over the past number of years, you know, that we've been fortunate to serve as government. As I said, \$2.9 billion to address pressures right across this province, and again that's something that we'll continue to work with our school division partners on these needs. Again recognizing that, you know, there's always going to be needs when it comes to school capital, whether it's the minor projects or the major ones and replacements. And we need to work within the government's fiscal capacity as well to make sure that we're spreading those dollars out accordingly and investing in projects across all four corners of Saskatchewan to make sure that we're not only building for the future, but

maintaining the schools that we do have.

Again on an annual basis, we look at how much money we're able to allocate to capital projects in Saskatchewan. Last year in PMR we were able to increase that program by another \$15 million. We maintained it this year, and again in the years going forward we'll look at if there's an opportunity to increase those investments.

But again, we've just in the past year opened seven brand new schools, and those are positive things for those families and communities and school divisions. And in some cases they take time to get to that stage because of the growing and, you know, the pressures around the province and the requests. And it's something we'll continue to advocate for and make sure that we're doing that on behalf of Saskatchewan communities and families.

Matt Love: — Minister, when making decisions with this year's budget on school capital, what role does the report that you receive from SaskBuilds on facility condition index . . . What role does that play in your budgeting decisions for capital projects?

[17:00]

Charlotte Morrissette: — Hi. Thanks for the question. So I'll just explain a little bit on the prioritization for the major capital program. So conditions of the school are considered at the school division level when the school division is submitting their top major capital projects to us.

And then on our side, when we receive all of the submissions, we follow a process to prioritize the requests that are submitted by each of the school divisions. Requests for the major capital funding are ranked by the ministry using an eight-factor rating system, with the greatest priority being on the health and safety of schools as well as addressing enrolment growth in the past.

So the factors, just quickly, those eight factors I referred to. So health and safety, this addresses elements that pose risk to students or teacher health and safety. Utilization is also considered; this is a reflection of how full the school is, shown as a percentage of capacity. Efficiency is also considered; this incentivizes consolidations of schools and also recognizes joint-use projects and the efficiencies.

New growth is also considered, recognizing enrolment pressures and new communities and subdivisions that are being created in our growing communities. Functionality and contribution to program is also considered, which addresses functionality and programming concerns. Contribution to community, recognizing the positive impacts that communities have to their community.

Project evaluations are also based on provincial priorities and assessing the most effective and efficient means to address each project by examining funding options. Thanks.

Matt Love: — So, Minister, in your words, just to be clear, the facility condition index is not considered by the Ministry of Education?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, FCI [facility condition index],

the FCI report is one of many factors. That's probably the best way of putting it, that it's part of the consideration of a number of factors, as Charlotte described earlier, and it's taken into consideration as part of the overall decision-making process.

Matt Love: — Thanks. Thanks for clarifying that, Minister. We've certainly seen that reported by the auditor, the impact that FCI has in making these budget determinations. You know, Minister, certainly we've had debate in here and other places about the announcement for consolidation, a new school in Shellbrook. Wondering if you can respond to the data, the list produced by your government that states that the two schools in Shellbrook are rated at 5.3 and 5.7 per cent on the FCI chart.

So to put that in context, that would be right around average of all 638 schools in Saskatchewan — you know, one of those schools slightly better than average, one of them slightly worse than average. And I understand this is one data point in making decisions. I get that. But it's the only data that we have access to in opposition, and I'm sure that you also get that.

So can you just comment on the state of these schools? Why not proceed with a minor capital project? Why not proceed with a renovation to the school if they're really right around average of all schools in the province?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question about Shellbrook. And the member is right; we've debated this, discussed it a number of times. Just an FCI is part of . . . it's one of the many factors that's considered when we're looking at approving projects going forward to the next stage.

In the case of Shellbrook, number one, it's a consolidation of a couple of the schools so therefore it has to be, you know, a major capital request summary. And we're doing a number of these and have done a number of these around the province, so that's an important factor to consider.

Both schools are over 60 years old. It's actually going to reduce the total school area and address many of the upgrades that are required in both of these schools with respect to HVAC, plumbing, roof repair, structural issues in the school. And there are a number of issues with this particular . . . or sorry, these two schools.

[17:15]

In the case of the high school, W.P. Sandin — built in 1961, had an addition in '85 — the school's roofing system, which was obviously developed and designed and constructed back in the '60s, is failing. Water penetration into the wall envelope, creating rot in windowsill plates, and wall envelope deterioration through much of the original portion of the school. Needs windows, needs a roof. Wall insulation has been compromised as well. Signs of twisting at joints in several locations. Structural issues in the gym, including cinder block saturation with water leaking inside the gym walls, creating the blocks that are shifting sideways. Structural issues within the soil shifting as well.

HVAC and electrical are original. They've been maintained but have aged out. And I know I hear that when I'm talking to officials and to those that, you know, the facilities folks in school divisions, who do a remarkable job of all our facilities. They've

talked about, there comes a point where you just can't replace them anymore, you can't repair them anymore, and you can't get parts for them anymore.

Shellbrook elementary, many of the same issues. It was built in '56. HVAC and electrical has aged out, building envelope is leaking, cold spots, air and water infiltration. They've been using electric heaters as supplementary heat.

So these are a number of things that are taken into consideration, along with FCI, and it's been a priority for . . . And then the school divisions all provide their priority lists to the Ministry of Education, you know, as they see fit based on the needs within their school division boundaries.

In the case of Saskatchewan Rivers, this has been on their list for quite some time, dating back . . . And I think again we've talked about this publicly, but it's been one of their top three projects. They submit the top three to the ministry in '23, '22, '21, '20, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016 — and that's as far back as this particular document goes. And I know, just from people that I've spoken to in that area, the need for this particular initiative.

But to get to the answer, FCI's part of it, but there's obviously a number of other things that are factored in as well when we make these decisions on major projects.

Matt Love: — So, Minister, thanks for the answer. You just gave us a long list of some of the challenges in the school facility: leaking roofs, water damage, window replacement, HVAC, all of that. Quite a lengthy list. I didn't have a chance to write it all down. I'll review *Hansard* later.

And yet these schools are about average in Saskatchewan. Does that concern you as far as the state of our schools, that list that you just provided, that that would be considered by your government average in the province?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — To the question, as I said previously, we're pretty proud of the investment we've made into capital in this province in education. And we have hundreds of schools across Saskatchewan. Some, in the case of the Shellbrook schools, were built in the 1960s or even, you know, even earlier than that. And in addition to that we have projects that, in northern parts of the province and projects in Saskatoon and Regina, that are addressing enrolment pressures.

You know, we are proud to announce in this year's budget new schools, joint-use schools, for the cities of Martensville and Warman, two of the fastest-growing cities certainly in Saskatchewan, perhaps in all of Canada in recent years.

And again we've . . . Through significant record investments and through major capital new school builds — 108, now 109 in the case of Shellbrook — whether it's a brand new school or a major renovation project, these are significant and important investments for communities and school divisions right across this province.

The creation of the PMR program in 2013 — didn't exist prior to that — \$616 million overall into that particular initiative. Minor capital as well. And we understand there are pressures around the province in requests. And that's why we work with our locally

elected school boards for them to identify the needs in their communities. There is the opportunity for school divisions to be able to address, through a number of different avenues, the capital needs of schools within their division boundaries. And again we'll work very closely with our partners to address those needs throughout the province.

Matt Love: — Minister, I've got a couple questions about relocatables. First one's pretty straightforward. Can you report to the committee how many relocatable classrooms are included in this year's budget? And can you also share how many relocatables were relocated, as in moved locations, in the last year?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Budget this year, \$20 million for relocatable classrooms. And school divisions apply in the fall for the funding for relocatables, so we'll be in a better position then to answer what that looks like.

In terms of the most recent numbers here, we have — would be for '25-26 — we have 39 new relocatables and two moves were funded. The '25-26 relocatables were provided to schools in Blaine Lake, Clavet, Corman Park, Humboldt, Lanigan, Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, and Swift Current.

Matt Love: — And that was two moves that were funded in '25-26?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah.

Matt Love: — Okay, thank you. Minister, one of the concerns or questions that I've heard has to do — I'm sure you've heard this too — with the challenge in adding relocatables to some of the schools that need them most, which are P3 [public-private partnership] schools.

I'm wondering, can you comment at all . . . In making these decisions where portables are going and where they can go, one of the challenges I understand is the contract with JCI [Johnson Controls Inc.]. And my question is, have you looked into or is there an ability to amend the contract to allow more relocatables at some of the P3 schools that were built in the past?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So we work with the school divisions on all of our, obviously, our school capital projects and the new builds. And then if there's a need for relocatables and the ability to expand and add on relocatables in this specific case or instance, with respect to the P3 schools that were opened in the 2017-28 year, we'll follow up with SaskBuilds on the contract piece.

[17:30]

The members have identified that's a unique component to that particular block of schools that was done. So we'll follow up with SaskBuilds and Procurement and just have a look at what was negotiated into the contract with respect to portables.

Matt Love: — Would it be possible to get an answer to that question by tomorrow's meeting of this committee? Just specifically if your government can look at amending the contracts to allow for more relocatables at P3 schools.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We'll try to get an answer as quickly as we can, but we'll follow up very quickly here.

Matt Love: — And if it's not available by the committee tomorrow, which I understand, how will you deliver that answer to the committee?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We can get it for the committee. Yeah.

Matt Love: — Okay. Thank you.

Minister, I'm going to move on to some questions around school operating funds. It's a bit of a shift here in our topic. So in this provincial budget, you've budgeted for an increase of 2.57 per cent for school operating funds. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation estimates that, when adjusted for inflation and enrolment, that this will lead to a decrease in per-student funding of roughly \$33 per student.

Could you report to the committee what is the provincial per-student funding for next year, the average per-student funding for the province, and how can you justify cutting adjusted for inflation per-student funding at a time when your government also says we have the best-performing economy in the country?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member for the question. There's no cut to average per-student funding. As I've said publicly before a number of times, on the operating side of things, a 20 per cent increase over the past three budget years when it comes to operating funding. And the average per-student funding amount — the average operating funding per student — is estimated to increase this year in the '26-27 budget to \$13,185 per student. That's an increase of approximately \$412 or 3.2 per cent compared to the '25-26 budget year.

School operating funding has received an increase of \$62.2 million compared to last budget day. That includes the implementation of 50 more specialized support classrooms, plus provides for salary and benefit increases, inflationary funding, and enrolment growth. And the per-student amount will change in the fall once the funding is updated to reflect the actual September 2026 enrolments. But it is an increase this year on the average per-student funding amount.

Matt Love: — Yeah. Yeah, I know, Minister. And I know, you know, every year with different ministers we have this conversation about the impact of inflation. I mean the cost of everything is higher today than it was, you know, 10 years ago or 3 years ago. That's the way inflation works, and I won't get into the nitty-gritty of that back-and-forth that we've enjoyed in this committee pretty much every year.

But I do have a question about dollars in this budget. You've budgeted 28.9 million for non-teaching salary increases. So my first question is, what percentage increase for education support workers did you calculate into this amount as far as a, you know, percentage increase to wages?

Clint Repski: — Hi. Clint Repski, deputy minister.

We don't like to give a specific percentage, and I'll tell you why. There is ongoing bargaining, as you may well know, that's happening right now. But I mean you can reverse-engineer some

of this, which I'm sure you're going to want to do at some point in time. But it is ballpark 2 per cent. The way that that \$28.9 million is allocated for non-teacher salaries is throughout the funding model, which is unconditional.

School divisions are going to make choices of what they do with those dollars, and so that money is split between the components of base instruction, supports for learning, locally determined terms and conditions, transportation, plant op, and maintenance. So it picks up little categories throughout to reflect that the non-teacher salaries component is spread widely across the school division — EAs [educational assistant], bus drivers, etc.

Matt Love: — Thanks for that explanation.

So, Minister, you know, StatsCan data shows that Saskatchewan EAs are paid at the second-lowest rate in the country. And I'll take a minute to just express how important, you know, educational assistants are in our classrooms. Our classrooms work because education support workers work.

You know, these are folks that are vital, often in one-on-one supports for students, supporting learning in the classroom. And they're often tasked with doing all sorts of work that probably delves into more, you know, personal support for students and medically complex students who absolutely deserve the right to education and deserve to be there. So these are really vital people in our schools. And I find it troubling to learn that in Saskatchewan we pay EAs at the second-lowest rate in the country.

So my question to you, Minister, is in determining this amount on the budget for non-teaching salary increases, you know, that your deputy minister just spoke to, how does that reflect your strategy built with local divisions to recruit and retain these vital workers in Saskatchewan classrooms?

[17:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — With respect to EAs — and I think that, you know, the member opposite is very accurate — I think that we all recognize the importance that they play and the value they have to the education system. I think there's a lot of parents and teachers certainly that count on the very important work that EAs do and the value they bring to individuals, schools, and to classrooms.

As an example, we know that EAs are important to all of our schools, increasingly so as part of the specialized support classrooms model that we continue to expand. They're a very important component as part of the ratios there. You know, we've in the past number of years since 2021 added nearly 1,100 EAs into the system.

Now we do understand and respect that local school divisions have the authority to negotiate their local agreements with respect to EAs. But I would just say that, you know, it's something we take very seriously as a government, that there's more than obviously just teachers that help make the education system a success. So it's teachers. It's EAs. It's the other specialized supports, whether they're OTs [occupational therapist], speech-language paths, bus drivers, admin folk — everybody that is part of that whole team.

And certainly EAs are a very important component of that. And I know I've heard that when I meet with them directly, one-on-one. Talked to some on budget day, as a matter of fact, in the rotunda, had a discussion and a conversation there with some of the folks that are part of the school system.

So with respect to the province's overall strategy with respect to recruitment and retention, as I've said, we've been able to hire a significant number over the past number of years. But certainly when we meet with them, when I do as the minister, just as an MLA in Swift Current, as a member of my community — and I think MLAs on both sides do that; they hear from EAs — we're always looking for ways to address their concerns around recruitment and retention. Again, still respecting that the school division authorities negotiate the agreements and the contracts, but know that this is a valuable part of the system.

Matt Love: — So, Minister, in a budget year like this one where we've heard from some school boards and from SSBA, their initial response to the budget — and you know, when I meet with school boards — I hear typically around needing an operating grant increase of at least 3 per cent to maintain status quo, right, and this budget doesn't get there.

But in addition to the . . . You know, with the 2.57 per cent operating grant increase, some of that's already allocated to things like specialized support classrooms, which — I agree with you — are valuable and important in our province. But that's already included in that 2.57 per cent increase.

And so if we're not providing school boards with a budget that can even maintain status quo, and we are predicting when school boards release their budgets — which will be later this spring, you know, as we get later into May and June and they release their budgets — I predict, Minister, we're going to see cuts. We're going to see cuts to supports that our students depend on. And yet these same school boards have to negotiate these local agreements with their education support workers.

So my question to you is, how can a school board that's already making cuts to supports . . . What funds are they supposed to negotiate with, in a year when they'll be cutting as a result of this budget? Does that question make sense? Like with what are they supposed to negotiate locally to ensure that they can recruit and retain and pay workers a fair wage? How are they supposed to do that with a provincial budget that will lead to cuts at the local level?

Clint Repski: — So thank you for the question around the increases that have been provided to the school divisions for the upcoming year. As we mentioned before in the committee, the funding that has been provided to school divisions for operating is largely unconditional. And we do talk about it being in different components, but at the end of the day school divisions are in a position to manage their budget.

The point I just wanted to bring up was regarding the 2.6 per cent increase. And yes, that is a 2.6 per cent increase, but you do have to recognize that amount is over the entire cost of the operations. And more than 50 per cent is simply teachers' salaries, which is a locked-in amount. So that actually frees up that 2.6 per cent to spread across the remainder of those operating pieces. At this point in time we do feel that the school divisions will be able to

manage within the 2.6 per cent that they've been provided.

Matt Love: — So would you say that you're expecting, to the minister, that there . . . Are you predicting that there will not be cuts to supports that students depend on this spring as a result of this budget?

[18:00]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — The school divisions obviously make their own decisions. They make their staffing decisions — all of their decisions — as part of the overall budgeting process, which they will be going through now in preparation for, getting ready for the next school year. So I'm not going to speculate on what their decisions are. And they obviously make decisions based at the local level and what they need in terms of staffing, and where that's allocated.

I would say though that, overall in the '26-27 classroom supports, funding is \$436 million. So that's a \$41 million increase over the previous year, about 10.4 per cent increase in funding. And that is primarily comprised of increases to supports for learning, specialized support classroom expansion as we've talked about, and enrolment funding growth savings from the previous year. In addition, just a reminder that we also signed the multi-year funding agreement in '24-25. And since signing that multi-year funding agreement, classroom supports have increased by about 22 per cent.

And as I said, there's funding in a number of areas, supports for learning: specialized support classrooms, targeted supports, the Teacher Innovation and Support Fund. But again, these are all significant increases that have been made to support classroom supports, and school divisions will make their budget decisions in the coming weeks and months.

Chair Keisig: — I recognize MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you, Chair. There was a budgeted amount of \$9.2 million for inflationary pressures. Would you be able to delineate some of those cost-driving factors included in that amount? And I'm listening for insurance increases. I'm listening for power rate hikes. I listen for fuel price because I think that is certainly what I've been hearing a lot in our rural school divisions and urban as well: the cost of gas, the cost of buses, and things like that.

Can you delineate a little bit more the cost-driving factors that you included in your \$9.2 million for inflationary pressures? Thank you.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Transportation funding for '26-27 is increased by \$8 million over the '25-26 budget to recognize salary increases for transportation personnel and also non-salary inflation pressures. '26-27 budget includes an increase of 28.9 million for salary and benefit increases. That includes funding for positions such as the bus drivers.

Now the 9.2 million for inflationary funding, as the member is asking about, that supports non-salary costs such as classroom and school supplies, cleaning and upkeep of facilities, but also school bus maintenance as well.

I would just point too that over the last couple of years, transportation funding has increased by a total of twenty-eight and a half million. That includes 15 million in the '25-26 budget to address rising school bus costs. So that was something that we were obviously hearing from school divisions, you know, recently. And so we addressed that in last year's budget.

Plus there was then a reallocation. There was \$2 million of reallocated in mid-year when we realized some enrolment growth savings that came as a result of lower than anticipated enrolment growth in schools, particularly in Regina and Saskatoon but, I think, in other areas of the province as well. So some of that funding, we used that \$2 million to reallocate it for what was initially designated for enrolments to put that further directly to transportation.

So I guess all that to say that there, again, that there's been a number of increases here recently to the transportation side of things. But specifically to the 9.2 per cent for inflationary funding, again that's for a number of areas in the school divisions but that does include for school buses as well.

Joan Pratchler: — So given the spikes that we have in fuel costs now, is that going to be adequate? And also how do you financially address the decision tug that's going to be happening between getting students to schools and then having teachers in the schools when they arrive?

[18:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks to the member's couple of questions there.

Certainly, you know, through our school division partners, we watch it too. We monitor the increases and the decreases in fuel costs. You know, we're seeing some increases this winter and now into the spring that were unexpected — unprecedented, I guess — in terms of what our school division partners are seeing. So clearly that's something that we'll remain in contact with the school divisions to make sure that we're monitoring it closely.

I don't think anyone's in a position to be able to say how long this will last at this rate. And you know, if it's something that school divisions are talking to us about having to do sort of additional steps — we'd certainly listen to them — that need to be taken with respect to that. But not going to prejudice any decisions there. But this is something we all see visibly as we drive past gas stations across the province.

But I would reiterate that this is, you know, a good budget. It's a good budget for the education sector and then for school divisions across the province, protecting a number of the investments that we have made over the past number of years. And as I said in my previous answer, you know, in the last two years transportation funding has increased a total of twenty-eight and a half million dollars.

And I know that I've, in the conversations I've had with school boards, with board Chairs, and directors of education, it's been appreciated. It's been, you know, the government has been told that it's made a difference. And so we'll continue to make those investments and make sure that we protect the investments that have been made there and continue to support the transportation.

It's one of the components of a very complex education system — staffing, capital — and transportation's part of that.

Joan Pratchler: — So do I hear you saying that you're considering having a contingency fund in the wings just in case they continue to escalate?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Oh no, don't have a contingency fund. But this would be, again as we talk to school divisions, this is part of the consultation we have with them, not just at budget time but throughout the year. As I said, they're going through the process now of preparing their budgets for the upcoming school year.

And you know, if they come to us, again over and above the investments we've made in recent years to help with a number of the pressures on the transportation side of things — school bus costs, other areas of concern; and again speaking here specifically tonight around the fuel cost for the school bus transportation system — we would certainly listen to what our school division partners bring to us for consideration.

Chair Keisig: — MLA Love, you have a question?

Matt Love: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. Minister, I'm going to turn to a question about the funding formula for operating grants for school divisions. And I will ask, you know, in the past when I've asked some questions about funding formula, it can often lead to very long explanations. If we can keep the answer focused on my question this evening.

Last year in this committee one of your officials indicated that there is “a standing committee that reviews the operating grant formula, the operating grant advisory committee, that has a number of stakeholders from our education sector.” Could you share for the committee tonight who is on that advisory committee? How many times did they meet over the last year to prepare for this budget? And are there any changes to the funding formula as a result of their input?

Clint Repski: — So the question was around a reference to the OGAC [operating grant advisory committee] committee. Lovely acronym. That structure has been changed moving forward. What we have now, instead of having this standing committee of the same members, is it has more flexibility.

And I'll give you an example of it. When we're taking a look at the funding model, we want to get specific points of view for who can provide the best information and feedback and analysis for us. An example of that was over this past year we created a First Nations enrolment working committee. And it was around reconciling enrolments across . . . And that was done with a series of CFOs, chief financial officers, of the school divisions across the province. Moving forward, that structure's going to continue.

We create a working plan to review various components or other financial matters, again across how we roll out operating funding. And this provides us the ability to bring in folks who have a deep level of understanding based on the topic at hand. And we do have a work plan for that moving forward.

The other question that you had asked was, were there changes

to the funding formula this year. And there was not.

Matt Love: — So just to clarify here, Minister, and make sure I've got this straight, so the answer provided last year in the committee about the existence of an operating grant advisory committee, that structure has changed completely since last year in this committee, and that that body doesn't operate any longer?

Clint Repski: — That's correct.

Matt Love: — That's correct. Okay. So in its place, is there any role, mechanism for teacher voice and the inclusion . . . I mean last year your official said that it brings together "a number of stakeholders from our education sector." So the question today is, how are teachers and teacher voice included in those decisions?

Clint Repski: — I would answer it in that it's not a set structure. And so depending on the topic at hand, having teacher voice, having teacher representation may be very appropriate. But where we're discussing matters of, say, transportation, it may not be all that pertinent. And so if the topic was regarding something that was relevant to teachers in their day-to-day work, then they would have a place at the table. So this provides us the flexibility to bring in the appropriate members.

Matt Love: — When was the last time that the operating grant advisory committee met?

Sameema Haque: — Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister, Ministry of Education.

[18:30]

The last year I met with the full OGAC, the older structure, was about a year and a half ago. I don't have the exact date, but it was about a year and a half ago.

Matt Love: — Okay. Thank you.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you, Minister and members. We shall recess now, and being it's 6:30 we shall reconvene at 7 p.m. Thank you, everyone.

[The committee recessed from 18:30 until 19:00.]

Chair Keisig: — Thank you to committee members. Seeing as it 7 o'clock we will resume estimations. I recognize MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. I would like to talk about child care now. When I look at what's in the child care budget for this year, \$396 million, how much of that included monies from the Saskatchewan government into that number?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. In the '26-27 budget year, the provincial amount is \$64.29 million.

Joan Pratchler: — And so how much did the federal government put in for the year 1 of this new extended agreement?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — The estimate from the federal government, because it does get adjusted for that population

demographic, but the estimate we have is about 317 million.

Joan Pratchler: — Can you tell me, in this budget how much money has been set aside for consultations for the wage grid?

Chair Keisig: — I apologize, MLA Pratchler. I missed that last word.

Joan Pratchler: — I said, how much money was set aside in this budget for consultations for the wage grid?

Chair Keisig: — Thank you.

Joan Pratchler: — Sorry.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — We don't have an appropriation or a set amount for consultation. We know consultation occurs throughout the year, as it has in previous years. It takes a number of different forms. I think some of that is obviously in person. Some would be through online consultation as well, but that happens with the stakeholders and in the sector. But yeah, in terms of like an actual number for consultation, we don't allocate a specific amount to that. It's just part of what we do in amongst the overall budget.

Joan Pratchler: — So then would you be able to tell me how much money might be set aside for discussions regarding the pension and benefits program for the EC [early childhood] workers?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Sorry, the question was around consultation again, right? We're on pension and benefits? Yeah, no, same as the previous answer. There isn't a dedicated amount specifically set aside for consultation.

Joan Pratchler: — Could you tell me how much money has been set aside to finalize an equitable funding model?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, on that question, just around dollars set aside specifically for consultation, again there's not a specific amount that we set aside each budget year to pertain directly to consultation. But I'll maybe ask just the ministry team here to speak a bit more about the dollars we get and what's put towards administration of the child care and implementation of the child care agreement.

And we've strived pretty hard on the, you know, on the first iteration of the agreement to make sure that we're getting as much of the dollars as we can directly to front lines, to the daycare, child care providers across the province. But I'll ask the team just to go a little bit further into the administration costs and implementation.

Sameema Haque: — Absolutely. Any consultation works, meetings of the stakeholders, any of those administrative tasks, in each of these agreements we can spend up to 10 per cent on administration costs. However in the province of Saskatchewan we have really tried really hard to get all the funding possible out to the sector. So our administration costs typically run from 1 to 2 per cent depending upon the year, so that's where these kinds of costs would fall.

Joan Pratchler: — My question wasn't about consultation. My

question was how much money was set aside for an equitable funding model.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Just wait while maybe Sameema's pulling together some information just on the various grants that make up the funding that's allocated to this sector. But just, my apologies. I thought I heard consultation, but understanding that you're wanting not just consultation in this piece. So Sameema's just pulling some information, and we'll share that with the committee.

Sameema Haque: — So as you clarified, MLA Pratchler, the question was not about consultation. It's actually about the funding model. Our funding is through the funding . . . Our funding framework is grant-based funding at this time. So all of the money that comes through the provincial budget as well as the federal budget, less 1 to 2 per cent, is for the funding of this sector. All of it goes to the sector through those variety of grants and we have about 19 grants.

So all of the funding in all of these agreements, which is \$400-plus million annually, and that is set aside for the grants such as: start-up grants; space development capital grant; fire, health, and safety grant; play and exploration grant; active play grant; early childhood services grant; equipment and program grant; northern transportation grant; teen student support grant; nutrition grant; parent fee reduction grant; wage enhancement for early childhood educators grant; workforce enhancement grant; individual inclusion grant; enhanced accessibility grant; professional development grant; tuition reimbursement grant; training support grant; skills enhancement grant.

So all of those grants, all of the funding is allocated for those.

Joan Pratchler: — And what all the stakeholders are telling me, that I'm meeting across the province, is the funding model is broken. And for the legacy providers — so those are the ones that had signed on in 2021 — are having financial difficulties. And they were having them all the way along and now they're getting to a critical point.

And what the stakeholders that I'm talking to are telling me, that it's about the funding model. It's not equitable. And so some of them are suffering now because that funding model is broken; it's not equitable. And they want to know, how much money will be set aside to deal with those emergent situations that are occurring as we speak? And also when can they expect a funding model that will be more equitable so there's more stability in this sector?

[19:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — In the conversations, consultations that I've had, you know, with child care providers as well, this is one of the topics of conversation that's come up. And that's whether it's, you know, I think in some of the bigger centres or in cities of my size, the community that I represent, we touch on a number of topics. And some of it is the discussion around . . . And I've heard it from the advocacy groups too with respect to the legacy operators and some of the challenges that they're facing. That is one of the reasons that we've advocated for some additional flexibility in the new agreement, is to be able to see what might be possible around addressing some of these

concerns there.

But it is something I know that the ministry team has put a lot of effort into and a lot of work into as they're consulting with the sector, trying to identify through all the, you know, the myriad of various grants and funding envelopes that are available for child care operators, some of these challenges that might persist.

But I'll ask Sameema to talk a bit more about just some of the differences between the legacy operators and the new operators and how they're funded. And again to the member's question just about equitable funding, you know, again that's part of the conversations that we're having right now. But I'll turn it over to Sameema.

Sameema Haque: — So in looking at the funding and expenses related to child care operations, you know, 7 per cent are related to inclusion-related initiatives, and those grants are the same between legacy operators and new operators. About 30 per cent are workplace operating-related expenses, and again those grants are the same between the legacy operators as well as the new operators. Eighteen per cent are workforce-related grants, and those are also the same between legacy operators and new operators.

The only difference is the family affordability, the parent fee reduction grant. That is the only difference that is between the legacy operators and the new operators. Our analysis, based on the information we have, the difference on a per-space basis is about \$100 per space. That's the difference between the legacy operators and the new operators on average. So it's a smaller difference.

But even with that, we have undertaken several initiatives to try and, you know, bring up the funding for those legacy operators that had lower fees. And to give you a little bit of information of the steps that we've taken: in April 2023 we provided additional \$2.8 million of funding to support child care facilities which were at the bottom third, to ensure greater equity among child care operators. So we provided an additional lift for them.

Other additional grants that are available to child care operators that I mentioned that have provided increase in funding is a one-time operational support grant of 19 million that was given for inflation-related costs, 3.3 million for one-time workforce enhancement grants, recruitment, and retention. And these were in February 2024.

In October 2025, the wage enhancement grant was increased again, and we've increased that every year. And you know, in that increase that we've given, about 8 per cent is included for employment insurance as well as Canada Pension Plan. And 3 per cent is included for administration costs as well. So that's also built into that grant.

October 2024, the ministry increased fees for all regulated child care facilities. What we observed was that some of the facilities were delayed in increasing their fees themselves, because this was left to the facilities to increase their fees earlier on and some of them were late in when they increased their fees.

And so they ended up losing some revenue of funding from us because they didn't increase fees for maybe sometimes months

and sometimes until they contacted us, and we were able to talk to them and say, well why didn't you increase your fees? And they were then able to increase their fees. So in some cases, we actually went back and retroactively applied the parent fee reduction grant and gave them that additional money, where they should have increased their fees and they didn't increase their fees, to make them whole again. So they had that additional funding.

But the last parent fee increase that was applied, we actually went and applied it for the entire sector at 3.83 per cent. And so that was applied to the entire sector from us. And you know, it was not left to the operator to increase their fees; we just increased their grant by that amount.

In January 2026, we provided six workforce enhancement grants for all the operators as well. So all of these initiatives have brought them closer and closer together, and we continue to work on that.

Joan Pratchler: — So do I hear you saying that an equitable funding model will be agreed upon?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. And as Sameema had indicated in her previous answer, talked about the equitable funding that we're getting to between the legacy operators and the new operators. And I think, you know, she detailed quite specifically a number of the initiatives that have been taking place to get us there. And I think we're pretty confident that . . . as the gap has been closed and they're going to continue to do that.

This is why, you know, it's something . . . You know, you mentioned hearing from the sector. I do as well. That's why we consult with providers and groups like SECA, the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association, there as well, talking to them on a regular basis to get their input on behalf of the people they represent in the sector.

The other point is just around the negotiation of the five-year action plan with the federal government. So it's my understanding, just through the ministry team, that that work is under way. And of course anything that we are looking to implement here in Saskatchewan requires that sign-off from the federal government. But that work will happen behind the scenes with the federal officials on the action plan and help us get to, you know, to as good of a spot we can get to when it comes to equitable funding for the operators.

Joan Pratchler: — As you know, children can turn six any time in kindergarten in the school year from September all the way to June. Can you tell me how many children would turn six from September of 2025 — they're in kindergarten — to April 1st of 2026? And then could you also share what your cost projections would've been if those children would've had access to their \$10-a-day child care?

[19:30]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks for the question. So just to reiterate, you know, our negotiations were always for the new agreement. And we were the only jurisdiction in the country that was able to get this negotiated into our new agreement starting

on April 1st.

So we don't have a calculation of what would have been . . . you know, what the numbers were from September '25 to April 1st or March 31st, tomorrow, because again that's the current agreement, the one that expires tomorrow.

So the negotiations were always on having this as something we wanted to have a very serious conversation with the federal government about adding this enhancement. But starting with the new agreement for April 1st and going forward, that the children who do turn six while they are in kindergarten, that they do have the ability to qualify for this.

So again as I've said before, that's what our negotiations were always focused on was on building on this enhancement into the new agreement which will take its effect on April 1st. And that was the direction that we were taking.

Joan Pratchler: — Well you probably realize that most other provinces have full-time kindergarten, so they don't need the six-year-old top-up there. And secondly we did some calculations on our own and we looked at . . . It was probably 2 to \$3 million to take care of those children who were born prior to April 1st.

My next question is talking about, a little bit about the spaces. So if I understood right in your opening comments, you suggested that 19,000 spaces are new \$10-a-day child care spaces. Was that correct?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, in my opening remarks I used the approximate number of 19,000 new spaces developed. But yeah, as of December 31st, actual number of new spaces developed December 31st, 2025: 18,837. So that's the reference to 19,000 new spaces developed.

Joan Pratchler: — And then could we talk a little bit more about the 7,000 spaces then? I'm assuming that you're subsuming under there the early learning spaces and also pre-kindergarten spaces under there. Is that correct?

Sameema Haque: — Sorry. Just to clarify, did you mention developing spaces?

Joan Pratchler: — No. If I understood right, it was 19,000 spaces that were the \$10-a-day that was just discussed here, but there was also additional 7,000 spaces. And could you disaggregate who populates those 7,000 spaces? And I'm questioning whether that's pre-kindergarten spaces and early learning spaces that were pre-existing.

Sameema Haque: — So the early learning program spaces, it's 6,984 that were recognized through our negotiation with the federal government. These are CCCC [children, communicating, connecting, in community] programs, that's children deaf and hard of hearing, that program; pre-kindergarten; specialized pre-kindergarten; and ELIS [early learning intensive support] spaces.

Joan Pratchler: — And so those are recognized under the \$10-a-day agreement?

Sameema Haque: — Some of those are recognized, and some are provincially funded, and some are federally funded for those

programs. Provincial funding cannot be displaced with federal funding, so there are a mix of provincial and federal funding in those programs.

Joan Pratchler: — And so the agreement that is going to be finished I guess tomorrow at midnight would have us as a target of 28,000 spaces here in Saskatchewan or very close to that, is what the agreement would be. Can you tell me, of those 28,000 spaces that we're supposed to have by midnight tomorrow night, how many are actually operational? And how many are in the queue then?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So of the 28,000 new space creation target set under the initial agreement, we're at 92 per cent of having those operational. We have to add another 2,100, is the number of spaces to hit that target. However we do have . . . The deadline isn't tomorrow, March 31st, 2026. We have another year yet in that to March of 2027 to add those remaining spaces in order to hit our 28,000 target as per the initial agreement.

Sameema Haque: — Just one correction, if I may: 92 per cent developing and operational, not operational. So we're at 92 per cent of the target for spaces that we've either allocated or they're operational.

Joan Pratchler: — Yes, so could . . . I guess I didn't word that properly. How many are operational at this point in time?

Sameema Haque: — So we have 11,277 operational spaces. And then we have 6,981 spaces that were recognized that we talked about, and we have 7,561 in development.

Joan Pratchler: — And when do you anticipate those getting on board then?

Sameema Haque: — So the 7,561 in total that are developing, out of that we have about 6,646 that are centre-based spaces, including some that are in our post-secondary institutions as well. So depending upon the progress of those capital projects, some centres will develop quickly. And some are part of a larger infrastructure project, might take a little bit longer. Then we have 915 spaces that are school-based spaces, and they are progressing with the school capital projects as well.

We anticipate that quite a significant number of these developing spaces will become operational over the next year and a half. That's the estimate, but again that depends on . . . These are private entities, and they have their own capital agreements, and how those are progressing. But we do expect, based on our previous years' trends, that many of these will become operational within the next year, year and a half.

[19:45]

Joan Pratchler: — Do you anticipate any of the school ones being delayed in terms of the school builds and the school operation challenges we have with delays or pauses?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Child care spaces will, the ones that are tied specifically to whether it's a K to 12 education or in some cases there would be post-secondary builds and construction and renovation projects. So they will obviously come online when those projects are completed.

It's my understanding that the federal government understands that when we're providing and sharing this information on how we're hitting our targets, they understand that a number of these spaces are included as part of brand new builds. And I think — again, it's my understanding — that the federal government is aware of that and that they understand that these projects are taking place in a sequenced process and that they know that we're building them. Projects are going ahead.

As example, you know, Harbour Landing School under construction right now. A number of child care spaces are part of that particular build. But other ones that are perhaps further down the road, the federal government knows that we're including those as part of the build-out. And they don't, to my knowledge, have not expressed any concerns around the timelines there because they know that the spaces have been committed to in the projects and will be included upon the grand openings of these schools.

Joan Pratchler: — So if I understand correctly, the number of spaces that were included in that type of a category, about 6,000?

Sameema Haque: — The school-based spaces that are currently in development are 915. 6,646, the other number that you're referring to, is all centre-based spaces, which is a whole . . . all kinds of operators developing.

Joan Pratchler: — I'd like to talk a little bit more about the rollovers. So in the past agreement, there was the initial understanding that 10 per cent could be rolled over from year one to year two to year three. And then there were significant challenges with those, and those became much larger numbers than just the 10 per cent.

So in the end, or as we're completing that first agreement, how has that rollover situation been? Where did those rollover funds go? Have they all been expended in child care, or has there been some other disposition of those funds?

Sameema Haque: — So each of the federal agreements, the carryforward amounts, as you mentioned, must be negotiated in the action plan. Because we had annual action plans, most of these were negotiated annually.

As part of the conditions of the agreement, the carryforward is first expensed in the following year. So that's the first item that goes into expenses. And they are expensed for the same grants that I listed earlier on in a response. So they're part of the operational funding that goes to child care operators. So each of these were spent the following year.

Now this current fiscal year that we're just finishing, we had approval to carry forward 10 per cent. But with so many spaces that have become operational, we were only able to carry forward 4 per cent, because most of the money is being expensed, and the carryforward amount that we are taking into the next year is already allocated in the sense that we have budgeted it for particular initiatives that are multi-year initiatives.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And then for the new agreement coming up, is that the same amount rollover that the federal government allow from 10 per cent per year unless otherwise agreed upon?

Sameema Haque: — We were very fortunate to get another enhancement in our future agreement. We are now going to be able to negotiate a five-year action plan. We would be the first jurisdiction across Canada that the federal government agreed to pilot the five-year action plan, which will provide some level of stability for us in the sense that we will have the allocations and the negotiation done once with the federal government. So those carryforwards will be part of that discussion. Can't anticipate what they would be; that's part of the discussion with the federal government. It's subject to the federal government and the federal minister's approval.

Joan Pratchler: — So do I hear you saying that the rollovers between year 1, 2, 3, 4, and the upcoming still haven't been negotiated yet as finalized?

Sameema Haque: — They are part of the action plan negotiation. The first draft of action plan negotiation is due to the federal government as of May 1st. And then we just operate based on their timelines as to when they're ready to kind of continue on with the discussions.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. I'd like to talk about ECE [early childhood educator] training and ECE availability. So how many students are enrolled in the ECE [early childhood education] I, II, and III levels for this year, and also how many would be graduating from each one of those? How many people are going to be coming onto the workforce after graduating their programs in each of those categories?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Just some high-level numbers, and then Sameema will get into just the number of tuition-free training seats. Some of this would be, I think, better answered by Sask Poly in terms of the number of seats they have and what the uptake is. But overall 37 per cent increase in the number of staff, 52 per cent increase in certification, 84 per cent increase in the number of ECE III. So all very positive advancements over the past number of years in the sector and in terms of how we've been able to build this up in collaboration with the early childhood education sector itself.

But maybe, Sameema, just talk a bit about some of the numbers we do have specific to the tuition-free training seats we have in the province and what we have for data there.

Sameema Haque: — Absolutely. Just one more point that I would make in regards to the 52 per cent certification. Under the agreement one of our targets was 15 per cent increase in our certification levels across the province. We have far exceeded that target, and we're very proud of that achievement within the province. So 52 per cent is the number that's much, much bigger than 15 per cent, so very proud of that.

[20:00]

Now I can only speak to the number of seats that we provide funding for. I'll give you the seats for each level for the '25-26 year. So ECE level I, 1,312; ECE level II, 452; ECE level III, 335. And then we also fund supports for students to obtain any of the ECE levels, additional professional development courses, and so 475 of those. And then advanced certificates that ECEs can take, we fund about 62 seats for that.

So this is just for last year. But since 2021 to this year, we have funded 3,893 seats for ECE I, 1,272 seats for ECE II, 856 seats for ECE III. We've supported 500 students in regards to their professional development and 132 students for advanced certification. So a total of 6,653 tuition-free certifications.

Joan Pratchler: — So how many ECE IIIs are graduating this year?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, I was just going to jump in on that and maybe go back to Sameema on it. But I think we were just having a discussion at the back about just sort of the profile — if you will, I guess, the student profile — in terms of, like, some of these would be part-time students, right? And so that makes it, I think, somewhat challenging to be able to predict what the numbers are going to be in terms of graduation rates going forward. But I don't know if we have anything more specific than that, Sammi, but yeah.

So that just makes it a bit more challenging because there are a number — and I don't know if it's a significant number or not — that take the training on a part-time basis. So again just makes it a bit of a challenge that way to determine, you know, predict what our graduation rates are. But something obviously that we work closely with the advanced education sector in terms of, you know, what is their demand, what's the uptake, and do we have to look at that going forward too.

Joan Pratchler: — So if we put an end date as August 30th of 2026, how many ECE IIIs would have graduated and entered the workforce after that training for this year? And how many IIs? And how many Is? And could we just get that furnished to the committee so you don't have to use your time now to do the calculations?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Certainly an area that we're working to get better data on to make sure. And I think, you know, this has been mentioned by the Provincial Auditor. So we're working with Advanced Education on better data reporting, better tracking of this. So you know, that has been mentioned publicly, so we have to do better at that.

Just going back to one of the other stats that I indicated — and this is where we do get some of our numbers — the 84 per cent increase in ECE level IIIs that are able to actually qualify for that particular top-up, they're showing us they have the certification. So we are, to a certain degree, able to point to that number and say that there has been a significant increase in certification, obviously, because people are showing that they do have the ECE level III training so they can therefore qualify for the wage top-up that's available.

But again I would say that we are working and our teams are working to do a better job of tracking the information, collecting the data so that we have a better handle on what's happening in terms of our post-secondary institutions as we further develop the workforce.

Joan Pratchler: — I hear you saying that you'll be able to provide that data within a week.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, we're working on collecting it. You know, I would say that I don't think we'll be able to provide

it in a week, but our teams are working to gather that data as we speak.

Joan Pratchler: — And so what date would you be able to provide it to the committee?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — The best data we have is, as I said, you know, the wage top-up data that we have internally here. Again we're endeavouring to try to collect that data and have a better tracking mechanism for that. So once we have that, we can endeavour to provide that to the committee. But I wouldn't be in a position to say . . . Just in terms of the work being done by the officials and the ministries, I wouldn't be able to say exactly what that deadline or what that date would be.

Joan Pratchler: — I'm on the Public Accounts Committee, and they usually give them a 30-day . . . And wouldn't you be providing that for Public Accounts anyway?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah. The difference there is that, you know — and this has been reminded to me — that we have to create the data. We don't have the information yet. So again that's where we're working to create that data to do that tracking. And then once we have that information available, then we can, as I said, endeavour to get that to the committee.

So we don't have the information right now, so we can't share it. I can't give a timeline if we don't have that data, if the teams are working right now to create that data and to get the answers that we're looking for.

Joan Pratchler: — So are you suggesting we ask Advanced Education to call Sask Poly and see how many are graduating this year?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, that's part of the information gathering or the conversations that are happening with Advanced Ed right now as we speak. So that's part of the work that we have to do to satisfy the auditor's recommendation, and so those conversations are happening. And again once we have that data all collected, then that becomes available to us and then we'd be in a position at that point to share it.

Joan Pratchler: — And that would be public? We wouldn't have to FOIP [freedom of information and protection of privacy] them or anything?

Clint Repski: — So it's not the type of thing that we would normally make public but, as was referenced earlier, this has been cited as part of the Provincial Auditor's report and it would be clearly brought to Public Accounts.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you very much. I'm finished now. Well I'm stopping.

Chair Keisig: — I recognize Mr. Love.

Matt Love: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to go back to one question that I missed, the topic that we were on before our supper break. In the past, Minister, we've had conversations in this committee about how LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] agreements are funded. And there's often, you know, in the last number of years there would have

been specific commitments from your government to fund teacher contracts in the budget.

Of course this year, the contract expires in August, and there's negotiations beginning this spring. I understand that that's on the budget. But when it comes to LINC agreements, how is your government funding increases that will be required to allow local divisions to negotiate new LINC agreements with teachers? Because I don't see that present in this budget anywhere.

[20:15]

Clint Repski: — Funding for LINC agreements for school divisions, now there's usually two factors that adjust that funding, typically in the up fashion. The first one is when there's a CBA [collective bargaining agreement] settlement. And so the last time that we settled that collective agreement, there was a significant enhancement to locally determined terms and conditions.

The other one is tied to enrolment growth. And in this year, as we've indicated before, we don't have a new collective agreement. When that's settled, LINC will be adjusted at that point in time as we roll funding out. And the enrolment growth component of LINC will be adjusted when we do the September 30th enrolment adjustment. So at this point in time, there is no change to the LINC funding.

Matt Love: — So how can school boards know what leverage they have to negotiate with their locals, which is ongoing at this time, if they don't know what they have to work with? Does that question make sense? I think what I'm asking, if they don't know what they have to work with, what do they have to negotiate with?

Clint Repski: — Effectively it's the same position that they would be in with any other negotiating settlements that they might be incurring right now. Right now the school divisions would be working within the existing funding that they've been provided over the past couple of weeks with their budget packages. And they would likely be estimating what these adjustments would be moving forward, and they'd have to make that work for now.

Matt Love: — Yeah, ultimately I guess I agree with you, Deputy Minister, that working with what they have, there isn't much new that they can offer, either through local agreements or to other locally negotiated contracts with education support workers that we discussed before the break. You know, in a budget year I do suspect — and the minister said he won't be speculating; I'll speculate based off of the years of experience I have in this role — that we're going to see cuts.

And so what's left over to do these local negotiations is going to put incredible strain on local divisions, especially in hard-to-recruit positions, whether it's bus drivers in rural Saskatchewan or more EAs across the province. I think that we're going to see some challenges. And I'm not looking forward to hearing how school divisions report back on this in the coming weeks.

Minister, I'm going to move on to some questions that are related to classroom complexity as kind of a general theme — classroom complexity, supports for learning, and inclusion. So just to start

off with, my question to you, Minister: how is the ministry handling the funding of article 17 in the new provincial collective bargaining agreement, the requirements for the article 17 teachers, for classroom complexity teachers, with respect to the separate and distinct specialized support classroom program?

So my question really is, how are these two initiatives funded separately? And how is it being communicated to divisions? Again how are divisions . . . what communication and what funding are divisions receiving distinctly for specialized support classrooms and for article 17 teachers in the new collective bargaining agreement?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. I'll start and then I think we'll have just the officials jump in with some additional information. Where funding is provided for a new specialized support classroom, funding for an additional classroom complexity or an article 17 teacher is not provided. The government however is meeting its commitments to funding classroom complexity through the combination of article 17 funding and also the specialized support classroom.

But I think Jason wanted to go into a bit more detail around this.

Jason Pirlot: — Yeah, thanks, Minister. Jason Pirlot. So for 2026-27, there's \$35.2 million in the budget for the SSCs [specialized support classroom]. That's an increase of 16.3 million, and that's an amount of about 326,000 per classroom.

Matt Love: — So I think our calculations are the same there, Minister and your officials. So that funding per classroom would cover one full-time teacher or two full-time teachers?

Jason Pirlot: — Thanks for the question. So staffing models across school divisions are different. The staffing mix that school divisions have landed on in terms of how to deploy this program, there's a variance. But I would say it's a minimum of one certified teacher.

Obviously with the 325, there's funding for different approaches. We've seen some classrooms, some school divisions deploy multiple teacher approaches. We see some lean more heavily on EAs. But we also see a lot of divisions leave some funding back for additional professional supports, whether that be ed psychs, speech paths, occupational therapists, etc.

And I think one of the benefits of that flexibility that has been provided to school divisions in this province relates to the fact that, as we all know, we have 27 divisions across, you know, a pretty wide swath of this province. And the ability to recruit and procure resources changes from community to community, and school divisions are maximizing that funding to do what's best for their communities.

Matt Love: — Yeah, I appreciate that. And I agree that, you know, when school divisions have additional resources and flexibility to implement them based on their needs, good things happen. So I certainly agree with the need for that flexibility.

Can you just confirm, Minister, that the funding for these specialized support classrooms include the full-time teacher that is not also being counted as one of the Article 17 teachers funded

in the budget? That those are two distinct . . . That your government is funding both of those things, not one but counting it in the other?

[20:30]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. With respect to the specialized support classroom model and the classroom complexity teachers, I just would point to that the specialized support classrooms, we started to do that work prior to the conclusion of the CBA through the arbitrated settlement. And that began with the pilots of course, and then funding in the budget here that's about to wrap up tomorrow, and then the expansion this year.

We do believe that the specialized support classroom teachers should be counted as article 17 teachers. There may be some disagreements around that and how they're counted but that's our belief, that teachers that are staffing the specialized support classrooms do meet that definition as an article 17 teacher.

Matt Love: — Now, Minister, your officials just spoke of the flexibility with which specialized support classrooms are being implemented. And I know that there's a variety of models out there that are, you know, decided upon at the local level, which is great. Some of those are maybe itinerant models, where a group of professionals travel and support teachers and learners in the classroom, and some of those are more of a classroom model, you know, located in a school.

So can you further explain your perspective that those classes, despite the incredible variety, that that should encompass article 17 teachers when I'm pretty sure that article 17 teachers are not allowed to . . . or that the agreement, the arbitrary agreement is that they would not be performing classroom instruction, and if some of these models are . . . or that they can't be used to reduce pupil-teacher ratios. So can you further explain your belief that article 17 teachers should be included as specialized support classroom teachers?

Chair Keisig: — I just would ask the member opposite to tie that question into the budget. I'm trying to understand the nuances of this and how it ties into the budget of '26-27.

Matt Love: — Gladly, Mr. Chair, while the minister discusses with his officials. So my previous question was about asking the minister to clearly delineate between how this budget is communicated to school divisions. Because when they get their operating grants, some of that is, you know, no strings attached. Some of that is in envelopes where — for example specialized support classrooms — that's a requirement from this government to spend that money in a certain way. And then article 17 teachers would be required in the collective bargaining agreement.

So the question really comes down to how this is communicated to school divisions, whether or not they're getting funded for both of those or whether or not they're only getting funded for one of those. But the government is taking credit for funding both of them. So it really is about the budget because a school division only has one source of revenue or one source of income, and that's their operating grant.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — So a couple of points. The information

was communicated to school divisions as part of their budget packages. Secondly, just to reiterate my previous answer around our belief that the specialized support classroom teachers do meet the definition of an article 17 teacher and that's how it was calculated, presented for the budget, for this year's budget, the new budget, '26-27 budget, and consistent with last year as well. So it's the same position that we're taking in terms of that.

But in addition to that as well, though, I understand that there has been a grievance filed. And so it wouldn't be appropriate for us to comment any further, given that situation.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. That's news to me that there's been a grievance filed. By the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah.

Matt Love: — Okay. Thank you. I'm going to turn things to my colleague for a question here.

Joan Pratchler: — I don't need an answer right now, a verbal answer, but if you would continue to furnish the committee with the documents like you did last year regarding the data on the number of students requiring intensive supports, broken down by school divisions; and secondly, number of students requiring EAL [English as an additional language] supports at the various levels in a school division, and broken down by divisions as well.

And you furnished those last year. I'm just asking if you could redo that for this year, your updated numbers.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Just double-checking with the team, and we did get that information to the committee last year, and we're still collecting some of the information from I think a couple of the school divisions. So once we have that we'll be able to share that information.

Joan Pratchler: — And what anticipated date?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Team's telling me a few days. I think again it's just a matter of us hearing back from a couple of these outlier divisions right now. I think there was a reporting issue or something with one of them. So we just want to make sure that they're double-checking their numbers to get that back to us for the global provincial number. But I don't anticipate it's going to take very long, so yeah.

Matt Love: — Minister, I'm wondering if you could comment for the committee. You know, as we look at . . . We've had a number of, I'd say, questions and discussions happening in this province over a number of years in this committee on inclusive education. Could you share for the committee your view on inclusive education and how that's reflected in this budget?

[20:45]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I'll start maybe just on some of the numbers that I've talked about before and then get into just the member's question about inclusion in our school system.

So the overall amount in this year's budget: \$436 million into classroom supports. And then in that, \$398.5 million dedicated

to supports for learning. So that would be the students who require intensive supports, students with vulnerable circumstances, those that require EAL. And then 35.16 million for the expansion of the specialized support classroom model to 108 classrooms, and two and a half million for implementing the Teacher Innovation ideas and enhancing education outcomes in schools.

But above and beyond that, I think just around the member's question around inclusion, that is something that's very much a priority for the government I think. And in terms of working with our partners, whether it's Inclusion Saskatchewan — I've met with Inclusion Saskatchewan on several occasions, and recently here this spring they had a reception here in the legislature — but had a chance to chat with Christina and Brittany and the team then and met with them earlier this winter. Met with them last year as well. Try to make sure I do a regular check-in with them.

In addition to that, some of the other work, I know that . . . Not just, you know, that the ministry team is doing, but I've reached out to a number of other organizations around the province just to gain some of their feedback and advice. And as part of our consultations, you know, Autism Resource Centre, I've talked to Ability in Me, Saskatchewan Down Syndrome Society, Autism Services of Saskatoon — those are just some of the groups that I've had a chance to talk to in the past number of weeks and months in my time as the minister. Because I felt it's important to do that, to make sure that we are hearing from a number of these organizations.

And in addition to that, directly from parents — parents of children who do have any number of challenges, whether they're physical limitations, intellectual disabilities, you name it. And I think what's been, you know, very important for us to consider as part of this is that there have been some differing approaches to how do we continue to address this.

And I think for example . . . And I hope I'm not speaking out of turn, but I think in the conversations I've had with Inclusion Saskatchewan, they're very much in support of the specialized support classroom model and how that's benefited a number of students in terms of working to provide them with better inclusion into their schools.

So that's a positive, you know, I think for us to be able to hear that from groups like that, but also at the same time ask the question as to how do we do a better job of that. And again that's why we're advancing the specialized support classroom model across the province as part of our target to add 200 on top of the initial eight that we had.

But I would say that, you know, some of the other challenges we face are . . . And what, you know, I think I'm very optimistic about is how we can try to find some new and creative ways to improve inclusion in the classroom and in the education sector. And I think what I've heard . . . and not I think, I know what I've heard from the associations is that there isn't one simple solution to this.

It's not as simple as saying, well just go and hire, you know, 500 — I'm just picking a number out of the air, but — 500 more EAs. Yes, in some cases it might be more educational assistants that might be the answer, but it's not easy, and I don't think it's fair

to be able to paint that with a broad brush that way.

One of the things I've heard from teachers as well on the other side of it — and this, I think, comes from both sides — is how, you know . . . There are some times I've heard directly from teachers that I've spoken to directly who say that, you know, sometimes they wish they had better tools at their disposal to be able to provide the necessary supports that they need to provide to the kids, students that face some challenges. So I've heard that.

The flip side of that is the associations that I've talked to and continue to meet with have said, we've got some answers for that. We've got some initiatives we think that would help provide additional tools for teachers and EAs and all of the professionals that make sure that we're doing the best that we can for kids that do require some additional supports.

So the work continues. Again I've committed to these groups that I've met with that . . . Happy, and will continue to meet with them in the weeks and months ahead as we work on developing a path forward and then building upon some of the work we've already done in this budget and in previous budgets to support inclusion.

And we're going to work closely with groups like that, as I said, some of the ones that I listed earlier today like Inclusion Saskatchewan. Again I've had very positive and productive meetings with Inclusion Saskatchewan. And we'll make sure we continue to do that work so that we can make enhancements and build upon some of the work that's already taken place and do better for all the students who require some additional supports in our education system. So pretty optimistic and upbeat about where we can get to.

And I think, you know, honestly I think we can really be a leader not just here in our province. But I think we can probably take some lessons from some other jurisdictions, but I think we can also lead the way in certain regards as well.

Matt Love: — Thanks. As Minister of Education in Saskatchewan, do you believe that every child has a right to be included at school?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, absolutely. We wanted . . . oh, sorry.

Chair Keisig: — Can I just interrupt? While you're answering that, just I'd like to remind the member we're here for the '26-27 budget. And how that question pertains to the budget, I'm just struggling in my mind to connect the dots. So what the minister feels about an issue or topic does not concern the financial details that we are here debating this evening.

So, Minister, go ahead. But just for future reference, members, please ask questions about the '26-27 budget.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I can probably predict where the member's going, so I think he'll make the connection for us.

Yeah, as I was starting to say, I do believe that every student should have the opportunity to be in a classroom, if that's what their family so chooses. And there's a number of choices there. You know, parents need to have that choice. I think, you know, they appreciate having that choice to have their child in, whether

it's public or Catholic school system or whether it's in other parts of the education system. But absolutely. You know, if a parent wants their student to be in a classroom and to be able to learn in that type of an environment, they should have that opportunity.

We know it's a bit more complicated than that though too, right? That we have — as we talked about already a lot here tonight and many times about — the complexity of classrooms, and you know, it's changed. It really has changed over the past number of decades. And so we do have more challenges that are presented in the classroom and students that all have very unique circumstances from time to time. Sometimes it's, you know, medical supports. They may require fairly intensive ones. And it's a matter of, you know, do we have the supports there available to deliver that.

The other thing we have to consider too — and again, this is part of the challenge and conversations we have, I think all of us whether it's at the Ministry of Education, but you know, our school division partners and teachers as well — is addressing . . . And this is a concern that I've, you know, had conversations with leadership at both the school division level and also with the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation], is around violence in the classroom. And so we have to be mindful of that and really relying on, at the local level, at teachers and administration be able to try to make sure that they have a plan in place, that the school remains safe for everybody and as a learning environment that everybody can be part of, if at all possible.

But you know, recognizing, of course, that sometimes that isn't always the case, and there aren't any easy solutions to some of these challenges. So that's work that we're advancing with respect to violence in not just the classroom, I think, but we want to make sure our teachers are safe, our EAs are safe, our school bus drivers are safe, and people that are in the administration office at the schools, that they are safe as well.

But again I just, you know, I do believe that we need to do everything we can to make sure that students have the ability to learn in a safe, inclusive classroom in our schools in Saskatchewan.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister. In 2021 your ministry adopted an inclusive education policy, and in 2023 your ministry adopted a policy titled *Actualizing A Needs-Based Model*. Can you share with the committee if supports for learning funding to support students with exceptional needs is delivered on a needs-based model?

[21:00]

Clint Repski: — So the first part of the question that was asked was regarding the needs-based model. And the answer is yes, we do. There was a period of time a number of years ago when funding used to be rolled out on more or less a diagnosis-based model. And what school divisions would do was identify additional-needs students through diagnosis and they'd be classified into tiers 1, 2, 3 in terms of intensity level of support. We would take the available pool of funding, divide that by those identified students, and roll that funding out.

When the new funding model was rolled out — it might have been prior to that, but around 2012 — what was happening was

students weren't getting the support they needed for a variety of reasons, partially because in order to get provincial funding, you would have a diagnosis. So a lot of time, effort, and energy was spent into doing those pieces as opposed to providing the actual supports. So what we did was to take a look at some broader-level indicators — poverty, EAL, other broad-level factors — to distribute the funding.

So that's the SFL [supports for learning] pool that you were referring to, which was what we call a needs-based model. It doesn't require a diagnosis. Rather that's how we cut up that allocation of funding to give to school divisions in terms of . . . Some kids don't have a diagnosis. Some parents choose not to have their child diagnosed for a variety of different reasons, but that doesn't mean they don't need some additional supports.

What our model does is allows the school divisions to provide the support as they deem appropriate without having to have a diagnosis. In some cases they may not be able to get a diagnosis. That doesn't mean the child doesn't need additional supports. So that's a bit of the reasons why we do the needs-based.

But Mr. Chase here is going to talk to us about the update that's currently happening.

Sean Chase: — Thank you. Good evening. Sean Chase, executive director, student achievement and supports. Earlier in the fall our branch reached out and conducted a pretty fulsome survey with student support services, superintendents from all 27 divisions in the province. And one of the items that they prioritized for us was the *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model* document and refreshing it to be better aligned with our current principles of inclusion as well as how we're funding across the province.

So very pleased to report our team brought together about 42 staff from across the entire province here in Regina on March 4th and had a full day of those folks undertaking a refresh of that document, recognizing that while it was recreated in 2023, this is a rapidly changing environment that we're facing in schools. And therefore we needed to have the most current documentation to support the inclusive approach to supporting students in the province of Saskatchewan.

So we're hopeful to turn around an updated version of that in the coming months. But it was great to have what we saw as overwhelming support from the school divisions in their commitment to join us in this work.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister, for those comments from your officials. You know, I understand the need to move away from a medical diagnosis-based approach. But I think the reality is, in many school divisions in this province, students are waiting years for a diagnosis to help connect them with the supports that they need. So they're also not being, you know, served well in that regard.

And I would say, Minister, as far as the current approach to using third-party data and some of these larger data points to determine how supports for learning funding is dispersed, also doesn't fully capture the needs of students who walk into buildings. And so one of the things that I'm hearing is the disconnect — many school divisions.

And I'd like to ask you, Minister: are you hearing these same concerns that there's a gap between the funds that divisions receive in supports for learning and the needs of the students walking into their schools every day? Again that's the gap that exists in funding the needs of our students between what school divisions receive in supports for learning and the actual needs that I would say we need to examine if we are to actualize the needs-based approach to funding education. Are you hearing those same concerns, Minister?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — I'll speak to again, you know, that there has been significant investments in this budget, in previous budget years, when it comes to supports for learning. And I'm not going to go through those numbers again. But these are significant investments into the education system to address these, you know, the complexity, the challenges we face in the classroom. And the government's going to continue to do that.

Now specific to children with intensive needs. There are a number of programs, and the earlier side of things, because as we all know, the earlier we can get at children who have these requirements, that need some additional support, the better it is for everyone, but most specifically those children.

And whether that's, you know, some of the K to 3 literacy work that's being done, but I would point to a number of other areas where there are supports and funding provided by the ministry to early years programs to support children with intensive needs. That includes early . . . and run through a bit of a list here: but the early learning intensive support program that provides a number of spaces, hundreds of spaces across the province; children communicating, connecting in the community; specialized pre-K; the ECIP program that we're all very familiar with, the early childhood intervention program; child care enhanced accessibility grants; child care individual inclusion grants; inclusive practices initiative; accessibility rating grants. And there's supports for medically fragile children as well. So a number of different programs there that help to provide some supports to children with intensive needs.

But as I said in a previous answer, it's not always just about funding. And I, you know, I talked about the significant, the millions and millions of dollars of funding that we have put towards this. But it isn't always just about funding. And again that's what I am hearing from groups like Inclusion Saskatchewan, some of the other ones that I've mentioned that I've met with here particularly as of late.

Sometimes it's an education approach, and teachers wanting to be able to have more information on how they can do an even better job in the classrooms supporting these kids. And the flip side of that is the organization saying, we can help provide some of that information. They are eager to provide some of these solutions to make sure that we're doing everything we can for students that have intensive needs.

Maybe go back to Sean here for a second just in terms of some of the work that's going to be taking place here, I think, in a couple of weeks time in April that I think that speaks to this very topic.

Sean Chase: — Thank you. One of the pieces our staff certainly hears from a resourcing end is resourcing opportunities for staff

— not just teachers, but all educators — around the challenges that some of the students present in terms of the world of complexity. And so we're leveraging the opportunities and the resourcing out of the specialized support classroom model to do just that.

We're, at their request, pulling together folks from all 27 school divisions in a couple weeks' time here in Regina. And they'll have a chance to network about some of the promising practices that we're seeing in that model right now to help them leverage those as we expand by another 50 instances next year and a hundred more to come after that.

But one of the pieces we're really excited about is, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation professional learning group has recently created a facilitation learning module on supporting neurodiversity in an inclusive manner in classrooms. And so they're spending about two-thirds of that day that we have the entire province pulled together doing that facilitation — which is quite responsive to what we hear in the number of instances, not just from staff but also from parents — of helping our very talented staff get up to speed on some of the leading practices to create those inclusive learning environments in our schools.

So that's an example of using the resource in a proactive educational manner for our wonderful educators.

Matt Love: — Thanks, Minister and officials. Minister, in your — and for the purpose of the Chair, this question is about the supports for learning funding in the provincial budget which is the topic that we're exploring right now — in your document on *Actualizing a Needs-Based Approach*, it indicates that the intent of a needs-based model is to ensure that, "all students have access to appropriate learning opportunities, all students are supported through differentiated and responsive instruction, and all students are provided with inclusive opportunities to reach their potential."

Now we saw a report this year from Inclusion Saskatchewan, from FOI [freedom of information] and local school divisions that they're up to 1,300 students in this province who are being denied access to full-time education, some of those on a part-time basis, some of those full-time being denied any access to K to 12 education in Saskatchewan.

And so can you help the committee understand how this budget addresses that massive gap between the policy on actualizing a needs-based approach that your ministry has adopted and the reality of 1,300 students being denied their right to education?

[21:15]

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. I think I've addressed the question a couple times previously. And again I think, you know, I've spoken about the increase to supports for learning and some of the other investments that we're making into classroom supports when it comes to the topic of inclusion and making sure that every student has an opportunity to be learning in the classroom. And understanding as well that schools and school divisions are making those decisions as well at the local level based on what students' needs are and what supports are available, because that does vary from school to school and community to community across the province.

And again I would just say that in the conversations and the consultation that I've had with a number of groups . . . And there's more to come, whether it's Inclusion Saskatchewan, whether it's, you know, some of the autism organizations, or Down Syndrome Society, and others, there's many others across the province. What I've heard is that — and I think the member's question is around what's in the budget specific to that — but what I've heard as part of the conversations is that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. There isn't a simple solution to all this.

So I think rather than, you know, jumping to a conclusion or, you know, coming to a solution that maybe misses the mark, that we have agreed to continue these conversations. I know I've had them. The ministry, the officials are having conversations as well behind the scenes. I'll have follow-up meetings with each of these groups in the weeks ahead and in the not-too-distant future, because I think there is a path forward. There are some ideas coming forward. But I think we want to make sure that we take the appropriate amount of time to involve those organizations as we're developing these solutions.

And again I don't think there's . . . As I said before, there's not an easy answer to any of this. But I think by collaborating with a number of groups in this space and the advocacy that they're doing, I think that's helpful to us and some of the work that has been mentioned here by the officials here tonight. As a matter of fact, some of it's already happened and some that will be taking place in just a couple of weeks here with respect to engaging with teachers, but everyone that is impacted by this.

I think there's really an opportunity, but we want to make sure that, you know, we do everything we can to get this right but we do so in a timely basis. And I think the work we get done, the feedback we get from these advocacy organizations and frankly from parents too . . . As I said, I've heard directly from parents as well, sat down face to face with them, met with them one-on-one, and I think that will help inform some of the decisions going forward. And we're going to have a collaborative approach to that and make sure that we do that, we take the time we need to make sure that, as best we can, we get it right.

Matt Love: — You know, Minister, I know that you and I can disagree on a number of items, but I hope that we can find common ground and agree on the fact that, if there are 1,300 students in this province being denied access to full-time education, that that's unacceptable for a province like ours.

And my final question on this topic to you is, is there any movement in this budget or any actions being taken from your government to track school exclusions? Is there any accountability for what needs to happen within a school division before an exclusion is issued to a student? And are there any supports that the province can offer to school divisions to help minimize school exclusions?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, just in terms of the tracking of exclusions, that's again something that we've spoken about, that's been identified by Inclusion Saskatchewan and the report, and that directed the ministry to do some work around, you know, how do we track this? What does it look like? And you know, as I said before, there's a number of different groups, part of the sector, that would have varying input on what this looks like in

terms of, you know, what should be provided for supports in the classroom, what defines an exclusion, what doesn't.

And there's a lot . . . And again I had a sit-down with a number of groups here, including Inclusion Saskatchewan, to speak specifically about their report. And I think they would also probably indicate that they're trying to get a better picture and understanding of that as well. So I think it's broad consultation across the sector and trying to do a better job of identifying that and, you know, the exclusions and what they are.

But again with the ultimate goal that we, as much we can, provide — and recognizing every student's a bit different; every school in terms of supports they provide is a bit different as well — and do everything we can to make sure that we have students in the classroom.

Matt Love: — Okay, Minister, we're going to move onto some questions about Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation. We'll see if that takes us to 10 o'clock here tonight.

If you could just start with some updated numbers for the committee, Minister, as far as . . . And we're looking at some of the information provided last year to this committee as well as Public Accounts. If you could provide us with some updated enrolment numbers, including full-time equivalents broken down into however SDLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation] breaks that down.

I think that you had provided it back . . . Roughly 3,500 students in probably K to 9 and then a different number of groups in the high school years, as far as what that turns into, in terms of full-time equivalents when you add up those courses in high school.

Whatever information you can provide us with that's readily available is appreciated for the student enrolment numbers, as well as what is projected for next school year, as well as if you have calculated a per-student average funding for SDLC students.

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Data we have is a snapshot. Would've been as of March 1st of this year, so roughly . . . Well we've got some actual numbers here. I was going to say roughly 13,000 students taking online courses this year, but the actual number: 13,067 students registered with the Sask DLC this school year.

[21:30]

That includes 3,296 full-time kindergarten to grade 12 students, including 1,246 kindergarten to grade 9 students taking 9,544 courses, 1,462 full-time online grade 10 to 12 students taking 8,119 courses, 1,669 young adults aged 18 to 21 taking 5,555 courses, 8,263 part-time grade 10 to 12 students taking 16,810 online courses, and 462 adults over the age of 22 taking 1,374 online courses.

And I'll maybe turn . . . That's the stats, but I'll maybe turn it over to Darren just to talk a bit about the funding that goes towards DLC and the students, just some of the complexities around that. Darren.

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, you bet. Darren Gasper with the Sask DLC. So, Mr. Love, in response to your question around the

average funding, the way our funding model works — and I'm speaking specifically to our full-time online students in this case — the funding provided for each of those goes directly to the local school division of which they reside within that boundary. And then we invoice on a \$500-per-course cost.

So to calculate that average would depend on how many courses each student took, which varies quite a bit from one student to another. But at the end of the day the funding connected with that student is in the local school division, and \$500 per course is invoiced out.

Matt Love: — Could you report on how much SDLC receives in total between operating grants in the provincial budget and tuition received from school divisions? Is that a number? If it's not readily available, could you table that for the committee?

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, and we'd be able to give a projection, right, for next year. Thank you, Mr. Love, for that question. For our projected budget for next year, it's a total of 42.8 million, which is broken down into a GRF [General Revenue Fund] allocation of 25.4 and a projected 16 million in tuition collection back from the school divisions.

Matt Love: — Thank you so much, Mr. Gasper. Minister, in the past — you know, albeit under a different minister — they were able to provide a per-student average for SDLC for comparison's sake to the provincial average that you provided, I think, in my first . . . No, not my first question. Earlier tonight. It's a long time ago.

So in years past that was a number that your ministry was able to provide. Is that something that you'd be able to calculate by tomorrow's estimates? Per-student average funding for SDLC students?

Darren Gasper: — Thank you, Mr. Love, for that question. We're just discussing the complexity of being able to provide the answer for what you're looking for. We would be able to do some work around the funding that's allocated to us and break it down by learner group, but I'd caution that it's not a direct apples-to-apples comparison there. But we could break it down by learner group.

Matt Love: — Yeah, that's fair. I mean in particular by your younger years who are enrolled in . . . You know, a full-time grade 3 student might be a fair comparison there. But I understand the high school student taking one course online might be a little different. But whatever you can provide by tomorrow's meeting would be appreciated.

I'm going to turn questions over to my colleague, MLA Pratchler, for some more questions on SDLC.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. We visit school divisions all over the province, and the greatest irritant to school divisions is the Distance Learning Centre.

This year the budget was 24.59 million. Last year it was 18.436 million. That's a 35 per cent increase. What budget lines are responsible for this 35 per cent increase?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. The increase, and the

member mentioned it just in her numbers there, but a \$7 million increase over previous school year for the DLC. Enrolment driven is the reason for that. I think Darren has a bit more detail in terms of some of the numbers that make up the enrolment increase that the DLC is seeing, and therefore as a result, the increase in the funding to the DLC.

Darren Gasper: — Thank you, Minister. Just to follow up then in terms of the increase in this year's budget. Those funds, the vast majority of them will be going to front-line supports for students with the majority of that being classroom teachers, a little bit towards the CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] agreement that we have signed to support students, and one occupational therapist position that's here to support students as well.

Joan Pratchler: — Is that online occupational therapy?

Darren Gasper: — Excuse me. Yes, that occupational therapist works with our full-time students. They perform that work . . . Their assessment work, for example, may be done in person or online, depending on the situation for the students. So they do travel out to meet with our families.

Joan Pratchler: — And what did you say your percentage of enrolment increase was?

[21:45]

Darren Gasper: — Thank you for your question. I'm going to start by answering with, first off, the growth that we've experienced over the last two years, which gives you a percentage growth.

So from 2023-24 to 2024-25, in full-time online students we saw a growth of 47 per cent increase. In our part-time online students — those would be the ones who are in a brick-and-mortar school, taking a course — we saw an increase of 50 per cent over our first two years. And then for our adults over 22 years of age we saw a 48 per cent increase in numbers over those two years.

During this year we have data from September 1st up until March 1st. So our growth throughout this school year, we've had a growth of more than 570 K to 9 students, a growth of 523 high school students taking 5,377 courses, and we had a growth of 34 adults over the age of 22.

Joan Pratchler: — So if I understand right, when you had mentioned earlier that you have 13,000 students registered, you've got 1,000 more. That's about 10 per cent change. So for \$6 million, if I've got the finances right, which is a 35 per cent increase, you've got one OT position, one physical therapy position, a 10 per cent enrolment increase, a new health course online. How much is that new health course costing?

Darren Gasper: — Sorry. Per course costs roughly around \$30,000 per course to develop — some a little bit higher, some a little lower depending on the development needs of it. But just to help answer the question, we're also needing to include the students that we continue to grow with throughout this school year as well. So we do look at the growth throughout the year.

We will continue to have students come in and join us throughout

this school year, from now on right through until . . . Typically into about the start of May it begins to slow down. So we will have higher numbers by May 1st.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah, I guess the part I can't see the finances working here is that a 35 per cent increase in operational funding for this delivery and much less for the regular classrooms all over the province. So I'm just trying to understand if we're getting value for our money in terms of \$6 million in that. I was just itemized.

Darren Gasper: — So just to clarify your question, member, when you say 35 per cent growth, I'm trying to understand that calculation when our overall budget is 42, which is a combination of the GRF and the tuition collection, and that includes a 7 million growth. That's where I'm looking to understand that percentage.

Joan Pratchler: — Well I'm looking at page 40 of the government's '26-27 estimates. And I'm looking at the line that says Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation. And I see that last year's budget was \$18,436,000 and this year's budget is \$24,590,000. So when I do the math on that, that's a 35 per cent increase in operational funding when other school divisions didn't well get that much.

Darren Gasper: — Thank you for your question. So that is in regards to the GRF part of our budget only. When we say 35 per cent, that's of increasing from the 18 that we had in the current year up to 25 next year.

Joan Pratchler: — Yes, that's what I'm referring to, exactly.

Michelle Miller: — Michelle Miller, Sask DLC. So to kind of answer your question, the GRF portion of our budget was the same from inception till now. This is the first year we're seeing any kind of a rebase on that \$18 million. So over the first two years of growth at Sask DLC, we saw about a 50 per cent increase in enrolment plus the enrolment that you're seeing year-to-date this year. So 5 million of that 7 was a rebase on our GRF from inception till now to cover the three years of growth, not just this current year. And then we received 2 million for a staffing increase.

Joan Pratchler: — And you still receive \$16 million from school divisions for tuition on top of that GRF then?

Michelle Miller: — That is an estimate based on the number of enrolments that we potentially will get. So if, for example, for some reason we had zero enrolments, we would get none of that 16 million. So it's based on courses that come from school divisions, which they're receiving that funding for, and we're billing out tuition at \$500 per course.

Joan Pratchler: — Yes. Yes, I think that's clear. Thank you.

Michelle Miller: — You're welcome.

Chair Keisig: — I recognize Mr. Love.

Matt Love: — So one of the questions that we often get from school divisions is about the funding that they're required to pay for a course that a student may enrol in with SDLC. Tuition is

paid, that student drops out of the course at a certain date when that tuition is not returned, and then the school is required to take them back. So they've essentially paid for a student to take a course, and then they're required to then provide that student with in-person learning.

So to the minister, what would you say to school divisions who feel like they may be on the hook for providing the same course to the same student in the same school year, sometimes even at the same time, and paying twice for that course?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Thanks. Maybe touch on a couple of topics here. One was the refund and how that is handled by the DLC and with the school divisions.

So the policy that is in place is that there's no invoice for students who drop a course within 15 days of their selected start dates. School divisions or adults over 22 are charged 50 per cent of the course cost for courses that are dropped between 16 and 30 days of their selected start date. And then after that there is no refund provided for courses dropped after the 30 days.

And then just around, you know, just the DLC as well and how it works within school divisions and our bricks and mortar schools, I guess, for lack of a better term. Having the distance learning corporation is about providing some additional options for parents and for students, right? To be able to access courses for a number of reasons.

And it allows for that flexibility, and we want to make sure that students do have the ability to, you know . . . that they aren't hampered by or they don't have a barrier in front of them. And perhaps for whatever reason that they need a more flexible option to be able to then take their schooling.

And that could be anything from sports-related things in their lives that limit their ability to be in a school, you know, on a more traditional basis, or — as we've talked about tonight — I think students that have some other challenges that might be, that the DLC is an option for them for whatever reason. But that they do have that option to be able to access education online.

[22:00]

So definite benefits due to the DLC and why it was created. And again to be able to provide some additional avenues for students to be able to get their education.

And I think based on the numbers that Darren and Michelle talked about tonight, some of the enrolment increases we're seeing, and some of the new, exciting opportunities that are being developed. Courses through, as we talked about last week, the health careers 20L offering; energy and mines, for example, or energy production I think it's called; and a whole host of other courses that are available to students.

So anyways it's about having choice for students and the ability to be able to achieve their academic success through another model.

Chair Keisig: — Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates today, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates and supplementary estimates no. 2

for the Ministry of Education.

Minister, do you have any closing comments?

Hon. Everett Hindley: — Yeah, just briefly, Mr. Chair, thanks to the committee members for being here tonight and for their questions, and of course to the ministry team that's in my office, in the minister's office here in the Legislative Building. But particularly to the ministry, deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, and Mr. Gasper and Michelle from the DLC. But thanks to everyone for your support and information here tonight, endeavouring to answer as many of the questions as we can. And appreciate everyone's time this evening.

Chair Keisig: — MLA Love, do you have any closing comments?

Matt Love: — Yeah, I'll join with the minister and thank all those who are here from the ministry and from the minister's office, as well as *Hansard* who has a late night, and support we get from the Clerks and everyone in the building who are probably waiting for us to leave for their end of their workday too. So I won't delay that. I know we've got one more hour tomorrow, but again just on behalf of the official opposition, thanks to everyone for the work that you do and for all of your time here this evening.

Chair Keisig: — Thank you for that. And I want to thank the committee for supporting me in my run for committee Chair. So I appreciate that. That concludes our business for today. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. MLA Bromm has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Keisig: — This committee now stands adjourned until Tuesday, March 31st at 3:30 p.m. Thank you all very much.

[The committee adjourned at 22:02.]