



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 2 – April 2, 2012**



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Twenty-seventh Legislature**

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

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Mr. Mark Docherty  
Regina Coronation Park

Ms. Doreen Eagles  
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Mr. Greg Lawrence  
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Mr. Russ Marchuk  
Regina Douglas Park

Mr. Paul Merriman  
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 19:00.]

**The Chair:** — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome. This is the first Human Services meeting so we are going to introduce . . . I'm Delbert Kirsch. I am the Chair. Deputy Chair is Mr. Cam Broten. Then we have Mark Docherty, Greg Lawrence, Russ Marchuk, and Paul Merriman. And substituting for Doreen Eagles is Mr. Glen Hart.

First I would like to advise the committee that pursuant to rule 146(1), the main estimate for the following ministries were deemed referred to the committee on March 29th of 2012. The main estimates is vote 37, 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration; vote 5, Education; vote 32, Health; vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety; and vote 36, Social Services.

The following supplementary estimates were deemed referred to the committee on December 12, 2011 and March 21st of 2012. Supplementary estimates: vote 37, 169, Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration; vote 5, Education; vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety.

This evening the committee will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Education. Before I begin I would remind the officials to introduce themselves when they speak into the mike for the purpose of *Hansard* recording who is speaking.

**General Revenue Fund  
Education  
Vote 5**

**Subvote (ED01)**

**The Chair:** — We will now begin to consider vote 5, Education, central management and services, subvote (ED01). Minister Harpauer is here with her officials, if you would care to introduce them and then have some opening remarks.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening to everyone. Thank you for coming. I'm pleased to be here tonight with the ministry officials to speak to the Ministry of Education's 2012-13 budget.

With me today to help answer questions that the committee members may have, to my left is Cheryl Senecal, the deputy minister; to my right is Greg Miller, the assistant deputy minister. Behind me I have Dawn Court, the director of finance and corporate services; Clint Repski, the executive director of education funding; Tim Caleval, the executive director of student achievement and support; Rosanne Glass, the executive director of strategic policy; Kathy Abernethy, the acting executive director for early years; Brett Waytuck, the executive director for Provincial Library and the literacy office; Doug Volk, the executive director of teachers' superannuation commission; Kevin Gabel, the director of independent schools; Mike Back, the director of infrastructure; Daryl Richter, the manager of capital projects; Lori Mann, the executive director of corporate services; Lynn Allan, the executive director of early years; and Brent Young, the executive director for HR [human resource] services.

Before we discuss the 2012-13 budget, I would like to take a minute to tell you about a few of the significant accomplishments we've made over the past few years. These accomplishments help maintain the Saskatchewan advantage.

When we formed government in 2007, there was an inequity in funding between school divisions that was ignored for years. We inherited a \$1.2 billion deficit in K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] capital, and for 16 consecutive years we were the last in the country for child care spaces. The creation of early learning programs was stagnant and the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners continued to grow. I'm proud to say that in four and a half years we've come a long way, but our government knows that there is still a lot more work that needs to be done.

Education is a priority for our government. A strong education system is critical to sustaining growth and opportunity in Saskatchewan and key to maintaining the Saskatchewan advantage.

To demonstrate our commitment to education since we formed government in 2007, we have increased the total operating funding available to school divisions by approximately 21 per cent on top of replacing our education property tax reduction of 165.7 million. To help school divisions meet the needs of their students this year, our budget includes 1.74 billion in operating funding for school divisions. This includes an increase of 59 million or 5 per cent in operating funding in 2012-13 based on the government fiscal year. In terms of the school divisions' fiscal year, funding increased by 91.1 million or 5.5 per cent.

With this budget, since forming government we will now have committed to funding for 41 major school capital projects and 750 additional smaller school capital projects across the province. This year 116 million will be provided for capital projects which includes: 50.1 million for 21 major capital projects currently under way; 38.6 million through the new provincial shared ownership model for six major school capital projects for their next phase of construction; 4 million for three new projects to receive approval in principle so that they can move to detailed design; 15.9 million for block projects; 2.8 million for non-school capital projects; 4 million for school-based child care capital; and 1 million for pre-kindergarten capital. This brings the investment in the province's pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] education infrastructure to approximately \$500 million. More than 50 per cent of all our schools across the province will now have received capital funding.

We have also made record investments in early learning and child care. With this budget we will see a 42 per cent increase in child care spaces and an 85 per cent increase in the number of pre-kindergarten programs since 2007.

This budget provides the funding for 500 more child care spaces, keeping us on track of our election promise, and will bring the total number of licensed child care spaces operational or in development by the end of 2012-13 fiscal year to approximately 13,240 spaces.

This budget also provides funding for the development of 15

more pre-kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-olds. Once developed, the total number of pre-kindergarten programs in our province will be 286, which will provide supports for 4,576 children. Closing the achievement gap between First Nations and non-First Nation students remains a high priority for this government. We will continue our commitment of 4.3 million in funding for program-specific for First Nations and Métis students. This funding again will be dedicated to the First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund and the individual achievement accounts.

Also committed in this budget is 500,000 to summer literacy camps. Education is partnering with six school divisions and the Pahnkissimon Nuyeh?áh Library and Frontier College to work at reducing summer reading loss by investing in summer literacy camps. We also value the role and the tremendous programs and services of our many community-based organizations connected with the ministry and they will receive 1.6 per cent funding increase in this budget. As well, we remain committed to high literate citizens with equal access to information, so libraries will also receive an increase in funding of 1.6 per cent in 2012-13.

Now, Mr. Chair, I would be very remiss if I didn't take a few minutes talking about the biggest change in the distribution of funding for education that we have seen in this province in nearly 40 years. This budget is the launch of the new funding distribution model which provides a long-anticipated fairer balance in funding for school divisions across Saskatchewan. It also provides 10 million in transition funding for the implementation of the new funding distribution model.

Prior to the introduction of the province-wide property tax rates, each school division set an annual mill rate. There was substantial variation in school division mill rates and the value of the assessment base on which the mill rates were applied. In 2008, for example, mill rates ranged from a low of 12.81 to a high of 24.8 mills, and the amount of the funds generated by 1 mill ranged from 163,000 to over 3 million.

These differences contributed to a substantial variation in fiscal capacity among our school divisions. The variations in fiscal capacity were partially addressed by the foundation operating grant, known as FOG. Through the use of an equalization factor, the equalization factor redistributed wealth among the school divisions, but only up to a mill factor determined by the provincial government. Any tax revenue that was generated above the equalization factor was not equalized and was retained by the school division that generated the revenue through their education property tax.

The amount on equalized tax revenue varied greatly among school divisions and was an indicator of the tax wealth of the school division. Some school divisions were zero grant board divisions, meaning that their tax wealth was so high that the school division was entirely funded by education property tax with no grant money from the General Revenue Fund of the provincial government. An example of such a school division was where my children went to school, Mr. Chair, which was the Lanigan School Division.

In addition, school division expenses were accelerating at a more rapid rate than the NDP [New Democratic Party] funding

levels for equalization. As a result, the school divisions' reliance on property tax base for funding increased each year. For a number of years, education property taxes were increasing by an average of 5 per cent per year. Saskatchewan became the province of the highest property taxes in Canada. The business community expressed concern that the high property taxes were making it difficult for small businesses to remain viable and was stifling potential investment in our province.

Agriculture producers were concerned that they were paying a disproportionate amount of education property tax and commodity prices were not keeping pace with the tax increases. A tax revolt ensued. The agriculture producers of more than 140 rural municipalities passed a motion to discontinue paying their educational property tax. To encourage agriculture producers to pay their education property taxes, the NDP introduced an ad hoc tax rebate program. Municipalities and school divisions were left with uncertainty of their funding because they didn't know if the property owners would actually pay their taxes and they didn't know what the NDP would do or would have as the tax rebate from one year to the next.

In addition, to address the issue of inequity in 2006, the NDP amalgamated the school divisions, reducing the number from 86 to 28. Although this effort watered down the inequities to a small degree, huge differences still remained.

The property tax issue became a prominent election issue in 2007. The government changed, and with the change of government in November of 2007, provincial-wide mill rates were set by the provincial government and school divisions no longer had the authority to set their own mill rate. The first education property tax reduction and the province-wide mill rate was implemented in 2009, and a second in 2010. The Saskatchewan Party government subsequently provided a historic 165.7 million education property tax relief to all property owners in the province of Saskatchewan.

With the introduction of province-wide education property taxes, the FOG formula no longer was working. The ministry adopted an interim funding model that was initially based on the 2008-09 budget, and then each subsequent year, in 2009-10 and '10-11, there was adjustments made to that base. There was increases in total allocation to cover inflation and salary increases, increases for costs of LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] settlements. There was changes for student enrolment changes, and there was debt servicing costs added each year.

An advisory committee was struck to design a new funding distribution model, and the committee consisted of members from the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association], LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents], SASBO [Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials], STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation], FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations], and MNS [Métis Nation of Saskatchewan], and ministry support staff. The advisory committee met through 2009-2010 and proposed a new funding distribution model.

As I said previously, the new funding distribution model will be the biggest change in the distribution of funding for education in nearly 40 years in Saskatchewan. Because of the importance

of the new model, I delayed the implementation for one additional year beyond what was originally intended. And this allowed for a smaller group of school division CFOs [chief financial officer] to examine how the new formula would apply to actual school division budgets and spending priorities. It allowed for a two-day technical briefing that was held in September of 2011 with all of the school divisions to explain the factors in the new funding model. And it allowed for additional briefings, which were held with individual school divisions in January and February of this year to review how the new model would affect each of the individual school division budgets.

In 2012-13 budget allocation funded to school divisions through the new funding distribution model with a \$10 million mitigation fund to transition school divisions who will experience a shift in funding due to the historical inequities that have been unaddressed for decades. No school division will see a decrease in funding. This new funding distribution model is not about the size of the pie; it is about the distribution of the pie. The primary goal of the new model is equity in distributing the amount of funding available for education. School divisions with historical tax wealth will no longer have more funding available than school divisions with less tax wealth. Equity, however, does not necessarily mean equal funding. The model recognizes differences in costs related to areas such as geographic dispersion, student vulnerability, and additional costs for northern areas.

[19:15]

Funding components will be reviewed through the ongoing evaluation process to examine whether funding is reflective of the general cost pressures facing school divisions, with a commitment by this government to hold a debrief consultation process, probably in September of this year or shortly after, so that school divisions can review and consult on any cost factor calculations that they have identified that may need some adjustments.

Almost all funding to school divisions remains unconditional. School board trustees are elected, and through legislation they have the responsibility and the authority to allocate funding as they see best to meet their students' needs. Conditional funding would include funding for such things as pre-K [pre-kindergarten] programs and capital financing costs, but almost all other funding decisions such as resources, staff, and transportation are entirely the decision of the elected school board members.

In conclusion, this budget shows that education, and specifically the success achieved by all students, remains a top priority for our government. The total ministry budget for 2012-13 is \$1.6 billion, representing a \$202.5 million or a 14 per cent increase over last year.

I now, Mr. Chair, look forward to the questions.

**The Chair:** — Thank you, Minister Harpauer, for those good notes. And now, questions. Mr. Wotherspoon is first questioning. You have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'd like to

welcome and thank all the ministry officials that are here this evening on what's an absolutely beautiful evening outside. I stepped out just before, and I was thinking I may prefer going for a jog this evening. But this is a great place to be as well, and thank you for coming before us here today, Minister, and your staff.

Just to start off here, I am interested just as it relates to the FTEs [full-time equivalent] in the ministry itself and the reduction, I believe it works out to be around 15.4. Just wondering where, what roles those are and what impacts you anticipate.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely. Thank you so much for that question. And for specific FTE questions, I'm going to turn it over to Cheryl Senecal, the deputy minister of Education.

**Ms. Senecal:** — Thank you for the question around FTEs in the Ministry of Education. And in '12-13 as part of workforce adjustment there are 14 FTEs that were identified as part of vacancy management and attrition. One of those FTEs is being transferred to Municipal Affairs related to the education property tax functions that they will be assuming in that ministry and previously were part of the work undertaken in Education.

And as well there is also a portion of an FTE that's being reduced in order to support the accounts payable centralization process, and part of that process has identified a number of FTEs that, you know, various ministries are contributing. And our particular accounts payable function is provided through Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration. And so the actual number of FTEs is relatively minor because of the fact that that work was done for us through a shared service agreement with AEEI [Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration].

So as I indicated, we will, the ministry will be working throughout the year to ensure that we are identifying vacancies within the ministry and ensuring that those positions are taken accordingly.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — If the minister could clarify, so there's 14 positions that are identified to be reduced at this point, but there's no decisions around where those reductions would occur within the ministry? Is that correct?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — If I may, twelve and a half are going to be through vacancy management and attrition, and the 1.5 is what the deputy minister just identified.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So the twelve and a half, those individuals in those roles aren't identified yet? It will be based on who's departing?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Vacancy management. Yes.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I always struggle with this government's approach to this. It seems to be very lacking of a plan as to what one's trying to achieve. I understand if there's a desire, if a government wants to make a reduction of employees, but it seems so ad hoc to just simply reduce based on where individuals are departing.

Is there a broader plan to this? It seems that there would be a desire or should be a desire to choose what would be priorities of a respective ministry or respective government in making sure that the resources, as in the human resources, are there to deliver that, and then making those decisions about where a government feels that it's appropriate to reduce.

Am I reading this properly? Is it simply through where somebody is leaving the workforce?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I would like to suggest, and the deputy minister can correct me, there are goals and priorities. So we have goals around student achievement and improving student achievement. We definitely have focused on improving First Nations and Métis education. So if the vacancy appeared in that place, we would probably move someone in a less priority area within the ministry into that vacancy so that the priority areas are still well supported, and take them from where perhaps we're finding that we're not as focused.

For example, we've undergone many, many years now of curriculum renewal. It isn't as vital right now, so perhaps — and I'm just suggesting this may be the case, not saying that there's an identified position — but perhaps with us slowing down what has been a number of years of rapid curriculum renewal, if a vacancy arrived in a place of priority, perhaps somebody could be transferred from the other area that isn't the priority this year.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And is it the minister's feeling that right now that she has excess capacity in her ministry by way of human resources, that there's individuals occupying roles for which aren't required at this point in time?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't do that micromanaging, but perhaps the deputy minister would comment on that. But we definitely, as I said, the priority in the past, the priorities do change, and curriculum, renewing curriculum was a priority. It is not at this point in time, although there always will be some. The priority is student achievement. So when priorities change, so does areas where you're going to put more focused effort. But I will let the deputy minister speak to that as well.

**Ms. Senecal:** — Absolutely. I think that it is always the role of the senior management within the ministry to ensure that the kinds of decisions that are being made around FTEs and in terms of where we are identifying FTEs through vacancy management and what have you, there's still another lens of assessment that always needs to be applied, because as the minister referred to, we do have priority areas within the ministry.

Certainly I would argue that the agenda of the Ministry of Education is an absolutely important one and it's a very full one, and we want to ensure that we have the right people in the right places doing the right work. And that is absolutely a lens that, within the DMO [deputy minister's office], that we are always paying attention to where those vacancies are but also paying attention to the fact that we are having to respond to the responsibilities of making sure we are able to follow through on the work that is important for us to do. And so we have to make sure, as I said, that we have the right people in the right places doing the right work.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you very much. So there's a discussion around shifting priorities, which I understand that'd be reallocating some human resources to another area. I'd like to hear more about that.

But we also have another thing that's going on. That's a reduction of staff in your office or in your ministry. So I would like to get a sense of what's being shifted and to where, and I guess there's this sense obviously from the minister that a reduction in her office is something that's able to be accomplished without impacts to students and to school boards. I'm just wondering, I mean, we do have shifting priorities and challenges in education in Saskatchewan — a growing population, divergent needs that are existing. And I find it a tad curious that we're reducing personnel in your ministry where I think there's a lot of good work and hard work that needs to be done.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I totally agree with you, there is a lot. But just to go back to it, changing in priorities also causes or creates shifting in staff. So the one example I gave was that there was a focus on curriculum renewal that's been, a lot of work has been done there but not as much needs to be done going forward. Student achievement is a relatively new focus, so that that's going to be a new area where we're going to have more people working on.

One thing that we did do an adjustment was that we used to have a First Nations branch. We've chosen to go with a specific person that answers directly to the deputy minister and four First Nations superintendents to ensure that all branches within the ministry is looking at First Nations issues, not just an isolated . . . So that's a shift in how we did business before in the past.

Another area, I'm trying to think of different areas where we shifted priorities. We obviously have a number of people that were working on the new funding formula, that hopefully they'll have — hopefully — they'll have some spare time now that they can be focusing in other areas of our priorities because that has been a huge initiative that's taken a lot of resources. Now we need to still have the focus because, as I said, we're committed to working with school divisions on any adjustments they need, but the numbers that were working on the funding formula doesn't need to be that same amount of people. So that would be another example.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — As far as the FTEs, that there was two areas mentioned. One, the area for the new funding formula, so I'm just wondering what that team consists of by way of FTEs. And also I'm interested in the number that were attached to curricula development.

**Ms. Senecal:** — So just to clarify, the number in the education funding — right? — involved in the model, right? And as well, the second one was, I'm sorry, just . . .

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The second one was the curriculum.

**Ms. Senecal:** — The curriculum. Okay.

So in the education funding branch there are currently 15 FTEs in that area. And in the curriculum area there are 16 FTEs, of

which we are in the process of realigning those resources to ensure that we're appropriately supporting not just curriculum but that we're also supporting the work that is being done in the assessment unit as well as the work that's being done in instruction. So that whole area's being rebalanced at this point.

[19:30]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So out of the 15 in the ed financing piece and then 16 in the curriculum, how many of those are going to be no longer required in those capacities?

**Ms. Senecal:** — I wouldn't say that in this area that those are not staff that we would identify as being no longer needed. Clearly in the education funding area I would argue that some of the work that they may now take on may change somewhat, but that those individuals are still very valuable and central to the work that we are doing with the implementation of the model and the close monitoring that we're going to do, as well as the fact that we anticipate that, like any large undertaking of this nature, we are going to have to be working extremely closely with school divisions to understand where the model is perhaps not working as we had hoped it would.

So you know, really those staff in my estimation are still very fully utilized because the implementation process and the ongoing work that we need to do with school divisions is as important as the work that was done leading up to the development of the model. So some of the nature of their work may change, but we absolutely are committed to working closely with school divisions to ensure that the model is doing exactly what we intend it to. And we also know that we are going to have to respond to some potential changes as well to make sure that adjustments are made.

In curriculum, it's absolutely the same, the same conversation. There is a huge body of work that needs to be done in the area of student achievement and supports. And those individuals who were previously involved more centrally in curriculum, we see them being very valuable to us, not necessarily in the continued work of developing or renewing curriculum, but we see that their contributions are relevant in terms of making sure that we have a balanced number of resources, paying attention to not only curriculum but to assessment and instruction as well. So you know, really that area of the ministry is absolutely very important to us.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you for those answers. So the education finance folks will be sort of deployed on a bit of a different fashion but under that same sort of working group, same focus. The curriculum folks will be redeployed to student achievement areas potentially. I guess where I'm . . .

**Ms. Senecal:** — Not all. Not all. I mean we are looking at the particular skill sets and backgrounds of our staff. And as you can appreciate, in some instances those individuals are absolutely the right people to have continue on doing work in the curriculum area. In other instances, they may certainly have a skill set that is appropriate to supporting another area of student achievement and support. It isn't as though . . . There's still important work that is going to be done around curriculum development and curriculum renewal and certainly, you know, certainly we're paying attention to that.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — No, those are all fair comments. And so there's a shift of focus from some of the curriculum folks as well. I guess my question is just, where would the reductions be appropriate in your ministry?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — If I may comment, we're talking about 12.8 positions in 311.8 . . . or 12.5 positions in 311.8. I don't think it does any of us well to say, when we haven't identified exactly where these reductions will be. I don't think it serves the public service well to say that, okay, we're absolutely taking it out of this area. We're not sure at this point in time where the vacancies will occur just from past history. That isn't a high percentage of vacancies that will naturally occur within the ministry. And at that time where the vacancy occurs, then there will be a shift of someone, somewhere. So that if the vacancy is in a high priority area and the work needs to be done by a person, then we will look in some other area.

But to identify, which I think is what you're trying to do, exactly who it is and what branch, to create an air of uncertainty, is not necessary because we haven't identified that we're going to take our curriculum branch and cut it down to X number of people. That has not been identified.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I suspect that the reduction in staff, any time there's a reduction and it's not spoken to or identified, that there is a sense of anxiety and confusion within the civil service. But maybe not. As it relates to reductions last year within the ministry, how many FTEs were reduced last year within the ministry?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The reduction last year was 22, and it was all through managing vacancies and attrition.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The reductions last year, were any of those capacities contracted out that had formerly been retained?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, they were not.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Is there a plan to do any of that this year?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — In a general sense, could the minister identify programs that have been cut within your ministry?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you. Two programs. One was the career development action plan, which had a lifetime, or it had an end date and that end date came, and so it was not an ongoing program. And the second was the drivers education training, and that was transferred to SGI.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The career development action plan, how did that program work and what's the impact?

**Ms. Senecal:** — So the career development program operated for a period of time, and basically it was an opportunity for school divisions to apply for funding to assist them in doing various kinds of pilots within their school division around career development in terms of preparing students for careers, doing aptitude, various . . . you know, aptitude testing and what have you.

It was, you know, very much a kind of joint conversation that took place around the, you know, the ability for us to continue that nature of a program. And along with school divisions there was the decision made that, you know, we would no longer provide special resources for them to access.

We felt as though there was a sufficient period of time for school divisions to understand the types of options that would work most effectively with students, and it was never really our intention to have this an ongoing funded type of thing. We wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity for school divisions to access specific dollars to help them explore what the possibilities might be, but there was never an expectation that as part of this program that we would continue it indefinitely.

So you know, we determined that it had served its purpose. Divisions participated in it, they accessed the funds, they learned about the various options that would be available, and they carried on in being able to do that. So it was very much kind of the intended outcome of the program and so it came to a logical conclusion.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — What was that program valued at? What was the cost of that program?

**Ms. Senecal:** — It was less than half a million. To the best of our knowledge, it was about 450,000.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Was it always fully subscribed to on an annual basis by school boards?

**Ms. Senecal:** — No, it was not.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Explain to me the shift of drivers education over to SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance]. How was it operating before under the Ministry of Education and what caused it to be shifted over to SGI?

**Ms. Senecal:** — So just, just to clarify this, this was a program change in the previous year. So not in '11-12, right? It was in '10-11. The driver ed program, and I think probably this is something that you know, historically it was the case that the ministry was quite involved in the provision of driver education support for school divisions. And over time I think certainly it became clear that the ministry was not well positioned to be really doing a responsive enough job of providing that level of support to school divisions. And we also knew that school divisions were seeking or entering into contracts directly with other providers because we were not responsive enough. So as I said, I think that this is probably a historical kind of program that the ministry at one point could do an effective job of but I think over time we realized that it made more sense for school divisions to be working directly with SGI and that way it could be more responsive. And our understanding is that, you know, this is clearly the direction that school divisions felt that they would be better able to get a more timely service. So really it was a decision that made sense from that perspective.

[19:45]

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — And if I may add, SGI was also providing driver education so it was an overlap of services as

well. Only SGI was doing a better job of it. So that was the better provider.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Was there a cost before in the budget maybe? So it's been two years, I guess the second year that it's not in the ministry's budget. I guess just going back a few years, what was the allocation in years previous for this program?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I know there was one FTE, but I'm not sure that we would have the cost here tonight. We may have to get back to you. But I will ask the officials if they have the cost from past years. If you wouldn't mind, we'll provide this committee with that number.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you. Thank you for doing so. So now SGI, are they incurring the cost then, or are, I guess, ratepayers of SGI?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again we'll have to provide you with that information because since we haven't been providing this service, we haven't followed up with SGI or school divisions to see who's paying the cost.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you very much. So I'd appreciate that, just a record of what the allocation was from the Education ministry in years previous and then who's paying for it now that it's shifted over to SGI. Are school boards contracting back with SGI? Or is SGI and its ratepayers paying for that? Thank you very much.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Those two pieces of information we'll get for this committee.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So my question was to highlight a couple of the cuts, or to highlight the cuts that were in the budget. I thank you for doing so. A general question about reductions. Could the minister highlight reductions in programs under her ministry.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — There are no reductions in programs within the Ministry of Education generally, nor have there been, because we have definitely as a government felt that this is a priority area for us.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — We'll just shift to discussion of education capital, or school capital. Looking back to the, I guess, the mandate letter to this minister on June 29, 2010 from the Premier, it states, "Develop a long-term pre K to 12 infrastructure strategy." Has that occurred?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We've very aggressively addressed, or tried to address, the infrastructure issues within the province. And of course it's enormous because we not only have the pressure of past years of neglect, but now we're also facing the additional pressure of growth in a number of areas. In particular, the city of Saskatoon, the city of Regina, White City, Balgonie, Martensville, and Warman are particularly seeing growth. So we have both of those two pressures.

We have now invested over, a little over half a billion dollars into infrastructure, but what we are working on presently is we're going to be consulting with school divisions and



revamping the prioritization process because it hasn't been an issue for critical space to weigh heavily within the prioritization process because the previous government was planning for a decline in students, and indeed that was happening. So it's rather unique that we're running into these critical space pressures, and I think that needs to have some additional consideration in our prioritization process.

The school divisions have also asked for better clarity in what that process actually is, and so that is sort of a process we're undergoing in reviewing.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I appreciate most of that answer. The comments around government and sort of their intentions to plan for decline is silly and ridiculous and has no place at this table here within the minister's comments, from my perspective. Nonetheless, they're the minister's words.

We know that the new education funding formula has come forward, and we know that there's no infrastructure plan from this government, despite being part of the mandate letter to this minister. What I do hear is that there's going to be some reprioritization of how to assess what's priority as far as projects.

I'd appreciate just a little bit more clarity from the minister about the competing pressures on this front and what she's hearing as to the current prioritization and how it's deemed inadequate at this point in time.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Health and safety always has to be, I think the primary consideration has to be health and safety. And we do have an aging infrastructure so that there are schools that health and safety is a considerable issue. One will be one that we approve this year, which was Hudson Bay, and I believe there is a structural, a major concern of a structural concern in that area. So that still has to, I think, remain a high priority.

But we also, as I mentioned, we need to bring critical space higher up in the priority, not ahead of critical health and safety, but nonetheless it can't fall off because we do have pressures where, classrooms where they're using inappropriate space as classrooms because of the growing numbers.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you to the minister for that. What sort of a timeline can the education sector expect for the reprioritization of that process?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We hope to — the list, the priority list is a public list — in July, and so we hope to have the new list that becomes available in July will come out after the consultation takes place and consideration is given to the new pressures that the province is facing.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The minister is going to consult?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, I won't be doing that personally. We have an infrastructure committee in place with members from the stakeholders.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And so is that undergoing right now, that evaluation with the education partners?

**Ms. Senecal:** — Yes, the infrastructure committee has been functioning for a few months now. It does have representation from school divisions, and we're using that as our key point of contact in terms of understanding what the most critical issues are. But certainly we also work with SASBO, Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials, as well to ensure that because they're also a representative group that often has contact with CFOs [chief financial officer] and certainly understand some of the challenges that we face in this area. So we're also going to be working with them.

And we will also, we have regular meetings with the directors of education. We will also certainly be bringing this issue to that table to ensure that directors also have an opportunity to provide comments and feedback. So there are a number of existing forums that we use to make sure that we're getting the right information to make the best decisions here.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So I can add, the changes we've made already on the infrastructure piece that is part of, is that we've gone to a consistent 35/65 split between school division and government. Prior there was, it varied from school division to school division largely because of the inequity of the tax well so that some school divisions couldn't bear 35 per cent. Now we've gone to a consistent fare across, all school divisions will be 35/65.

And in this budget, as was announced along with health care, in order for projects to move forward in a more timely fashion, we've gone to, for brand new facilities, a shared ownership model where the government will own 65 per cent and the school division will own 35 per cent. So we have some other initiatives that we've undertaken to try to help lessen the infrastructure pressure.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I struggle, and I think a lot of the education sector struggles with this concept that there's a 35 per cent, the local contribution still exists. When education funding was taken over, taken control of by the province back in 2009, I believe it was the common sense thought of the education sector that it would only in due course become the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to finance that capital.

I'm just wondering, to the minister, how she feels that this is in the best interests of Saskatchewan people to have school boards contributing — when they have no control over any sort of revenues or purse strings, have no own-source revenues — why it's in their best interest to be borrowing 35 per cent or, if they are in the rare position of having a reserve, utilizing those dollars.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — School divisions still receive the money from the tax base within that school division and then the grant through the funding formula is adjusted accordingly. So school divisions also do want to have some ownership and local input into schools. Now having said that, if they do have to borrow the money, the government does bear the financing cost of the 35 per cent should they have to borrow it.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Does the minister recognize that for the school boards, when they are going out and sourcing financing, they're doing so at a higher rate than that of government?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — They have in the past. School divisions have always funded a share of their capital projects and used a variety of methods of doing so: some borrowed from traditional lenders; some issued debentures, although that was not a commonly used practice; and some through their tax base built up reserves; and some used line of credits. So this isn't, for them to go to traditional lenders is not new or unique.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Has the minister heard concern from the education sector and school boards on this front?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — There was one concern of a board member, I believe it was Regina Catholic, made a comment in the news media, never contacted my office. And other school divisions — and I have met with a number of school divisions — have not raised one concern on that issue.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Have taxpayers raised this as a concern with the minister?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, they have not.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Because what we have going on is a portion of dollar, 65 per cent, coming from the province potentially, and certainly sourced at a much lower rate if financing is involved. And then we have school boards that are borrowing at a higher rate, and certainly this has complications for budgetary pressures for your government, for Saskatchewan people. So we're spending more than we need to be in this area. Does the minister see this?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — This isn't a shift from how school divisions borrowed before, as I mentioned to you that they borrowed from the traditional lenders. And how they paid for it before was to up the mill rate and get the funding directly from some taxpayers — not all taxpayers, but some taxpayers, and that's those that own property. And we know how the taxpayers reacted. There was a tax revolt. And so now the province, all taxpayers are sharing the cost of the borrowing. Will we consider revisiting this in the future? Possibly. But no, I'm not getting complaints on this.

[20:00]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Does it make sense for, let's use Regina Public project for example, where \$16 million will be or has been borrowed. The cost of that financing is \$2 million over the duration of that period of time that that financing is in place, 2 million more than what it would be for government to source that. Does it make sense to the minister to spend \$2 million on high interest?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I would suggest to you that you bring that particular question to the Minister of Finance because I don't know what our cost of borrowing right now is as a government. I'm not sure that the 2 million is an accurate number.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I know about a month ago the government rate for 20-year money was just over 3 per cent and it was about a per cent higher, just a little more than a per cent higher for the school board. I believe Regina Public sourced it at 4.2 per cent and that's where \$2 million needlessly spent

on high interest instead of either into other school projects or into student program or into other priorities of government.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — As I said, at some point we may revisit this. Right now we feel that the school divisions still want ownership, some ownership of their facilities. They still want some involvement.

This isn't unique. It made sense in the past obviously because the previous government, school divisions borrowed money from traditional lenders. We will always be visiting different issues within how we're going to manage the building of infrastructure, but this particular piece we haven't changed at this point in time. They have always most often used traditional lenders. They are using traditional lenders now. Some, some have reserves. That's just a practice that we haven't decided to change at this point in time.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — You see, what's changed in this whole piece and why it just doesn't add up and doesn't make sense or doesn't serve the best interest of the taxpaying public is that government's taken over full control of education financing, and as such there is no control at that local level as far the revenues, no own-source revenues. In the past, school boards would often build their reserve funds working towards an infrastructure plan. That's not the case now.

I guess my question would be . . . I highlighted the Regina Public circumstance. Could the minister and her officials highlight how many other school divisions and to what extent, total value of projects, how much borrowing is going on currently, has gone on in the past year, and what's anticipated this year?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We could perhaps get that information for you. We wouldn't have it tonight. I know for example in my own hometown where I just had the privilege of making an announcement this morning, it's a joint facility between the Greater Saskatoon Catholic school division and Horizon. My understanding — and I could be corrected — Horizon had the money in their reserves; Greater Saskatoon did not. So that particular list we wouldn't have with us tonight as to who would have had reserves and who did not, but we can provide you with that, I believe.

And I think there's going to be a lot of consideration because — you're right — some school divisions through the tax base were building reserves for a capital fund or future capital; others were not. And so we sort of have that situation too that needs to be balanced at some point in time. So I think this is something we will be constantly mindful of and revisiting as we go forward.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I would urge a more aggressive pursuit of these savings. I think it's needlessly being spent and on the higher interest arrangements. And I know when you start laying out school infrastructure that we need to make significant gains on, I think we're about three-quarters of a billion dollars right now, \$750 million of deficit in our school capital that we want to work towards.

If you take 35 per cent, and it's not necessarily this direct, but 35 per cent of that portion, and then you look at the cost for the high-interest loans that school boards will be taking on, we're

talking about not just a couple of million dollars — which is not insignificant; that's a huge amount of money to simply be spending in a fashion that's not needed to be. But we're talking about tens of millions of dollars into the, you know, \$40 million or so on that activity alone, certainly savings for government that can be reprioritized towards other priorities and certainly not in the best interests of taxpayers to be expending these dollars for no gain.

So I guess I would . . . Can we count on the minister to take this review up and not just in sort of a, over the course of the next couple of years, but in an aggressive fashion to report back some possibilities to save some dollars in education capital?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — You can count on this minister having that discussion with the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — We'll be chatting with him on another evening as well, and I know you know that, so that's . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — He's looking forward to it.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Right. We appreciate one another. The amount of education capital in this budget is . . . Can the minister just clarify the total expenditure in this year's budget?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Okay. As I said in my opening speech, there was 1 million for pre-kindergarten and 4 million for child care spaces. We have the CEF [Conseil des écoles francosaskoises] high school in Regina is 8.4. École St. Thomas in Lloydminster is 2.46. St. Mary School in Saskatoon is 1.5. Douglas Park in Regina is 1.5. Arcola is 750. St. Michael School in Weyburn is 264,000. Wascana School in Regina is 7.4.

I think you want to read *Hansard* on this because it's a fairly lengthy list.

Campbell Collegiate in Regina will get 2.3. Weyburn high school will get 1. Holy Cross High School in Saskatoon, 5.5. Georges Vanier School in Saskatoon, 3.57. St. Matthew School in Saskatoon, 3.51. Carlton Comp in Prince Albert, 4.55. Lumsden Elementary, 3.945. Hillmond in Lloydminster will get 3.45.

The shared ownership, six projects, is the Warman, I think it's the middle school, of 12.408. St. Joseph/Oman in Swift Current is 3 million. Willowgrove School in Saskatoon is 7 million. Holy Family School in Saskatoon, 6 million. White City Elementary in Regina . . . or White City, 7.475. College Park in Lloydminster, 2.730.

And the three new projects that we announced for an AIP [approval in principle] are Hudson Bay Composite for 1.5 million; Leader Composite, 1 million; and Martensville High School is 1.5.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you to the minister. I'm just going to turn over to Mr. Broten for a couple questions.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Broten, you have the floor then.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the minister, I just

wanted to have a couple of follow-up questions on the comments you made about the infrastructure committee because I know this is of real interest to divisions in terms of predicting how they get on the list and how they stay on the list and how the list is followed.

So if you could just state as an overview, with this infrastructure committee that is meeting — and I know you don't want to prejudge its work — but what is the, what is the stated goal of this committee and how extensive is the projected remake of the system, so to speak?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't think the prioritization is going to be a huge remake. As I said, we need to address the critical space better than what we have. But we still . . . I mean I don't think . . . Health and safety, any one of us would argue, needs to be number one. But I'll let the deputy minister expand on the work of the committee.

**Ms. Senecal:** — We determined that, and certainly as you have raised, that infrastructure is an issue that is of critical importance to school divisions. And we recognized that we absolutely needed to look at how we could approach that area of our ministry work in a way that would be more responsive to the needs of school divisions.

So hence we determined that it would be helpful for us to be able to connect with what we identify as being the experts in this. And the experts in this for us are those who work in school divisions and are involved in managing their infrastructure needs. And so we knew that it was an important issue. We went to school divisions. We asked for their level of interest to work with us, to help us understand how it might be that we could work more effectively, how some of our processes could be streamlined so that they'd be more responsive to the needs of school divisions.

And certainly the prioritization is something that it's logical for the ministry to be looking at this. And I mean certainly there have been issues raised with us by school divisions who are dealing with unprecedented growth in some of their school divisions, particularly Saskatoon and the areas surrounding Saskatoon, Warman and Martensville in particular. And so we know that our prioritization process, which has been very thoughtfully constructed, but again it didn't necessarily take into consideration the growth scenario that some areas in our province are experiencing.

So we know that it's a fair statement for school divisions to say, you know, this prioritization process doesn't necessarily respond to where we see there being great demands put on us because of additional enrolment. And so hence the direction from the minister to say, all right; go away; look at this and consider how we can assess this so that we make sure that we are being responsive to the changing demographics of our province. As the minister indicated, it is not a complete rehaul of the prioritization process. We want to ensure that it is a prioritization process that works effectively for school divisions now and that takes into consideration the fact that we are dealing with some areas of the province that are having unprecedented growth, and our formula does not necessarily put the amount of weight on that factor that we believe is probably warranted given the changing demographics.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I would like to reply to that. We want to work with the sector on . . . Because I'm hearing loud and clear and I know you both probably represent areas that's growing very rapidly. We need to react in a more timely manner when portables are needed. They're, you know, that is something that we need the school divisions to help us do better.

And we're also looking at the block funding process. Like how can we make the block funding process, which is repairs, react better to the school divisions' needs? So it's not just the major capital piece that we want to work with the sector to try to identify improvements. It's also the portable piece. It's also the block funding piece that we're looking forward to their input and see if we can do it better.

[20:15]

**Mr. Broten:** — On the issue of the priority for new builds or the topic of the priority for new builds, there has been a preference given by the ministry to joint-use facilities between Catholic and public, and in the points system, I guess, extra points given for projects that are joint in some way, shape, or form. Question to the minister: is it still the ministry's position that this is the preferred path for new builds, and is this something that the infrastructure committee would be looking at? Will this be one of the topics under its scope of discussion?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I will say yes, in meeting with both public and Catholic school divisions, we still need to look at that. It sometimes needs to be a case-by-case basis. I don't foresee a school in an elementary level being any bigger than what we're seeing in Willowgrove. That's a very large school and it doesn't really share a lot of facilities, other than a joint wall, which is one extreme to what was just opened in Humboldt, where it's completely 100 per cent shared.

There is some merit to the completely 100 per cent shared. I don't think we had the fiscal capacity to build two high schools in Humboldt. And so it does bode well for Humboldt if they can come to an agreement and share the entire facility. But if you can share a gymnasium, a library, and a commons area, you know, that definitely helps with the infrastructure pressures. So yes, I think that needs to be part of the conversation.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you for that response. I do have a couple more Saskatoon specific questions, so I thank my colleague for letting me ask those.

I have, from time to time, talked about — not time to time, regularly — I've talked about Hampton Village and the need for a new school or schools in Hampton Village. And of course this is something I heard about a great deal during the election and well before the election as well. Is there funding in this budget for Hampton Village school projects?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, there is not.

**Mr. Broten:** — When might the minister expect that funding for the Hampton Village projects could be coming?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Major capital projects are a year-by-year decision made by Treasury Board and totally

dependent on the fiscal capacity of the province for that year.

**Mr. Broten:** — Where do the Hampton Village projects currently rank in the priority list for new builds?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's a public list but . . . At this point Hampton Village is in the priority four list of non-critical.

**Mr. Broten:** — I'm sorry, I just couldn't quite hear. It's in the list?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's in the priority four list of the non-critical space. There is a lot of categories on these priority lists. Yes, so it's in priority four list. Priority one is health and safety. Now I'm drawing this from memory of reading this. But each priority . . . Priority one I know is health and safety and priority four is critical space.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. And I know it's public, but it's nice to put the information in one spot for communicating with constituents and also having it in one spot for reference for going back.

So the minister's estimation, does she think that there will be new schools in Hampton Village in three years, five years, 10 years, or 15 years? How soon will new schools be in Hampton Village?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Wow, I wouldn't even venture. I guess we could go by an average. In five budgets we've announced 41 major capital projects, so on average that is how many a year? Eight a year. So if we kept at that pace I would have to go to that list to find how many come before Hampton Village. It is, you know, it's major capital investment, and again we must work within the fiscal capacity of the province.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. One other topic on the Saskatoon front. Was it 2010 that Willowgrove schools received approval? It was the same time as the Martensville middle school, I believe. Was that 2010?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes, it was.

**Mr. Broten:** — Thank you. And then in this budget, the funding was provided beyond the planning stage but for the actual construction of the Willowgrove schools, correct?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes. Now they can go to tender.

**Mr. Broten:** — We were in the House during adjourned debates and I was speaking to a piece of legislation. I think it had to do with, I think it was *The Education Amendment Act*, as I recall. And it was a discussion about new Bills and a discussion about Willowgrove. And I was commenting on the delay that . . . This was pre-budget, so the announcement in 2010, and indeed there was some funding for the planning phase, but the actual dollars for the building and the tender process had not yet been provided.

And at that time the Finance minister, who is a former Ed minister as well, commented that it's because the school boards in Saskatoon were dragging their feet. And the quote was that they were sitting on it. Now in my discussions with the . . .

when I've bumped into trustees in Saskatoon for public or Catholic, they have been very keen and eager to have the project going, and I can't see them sitting on such a project. So is that an accurate description of what occurred over the past few years, or was it something else?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — To my knowledge, and I too had a conversation with the board Chair, and there has been no delay by the public school division whatsoever. I didn't talk to the Catholic school division, the greater Saskatoon Catholic, but talking to Saskatoon public we agreed that neither one has been delaying. It has gone forward with funding each and every year to take it to the new stage. So I'm not sure what was said on the floor of the Assembly. I wasn't present at the time, and I know sometimes in the heat of debates things are said or taken out of context. It does happen.

**Mr. Broten:** — I thank the minister for her remarks, and I'll hand it back to the member from Rosemont.

**The Chair:** — Mr. Wotherspoon, you have the floor.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Just looking at the new co-ownership structure of education capital, could the minister describe this? I believe the reason, the justification for the change from the minister that was provided was to sort of expedite the delivery of capital projects. If the minister can explain this structure and rationale for the decision and implications on education financing.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — What this allows us to do is to amortize the cost of the project over the expected life of the facility rather than expensing the entire capital cost in the first year. So this allows the province then to get projects started sooner.

The six major capital projects that were being considered for this budget are new school projects. And so both the Health and the Education ministries are participating in this new approach, and the accounting practice is in line with the public service accounting board principles. So this was a decision made by our government that we would treat long-term care homes or health care projects and schools in the same manner that we have always treated highways, and that's amortizing them over the life of the facility.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The structure in this fiscal year, what is the impact on it from a budgetary perspective as it relates to expenditure or expense?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — 38.6 million.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — 38.6 million is the reduction by shifting to this model of accounting?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'm being told that this year's cost of the amortization would be zero this year because they're not in construction.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — It's sort of the point that I've tried to highlight on a few occasions, so that it allows for the announcement of the school, but there's no actual dollars that flow in this fiscal year.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — 38.6 million flows, yes.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — But it's I guess a reduced expenditure as opposed to the previous structure to how this would have been financed on a given year.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'm going to ask Dawn Court to answer this question, as well as Finance are actually working on the details of this, too, so I know on another night you're going to have a second opportunity to get this all explained. But from our understanding and working with Finance, we'll get Dawn Court to help answer those questions.

**Ms. Court:** — So in the '12-13 budget for Education, we have 38.613 million which is related to the shared ownership for projects. That's a part of our appropriation so that we can cash flow those projects to the school division. The expense actually occurs when the asset is completed and then that will be amortized over the life of the asset.

[20:30]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And I'll save my discussion on this front for the Minister of Finance because it's the appropriate place for it. You know, it's sort of cherry-picking the best of a couple worlds. Certainly this is public sector, compliant with public sector accounting standards. The problem is the provincial government isn't compliant with public sector accounting standards on a whole other front, so it sort of, it grabs from the best world of the summary financial sheet and then utilizes this mechanism to manage expenditure on the other GRF [General Revenue Fund] piece. But I'll leave that for the Minister of Finance. I appreciate your answer here tonight.

Infrastructure's certainly an area that's important, and I think it's fair to say that there isn't a solid plan in place yet for school boards as far as having a certainty of how they're going to be funded in the new environment. I know there's lots of questions and concerns that exist out there across communities on this front.

I appreciate the minister's mentioned there'll be a review of the high interest loan structure that's in place. It simply isn't in the best interests of taxpayers. And I know that there's some concern around just that long-term plan as was highlighted in the mandate letter with the new funding formula to, you know, how do school boards plan towards school infrastructure. But certainly some of the discussion here tonight highlights that there's some recognition of that work going on in the ministry, and I know that's important work, and be shifting more specifically to the education funding formula.

And maybe if I could ask the minister to lay out the cost drivers in that formula, and whether she's hearing right now some specific concerns or some trends in that concern around whether that appropriate balance is being struck with those cost drivers.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The cost drivers are governance, administration, instruction, plant operation and maintenance, complementary services, transportation, debt repayment, are the cost drivers. I think where school divisions . . . Just conversations that I've had with school divisions so far, I think the scrutiny will fall in the instruction piece as to whether that's

weighted appropriately. There is a lot of pieces within the instruction piece: there's base instruction, school base support, supports for learning, instructional resources. That is where you'll find your vulnerability component.

So I think that is the piece that will be the most scrutinized for two reasons. One, we want to ensure that the proper supports are there for the appropriate students. And second, the discussion that we need to have with school divisions is their concern, and a legitimate one, of how we source the data to do the calculations, because in some cases the data isn't as current as we would like it to be. And it is going to be difficult when the federal government actually discontinued the long-form census. It's going to mean that we have to source other data sources. So I think we need to have suggestions come forward from the school divisions on the most reactive and current data that we can use in doing our calculations. I think is going to be important. And so I'm looking, you know, I think that's where we need our school divisions to have some input.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I appreciate the Minister putting her view of the cutting of that long-form census on the record and implications back in education. It certainly does have implications, and right now is it the census of 2006 that we're reliant upon for some of these cost drivers?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — For some of them, yes.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And I understand in many communities, and I might just use one such as Prince Albert as an example, I understand there is significant change in that region, that area, from those discrepancy, from what those numbers are. Is the Minister aware of those concerns?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes, I am very aware of those concerns, and so we're going to be looking for the best mechanism that we can find. We need the best data possible, so I'm sure that we'll be working with the school divisions on how we source that best data.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — In the meantime, is there any ability to reconcile the discrepancies that exist and the difference between the students that are there and who they are and how they should be factored into funding?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I don't foresee a reconciliation in this budget. What I foresee is having that technical debrief, if you may, this fall and identifying the concerns and if they're universal and not just an isolated one school division. But let's look at the universal picture.

I'm sure that school divisions by that time will have — I know they will — they will have had their budget. They will have seen how it's affected their programming and their staffing levels and what their goals are. And so they're going to, I believe, be very constructive in helping us identify those areas so that it can be addressed for the 2013-14 budget.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I think the education sector will appreciate hearing a willingness to review and to make changes on the formula, and reviewing in a way that is comprehensive of how are these drivers directly impacting school boards. What have been the impacts? And it is a big task to take this on, and I

wouldn't simplify the exercise at that front. But I think it's critical that there'd be constant monitoring on this front and any unintended consequences be addressed, and then certainly from a structural perspective moving forward, that that opportunity is provided. And I'm hearing September is likely, that broad-based discussion with the sector.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes and I think the September . . . I don't think that ends the discussion either. September will be the largest debrief. You know, it's a new funding formula introduced this year. You know, but I think it's something that we're going to . . . It'll be ongoing exercise of the ministry to monitor data and the data sources that are available and always be receptive to if we can find a better source because this is very driven by . . . There's a lot of calculations driven by the data that we can get and the . . . I'm lost for words. But the reliability of that data is very critical.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Could the minister describe the factors around school size . . . or sorry, student population is a better way of phrasing it and its impact on funding within the formula?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Student population would be the base instruction. There is a base per student, and then the other factors come into play. How many are vulnerable? How many need English as an additional language? How many have disabilities? So there is a base in the instruction envelope, and then there is add-ons to that base for vulnerability.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Maybe more specific to population of a school and some of the factors as it relates to the various thresholds of population that influence what the funding level is for that school.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So there is a factor, and it's a sliding scale because we recognize that the smaller schools will have a lower pupil/teacher ratio. So it's a recognition factor and so using the PTR [pupil/teacher ratio] from 14 to 24. And there's also an additional factor for schools of necessity which are schools that through legislation cannot be closed because of the distance to the next school. So there is that factor in consideration of the smaller schools.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So the minister's reference to the PTR and the sliding scale, is there not some factors as far as that sliding scale and actual, the number of students there? There's a certain funding level for, and I'll just use for example, for schools that are 200 students and under; 200 to 300; 300 to 400; 400 to 500. And I think it caps off at 900, and I think it reduces.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So funding is based on the school profiles. So as you pointed out, there would be a funding level for a school of 200, and there would be a funding level for a school . . . different incremental levels up to a school of 900 students.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — There is, I guess, a belief that there's efficiencies with the scale, the number of students as a school is larger. Is that the premise to this?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, because location makes a difference too. You may have an inner-city school of 900 and a

rural school of 900, but the inner-city school probably has more at-risk students. So there is recognition, however, that a smaller school, in order to have not four grades in a classroom, will probably have a lower level of the PTR.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Could the minister describe what that sliding scale looks like for each of those thresholds with . . . Sorry. Could the minister describe what those impacts are for each school by way of the thresholds and then what that sliding scale looks like by way of impacts back towards funding. So what happens . . . How is funding different for a school that's 400 than it is for one that's 200? Just the same for one that's 500?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — My officials have asked if . . . We will meet again, and if you could ask these specific questions on the actual calculations because it's quite a number of calculations, and they will have the funding calculation manual here to really get into the details of those calculations. Because in fairness, I couldn't answer some of these questions myself. I know the different envelopes, but the details of the actual calculations, I don't.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Fair enough. So we'll save that conversation for next time and then talk . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — And we'll be better prepared. We apologize for that.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Sure. No, that's fine. There is some concern in the sector as to that sliding scale and how it's impacting schools and whether it's the appropriate thresholds. And I know, you know, a school . . . So the cut-off is at 900. It's interesting when you look at a school such as Carlton in Prince Albert where I think it's, you know, upwards of almost 2,000 students in it. I'm not sure that this model serves it, serves it well.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Right. The model was based on the past practices of the school divisions and the school sizes so that it was basically using the existing statistics and numbers of the school divisions and what they were allocating for funding to determine what was the funding needed. So I find that interesting that you've had a school division raise that concern. That particular concern has not been raised with myself.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I'll try to consolidate some of the discussions I've had on this front and maybe carry them into the next meeting, but I think all of this is maybe some of that review and recalibration process that's before the ministry.

As it relates to sort of vulnerable students or the vulnerable sector, does the minister have some concerns as to potential impacts of this, both the formula but then the formula of course is impacted by the funding level of her government.

[20:45]

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The vulnerable factor is quite large in the funding, and it's been increased by 4 per cent over the past, again using past actual expenditures of the school divisions. So that — if you don't mind, I will look up that actual number — now stands at over \$258 million in the supports for learning

budget allocation, which again using numbers that school divisions gave us on what they were spending on that envelope, this will be increasing it by 4 per cent.

It's always going to be a concern, and one we have to be very mindful because I think it is a critical funding proponent within this formula.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — What's the minister's view of community schools sort of as they were, and what's her vision for community schools in the future as they fit into the education sector?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We support the community education philosophy which recognizes the relationship between family, schools, and community. And school divisions will still, I believe, support that community school philosophy.

In the new funding model, community schools are addressed, as I just said in my previous answer, with the vulnerability portion of the supports for learning component. The vulnerability portion or envelope, if you will, has similar factors associated with the community schools in the past, what they used for factors, and it will be allocated based on socio-economic indicators which include low income, single parent, language needs, low education levels. So those are the indicators that are in that funding proponent.

And so that funding pool will be available for the school divisions to support community school councils, the community members where the school division feels it's beneficial to the local need. And the allocation of funding under the new model will be made based on need and identification of the numbers of students that fall within the vulnerability factor so that . . . No school division has designated a community school since 2004. But those that are designated as community schools, I see no reason why that would change.

It is a philosophy getting communities involved in the schools, and what we would encourage is that that philosophy spreads to more schools. As a discrete budget line item, that was removed actually by the previous government. That was already removed. But I think the philosophy remains, and I think it's very important.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — There's a lot of concern that, you know, of course there's no . . . I guess the envelope of dollars has broadened, or greater autonomy to those dollars, if you will. They're no longer specific to a community school as they were designated at a certain amount for each community school and then funded back to school boards. That's been a change in the last few years.

Maybe specifically, to the minister, when did that change occur that no longer allocated specific amounts of money? Maybe it was in the . . . Was it prior to the education funding formula 2009, and can she describe that change? It's gone through a few different changes over the last few years.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — My understanding was the change was the last NDP budget eliminated it. So the 2006 budget is my understanding as where it was eliminated as a discrete line item in budgets.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — If you're able to consult just with the officials as well just to receive specifically what that change . . . because it's gone through a few different changes, community schools at one point were, you know, as you've highlighted, a specific amount for each school and then those boards were funded for those schools. Could the ministry, your ministry describe this evolution?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Keeping in mind there has been no designation since 2004, so since the 2006 budget that I mentioned there was no conditional funding for a community school designation. However we find that school divisions are still supporting, as I said earlier, they're still supporting the philosophy and the concept in the community school councils.

The ministry also has a very, very good working relationship with the Community Schools Association and I believe from emails that I've received that they're very supportive of this concept.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — It's certainly in the approach, community-based education and that philosophy certainly is of value to school boards and to students. And I know there's some concern across the sector and in communities about some of the impacts where you have school boards that are squeezed by some of the budgetary changes or the formula changes or the level of funding for this year. And then there's some very difficult decisions for school boards to be making based on those funding levels. Has the minister been aware of reductions, if you will, to the community-based approaches to education or to the vulnerable sector as a result of this current budget and structure?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I find that this actually a very, very interesting line of questioning in that no school division has seen a reduction in their funding, and overall in the last five budgets, school divisions have received a 21 per cent increase, which is quite substantial. And I think Saskatchewan has far passed increases in education than in other provinces because I can start to name some that are looking at reductions, true reductions for education.

So I guess I don't agree with the premise of your question that school divisions are squeezed and having to remove the community school supports. And perhaps you heard a lot prior to the budget being released, and school divisions were anxious about what would be in our budget. There is no doubt the funding formula is a huge change. But I certainly haven't had the concern since the budget's been released, and I have not heard any school division suggest that they are going to start cutting community support.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Is it fair to assess, or maybe I'll ask the minister, when we're looking at the value of the teachers' collective bargaining agreement, the incremental increase for that, are you able to attribute a percentage to that increase for sort of an average cost to each school division, and not individually to the average cost for school divisions?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely. Our government promised to fully fund the teachers' contract, and we did.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So it represents about a three and a half

per cent increase to an individual school board's budget?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It varies depending on the school division, but three and a half is high because teachers are about 50 per cent of a school division's cost on average, and they didn't get a 7 per cent increase in a given year. So that seems very, very high. In the first year they got 2.86, plus half their budget is teachers' salary, not their entire budget. So I'm not sure. Do you want us to maybe come forward with doing the calculation for every school division, what percentage the teachers' salary is?

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — You know, I think I still have the information from the technical briefing that we had just the day prior to budget and maybe you have that handy as well. And if we look at it, so I think that, and I have rough notes here from that day, but if I recall, Chinook School Division, maybe we can just take a look at it.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — My notes might be incorrect here, so correct me if they're wrong. But \$2.8 million, I believe, is attributed to collective bargaining agreement increased costs, whereas 400,000 is inflation. Is that correct?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — What I have is that the Chinook . . . The numbers that I have is the '11-12 budget was 78 million and that the teachers' salary increase is the 2.88. Yes.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So 2.8. I don't have my calculator in front of me here. Maybe one of your officials do but if . . . So the increase to funding in Chinook is 3.3 and 2.8 of that is for the collective bargaining agreement. Maybe we can just look at a couple of the other . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We can quickly calculate the percentage of the teachers. Do you want that done quickly?

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Sure, that would be helpful.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The 2.88, they are telling me that is 3.7, keeping in mind that this is two years, because by the time the settlement was made. So we are paying for two years. But having said all of that, the increase to the Chinook School Division was 4.3. So what I am hearing from school divisions is, you covered the teachers' cost plus, in many, many cases. So the biggest cost driver in school divisions is salaries.

[21:00]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I appreciate the comments of the minister. So in Chinook School Division, the teachers' contract's a little bit higher than what might be the average around 3.5 per cent. It's 3.7 per cent.

I understand sort of the impact of the fiscal years in the contract, but the impact is still felt by school boards who are planning the provision of services. And it's not fair to say that the funding levels have in fact covered the teachers' contract along with addressing some of the inflationary pressures in those divisions or the population changes in some of those divisions. That's where many boards and many communities



are recognizing constraint and reductions that are potentials, and there's certainly many divisions where their funding level doesn't cover the teachers' contract, let alone the other inflationary pressures in education. So they're left with making some hard decisions over the coming weeks and months. Has the minister heard from some of these school boards about those difficult decisions?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, but I will because I meet any school division that's asked for a meeting. Quite frankly, I've never ever denied any school division a meeting, plus I of course go to the conferences that they have throughout the year. So I will be talking to most, if not all, of the school divisions throughout the upcoming year. And I'm interested in what you're saying.

I'm pleased to see a school division that does see a significant shift, which is Living Sky is going to see a significant shift. It was one of those tax wealth school divisions that I spoke about earlier. Very pleased when the board member publicly said that they would not be cutting any programs. And it's definitely a school division that sees a shift.

The other one that's seen a significant shift is Prairie Valley. I met with them days before the budget and only talked to the Chair and the director and one board member briefly after the budget. At that point they thanked me for the mitigation funding. I have not talked to them since to see if there's specifically any programs that they may have had to cut. Because that's another school division that again, had a historical tax wealth that will be impacted. But you know, it will be ongoing conversations with school divisions.

I find the school divisions extremely reasonable, even those that were in the high tax wealth positions very, very reasonable and understanding that there needs to be a shift, that there wasn't a fairness in the system before. What they asked me for is, just help us through it. And they recognise that this mitigation funding was doing that, but I'm sure, like there will be pressures and we will be keeping the conversation and the line of communication going. Because none of us, you or I, want to see a child impacted.

**The Chair:** — All right ladies and gentlemen, seeing we've played so well together and nobody's thrown sand, we're going to have a five-minute health break.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**The Chair:** — All right, ladies and gentlemen. We shall continue again, and Mr. Broten has the floor. Or no, Mr. Wotherspoon has the floor if he would wish to continue.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. I believe we left off, just before that brief recess, was identifying some of the pressures that school boards are going to be facing this year and a recognition that, I guess a recognition that for many of the school boards that in fact what they're facing is a reduced budget to meet the demands in programs and services in their division. And this is some of the anxiety and concern that exists across Saskatchewan, wondering what those impacts will be.

I believe I asked the minister whether or not some of those impacts, as a result of this budget, have yet been shared with her from those locally elected school trustees and school boards. I believe I heard back that not yet at this point in time but certainly there's a willingness, I heard from the minister, to be engaged in that discussion moving forward. It's certainly in part, you know, an unfortunate concern that many, many communities and many, many schools are left wondering what those impacts will be.

I appreciate that there's some stopgap funding in place to help mitigate what that impact is in this year. Now this year, if I understand correctly, that's \$10 million that have been used as a one-time backfill to address some of those impacts on boards, and the minister can correct if I'm speaking incorrectly about that.

What is the minister's plan for next year? There's \$10 million allocated. I know there's two factors going on, or a couple of factors, to mitigate the impact to the school, the funding formula: one being, I don't know how to describe it the best, but those that were going to receive some increases in funding have been scaled back. Those that were going to be seeing reductions in funding have been bumped up. And then I suspect there will be a gradual implementation over time to rolling out the funding formula of this government to have its full impact.

So that's one aspect of mitigation; we can talk about it. And then the other aspect of mitigation is the \$10 million backfill. Maybe specifically to those backfill dollars, I hope the minister can understand that certainly there is concern around impacts this year, recognizing that many of the boards don't have adequate funding to meet even the teachers' contract, let alone inflation in other areas or population and demographic changes within their school division. So what the consequence of this, the real consequence, is potential reductions and changes in communities and in classrooms for supports for students. But recognizing the \$10 million that was put forward here — and I guess speaking specifically to it, those \$10 million — which school boards is that flowing to specifically?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Before I answer this specific question I do want to point out . . . Or I guess I have a question for the member to consider because I understand you don't have to answer questions; I do. But I want you to consider, was it fair the way it was? And school divisions have asked for this for a few decades, recognizing that some had access to tax wealth that others did not. And so there was a pretty substantial inequity. So if there is inequity, inevitably those that had access to a large tax wealth are going to be reduced and those that had a low tax wealth are going to see a substantial benefit. So for a number of years, those that had a low tax wealth didn't have the opportunity to have the staffing or programs that those with a higher tax wealth could have.

The goal of the government, and I mentioned that earlier, is we want equity in achievement. So we are working with school divisions. Even those that see a reduction are very reasonable school boards in saying that, we understand why this needed to be done, but work with us. And I intend to do that.

So specific to your question, those that will see some of the \$10 million in a positive manner will be Chinook; Christ the

Teacher, which is Roman Catholic; the CEF, Conseil des écoles fransaskoises; Englefeld; Good Spirit; Holy Family; Holy Trinity; Horizon; Ile-a-la-Crosse; Christ the Teacher Roman Catholic; Lloydminster — Lloydminster Roman Catholic, sorry; Prince Albert Roman Catholic; Regina Roman Catholic; Regina Public; Saskatchewan Rivers; Saskatoon Public; Southeast Cornerstone; St. Paul's in Saskatoon.

I stand to be totally corrected here because I read the wrong column. Even I, when I got to some of them, I hesitated, thinking well . . . Okay. So let me read the . . .

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I thought I was entirely wrong in how I envisioned this for a moment, so that's fine.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, no. When I was getting towards the end, I thought I better question myself here because this wasn't making sense. So allow me to read the right column.

Okay. So the beneficiaries of the transition 10 million were Creighton — so this will be a totally different list — Creighton, Living Sky, Lloydminster Public, North East School Division, Northwest, Prairie South, Prairie Spirit, Prairie Valley.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you very much . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, that's wonderful. Does the minister anticipate having a budgetary amount next year as well? This year it's \$10 million. What's her plan next year for addressing some of these impacts?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We hope to . . . I know school divisions, some, and there's a difference of opinion. So again we'll, you know, we're going to really have that conversation in September. Two years, possibly three. Some are saying, let's get the band-aid ripped off, let's actually . . . But of course there's some that are impacted more than others. So it depends if you're, which end of the impact you're at.

I don't want to see this go on for more than three years. So three would be where I think is reasonable. And the allocation will be different from year to year. We will see how, when you also add inflationary and salaries, you know, what dollar amount do we need to make sure that no school division sees a significant reduction. It'll be a budgetary decision each year. But in my conversations with school divisions, I'm saying two would be great but three is max.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Because if the new model is equitable and some of those boards are by way of the funding model entitled to a larger share, it's I think an argument by some that they're not being treated equitably either — some of those ones that maybe have a historically lower assessment that we're going to see a bit of an improvement and now the mitigation, of course, reduces them allowing to address some of the arguable inequities that existed in their funding. So have you heard a little bit from school boards, that by way of the mitigation process that has been put in place, that have actually been reduced and have some concern around that decision?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I need some clarity. So have I heard from the school divisions that have overall seen a reduction in real dollars? Is that what you're asking?

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Sorry. Actually the, almost that opposite group, the group that initially came out that actually were going to be able to arguably . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Be having some catch-up or have some improvements.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — One has expressed that they would like to see their in-total increase in year 1. That's the only one so far. But having said that, we haven't had a lot of time to meet with school divisions since the budget has been introduced. So there has been one that expressed that concern. But again I am truly impressed and very respectful of the school divisions' understanding, that those that are to see a substantial increase for the most part I think are very reasonable, that perhaps that needs to be shared with those that are seeing a substantial decrease for a year or two.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — How does the structure work for . . . Is there a fixed percentage as far as mitigating those that were, how we sort of tightened the gap, I guess that . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Okay. So prior to the addition of the teachers' salary increases and prior to the inflationary increase, no school division would receive more than 2 per cent and no school division would see more than a reduction of 2.8 per cent. And so that's where the 10 million came in and then . . . First let's go through this step by step.

First we did the calculation for enrolment changes, and then we took the mitigation, the 10 million, and said, okay, no school division will see in the new formula more than 2 per cent increase and no school divisions will see more than 2.8 per cent decrease. And then we added the teacher salary as what it would be and then the inflation that was added in the budget.

[21:30]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Does the minister recognize that this is going to be, as I've mentioned, there's tough decisions to be made this year, but certainly in the years to come as well, as the ministry fully phases in the funding formula and pulls back some of the controls on those mitigation aspects but also stopgap funding?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The impact will very much depend on the inflation factor that we add each and every year so that if you . . . Let's just do some simple math. So let's say that in another given year we decided that we would add 2.5 per cent for inflation and that school division X needed to see another 2 per cent reduction for the equalization. So that school division then in that year would see a point five per cent increase overall. So from that day forward, that school division then would be in line of where it needed to be.

So I know that's very simple math, but in essence, if you phase it in along with inflationary and salary increases, you never will see the full impact because you're adding other increases in the budget each budget. So it's kind of like red circling where you'll get less of the increase than another school division in that given year, and eventually then you're in a position where

you should be.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And nonetheless there will be some when you're . . . Any time you're losing ground with real inflation in the sector, there's going to be impacts and decisions that will be made, and not easy ones. And I look at lots of these school divisions. Those aren't easy reductions. And I know lots of those communities are certainly, you know, have concerns on that front.

One of the mentions was population. We're at a time in the province where our population is changing, quite dramatically in some cases, and shifts that are going on, which is a tremendous opportunity on many fronts. Just the same, those are . . . We have many . . . We can use Saskatoon as an example, although it's occurring in many of our communities across Saskatchewan. But the population increases inside one school year are significant and arguably not reflected with how the funding formula works and recognizes student population based on the previous year's end-of-September numbers. Has the minister given consideration to address this? It's a time of dynamic population changes in Saskatchewan. And what's happening are some school divisions are having many students added to their, in a disproportional way, to their enrolments and then not being funded for them, and certainly offering challenge for those divisions.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes. I'm in conversation with those growing school divisions, and in fact represent one of them because Prairie Spirit is part of my constituency. We don't have it in this year's initial introduction of the funding formula. It's exciting that we actually have this pressure, but it is also a challenge because we haven't had increases in enrolment that we're seeing now in the province.

The funding formula addresses that issue quicker than the FOG grant did, the past formula. And the reason why I say that is in the past if you had an enrolment increase and you realized it by the end of September, then you would have to go to the mill rate. And you would tell the municipality that you wanted to increase your mill rate to address the enrolment increase. That mill would be then applied to the next year's taxes, and you wouldn't realize an increase in funding until the following year's taxes were collected. That was a very lengthy process in order to address an increase in funding that you may need.

In the new formula, yes, we use September's numbers and a March budget using . . . So there is how many months lag? So they won't see the increase till the following September. It shortened the timeline considerably, but do we need to work with school divisions and within this new funding formula. And again, I'm sure that's something we're going to hear in the September debrief of how we can incorporate a faster reaction to a substantial enrolment increase. That's conversations that I think is well worth having because I do understand that pressure.

It might be, and I don't know, but it might be a mid-year, understanding that if we do a mid-year increase, we can't likewise do a mid-year decrease. But at the end, the following, it would be almost cost neutral. And when I say a mid-year decrease, there are school divisions that are seeing a decrease in enrolment, but however once they hire their teachers, I don't

want to see that, you know, mid year having to change staff. So that's something that I think is a very worthwhile conversation with school divisions of how we can address something that we haven't faced before, and it's significant.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — We have a great opportunity right now with the revision of the funding formula to address some of these pieces. And I hope that this is something that can be addressed, and the discussion is that maybe it will be considered in September. Would there be a willingness of the minister to work with the education sector to look at some of the solutions that might be there, to look at how this could be addressed in fact in going into the next year? Because the impact is significant. I believe we can talk about Regina Public, or we can talk about Living Sky, or we can talk about in Saskatoon. But I believe between the Saskatoon school divisions, they received more than 1,000 students in that current year and what I wouldn't . . . I don't think we'd be looking for some sort of a check and balance that reduces dollars to boards because they need to plan, unless the change was dramatic and significant.

But what about those that are seeing the dramatic and significant increase that isn't funded right now in the current environment? I mean it's all well and good to be excited about population growth, and certainly I am. It provides a tremendous opportunity, but then it requires some responsive tools or fiscal tools from government in areas such as education. And I think it would be disappointing to wait until September to review this and not work with the sector to see how this could be refined.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — My officials are meeting with the school divisions before September on this very issue. Oh and the deputy minister says that will be next week, so that's even sooner than I was expecting. And I know, like I said myself, meeting with school divisions, this is something that they have raised in the areas where there is substantial enrolment increase.

What I consider . . . You know, obviously by this time, if we do decide to do something this year, it would have to be supplementary estimates. It's obviously not in this budget as we're presenting now. I would never say never. I would suggest that you really be nice to the Finance minister.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — We speak of equity in the model, and it's certainly important to pursue. I guess, question to the minister: what does equity mean? How does she define equity for the education sector?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Equity is two schools with the same enrolment and very close to the same demographics would receive the same funding.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — My question to the minister would be, has she been given the opportunity, her or the ministry as a whole, to evaluate whether or not equity has in fact been produced at this point in time through the model?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again we're going to go back to this is . . . The model was decided, planned, designed by the stakeholders, and it was using existing data. It wasn't, you know, taking numbers from nowhere. So basically what the stakeholders and in the advisory committee did was really examined closely, what are the cost drivers? Like truly what are

the cost drivers within school divisions? And they took that data then to design the formula. So that is generally what school divisions have been spending.

Having said all of that, there are different decisions made by different school divisions, and there still will be because we're not putting conditions on this funding. These funding calculations will only decide allocation amount, and two school divisions will still possibly make two different decisions.

All of that, I'm sure, will be very good discussion come September. And again we're going to be looking at, are the different factors weighted appropriately? Are there going to be a number of school divisions, and I'm just going to pick one factor, who are saying . . . You know, there's a large number of school divisions that are saying the vulnerable factor just simply isn't enough, and so that needs to be weighted more. Or it may be another factor. Maybe it's transportation. But the data that was used was existing data of what were the cost drivers that school divisions were experiencing in Saskatchewan in reality.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you for that answer. Does the minister have or the ministry have available here the increases or decreases, the changes to population by way of per cent for each school board?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Yes. So would you like . . . Because it's a chart. Would you like, again, that we supply this chart to all committee members?

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — That would be wonderful. And instead of going through all of them, maybe just for purpose for understanding at this table, if the minister could highlight Chinook, Horizon, Regina Public, Regina school division, and Living Sky.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Okay. Chinook has had a reduction of student enrolment by 2 per cent. Horizon has seen a reduction in student enrolment by 2 per cent. Living Sky has seen an increase of 1 per cent, and Regina Public has seen an increase of 1 per cent.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — What are the biggest gainers out of the school divisions?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again, Saskatoon Public is 2 per cent. Lloydminster Catholic is 5 per cent. Holy Trinity Roman Catholic is 5 per cent. And St. Paul's in Saskatoon is 3 per cent.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I assume when you look at St. Paul's there, it's an interesting division to highlight just because the increase of population of course is 3 per cent, the teachers' contract in around that range of three and a half per cent. And when you're looking at its increase then, and really nothing there for inflation and certainly evolving needs within a school division like that and opportunities, it's sometimes misleading to look at sort of what looks like an increase of 5.9 per cent and feel as though that that's somehow significant new dollars to that division to address new priorities when realistically that's an incredibly tight budget to simply get by.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'm not suggesting it's a flush budget for some school divisions. I think I agree with you: it's

incredibly tight for some of the school divisions. However I sat on Treasury Board when we had almost zero potash sales, and you have to live within your means. And we cannot have education funding outpacing the increase to the GRF for the province. And quite frankly, our education budget was considerably more generous than other provinces are facing.

[21:45]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So it's the minister's belief that we're a little overfunded at the current level in education.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No, it's the minister's belief that education is a priority. So within our fiscal capacity, our government will prioritize it. And it is the minister's belief that some of the tax-wealthy school divisions will be in a tight position for a couple of years until the tax wealth is equalized.

But to suggest that we bring all of the school divisions up to the highest tax-wealth school division, I don't believe is fiscally responsible.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Didn't hear that suggestion. Maybe it was on the other side of the table there.

But no, it is a difficult balance to have. But I think one of the pieces is when you are growing as a population, this does provide opportunity but also challenge in the classroom and for school divisions. And I guess a level of caution with the minister's language when discussing what might be suggested by the minister as an increase to school divisions when the reality is that it's in many cases not covering the teachers' contract. In many others, certainly not covering the teachers' contract, you know, coupling that with population, which means one thing: impacts in the classroom and in divisions.

Has the minister heard a significant concern or concerns as it relates to the lack of attention to maintenance dollars within this budget for facilities?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Not specific to this budget. I've definitely heard huge concerns of the lack of funding for maintenance from the previous government, and well recognized that we're playing catch-up here. I know that we've put significant dollars into block funding and overall in capital generally in our five years of government. We have increased capital, both major and block, by 217 per cent over the previous five years of the previous government.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The minister doesn't seem like the biggest fan of that previous government.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — No.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The maintenance funding in this budget and in this formula is a concern to many school divisions. And as they're looking to make plans . . . The minister grimaces at me, but it's a real concern to many divisions. I know many divisions have taken great pride in the maintenance of their facilities and making sure they're kept to exceptional standards for students, or at least safe facilities and, you know, I think we can call that a high standard to be holding those facilities to.

It's the concern of many divisions that the new funding formula and the control of the dollars, in the allocation of the dollars, more so, doesn't allow for the upkeep of those facilities in the way they have in the past. And the concern is that it will defer significant challenges. Of course it's in our best interest to make sure we're managing these facilities, repairing them on an as-needed basis through proper schedules as opposed to seeing significant failures of structures that certainly are a less efficient way to go about it. The minister hasn't heard this concern in the education sector?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Again I don't buy the premise of the question. It isn't many school divisions. There is a couple of school divisions that had exceptional high tax wealth that, quite frankly, could do just what you said. And they could keep their facilities to state of the art and well-maintained. However the majority of the school divisions were not in that fiscal position, and so they welcome being the beneficiary of the equalization or equalizing the tax wealth.

Having said that, there are still infrastructure, like maintenance, pressures because the majority of the school divisions have not been able to keep up with their maintenance because the previous government we speak about didn't provide those dollars. So we are doing catch-up. I absolutely admit to the fact that we are doing catch-up. And in the meantime, we've had some pretty stressful weather years which has taken its toll on roofs and infrastructure, and every year, of course, our school infrastructure is aging.

So I guess my push back here is it's not many school divisions. There was a few, very few that had the tax wealth to do the maintenance ongoing that you suggest. The majority did not, and so they're going to welcome the equalization, and they will always welcome any infrastructure money that we can have available. So I'm pleased that we've been able to increase it by 217 per cent, but there's always more work that needs to be done.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And certainly when I highlight the concerns around maintenance, I'm certainly not hearing that from a couple school divisions. I'm hearing that in a broad sense across the sector in communities across Saskatchewan. The minister shakes her head that that's not the case but . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — So you were suggesting that there are a number of school divisions who said that they had the funding available to keep their facilities up to state-of-the-art state?

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — What I'm suggesting is that the hope is that, through a new funding formula and being able to address some of the funding needs in education, that a maintenance structure will be built into that to allow proper maintenance of buildings — which is both in the best interests of students who are accessing those buildings, but also in the best interests of taxpayers when you're thinking of the most efficient and effective way of maintaining properties as opposed to deferring significant expense to a later date that causes larger circumstances as well.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Absolutely. And I can . . . You know, for the sake of time in questions, I won't go through all the quotes from different school divisions when we announced

mid-year 60 million to just that. But there was significant quotes.

There is recognition that we have stepped up and increased funding for maintenance and block funding significantly. Do we recognize that we have an aging infrastructure and more needs to be done? The answer is yes, we do. But we have to work within our fiscal capacity to do so in a responsible manner. And we have increased block capital funding overall by 217 per cent. But it's going to be an ongoing pressure.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — A couple of times the minister has used the language, state-of-the-art facilities in tax-wealthy divisions. The minister is suggesting I believe, by the tone of your voice, that there's sort of extravagance in some divisions, choices that have been made. I guess if the minister could just clarify for Saskatchewan people to understand which state-of-the-art facilities are we speaking, is the minister speaking about?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We're not. I actually was taking that from your language when you said that there were school divisions that kept their facilities very, very well maintained and . . .

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Right.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — . . . And that they had the funding to do so. So that was the language that that was launched from. It wasn't any one particular facility or school division. I just know of some school divisions that had the ability to fund capital projects on their own.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So you . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Most did not.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So you misunderstood the nature of my question and my nature of my comment which was simply that there's a lot of school divisions — in fact I'd argue all of them — that would like to keep their facilities in great shape and in safe condition and dealing with that facility management in the most effective way possible. And what the recognition in a fairly broad-based way across the province is, is that there could be a better tool built into this formula to reflect some of the maintenance.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'm not necessarily saying it could be built into the formula . . .

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — More separate and apart.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I think we need to be addressing it, and I mentioned that earlier. As we review the capital project process, part of that being block, we need to devise mechanisms to respond in a more timely manner knowing that we're still bound within the, you know, within the restraint of what's fiscally available. But there are times where maintenance does, as you mentioned, become more costly because the delay of being able to do the repairs. So although we've improved in getting capital or block funding out, there's always more improvement that needs to be done.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Would the minister maybe make some

comments as it relates to pressures that you may be hearing as it relates to locally negotiated aspects of contracts for school boards and some of the challenges to manage those, that aspect, and going out and whether it's with education workers or whether it's the LINC agreements, the local agreements for teachers.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The Saskatchewan School Boards Association has put together a committee to review the different school division LINC agreements and come forward with proposals of what they may see as constructive changes. They haven't brought anything forward yet.

The concern in the past years when the school budgets were in essence frozen, only built on inflationary and student enrolment, of course we were funding increases to the LINC agreements. We are suggesting to school divisions that it'll go back to within your allocation, that the funding has to be found within the allocation going forward. Have I specifically heard of difficulties that school divisions have had in those negotiations? The answer would be no. My understanding is they negotiate reasonably well. I haven't heard of any school division saying it was particularly difficult or onerous a negotiation.

There has been a few school divisions that have raised the concern over the extreme different costs of the locally negotiated contracts and the, again, inequities that they see from one school division to the next. But they are decisions that school divisions make.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So that gets to an interesting point, and you highlighted a concern that certainly I'm hearing across the education sector. And that's the, sort of the number that was chosen to reflect the costs of the locally negotiated aspects of the teachers' contract, for example, are not consistent with the real costs that many boards are incurring. And there's only one pool of dollars, so it then has impacts on other aspects of planning.

Does the minister . . . And I've actually struggled in some ways from the moment that the control of revenues was entirely taken over by the province. It's difficult to suggest that there's some . . . that, you know, professionals or education workers can engage in good faith collective bargaining at a local table when those they're sitting with, being the school boards, don't have the levers or any control over the purse strings. Does the minister see any substantive changes to locally negotiated processes?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I think that will be an ongoing discussion. I'm definitely looking forward to what the SSBA will come forward with.

I think what we can agree on very, very easily is that yes, there was the tax base available, and school divisions accessed it so that there was tax increases on the average of 5 per cent per year until there was a tax revolt. So I mean that is not the alternative to go back to. I understand that that was a revenue source for many, many, many years that finally, you know, the property tax payer said, enough.

And so yes, this is something that I think that we need to have a

number of discussions with the different stakeholders of: should we continue the practice? If we do, are you willing to live with it within your allocation? You'll have to find it somewhere. It's just like through the transition or the years where we basically, we paid exactly what it was, but that's not the answer because that's basically your provincial blank cheque. So we need to have those discussions with the school boards.

[22:00]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — It's an interesting area and certainly brings uncertainty. I know when we sat in this committee, same table in 2009 — you weren't the minister at the time; the current Minister of Finance was the minister at the time — but certainly raised this aspect of some concerns around how has this been thought out around some of the funding changes. The commitment from the minister at that point in time was that, moving forward, that school boards would be, their costs through the negotiation process would be fully recognized which . . . That's certainly a significantly changed message here tonight.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The other thing that we need to consider and then have those discussions with all the stakeholders is the intent of the local agreements. The original intent was there was to be no cost factor, that they were negotiating non-cost items. Some school divisions have pushed that envelope a long ways. So I think we need a lot of discussion on this particular item. If it remains as is, then I suggest that it will be addressed through their allocation.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Does the minister support provincial bargaining for education workers in the province?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — In my meeting with only one of the unions of the support workers, which is CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees], I have said that a number of things have to take place before I would make the changes for provincial bargaining. I know they've lobbied for this for many, many, many years because I met with them when I was in opposition on this very same issue.

I said the steps that need to take place is the new funding formula has to be in place. And so that has now happened in this budget, but I dare to say we need one year of the new funding formula. Then we need to have consultation with the stakeholders, and we need the stakeholders to be involved in those discussions and get a consensus of what they would like to see happen. Then we have to do a cost analysis, because again there's a lot of differences in the different divisions as to what those wages are. And the fourth step, of course, should this go forward, would be the process of changing legislation.

So clearly I have both verbally and in writing given that to CUPE, although not the other unions. So we're only at stage one that I have suggested that we need, which is the beginning of the new funding formula.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I've heard the word consultation from the minister a couple times tonight, and I think that people across the province and in the education sector, throughout the education sector will appreciate not only hearing it, but seeing it as decisions are made moving forward.

As it relates some of the discussion, I guess, within the sector, there's questions around potential changes to school day, both for students and for teachers. Could the minister comment on that?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Well we have *The Education Act*, and I know you're very engaged in the changes that we're making there. And we're moving some of the legislation into regulation. The discussion is the possibility of more flexibility for school divisions. We're not looking at a ministry-dictated school day at all. What is happening at present is that there are school divisions that make changes that then the minister approves each one — one by one, case by case. I've never denied any school division. They undergo extensive consultation with their staff and with their parents. We even have a school division that has a four-day week. So there are alternative kind of calendars.

I held, on changes to the Act, I have met with the STF, SASBO, LEADS, and SSBA. The regulations is now with those stakeholders to take a look at, and I'm looking forward to their input back.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Is there a timeline as to when those regulations might be made clear to the Saskatchewan public and the education sector?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Well the Act will pass this session. The regulations, I believe — we're hoping — will be agreed upon and the consultation process will be complete and put in place for the school divisions to plan their schedule for '13-14 school year. So there will be a fair length of time for input.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Within that, what are the range of potential impacts back to potential school day-type changes? What are the possibilities that are being considered or that would be accommodated?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I can only say, you know, what some of the differences are now because again I'm not considering dictating it. So we have different lengths of lunch breaks from one school division to the next. Some school divisions have gone to a 15-minute longer day. I believe there's some that start their day earlier than 9 o'clock. I mentioned that there's a four-day — not the entire school division, but part of the school division — has a four-day school week. So that's the differences that are there right now. And I would venture to guess . . . I mean I'm not sure what else you could do different.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — The topic of instructional time is a discussion in the sector. What are the minister's plans as it relates to instructional time?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — My plan is to get the feedback from the stakeholders who have the regulations and to see what that feedback looks like.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So any changes on that front, now is that by way of legislation? That would be reflected in the regulations?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — That would be reflected in the regulations.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And does the minister have an understanding of what the sentiment is with the public or the education sector with respect to instructional time? Is there a direction that the minister's headed?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — The SSBA and LEADS have issued a joint paper suggesting that they would like to see a set number or hours of instructional time that they've made . . . I don't know if they've made it public. They've shared it with myself and they've shared it with STF. However, again we will be seeing, we will be getting that feedback from those stakeholders as they get the draft regulations and give the feedback.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — What about the election promise to change the school year? How's that gone for the minister and what sort of concern has she heard?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — It's varied. You know, we had that as an election promise. A number of parents had expressed concern of the school year creeping further and further into summer, as well as, of course, everyone knows it was highlighted by the tourism industry. And we decided to make that change, which puts us in line with BC [British Columbia], Manitoba, and Ontario that all have a prescribed school year that starts after Labour Day.

Immediately following the election, I met with the executive of SSBA to discuss what needed to be done and what they would like to see done. And one of the things, as I already mentioned, they would like to see some flexibility without having to ask permission each and every time. Within the day, I . . . That meeting took place on November 16th. On November 22nd, I met with the president of LEADS to again have the discussion. On December 6th, I met with members from the STF, SSBA, LEADS and SASBO, so all of those stakeholders. Again, they have the regulations in the hands and they're looking forward or they're . . . You know, I'm looking forward to feedback.

The concern from there wasn't as much as the start of the school day. What that initiated then was concerns of what would happen to the February break. Not all school divisions had a February break. The calendars vary from one school division to the next. But those that did have a February break, there was concerns forwarded to me from parents saying, you know, we still want a February break. The boards of education are responsible for setting that school calendar, and they'll need to determine whether or not they'll retain or implement this break.

Legislation sets out the start and the end times, well now it'll have the start. It's always had the end of the school year plus some set holidays and winter vacations. It's never had in legislation a February break. This is something that school divisions have chosen to do, and it is their ability to do so. The biggest pushback I had was concerns from Saskatoon. Now both school divisions there have maintained their February break, and that has basically ended the discussion.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Has the minister heard concerns from those working with sort of the more vulnerable population in the province, maybe a socio-economic with extra challenges and impacts as far as what the importance of just the institution of school, the open door to that school and what that means as

far as a stabilizer and equalizer within the lives of students? Unfortunately, the sad reality is that we have students that are living in some pretty difficult circumstances all across Saskatchewan. And there's certainly, I think, been some concerns that have been raised, maybe not with yourself, Minister, but certainly with myself about what sort of impact that prolonged period of time away from school has on those students.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Through the summer. To be perfectly honest with you, I had more of those not necessarily vulnerable students, but I definitely had concerned parents who didn't want a February break because they then have issues with child care and there's two parents working. So I did hear that.

However, having nothing to do with the school year issue, I am a huge fan of the literacy camps that we are supporting because it does that, it supports the more vulnerable students. And we, you know, largely we're putting, implementing them in the northern communities so that they have a continuum of activities around literacy because I do see a lot of merit in just what you have said.

Would I like to expand that more? You know, yes I would. You know, in future years I would like to see us be able to expand literacy camps to more and more communities for those vulnerable students so that they're being exposed to activities around literacy.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I think some of those positive outlets, whether they're literacy camps or other positive pursuits, are of significant value to not just northern Saskatchewan. Certainly that's the case, you know, that that's a community that would likely benefit from some of those camps, but certainly right across the province and certainly throughout Regina and Saskatoon and many of our small urbans and possibly even some of our rural circumstances.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We started as a pilot, and I was very interested in outcomes. And it's interesting because the library kept stats, and apparently there was a significant increase not just from the kids but from the families in accessing the library after literacy camp. So that was very, very positive and definitely made me a big fan of the literacy camps. So hopefully in future budgets, we'll be able to expand them because I do think they have a lot of good merit.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — I'd be interested in some of the reports that show the increased family literacy that you're highlighting there because certainly those are, provide significant benefit for a whole community when that's going on.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'll add that to the list of information I can pass on to you.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — That would be wonderful if you have . . .

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — You bet.

[22:15]

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Quite a few different areas to speak to,

but I see the time on the clock that we're coming around to and I know we have a few hours yet. But maybe I'll focus just a little bit around English as an additional language. And this is part of the dynamic circumstance within Saskatchewan where we have a growing population and a tremendous opportunity that comes with it, not only to meet the needs of students that have always resided in Saskatchewan, but also those that are moving to the province and building their lives here in Saskatchewan.

There's certainly some concern that this isn't recognized in an adequate way by way of funding. We spoke a bit about boards that are going through significant population growth. Quite a bit of that population in fact is students from all around the world which is, as I say, an exciting development in the province but also needs to be supported. Both those students that are coming in need to be supported, but all students need to have supports.

So I guess, question to the minister: what do you suggest to those critics across the province who are concerned that your government isn't providing the resources and supports required to address the challenges, pressure, and opportunities of English as an additional language students in the schools?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — We now have 38 more English as an additional language teachers working across the province since '08-09, which is a 51 per cent increase because of course at one time we didn't need that many. Now we need that many plus more.

I didn't mention in the beginning in my opening comments, but in our budget, in this particular budget, we have added 600,000 to assess the readiness of the new immigrant, English as an additional language students. And it will not be just lost in the general funding, it is kept separate. And I would suggest to you that the entire 600,000 will go to Regina public, Regina Catholic, Saskatoon public, Saskatoon Catholic because they are undoubtedly experiencing the largest number of immigrant students and the most diverse in the number of languages that those particular school divisions are facing. So that is the additional support that's new that's within this budget.

Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration ministry also works with a number of CBOs [community-based organization]. They have set up newcomer information centres; they give the funding for the Open Door Society. And so there is supports outside of the actual Ministry of Education. So again I don't think we want to move towards conditional funding to school divisions. We want to increase their budgets so that they can make decisions around their staffing and what they need for staff. And they have indeed moved towards, as I mentioned, more English as an additional language teachers. But this budget we did feel that it was important to put in the 600,000, not in the big pool, to specifically address this issue.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — It's good that there's some additional resources that are there, but I think when you break out the \$600,000, with the demands and pressures across the communities and classrooms in the province I would suspect that it's a small amount in dealing with an important pressure and challenge in the classroom.

You know, I had it related to me from a group of EAL [English



as an additional language] high school teachers that suggested that they saw a direct correlation with the significantly larger classroom and pupil/teacher ratio with their ability to keep those students in the classroom. And they said that so many of these students that were coming in, that in fact if there wasn't adequate support in place for those first few days in fact that they were entering into the school environment, that there was a real risk of losing them to, well, to employment where they'd be working two or three jobs to sort of, you know, make ends meet. But there was certainly, with some of the supports that they were highlighting that they've had at different periods of time, there's been more successful outcomes of being able to balance out education and work and meet those needs of those students. So it's an important area, and I'd urge the minister to focus her attention there.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — And I think it's important for both of us to recognize that the school divisions have . . . They're doing a pretty good job. I know they have pressures, and I know — because they're telling me; they're telling you — but beyond that they have done a very good job in putting in supports for their, again a unique pressure that's exciting but it's also a challenge, and that's the immigrants.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — As it relates to treaty education, what sort of monitoring is going on to make sure that treaty education is occurring in the classroom?

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I'm going to ask Greg Miller, the assistant deputy minister, to answer that question.

**Mr. Miller:** — Treaty education in the classroom is monitored, I guess in the most concrete way, Saskatchewan has a grade 7 treaty education, treaty essential learning survey — first province in Canada to have an instrument like that. The results of that survey are used by school divisions to assess the levels of students' achievement and to look at the impact of training around the incorporation of First Nations ways of knowing and perspectives that are in Saskatchewan curriculum and ensuring that they're delivered through the instruction to students.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — So is there a report of any sort that gives an understanding of how consistent treaty education's being applied across Saskatchewan?

**Mr. Miller:** — With respect to the treaty, the TEL survey — treaty essential learning survey — there is a report that reports school division results for grade 7 students.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And what sort of outcomes or what sort of information is that report suggesting is occurring in Saskatchewan?

**Mr. Miller:** — The results of that survey indicate that Saskatchewan has . . . By having this focus we have that initial data in place and we have some work to do across the province to get all students to sort of a sufficient level of understanding of the treaty relationships that exist here in the province.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — And what about the incorporation of residential schools and that learning into curriculum or curricula? Where are we at as a province on that front?

**Mr. Miller:** — So certainly the historic imperatives around treaty education around residential schools are reflected in various areas of curricula across the province. And that would be reflected in the treaty essential learning survey at grade 7. However, you know, it's to be incorporated across curriculum.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — How much incorporation of residential schools are incorporated into the social sciences program?

**Ms. Senecal:** — We don't have that specific information with us today because actually there . . . And you might be, I mean some of your question might be prompted by the recent report that came out pointing to this, and certainly the ministry is paying attention to that. We certainly have various pieces of curriculum and certainly in the social sciences area, absolutely, there's a number of places where we've integrated that information and used it to illustrate various historical facts about our history in Saskatchewan and in Canada.

But we're actually in the process of paying closer attention to determine exactly where it is situated in the curricula, to make sure that it's being done in a way that's accurate and reflects accurately on the history, and as well, of course, ensuring that if there are other points where we should be including the information that we're making a note of that so that as we renew curricula into the future, we'll be taking note of that when we do that broader piece of work. So we are paying attention, and we are doing some specific work to understand exactly where we're sitting because there was a fair bit of media coverage around that issue when the report was released, what, about a month or six weeks ago.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Thank you for the answer. Is there a process then to evaluate the report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to look towards making full compliance with the recommendations that are put forward?

**Ms. Senecal:** — I think it would be fair to say that we're really looking at that now. I would say that it's . . . Honestly, it would be premature for us to say that we have a plan and this is how we're going to approach it. I think we're really in the process of actually taking stock of exactly where we are at, and then what is a plan for how we potentially might address it. And that's something that we of course would want to consider in having some conversations with relevant stakeholders and certainly our partners in the school divisions.

**Mr. Miller:** — So certainly the ministry has begun a dialogue with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner to sort of mature the state of this area. And so we are in dialogues right now as we look at how to best represent the treaty relationships and residential schools certainly being a part of that.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — Good. It's important work.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — I believe we are the first province of have mandatory treaty education in our schools. I'm not sure if any other provinces have followed suit since, but we have to be mindful too that we need to have an ongoing review of what's there. We can't rewrite it every few months because it just gets too costly and too onerous. But we always have to be mindful of reviewing it. And I think that is, changing the structure and the focus within the ministry of the First Nations and Métis

education is going to help us all to be mindful of constantly renewing it.

**Mr. Wotherspoon:** — With that note, Mr. Chair, before I segue into another area, I see there's just a few minutes left of time for our allocated time here tonight. Maybe we can follow up with some of the curricula discussions next time, whether that's on this front around our treaty relationship and residential schools but also, I think, the vast changes that have occurred in curricula and some discussion around implementation. So maybe I'll tip my hat where maybe we'll start some discussion or have some discussion in our next meeting.

But from my perspective, Mr. Chair, I'd certainly like to thank the minister for coming before us here today, bringing forward some answers. And I'd certainly like to thank the officials and ministry staff that are here tonight. So thank you very much.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you for that, and I too would like to thank the opposition members for their questions, committee members for their time, and all of the officials for being here with us tonight.

**The Chair:** — Thank you. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Hart has moved. All agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Chair:** — This meeting is adjourned. Carried. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 22:28.]