



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. Delbert Kirsch, Chair
Batoche

Mr. David Forbes, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Centre

Mr. Mark Docherty
Regina Coronation Park

Mr. Greg Lawrence
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. Paul Merriman
Saskatoon Sutherland

Ms. Laura Ross
Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

Ms. Nadine Wilson
Saskatchewan Rivers

[The committee met at 15:21.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Delbert Kirsch and I'm Chair of Human Services. And with us tonight is Mr. David Forbes, Deputy Chair; Mr. Mark Docherty; Mr. Greg Lawrence; Mr. Paul Merriman; Ms. Laura Ross; and Ms. Nadine Wilson.

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

Subvote (SS01)

The Chair: — This afternoon we will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Social Services. We now begin our consideration of vote 36, Social Services, subvote (SS01). Minister Draude is here with her officials. Madam Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to the members. I apologize to the members. I especially apologize to member Forbes for being late for estimates. I'm willing to go for the 20 minutes longer if you would like to. I know that we've agreed to two hours on Housing, so I'd like to get that in today. So whatever is comfortable for the member, I will do that.

I'd like to introduce the Social Services deputy minister, Ken Acton, as well as the housing officials that are here with me today. I have Don Allen who is the president of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and the assistant deputy minister of housing; Dianne Baird who is executive director of the housing network; Patrick Cooper who is the executive director, program and service design; Tim Gross who is executive director of housing development; and Miriam Myers who is executive director of finance; and also Jessica Broda who is executive assistant to the deputy. And welcome. This is one of her first couple of weeks, so welcome.

I'm very pleased to be here this afternoon to talk about our government's track record when it comes to housing, and our priorities for the coming year. With the '14-15 budget, we're going to continue to invest in affordable housing and provide better access to safe, quality housing for all Saskatchewan people. We will also be continuing our commitment to our housing plan because we know it's working.

We've seen some very positive changes in the housing market in the last few years. For example, the average provincial vacancy rate in 2013 was 3 per cent. That's up from 2.2 per cent from the previous year. Some communities are still dealing with vacancies below the 3 per cent, but we've seen some improvement.

Since 2011 when we introduced the Saskatchewan advantage housing plan and the housing strategy, we've made great progress in developing the supply of housing right around the province. To the end of 2013, our government has invested \$256 million to develop more than 4,500 units and repair more

than 24,300 homes right around our province.

The private market has also responded to housing needs by increasing the provincial housing supply. There's been a 55 per cent increase in the number of rental starts since 2011, and housing starts are well above the 10-year average. This has allowed us to focus our efforts on supporting households with the greatest housing needs.

Our budget for 2014-15 contains \$14.7 million to help address housing affordability. We will commit \$9.2 million for the first year of the renewed five-year federal-provincial Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement. This funding will be used for more affordable housing supply, home renovations, home adaptations, and rent and housing supplements. We will continue our partnership with Habitat for Humanity with a further \$750,000 to help develop another 12 homeowner units right across our province. In addition, we'll invest another \$2.9 million to support the construction of 580 units through the very successful rental construction incentive and our affordable home ownership program.

The 2014-15 budget provides a portion of the funding towards these initiatives and the remainder is internally funded by Sask Housing Corporation. Sask Housing Corporation will have a total of \$22 million in 2014-15 to support the development of nearly 800 homes and the repair of another 564 homes across the province.

I'd also like to mention the success of Headstart on a Home program which continues to encourage construction of entry-level homes all around our province. The federal budget delivered in February announced the termination of the federal immigration investor program through which Headstart is funded. However there is no immediate impact on Headstart and the program will continue. As of December 2013, financing of \$224.8 million has been approved to construct 1,331 units and more projects are being approved on an ongoing basis.

The real value of the Headstart program is measured in the difference it makes in the real lives of Saskatchewan families. Take Amery and Desiree Martin who moved to Saskatoon from Ontario with plans of purchasing their first home and starting a family. They arrived in Saskatoon and rented a home and, because the cost of having a new baby made it hard for them to save for the down payment, with the help of Headstart on a Home program, their goal became achievable. In fact with the help of the developer, NewRock's mortgage assistance program, and the city of Saskatoon's mortgage flexibilities support program made possible through the province's affordable home ownership program, the Martins are even able to afford a three-bedroom unit so they can have a larger family someday. Stories like that tell me that our housing plan really is working. It's about families.

In the following months we'll also follow through on a commitment made in the Throne Speech last fall by renewing and expanding the life lease program. This initiative will provide accessible and affordable housing for seniors who can't afford housing in the private market but wouldn't be eligible for the social housing program. It's an exciting initiative because it really addresses a need in the continuum of housing supported

by Sask Housing.

Before I conclude my remarks, I also wanted to talk about the support we provide to low-income families and individuals through our income assistance program to help them access rental housing. Since 2007 our government has invested nearly \$97 million to improve income assistance benefits. Shelter rates increases since that time have been significant.

I'll give you an example. In 2007 a family with one or two children would have been eligible for up to \$604 in combined support through the Saskatchewan assistance program and the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement. Today that very same family would be eligible for up to \$1,075 in support from these programs. It's an increase of \$471 or 78 per cent.

These enhancements will also have benefited those with disabilities. In 2007 a single person with a disability would have been eligible for up to \$535 in combined support through SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] and the rental housing supplement, Saskatchewan assistance . . . [inaudible] . . . Today the same person would receive up to \$795 in support from these programs. That's an increase of \$260 or 48 per cent.

I'm proud of the progress the government has made in the last six years to address the province's housing needs. With our 2014-15 budget, we're going to continue the progress by investing not just in housing but in people and the places that they call home. So I'm going to be pleased to take your questions at that time.

The Chair: — Thank you. Mr. Forbes, you have the floor.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. And I'd be happy to stay to 5:20 if the committee wants to stay. And then that would accommodate I know the Housing folks that are here for this time. And while I have talked to the minister about . . . If at a further date down the road I have one or two questions, I'll let her know that. But what's the pleasure of the committee?

The Chair: — If the minister's in agreement and the committee's in agreement, so be it.

[15:30]

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Thank you very much. And thank you very much for your opening comments. And I do appreciate that and look forward to your answers and your questions — my questions, your answers. And we'll get started right away. I guess I'll back up first of all though just because we have been talking a lot about the structure of Sask Housing and how that works with Social Services and what's happening there.

I'm curious to know . . . We've had a discussion about this over the last couple of years, about Living Skies Housing Authority. And it seems to be taking on more and more of a role of providing services. First it was accounting, administration. But now they're doing inspections and that type of thing. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — If I may, I'm going to get some of the questions like this, I'm going to ask if Don Allen can answer these.

Mr. Allen: — Thank you for the question. Don Allen, assistant deputy minister responsible for housing in Social Services and the president of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation.

Living Skies has been around for a couple of decades and has performed some services for that entire time. When it was first created, it was not able to do certain things. Accounting was one area that it didn't have the expertise in. Those services were maintained within the Ministry of Social Services. But as Living Skies became more mature, it was determined that they should take on those responsibilities that were theirs. In fact the accounting that was being done in the ministry until recently was the accounting of Living Skies. So we were actually contracted by Living Skies to do the accounting for Living Skies. So we simply allowed it to take that responsibility back, which was something that was considered back when they were created and they weren't ready to do that.

As time has gone by, Living Skies has added certain technical expertise that was required, given the ages of their buildings: boiler, boiler inspections; they've got an expert on boilers. They've got an expert on elevators. They've got an expert on drainage and drainage issues. So we actually had two pools of technical experts, one in the ministry and one in Living Skies, and they weren't always on the same page. They sometimes were travelling to see the same facility, you know, within a very short time of one another. So we determined that the best course of action was to have the experts all in one agency, and we chose Living Skies as that particular agency.

So they're taking on responsibilities that we were already fulfilling, either in the ministry or in housing authority land. The staff that have gone to Living Skies, particularly the inspectors, transferred with their union, with their union rights, and with their collective agreement.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. So now reviewing past *Hansards*, I believe the comment was made last year that actually Sask Housing has no employees at this point. Is that correct?

Mr. Allen: — The legislation actually will not permit Sask Housing to have any employees. It's a prohibition within *The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Act*.

Mr. Forbes: — Now you work for Social Services and the officials here all work for Social Services. Their titles are based within Social Services.

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — And so how many employees does Living Skies have?

Mr. Allen: — I would be estimating it's in the order of 70, perhaps a little more than 70.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you give me a bit of a history of when did they acquire . . . You're talking about how some of the changes occurred over the last few years because of expertise. What did they have like, say, five years ago?

The Chair: — We have a moment here and I would like to take this moment to welcome the participants of the Saskatchewan

Teachers' Institute. The object of this institute is to allow Saskatchewan teachers the opportunity to gain a better understanding of our system of parliamentary democracy by observing our political system in operation.

This afternoon the Standing Committee on Human Services is examining the estimates for the Ministry of Social Services. We have the minister and many officials from the ministry here to answer questions regarding the 2014-2015 expenditures. Thank you for being here and hope you enjoy. Thank you.

Mr. Allen: — Over the course of the last five years, about 30 to 32 — that's an approximate number — employees have transferred out of government and been added to Living Skies. Now there might be some who didn't, who chose not to transfer, who took employment elsewhere in government.

Mr. Forbes: — And Living Skies now has offices in Regina, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, anywhere . . . Am I correct in that? And anywhere else?

Mr. Allen: — There are other, what we call regional office locations. And if you wait just a moment, we'll get you the precise number.

So Living Skies has a total of seven offices. They're located in Melfort, Saskatoon, Regina, North Battleford, Weyburn, Yorkton, and Swift Current. That's seven, yes.

Mr. Forbes: — How long have they had these offices? Have they had these seven offices for more than five years? Have some come on stream just recently?

Mr. Allen: — So first of all, let me correct my previous answer. I missed Prince Albert which was the most . . . which was the only one that's been added in the last five years. And that's why we had some technical, some inspectors in . . . located that we transferred to Living Skies.

Mr. Forbes: — I understand Living Skies has a board of directors?

Mr. Allen: — Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Who is on the board of directors?

Mr. Allen: — The board of directors is made up of myself as the Chair, Mr. Gross, and Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So now I know, Mr. Gross. Mr. Cooper, is he here with us today? Okay. Right. So it is the civil servants that are on the board?

Mr. Allen: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Who appoints the board?

Mr. Allen: — Living Skies Housing Authority board is like all housing authority boards. The appointments are made by the minister.

Mr. Forbes: — And is there a limitation or is this in the Act that it should be civil servants? Or is there a reason why . . . I

mean with the other housing authorities quite often there are community members involved.

Mr. Allen: — Living Skies is unique in housing authorities in that . . . or semi-unique. There's another housing authority that provides labour relations advice to housing authorities. Living Skies doesn't manage any properties. They don't represent any community. Their basic role is to support other housing authorities. So their role is to support the bigger housing authority — the Regina Housing Authority, the Weekes Housing Authority — to provide them advice and support, training, you know, board training, housing authority manager training, administrative training on how to collect rents and how to account for them, helping them with their budgets and their repairs planning. So in that capacity it's been deemed that governance by a board of directors made up of civil servants, as I understand it, is the best advice we'd give to the minister.

Mr. Forbes: — Living Skies has no contact basically with the public though? Is that what you're saying in terms of their services?

Mr. Allen: — It would be minimal public. They might find themselves in a situation where they're having to direct manage a unit if a housing authority suddenly finds itself without a board or a manager. That's not our long-term choice, but when that occurs we attempt to find an alternate management system other than the Living Skies Housing Authority.

To say they have no contact, they might be approached by someone who has a question. Generally speaking that would be just the nature of their contact with the public.

Mr. Forbes: — Does Sask Housing have offices in any other . . . I mean is there an office for Sask Housing? If somebody wants to call Sask Housing, what do they do?

Mr. Allen: — Most of the public would dial our 1-800 number and that would . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — All the programs are administered out of Regina?

Mr. Allen: — We have staff in three offices. The primary office is Regina. We have a small office in Saskatoon who works with non-profits and builders and contractors in Saskatoon. And we also have a small office in Prince Albert who does the same in and around Prince Albert but is primarily responsible for support to the North.

Mr. Forbes: — So now, and you're saying Living Skies was created out of the legislation, the Sask Housing Act, is that right? Is that what the mandate . . .

Mr. Allen: — *The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation Act* gives the minister the authority to create agencies such as the Living Skies Housing Authority or any other housing authority.

Mr. Forbes: — And when was Living Skies created?

Mr. Allen: — To the best of our recollection, it was 2005. It could have been slightly before that but around 2005.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And do you see any expansion or change in the Living Skies mandate? I'm thinking here. I see in Saskatoon we have the Saskatoon Housing Authority. We have the Living Skies Housing Authority, but they wouldn't have a sign out front of their door saying, come in and we'll help you. It would be the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and Social Services. So there's four different groups working in Saskatoon, for example, is that right?

Mr. Allen: — The Living Skies Housing Authority office in Saskatoon would be supporting, if they're doing any support with respect to housing, it would be, they would be supporting the Saskatoon Housing Authority. So the Saskatoon Housing Authority would contact Living Skies.

Mr. Forbes: — Do they have a regional office in Saskatoon, Living Skies?

Mr. Allen: — Living Skies does, yes.

Mr. Forbes: — And so the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation office in Saskatoon is more or less a regional office, I assume?

Mr. Allen: — It's more a program delivery office. I mean its regional services would be related primarily to delivering programs such as the rental construction incentive or the investment of affordable housing and rental development program. They also do some significant amount of work with housing non-profits, whether it's the Lighthouse or K.C. Charities, any of the other housing non-profits that exist in Saskatoon and, for that matter, in the North. They cover the entire North out of Saskatoon with respect to housing non-profits.

And there's a third element: advice and support and monitoring to housing authorities, broadly speaking. We are responsible for the actions of all housing authorities: how they spend their money, how they plan to spend their money. So we have staff in all three offices who provide a certain amount of advice, support, and monitoring to housing authorities on how money is being spent.

Mr. Forbes: — To switch gears a bit, lean is often a part of conversation here. Can you tell us about how lean is impacting housing in the Sask Housing Corporation?

[15:45]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Geared to the member, we thought that question might come, so I'm going to ask Ken to give you the detail of it. I could, but I think it's probably just as simple if I ask him. So thank you very much.

Mr. Acton: — Sure. Just in terms of . . . Ken Acton, deputy minister, I'm sorry. We have a business process improvement unit inside our ministry actually that was set up after the ministry was restructured in '09-10. And so in March of '09-10, we established a small business process improvement unit to help improve process and streamline processes across all of the ministry, including working with Sask Housing. And so that's kind of . . . Through that there's a number of initiatives that have gone on. Across the ministry, we've had about 55 different lean events where we tried to focus on client service and gain

efficiencies by removing redundancies.

One of the first ones we did in fact was around the RRAP [residential rehabilitation assistance program] program to gain efficiencies there. And what we found when we reviewed that was there was a number of home inspections going on the midst of that. And in fact it was slowing the process down and was not particularly helpful to our clients and was certainly costing us lots of money to do home inspections halfway through the projects. So as a result of that, we eliminated those at a saving of about \$100,000. We've had a number of other ones across the ministry, but that in particular for the housing was particularly helpful.

Mr. Forbes: — I'm sorry if I missed something there. I was just distracted a bit. So I'm wondering about the housing. So you've taken this through, and who's administered this? Who's been the consultants? Or do you have in-staff people who are trained?

Mr. Acton: — Yes, most of it has been delivered internally. So in '10-11 and '11-12, we used Westmark Consulting to provide some training and provide some guidance on some of the early events that we did. And so our total cost for those, in those years, were \$136,000 in '10-11 and \$39,400 in '11-12. We received that money back from the productivity fund through the Public Service Commission. So we were reimbursed with that money. And since that time, the only consultants we have used have been related to a project in Regina to renovate 2045 Broad Street. We had McNair business associates work with us there on mapping out a plan to renovate and combine space in 2045 Broad.

Everything else was done internally because we have folks that are already accustomed to mapping out business processes, to working with staff around change management — all of those things we were able to do internally.

Mr. Forbes: — So were they, Westmark consultants and these others, were they trained in what we're hearing, in terms of the lean, through John Black consultants? Are they associated with that? Or have they come up through some other way?

Mr. Acton: — No. Westmark is not associated with John Black at all. But they do have expertise in lean, and they provided some general training for us. And then we had a consultant that led a couple of projects for us as well in those early years. Since that time we just learned from them and then adopted that process ourselves.

Mr. Forbes: — So this training has gone through the housing authorities and employees in different housing authorities across the province, or no?

Mr. Acton: — Not the housing authorities, no.

Mr. Forbes: — So they haven't . . . What are they going to be . . . Is there, with the government initiative around lean, is there an expectation with housing authorities to embrace that? Or is that up to each housing authority to make up their own minds?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. I know that the housing authorities' members are aware that they are

independent. And they are appointed by me, by my office. And so we talk about efficiencies with them, but there's really no plan right now to do the lean work with them. We're just working all the time on efficiencies.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much. So in terms of staffing, you know when I look at the budget here, there has been no change in terms of Social Services staff that work in the housing area? Is that fair to say, or has there been any further reductions in staffing of people who work in the housing area?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — No, there hasn't been any change this year.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And how many people, how many FTEs [full-time equivalent] are working in the housing (SS12) component?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. There are 93.

Mr. Forbes: — 93?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And when I look at the budget allotment . . . And I guess, let's focus a bit on the numbers in front of us right now. Goods and services last year was 1.4 million. It's now 472,000. So a significant change in that. What would be the reason for that change?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. Yes. In 2013-14, it was 1.448 and now it's 472. That relates to the number of employees that were transferred over to Living Skies.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — [Inaudible] . . . the travel and the work that was related to that.

Mr. Forbes: — Their expenses.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, so that's interesting. That's about \$1 million worth of . . . So now how does Living Skies get their money to do their work?

Mr. Allen: — Living Skies' budget is prepared and approved like every other housing authority's budget is prepared and approved. They go through a process guided by the housing network, so Ms. Baird's shop, where they get parameters that are set by the board of Saskatchewan Housing Corporation on what the budget targets will be for the upcoming year. Once that's been reviewed and approved by Ms. Baird's shop, it is then approved by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation board.

Living Skies then gets its funding from a pool of funds that is covered by the rents paid by tenants of the housing authority units or the housing units, the 18,300 units that we own, funding from the federal government, funding from municipalities, and funding from the province. So it goes into

this pot, and then all of the housing authorities get their budget from out of that pot.

Mr. Forbes: — And some obviously comes from . . . or does any of it come from this, the Social Services? Would they see any money from Social Services, the (SS12) line we're looking at right now?

Mr. Allen: — There's a certain amount for administration, a small amount of the transfer that you see in this subvote. But it's not specifically earmarked for Living Skies. It goes through Housing for housing programs, broadly speaking.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And I see transfer for public service has gone up 1 million. What would that be?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — [Inaudible] . . . I commented at the beginning about the commitment, about the \$14.7 million in our commitment to housing. This amount of money, well part of it'll be the RCI [rental construction incentive] and some of the programs that we have as well. I can break that down a bit if you'd like.

Mr. Forbes: — Well that's okay. And I'm wondering as well, I look at the top where it talks about program delivery and Sask Housing Corporation. And I mean it is interesting. The estimates in 2013-14 were 14.672 million. The same number reappears but it seems to have been a little bit more balanced out, and why is that?

Mr. Allen: — In the earlier answer, with respect to the \$1 million for Living Skies and the transfer of technical services of Living Skies is why there's \$1 million difference in the program delivery. So that transfer for goods and services is simply a breakdown of the above amounts.

When we made our submission to government and were suggesting that we needed a certain amount of money in order to operate for 2014-15, it was by design that we were keeping the amount we were requesting exactly the same. So we need the amount that was requested, in terms of the transfer, to carry through on our plans for 2014. And the savings from transfer of technical services of Living Skies is \$1 million as an offset. So the commitment, as I was told, the commitment to Housing is the same as it was.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So the number, the main number, 14.672, stays the same. That's the commitment. No change from the previous year. But you're saying the \$1 million changeover for technical services, when it went from 1.4 to 472, was essentially the reduction in program, and then you bumped up that Sask Housing number. Is that where the \$1 million went?

Mr. Allen: — Not a reduction in program, but a reduction in the cost of program delivery. So we no longer had the program delivery costs; instead the program delivery costs were transferred into new program dollars.

Mr. Forbes: — So when somebody was looking at this they would say, it looks like program delivery went down by 1 million. But you're telling, no, that's not the case.

Mr. Allen: — Program delivery costs funded directly by the Ministry of Social Services through a transfer from the General Revenue Fund — I realize, I appreciate that term is no longer appropriate — did go down by \$1 million. We no longer are having to receive those funds from the General Revenue Fund in order to fund the programs that are being delivered by the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. Instead that \$1 million has been converted into new program dollars to allow new programs to be delivered for the same amount of money.

[16:00]

Mr. Forbes: — But I look at this; I'm almost with you halfway there. But I see a reduction of \$1 million and I see an increase in Sask Housing of \$1 million. And I'm concerned that when you say that it's been converted into program dollars, how does that happen? Can you give me an example of a new program that wasn't there before?

Mr. Allen: — Not a new program but an extended program. It's been announced by the federal government. And I'll let the minister conclude as to whether the province will sign on to that, but perhaps I'm concluding that by virtue of this response.

The federal government have offered \$45 million over the next five years for new programming. The previous funding agreement has ended. That money is no longer available. However they've come forward and said if you're willing to participate, province of Saskatchewan, and contribute \$9 million a year for each of the next five years, we'll match it with 9 million federal dollars for each of the next five years.

So that \$45 million of provincial money and 45 of federal money actually totals 92 million because it's a little over 45. That's \$92 million almost of new funding that we have to deliver new programs, new repair programs this year and for the next five years; new rental develop programs to develop affordable housing this year and for the next five years. And so that means we need new provincial money in order to match the new federal money, and here's a little bit of it.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So we're matching the 9.5 million. So I guess I would ask where . . . So I understand the federal 9.5 million will flow into the Sask Housing Corporation's bank account. We won't see it in these books here. Where do we see the provincial share of the money coming from? Or is that new money, or where does that come from?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm going to answer this. There's actually three parts to this answer. The first one is Sask Housing has transferred some money in the past that they haven't spent yet. They still have this money. For example, some of the projects for the RCI and AHOP [affordable home ownership program] weren't completed last year and Sask Housing still has that money in a bank account. This will be the last time Sask Housing can say this because we're moving to the summary budget, but I'll get to that.

Secondly, Sask Housing has internal resources that they can make available and, for example, that would be proceeds from the sale of what we could call assets in smaller towns and villages. For just about 10 years, Sask Housing has been selling units that's really not needed. For example, I think in 2007,

there was 257 units sold up until, from January to November, the end of December. And this last year, it was 16 units.

The reality is that there is a population growth in some areas but it's not equally felt by all communities. So when communities aren't growing, Sask Housing looks at the housing they own and decide what they need to keep to meet the future needs and what is really surplus in the communities. So the proceeds from the sale of these units have been averaging close to about a million dollars in the last number of years, and this money is now available for initiatives.

And probably the most important is the impact of the General Revenue Fund transfer to the Sask Housing under government's new summary budgeting process. Under summary budgeting, in the future, transferring more money to Sask Housing in a year than the corporation can spend is really counterproductive.

What Sask Housing needs is a commitment from the government to be a part of the federal-provincial agreement. Once that commitment is made — which it has been — Sask Housing and the General Revenue Fund are going to agree on how much Sask Housing can spend on that level of transfer. The first year on this new housing agreement, the process of finding and approving starting projects will mean Sask Housing needs for actual cash flow in this first couple of years is going to be lower. If Sask Housing were to be given more money than it could spend, then it's . . . under the summary budgeting, the extra money is effectively just given back.

So what's important is the government's commitment and the government providing cash the year that Sask Housing needs it. And in this case, over the course of the next five years, the investment in the affordable housing agreement, we have the signed agreement with the federal government for what will amount to \$92 million in the next five years.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Good. One other thing — and I know my colleague here has a few questions, but I want to ask this last question and then he can take the floor for a bit — that the agreement with the federal government does allow for some of the money to be used for rental supplements. Is that a plan, that you'll be using some of that money for the rental supplements we have, the program? Or have you decided how it will be allocated?

I'm hearing you say, Minister, you're waiting for some projects to come forward. We may not spend everything in the first year, like to. But I am concerned about that money being used for rental supplements.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm just confirming that we have not earmarked any of it for rental supplements.

Mr. Forbes: — None of it's here. None of it at this point is . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay. Thank you very much. Then I know my colleague has some questions about northern Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, and welcome to the minister and welcome to her officials. And I just want to ask a bunch of questions as it relates to northern Saskatchewan because obviously my colleague, and I thank him for sharing

his time, but he obviously has more of a southern focus and is much more familiar with what the issues are facing southern Saskatchewan as it relates to housing overall.

So I'm going to be a bit focused on the North and again recognizing that issues are pretty prevalent throughout the whole province. That being said, how many units have you got that's under Sask Housing's mandate? And that obviously includes all the housing authorities' units, whether they're apartments or housing. Can you break them down for me between apartments and housing that are being administered by Sask Housing through the housing authorities in the North?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. I think you're speaking about northern Saskatchewan. Are you talking about Prince Albert and north, or what do you consider northern Saskatchewan?

Mr. Belanger: — The northern administration district, NAD.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — [Inaudible] . . . get that information for you.

Mr. Allen: — Just to clarify the question, you're looking for a breakdown between different types of units, houses versus apartments? Or just the number of units that we have, for example, that serve seniors in the North and families in the North?

Mr. Belanger: — Yes. If we can break it down exactly how you've described it. There is housing units; that's stand-alone housing. And then there's apartments that have two or three people in a shared place. Then you also have senior citizens' homes that are administered by housing authorities. If you can break it down in those three categories, that'd be great.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. I apologize, but we don't have it broke down in the categories that the member is asking about. We do have it broken down into senior and family, and I can give you those units. Under seniors, the social housing, we have 97; under family, 1,195, for a total of 1,292. Under affordable, we have 98 family units. So the total then, for the member, is 1,390. Third party agreement, owned housing units, we have eight groups and 74 units. And that's the information we have available. If the member would like us to go deeper into it, I can commit to getting further information to him.

Mr. Belanger: — So just a ballpark figure would be sufficient. So the total overall number of units that you administer in the northern administration district, is it 2,200? Is it 3,200? Could you just give me a round-about figure?

Mr. Allen: — The total would be about 1,450 and most of those we own directly. 1,390 we own directly. Another 74 are managed by non-profits, by third parties.

Mr. Belanger: — So it's 1,450 units that you administer in northern Saskatchewan?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Belanger: — Now I want to chat a bit about three or four

categories, if I may, one of them being the RRAP and the ERP [emergency repair program] program. The rural residential assistance program and the emergency program as well.

What's the breakdown for this year's budget in terms of how much? Is there an allocation that you're going to be giving to northern Saskatchewan versus southern Saskatchewan? What has the trends been over the last number of years? And how much of the total budget province-wide for RRAP and ERP this year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member from Athabasca, we were speaking a few minutes ago to the member from Saskatoon Centre about the fact that we have \$92 million over the next five years to be spending in various areas in the province.

We're working right now to determine what the allocation should be when we compare the North to the South in various areas in the province. That determination hasn't been made, but we are working on it and we have a strategic planning and partnership. There's a working group with the New North and the northern Sask stakeholders, and they're looking at recommendations for housing policies and programs. And as we move on, we will make that determination.

I think it's important to note that at this time we've spent about \$2.9 million to repair, upgrade 221 homeowner and rental units and about \$24.8 million for 253 units that are either completed or in progress in the last number of years.

Mr. Belanger: — So the last number of years would be four years?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Since 2007, to the member.

Mr. Belanger: — And that's in what I would refer to as the northern administration district, the NAD line. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm just going to confirm that, but I believe that's correct.

Mr. Belanger: — Can the officials give me a breakdown of which communities received which type of dollars? Because obviously you would assume that La Loche, which has probably the concentration of Sask Housing units versus say, for example, Creighton, which has more of a housing market than many other communities . . . Is there a breakdown of what you've spent in each community in the North?

Mr. Allen: — Just a point of clarification again. On repair programs or on rental development?

Mr. Belanger: — Repair.

Mr. Allen: — We do not have the detail on the repair program, the monies that the minister mentioned. We could certainly, you know, send that to you, but we didn't bring that detail with us today.

Mr. Belanger: — No, I just think that would be certainly valuable information for a lot of northern communities because a lot of them are asking like what's the breakdown for some of the repair programs like the . . . [inaudible] . . . for RRAP and

ERP? Because obviously when you look at the \$92 million that was earmarked for RRAP and ERP, is that — that figure you gave me — is that for a number of years, province-wide?

Mr. Allen: — I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question please?

Mr. Belanger: — I guess the question I have is, you indicated you spent a certain amount on RRAP and ERP. I think the figure was 92 million. Was that for a three- or five- or a seven-year period? What's the breakdown in terms of that total amount?

Mr. Allen: — The 92 million is the future funding under the Investment in Affordable Housing Agreement. My recollection is the minister indicated 2.9 million. I think that was the number that she had mentioned had been spent on the repair programs and the emergency repair program in the North in the last five or six years.

[16:15]

Mr. Belanger: — All right. Thanks on that because I marked it in the wrong spot here on my notes, so I stand corrected on that. But the RRAP and the ERP program themselves, what time frame are we looking at with the federal government in terms of this most current agreement? How many more years left in the current agreement?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, we just signed the agreement at the end of March of this year . . . April. Pardon me, I misspoke. We're signing it later this month and it's a five-year agreement. So there's been an agreement to sign it, and the signature will actually take place later this month. And then it's on for five years.

Mr. Belanger: — So I guess just to clarify, we're signing a five-year agreement on housing which is called the \$92 million future funds in housing. Correct me if I'm wrong. And of the \$92 million, there will be an allocation set aside for RRAP and ERP. Is that correct, or am I totally off base here?

Mr. Allen: — That's absolutely correct. A significant amount of money will be set aside for the repair programs and that will be handled, as it has in the past, on an application basis. Every homeowner will be able to make a submission to his housing corporation to have their home repaired.

The emergency repair program is different. That's again on an, you know, on an application basis, more first-come, first-served. That looks at if someone's roof is leaking and it must be repaired, it can be repaired under that program. If someone's furnace quits, it can be repaired under that program.

But for both of those programs, a significant amount of money has been set aside for right now. I just call it earmarked for the repair programs. And a separate amount of money has been set aside for the emergency repair program.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm not sure if the member would like some information on the actual projects, not the repair ones, but the projects that have been undertaken. Would you be interested in that?

Mr. Belanger: — No. I guess I'm just trying to start right from square one here. And I apologize. I arrived here halfway through my colleague's presentation so you may find yourself giving the same information twice here. But I want to make sure that people back home understand exactly what the five-year agreement you spoke about, (a) part of it's earmarked for RRAP. I understand that. Part of it is earmarked for ERP. Is there any earmarked from 92 million over the next five years for new construction? Is there any of that money set aside for that? Because I want to make the message back home very simple. We have a \$92 million agreement for five years and here are what the components of the agreement are: there's a certain amount set aside for RRAP, a certain amount for ERP, and a certain amount for new construction. I just want to know — if that's a brief explanation — if that's correct.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, you are correct. We've got \$92 million to decide and we will determine how to spend it, whether various locations in the province. Some of it will be spent on repairs. Some of it will be on new builds. And that determination has yet to be made, but we are working in conjunctions with authorities and the needs in various areas. So it would be fair to say to northern people that as we move forward and make the determination over the next five years on how to spend \$92 million, it will include both sides — repairing existing units and building new ones.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. So is it fair enough for me to tell my constituents that we have a new five-year deal, it's \$92 million for the whole province, they are obviously going to be accepting applications for RRAP and ERP, that now is the time to submit your applications? And we have \$92 million province-wide for new construction for RRAP and ERP for the next five years, so we can start processing applications right away. Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — They can submit applications, correct. We're working with New North right now when it comes to determining how money should be spent and the areas of greatest need. I think the member maybe wasn't aware, wasn't here when we were discussing it, but the money doesn't all come at once. So it's over five years. So the federal government will put in their \$4.5 million and we'll put in ours each year, and we'll see what happens, you know, when the money will be available. So yes, we will definitely work with northern communities in seeing what their needs are.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay. So am I also safe to assume that under this \$92 million and five-year agreement that the operations and maintenance of the housing authorities are also included in this budget? Or is that separate, above and beyond?

Mr. Allen: — The \$92 million is not being used in any way to fund the ongoing operations, the care and feeding if you will, of the housing authorities or the housing units that are out there. This is money that's going to develop new units under the rental development program or the secondary suite program or one or two other options, to the repairs of homeowners' units, and through the repair program and the emergency repair program. Not for housing authority operations or the subsidies to social housing, no.

Mr. Belanger: — The other question I had was in relation to

the housing authorities themselves. They obviously have a lot of responsibility and a lot of work ahead of them. And last year there was cuts to the housing authorities' budgets. And should they anticipate any cuts this year? Because obviously when you cut housing authorities' maintenance budget, as an example, it really challenges these housing authorities that really are doing a lot of work for the government on behalf of Sask Housing.

So last year, when we had cuts last year, it really did affect the performance and the support wasn't given to the housing authorities to the extent that they've enjoyed over the last number of years. So is there any other planned cuts to the housing authorities' funding?

Mr. Allen: — In terms of planned cuts, I'm not aware of any. We will continue to be looking at where there are ways to be more efficient and more effective. What the member may be referencing in terms of cuts were some changes that we made and changes that we are making to our planning process. We are in the process of implementing capital asset planning as its . . . capital asset management, which looks at the different components of buildings, breaks it down from the heating system and the roof, and makes predictions as to how much you're going to have to spend on that building in that community in what year.

In advance of that we actually took some money out of housing authority budgets because we knew we were going to have more intelligence right around now to be able to make some decisions on where communities needed more money and where communities maybe didn't need quite as much.

So we've actually gone back out to housing authorities very, very recently with the money that we removed from their budgets and allowed them to make calls on it. And in fact, we ended up with \$5 million that they didn't need. So more cuts, I don't expect to see more cuts. We're trying to use the maintenance and the improvement money to the best effect by using intelligence in order to make those decisions, as opposed to historically which has been a lot of anecdote.

You know, we didn't have much in the way of evidence and no real ability to compare objectively Regina against Saskatoon or Saskatoon against Estevan, which seems like an odd comparison — communities of that different size — or Estevan against Esterhazy.

So more cuts? No, I don't expect to see more cuts of that nature. What we will though see is a more thoughtful approach, a more collaborative approach with housing authorities. We were able to decide what amount of money is needed in order to keep the buildings to a certain standard.

Mr. Belanger: — So am I safe to assume that the \$5 million in cuts that you've made reference to, that's province wide. It's not just any particular region or city, right?

Mr. Allen: — I wouldn't characterize them as cuts. It's money that the housing authorities did not ask for. And it could've been from all 270 housing authorities who asked for slightly less than what they might have, but it wasn't any individual housing authority. No.

Mr. Belanger: — Yes. So I'm just going to focus my questions on northern housing authorities. So I guess the question I would have is, how much of the \$5 million cut — or efficiency gains, if you will — did the northern housing authorities find as part of this \$5 million figure you made reference to?

Mr. Allen: — Thank you. The North actually wasn't really involved in this particular exercise. We don't believe that there are many cuts of any real significance at all to the North's budgets. So of the \$5 million, almost none, virtually none is attached to northern housing authorities. And the \$5 million is not gone. The \$5 million is still in the budget of the Housing Corporation. We are still going to seek out the best place to spend that using our new capital asset planning model.

So while the housing authorities haven't asked for it, we still believe that there is a need to spend that money in the housing authority system. And we will find the best place to do that.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you. I've only got a couple of questions, and I'll turn it back to my colleague. And I again thank him for sharing some of his time here today.

But one of the questions is around the seniors, their rents going up in northern Saskatchewan. Again I'm focusing on the North in general, not the whole province. Obviously it's a concern throughout the whole province, but many northern Saskatchewan people, the elders in particular, they live on a very small income. Many of them in the early years obviously didn't work for government. They didn't work for corporations that provided them with a pension plan. So a lot of them were basically surviving off the land and raising their family off the land. And over time of course as they begin to age, the only income they have as they reach an older age is of course the old age security.

So many of them live on a very meagre amount of maybe 1,100 a month. And many of these elders are living in the Sask Housing units and then they have to pay, they obviously have to pay for their rent. They've got to pay for their food. They've got to pay for their medicine. They've got to pay for a lot of the other things that they need to be able to survive. So many of them, living on \$1,100 a month, find this a very challenging time. And particularly the cost of medicine and the cost of food and obviously they pay their power bill and phone bills. All of these are moving up. And to an elder that lives on \$1,100 a month, a rent increase is something that really provides a very troubling time for them.

So I guess many of the elders that follow this and really want to know what's going on, they don't like the idea of having to pay more for their rents going up the 30 per cent. So their argument is that we can't afford to see a rent increase simply primarily because they don't have enough money to survive on. So I guess the question I would ask is that how much of that rent increase does the government net each year? Because obviously the housing authorities collect all these increased rents. What's the total value of that increase to seniors' rents in northern Saskatchewan? What would it be? Would you have a ballpark figure?

[16:30]

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, and I appreciate his concern about the seniors. I just want to start by . . . The total cost for the 90 units is \$60 a month, works out to about \$78,000 a year. The social housing senior clients in 2010, their monthly income with OAS [old age security] and GIS [Guaranteed Income Supplement] and SIP [seniors' income plan] was about \$1,363, and their rent, including fuel, was 520 with the leftover . . . 320, pardon me. So their income available to them after paying rent was 1,043.

After the changes today, the monthly income with OAS, GIS, and SIP is \$1,532. The rent, including heat, is \$387. So the income that's available to them after paying rent is \$1,155 — so 1,155 compared to 1,043.

I think the member also would be aware that the housing authority or housing does not make money. Every year there is a loss. And we're trying to do with our efficiencies and asking for various housing authorities to see what they're doing, what else can be done to ensure that we're being efficient with taxpayers' dollars is something that's important as we move forward. We have to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are . . . Every one of them is looked at carefully. So Sask Housing is losing money, and we have to balance the needs of the individuals with the money that's available to them with what we should be doing as government.

Part of our goal of course is to make sure that we have a balanced budget, and the members opposite are aware of that. So all of the changes are the balance between what it costs to operate, what people can afford to pay, and what we should be doing as government.

Mr. Belanger: — Okay, thank you. I'll turn it back to my colleague.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. Thank you. You know, and just to follow up on that, and I know that the minister's been very aware of the discussion around social housing, the rental program adjustments and particularly when it relates to Creighton. And I'm looking at the letter that you had sent out on January 30th, 2014 and it talks about the community market rents. And there's a group C which has Creighton, Battleford, Canora, Denare Beach, Esterhazy, Humboldt, Meadow Lake, Melfort, Moosomin, Nipawin, North Battleford, Outlook, Swift Current, Tisdale. And I just know, you know, when you've been up — and I think you have been up to Creighton; you've met with the folks up there — that, you know, it reminds me of some of these things don't belong in this list.

You know, when you look at Creighton and Denare Beach, and maybe some of the others would make their case, I think and I assume this is all based on levels on population, but the remoteness, that the case was really well made of the seniors in Creighton. If they have to get down to Saskatoon for an appointment, it is a bit of a chore. It's the travel time, and they talked about the reality of the buses. They're not on a main line. And you know, I look at that list and I know that, you know, they all, the seniors would have, obviously in Humboldt to have appointments to make and keep in Saskatoon as well and Meadow Lake as well and Melfort and North Battleford. But it is a different story when you're talking about Creighton.

And I know they still are concerned that the government is not quite seeing how difficult it is and the costs that are involved. Because when you have to travel from Creighton, the costs are significant. You have to stay overnight. When you get there, it's hard to have just a straight doctor's appointment. You can't get in town . . . You can't come in the morning, have your appointment in the afternoon, and go home that night. You really are quite often taking a look at one or two days to travel. So I'm just not sure if in this case where . . . and I'm making an assumption. If I'm wrong here, tell me it's because of population, that's why they're in C and not D. But I think that there's a point to be made for remote distances.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. And I guess changes in monthly rent is something that of course we've been thinking about a lot in the last while. You brought up Creighton, and I just checked with my officials and there's one tenant in Creighton that's paying the maximum rent. So we . . .

Mr. Forbes: — That person is paying the 960, is that right? Or the 1,200 per month?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'd have to get the specifics to see which unit that they are actually occupying, so we . . .

Mr. Forbes: — But they could all be just slightly below the 960 as well. I'd be curious to know. And we continue to hear this issue from Creighton. This has not gone away, so whether they're just below it, or what they're paying.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm just going to give the information to the member. In the C category, the number of people paying \$400 or less is 16.8 per cent of the people. The ones that are paying between 400 and 600 is 62.2 per cent. So adding 62.2 and 16.8 — I'm real fast at math here — 79 per cent of the people are paying less than \$600 a month. We have another 11.8 that are paying up to \$800 a month.

So the category that are over that amount is a small percentage. And I'm aware that every one of them, they're looking at their dollars. But we're trying to make sure that there is a fair comparison of the rent that's paid.

Mr. Forbes: — What you're describing to me is a perfect bell, statistically. Would that be the same with all of these categories? Essentially the vast majority would be paying less and there would be about 10 to 15 per cent that would be paying at the top? That's how it's structured?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Yes, that is correct. Overall the percentage of seniors in all the categories that are paying \$400 or less is 13 per cent. The percentage paying between 400 and 600 is 64.3 per cent, and the ones that are paying 600 to 800 — and that could be just below — is 13.6 per cent. So it's a small percentage that are paying, you know, over the \$800 a month.

Mr. Forbes: — I will undertake to find out where they are and if they are still feeling . . . but I know this has been raised and just recently.

I want to switch gears here, and you know, I've taken a break from asking the written questions about the waiting lists because Sask Housing was still working out what the categories

were. So when I was asking prior, I was asking about in 12 communities, social housing, affordable housing, senior housing. Are those still the three main categories of the waiting lists in most of the housing authorities in the large communities?

Mr. Allen: — That's pretty much the case. Saskatoon, I believe they've merged the social family waiting list and the affordable family waiting list under a single waiting list. But I believe that by and large that that would be the case across housing authorities.

Mr. Forbes: — And now they've established their waiting list, or they would be able to provide that information?

Mr. Allen: — Every housing authority has a new waiting list. The social housing policy changes haven't taken effect yet in the very small communities. But we do have waiting list information for the larger ones that we've been monitoring for the last 18 months or so.

Mr. Forbes: — I will follow up with that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Can I just put on the record, I think that people should know that since we've implemented the social housing changes, the wait-lists have decreased. In Regina, it's down 34 per cent. In Saskatoon, it's down 57 per cent. In Prince Albert, it's down 49 per cent. And in Moose Jaw, it's down 44 per cent. And I think previously people could be on a wait-list regardless of their income, and with the changes to social housing, I think the wait-lists more accurately reflect the demand.

Mr. Forbes: — I want to ask about the tax rebate. And this was the . . . I want to make sure I get the words right in terms of the incentive of the 10 per cent reduction for the general corporation income tax that was announced in 2012-13. And so the deadline, the two-year period, has come and gone, and the number of units that has been applied for this I think is 317.

One of the other things I've got to say. When you have written questions, there should be a time stamped. So I don't know whether I'm looking at last year's written question or this year's written question, but anyways, how many units have qualified under that tax rebate program?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. I asked that very question to myself this morning. The written question — and again I don't have the date on it — but we talked about 317 units and not all the applications have been approved. That answer's still right as of this morning.

Mr. Forbes: — Do you think it will hit the 10,000 mark?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I don't know if it will or not. What I do know is we're balancing the programs that we have and the various incentives to ensure that we can get to a healthy balance of a provincial vacancy rate of 3 per cent. And I know that with the various programs out that are in effect and the work that's been done by the private developers as well as government, we are heading in the right direction.

So it's not as much that I'm going to meet a target of the

number that we're talking about, but what's the end goal. So I've spoken with developers who've said that the first year that the grant or the opportunity was available to them, that has to go through a business financial plan and go through their own work schedule. And so we're getting more applications at this time. I'm sure that there will be more applications. But for me, the goal of it, for our government, the goal is to make sure that we have housing opportunities for people right along the continuum, and we'll be working with developers to see what they have to say as we move forward.

Mr. Forbes: — So the document that I'm looking at is one from budget 2012-13 and it says, the initial application qualification process has to be . . . The rental housing building permit has to be dated on or after March 21st, 2012 and before January 1st, 2014 to be eligible for the tax rebate. So are you saying then that you're continuing this program? Because it sounded like there was a two-year window when this was first announced from 2012 to '14. Is the program continuing?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We've extended it for one more year.

Mr. Forbes: — For one more year?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Right at this time, it's one more year.

Mr. Forbes: — Oh, okay. And is that because . . . Why was that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I was explaining earlier, we started to see the applications come in towards the end of the project. And when I spoke to the individuals who were putting in their applications, they were saying it's working into their business cycle right now, into their process. And that's most . . . the bigger businesses that are developers that are going to be working with this program.

It's not changing on a dime where they can look at their programs and say, I think I'm going to look at this in this program. They go to the bankers before and do their planning. So it's now working into what they are looking at and the type of project they'll be building. So we have . . . They know that there's a year extension. We will see what the request is and the demands are as we move forward, see what else they have to say.

But again I will reiterate that our goal is to make sure that we can get our vacancy rate to what is called healthy and balanced. I know that we have done it across the province in the big picture, but there's still areas that definitely need more support. So we'll be watching it carefully. And our tool box of programs that we have available right now have been fairly flexible, and we'll ensure that we're working with all the people that'll be helping us meet the vacancy rate. We'll see what happens into the future.

[16:45]

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you. I'm looking at . . . Now you've talked about the vacancy rate and I'm looking at page 10 of your plan for 2014-15. And it talks about using the provincial rental vacancy rate as a measure, and how this supports commitments under the plan for growth. And it is interesting,

but as it goes on to the next page to talk about vacancy rates in Saskatchewan's 10 largest communities . . . And I'm curious, you know. I think on one hand the rental vacancy rate is a good idea, but by itself it leaves other questions unanswered.

And the two questions I would have that we're often . . . And part of it is maybe not this government's fault, but the federal government, particularly when they stopped the long form for the census. We don't have a sense of quality of especially rental housing, a rental unit across the province. We don't know as well as we might — maybe I'm wrong; maybe the officials can correct me — but we don't know the quality of the rental stock generally in Saskatchewan. And I'm not talking about . . . I'm talking more than Sask Housing units. I'm just talking generally, what is the state of affairs with rental stock in Saskatchewan and also the cost to rent, the cost of rent?

And so I would think those three together are a much better picture of what housing is like in Saskatchewan. Because while people still want a vacancy rate . . . And you can see, you know, and I can see this in Saskatoon for sure. And it is, you know, one of the saddest stories when we opened up, and this current government was able to open up market yard . . . Monarch Yards. And that was a great addition on 20th Street.

But I know people who couldn't get into it because they were caught in a situation where they were sharing a house with family members and if they left . . . It was sort of like a house of cards. Who was the first one to go out to get an affordable place in Sask Housing, but they would leave their brother and their sister in a jam because they were paying high rent. And rent is just simply, in some places, extremely high.

And so that's what I'm thinking. And I don't know if you have comments about why you don't have the cost of rents or cost of housing. CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] uses that when they release their reports twice a year. It's a combination of vacancy plus cost of rent. And I would suggest to . . . And I've often asked this about, why is it that cities like Prince Albert have a high vacancy rate? And sometimes, you know, you do have to wonder about . . . People have a tough choice about moving into a place that's vacant but they know has black mould. It can lead to all sorts of problems. So I'd be interested to hear your thoughts on that.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I'm not disagreeing with you. There is, you know, we do have to watch what's happening and the one thing that I'm really happy with is the fact that our owners, our building owners now are really aware of, first of all, the condition of the buildings that they're putting on the market. And we, through our rental housing supplement, we investigate those units to ensure that they are, you know, may . . . that they are safe and that their safety issues are there, are looked after. At the same time, we know that, I believe and I'm not sure that the member does himself, but I believe that as we get more units on to the market, that we have the opportunity to see the prices, the balance start coming into play.

We still do have the housing supplement. And looking at individual cases, I think that there's always more that we can be doing in this area. The affordability issue is something that's been a priority for our government from the very beginning and I'm pleased to see some of the things that are happening. But

I'm well aware that it's tough for some people.

I'm going to ask Don if he has a comment to add because we work in partnership with government with the private industry to ensure that we can provide spaces for individuals. Do you want to go ahead, Don?

Mr. Allen: — So in addition to the rental housing supplement being quality conditions, so I mean in order for a family or an individual to receive the rental housing supplement, that unit has to pass certain basic quality standards. When we look at the vacancy rate, part of that conversation is about choice. Part of it is about, you know, if there's no vacancies in the market, then if you're living in poor-quality housing, you have no choices. You have to stay where you are. So 3 per cent allows tenants some choice. Now, granted, you still have to find one that is in your price range.

We've been doing some studying lately and we're not completely through it yet, but I will jump to sort of the conclusion that we've already reached. By studying statistically the vacancy rates and rental increases, there is a relationship between higher vacancy rates and lower rates of rent increase. It's not necessarily cause and effect, but if you see the market responding with supply, you see prices not escalating. So I mean it's not something that we just simply believe. We've studied it and we've had statisticians study it. And so there is . . . You know, the 3 per cent vacancy rate will have an effect on price.

Mr. Forbes: — I think this, and the minister is alluding to what we might disagree on, and that's fair enough. That's what makes democracy democracy and that's why . . . And I understand a bit of what the official is saying, but I would like to see that more explicitly put out when you look at the vacancy rate because I don't think the vacancy rate by itself tells a whole story. But while I am waiting patiently for rents to come down a bit, and we do hear the odd story of that, when we know that some of the large landlords have offered decreases or have flatlined them.

But we'd like to see proof of that too because, you know, your saying so may be accurate, but I sure would like to see it because I think that's important. And it's also important in terms of the quality of the housing. Those three together, I think, provide a pretty good snapshot. I don't think you could roll it all into the vacancy rate, that I mean somebody might assume that you could, you know, a higher vacancy rate implies that people will start to look after their properties. And that may not be the case. So I think that I would urge the ministry to think about expanding their measurements. We have a disagreement on how we might get there.

But I'm patiently waiting for the vacancy rate. Or you know, I mean I do find that CMHC itself, I'm not sure how accurate it is because their measurement is, that there are different things that they don't measure. And we don't know, and maybe you do. It would be interesting. Have you taken, do you know what the stats are on overcrowding and people sharing units? Because this is becoming more and more of an issue, of overcrowding in housing units.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you to the member. And he's

right; we will disagree on some of these issues, in fact probably on this issue. And we talk, we look at companies like Boardwalk that are offering incentives right now to have people move in. And I'm not sure that, I don't know whether rents are actually going to come down. But what we do know is things like increasing the minimum wage and the fact that the average weekly earnings are going up gives people more money in their pockets as well.

So we're not going to turn the clock back to days gone by when you could rent a house for \$75 a month. We know that things have changed a lot in the province in this area.

So what my goal is as minister, and I believe it's fair to say our government's goal, is to make it affordable for people, and attainable I think is probably a better word. What do they have? And we know that in this area that 30 per cent of the wage is considered, of your wage is considered what should be available for housing. In lots of cases that, you know, people say to me, that's a lot. But at the same time I'm proud of the fact that we are working hard on ensuring that people have more money in their pocket.

So I guess that we can agree to disagree on some of these areas, and I look forward to the other questions you might have for me.

Mr. Forbes: — Well we won't debate how much minimum wage is, should be. But I appreciate the comments about that because I think there are . . . People need cash in their pockets, so that's good. I wanted to ask about the land sale. That was, should have, it's been concluded. It was concluded last year, and I assume more of the details should be available now.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — It is available. I'm going to ask Don to go through that with you.

Mr. Allen: — So yes, the land sale closed on March 31st of 2013. The total proceeds of the entire 336 acres was \$40.5 million. Now the city of Regina got a share of that. So they got just a little over \$2 million. That means Sask Housing's share was \$38.3 million, the province's share.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. A couple of questions. Can you tell us who bought it?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — To the member, we are not 100 per cent sure if we can do that or not. We can check it out and find out for you. I don't want to break any type of agreement. If we can tell you, we will.

Mr. Forbes: — And if you can't?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We won't. It would be an agreement.

Mr. Forbes: — I think it should be a matter of public record. And if you can, much appreciated. And if you can't, the reasons why, that would be good.

All right. And so that revenue would then go to, now would it go to Sask Housing and this would become part of the money that could be used for the affordable federal-provincial agreement that we were just talking about? The share of

money? Or what will this money go towards?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The commitment that we made when this land was sold is that this money would go to housing in Regina. And that was things like the U of R [University of Regina] residence and other work that might be done here in Regina.

Mr. Forbes: — So now there was a commitment made last year, I think to the U of R, for \$10 million? Is that correct?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Correct.

Mr. Forbes: — I think they are short of money for that building, if I am understanding, that the building actually was going to be more than they had originally thought. Am I correct in that?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — The agreement, the work on this U of R residence has been undertaken with Advanced Education. So there is a — I think it's Advanced Education — they have an agreement on how that residence will be funded. So the discussions through government will happen. Now that we have summary financial statements, the money, you know, we know where the monies are. As we move forward, we will ensure that we'll keep the commitments. And we know that there was . . . The monies that are available will stay in the Regina area, but there was no time frames put on it. So we will ensure that the money is spent in the city.

[17:00]

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, thank you. So what will the other \$28 million go to in the city of Regina?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — In discussions with the city of Regina, as we move forward we will talk about the needs that they have and working together on agreements. Whatever type of development we can agree on would be important for the housing continuum in Regina. We will discuss it as we move forward. The relationship between the city of Regina, the mayor's . . . and the needs in the various areas is something that we will take into consideration.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. So it will be put into some sort of trust account or something that you can't touch, or they'll be watching this very closely, I assume.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — We will be watching it carefully. We know what the number is.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. And you're working with them as well. Okay. Now there were houses that were being sold as well. There were houses that were being sold as part of this in Regina, Moose Jaw, and Saskatoon.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's right.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you give me an update on what's happening with that?

Mr. Allen: — So what we call portfolio renewal was where we have some single-family homes in Prince Albert, in Moose Jaw, and in Regina. We will sell those homes and replace them with

new medium-density homes built in those same communities. So in Moose Jaw we will be selling — actually we'll be constructing. And in every case we intend to construct first and sell later. We have sold a few in Regina because we had a property that we had totally renovated. It had been empty. We renovated it and made it available to the market, some 70 or so units. So that's allowed us to sell about 33, 35 houses in Regina already. There have been no sales attempted in either of the other two cities.

So contracts have been awarded in Regina, in Moose Jaw, and in Prince Albert for homes. In Regina we've awarded 48 units totalling just over \$204,000 a unit in Regina. There was another request for proposals that's closed fairly recently and is being examined. In Moose Jaw we've awarded three contracts totalling 91 units at an average of just about \$196,000 a unit. And in Prince Albert we've awarded a contract for 30 units, which is all that we will need to build in Prince Albert is 30 units, for \$191,300 per unit.

So I don't have the average of all of them, but the highest number is 204,700. The average on proceeds so far is, after real estate commissions, over 204,000. So we're ahead of the game in terms of proceeds as compared to cost.

Mr. Forbes: — And how many houses have been sold of the old . . . So you're building first so people can move in and then selling the older ones after they're vacated. So how many of the old ones have been sold to date?

Mr. Allen: — We've sold 34 so far.

Mr. Forbes: — Thirty-four. And that's in Regina?

Mr. Allen: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. And they're averaging 204?

Mr. Allen: — After real estate commissions.

Mr. Forbes: — After real estate. But there has been no activity in Moose Jaw yet for sales?

Mr. Allen: — None. No.

Mr. Forbes: — Has there been . . . Have they been on the market? Have people . . . Or you haven't put them on the market yet at all?

Mr. Allen: — We haven't . . . We have a process, what we call releasing them to the market. That's the first step. None have them have been released to the market in Moose Jaw or Prince Albert.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And were there any in Saskatoon?

Mr. Allen: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — No. Okay.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Just for the member, I just want to ensure that the member realizes that this is going to create about \$53 million to invest in new affordable housing units. And we know

it's going to be cheaper for the tenants, probably up to \$100 a month, to live in one of the newer units, and cheaper for the taxpayers. We expect to save about \$10 million over the next 25 years. And we have . . . And it's going to create entry-level home ownership opportunities when people move out of these homes.

Okay. So far there has been 22 of the units that have actually been purchased by people that were in them. They were given the first opportunity to buy. And we think the sales are going to occur over the next two to three years.

[Inaudible] . . . there's only been one that actually had the right of first refusal, there's only been one that actually purchased it. Twenty-one were bought by other people when they moved out.

Mr. Forbes: — Sorry, they bought . . . 21 were bought by the tenants? No.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — One was bought by the tenants, 21 were . . .

Mr. Forbes: — Were bought by somebody else.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — By someone else.

Mr. Forbes: — But the tenants had moved to another area.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. Okay. Now I have a question about the rental development program. And I understand that you've spent about \$22 million on about 198 units. Is that correct? Have I got the numbers right here?

Mr. Allen: — What's the source for that?

Mr. Forbes: — Oh you know, I just let people know I'm doing this and they send me questions. And I say, sure, I'm going to ask. So I'm going to ask, and you can tell me whether I'm wrong or right. You have a rental development program?

Mr. Allen: — Yes, we do.

Mr. Forbes: — And how much have you spent on it?

Mr. Allen: — Well we've . . . It goes over a period of time. Under the rental development program since 2007, a total of 2,716 units have been completed or are already under construction, so there are a few that are in planning and haven't begun construction yet. So completed and under construction, 2,716 with a total value of \$199.8 million of assistance from the Housing Corporation. The total project cost on all of those units is over \$372 million.

Mr. Forbes: — What does that average out per unit?

Mr. Allen: — The 199.8 million averaged out? So that would average \$73,565 per unit. Now some of them get more than that, considerably more depending upon the client being served and the community. For example, the North, the cost per unit would be much higher than that on average. Others would be considerably less.

Mr. Forbes: — Why would the North be higher?

Mr. Allen: — There are a number of reasons for the North being higher. One of them is density. And most construction in the North is not medium density. So you might see a project in Regina that's 20 or 30 or 40 units. You might see two or three units on a single site in the North. Another impact is the cost of materials and the cost of labour. There's not a lot of competition amongst builders in the North, so we often have to be our own general contractor in the North.

Mr. Forbes: — Can you describe generally what is the rental development . . . These are new builds. Or what is the rental development program?

Mr. Allen: — The rental development program is primarily a new build. I mean it can pick up other things. You could convert an office building into rental units and that would fit under the rental development program. But at the end of the program, you have rental units available that did not exist otherwise.

Mr. Forbes: — And are there target areas in the province where you're aiming, or is this a general application and you see what the applications are that come in?

Mr. Allen: — We've used a variety of different vehicles depending upon, you know, at certain points in time. At some times we've gone looking for projects to serve disabled people, so we've gone out with a call for units to serve persons with disability. At other times we've been interested in a particular geographic area such as Estevan or the North, and we've gone with a general call. We've gone with calls for seniors in the North and in certain other communities. So it depends on the needs and demands in the province and in a region at a particular point in time. And so that's what we've done in the past and that's what I expect we will do in the future.

Mr. Forbes: — So I've got a couple more, and time's ticking away pretty quick. Bedbugs in housing is becoming an issue right across the world and not a stranger here in Saskatchewan. What is Sask Housing doing about bedbugs?

Ms. Baird: — I'm Dianne Baird, the executive director of the housing network. So with respect to bedbugs, bedbugs are definitely a growing concern, not just with Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, just with industry at large — hotels and other apartment buildings and whatever. It is becoming more of a phenomenon in Saskatchewan than ever before.

You know, we are pretty aggressive when we find cases of bedbugs, and the housing authorities react quickly and get in professional exterminators to try to basically address the situation as soon as possible. But we understand that we need to take a look at some strategies and try to figure out how to do it a little bit better. So we have actually, right now are looking at developing a committee of professionals as well as people within the housing authority system to take a look at this situation just generally in terms of how we can actually address it. And even the industry itself says that the way in which we're looking at bedbugs may not be, you know, working in the long term in terms of continuing to try to go in there and, you know, do heat treatments and whatever.

So we are looking at a strategy to see how we can do it. A lot of it is involved in providing better education to tenants so that they understand what a bedbug is, that they're not . . . They actually don't pose a health threat, but they are definitely a nuisance and people really . . . They're very disturbing for people when they do arise. But the big thing about bedbugs is quick identification of them is really the key to ensuring that they don't spread from suite to suite. But overall that's sort of what our strategy is right now, and to sort of, as soon as we are aware of them, to make sure that we have professionals go in there as quickly as possible.

Mr. Forbes: — So first can you tell me a little bit . . . You introduced yourself as the housing network. What is the housing network?

Ms. Baird: — The housing network? The housing network . . . My area of responsibility is working with the housing authorities as well as working with third party agencies in terms of the rental portfolio that Sask Housing has or funds.

Mr. Forbes: — Obviously you are an employee of Social Services.

Ms. Baird: — Yes, the Ministry of Social Services. Correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. All right. Okay. So you're external . . . Okay, good. So this committee, can you tell us a little bit about the committee? Who's on the committee?

Ms. Baird: — Okay. The committee that was just formed is made up of individuals of Living Skies, the technical services people, as well as folks within the ministry. We have a risk manager that we have to take a look at sort of some of our risks as well as some of the larger housing authorities that had been experiencing this. You know, they had more incidents, so they actually are quite familiar with it. As well as, you know, they won't be a member of the committee, but they will be an individual that we have information from, which are some of the professional extermination companies in the province that are experts in bedbugs and taking a look at what can be done.

[17:15]

Mr. Forbes: — Do you work with public health in this area at all?

Ms. Baird: — What happens is, with respect to public health, is when you take a look at bedbugs, if they think that the source of the bedbugs is outside of our apartment buildings, we contact public health to see whether or not they're actually coming in from some other area. If you think that . . . That particularly comes into play when you find instances of reinfection in which they come back and back. So you're figuring out that you're getting, they're coming in from another source. And then we try to work with public health to sort of track it back, and then if they come from a private landlord, to work with that private landlord to see if we can sort of resolve the situation.

Mr. Forbes: — So is Sask Housing thinking of playing a leadership role? I think that in my riding which has so many apartment blocks, you know, we hear concerns about Sask Housing, the Saskatoon Housing Authority — and they do a

good job — but of others as well. And you're talking about a concerted effort, being part of a community that might really tackle this issue.

Ms. Baird: — I think what happens is, with this committee, we'll be taking a look at sort of some of the best practices, and then we would share that with other landlords. I'm not sure whether or not . . . you know, we don't actually have the experts within our . . . You know, we have people that have worked with them, but obviously we're relying on the professional extermination companies that have more of the information on them than us being the actual . . . You know, we're not going to be . . . We have knowledge of them, but I don't think we ever want to assume that we'd become the experts in bedbugs.

Mr. Forbes: — I just want to switch gears — just thank you very much for that answer — and just raise concerns about seniors and housing. And I think that as we're looking forward to many more seniors and, you know, what they look for in the type of housing that they need, what kind of initiatives is Social Services and Sask Housing thinking in terms of providing them?

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think one of the things that we should be remembering is we have a responsibility to ensure that seniors who need housing, it's available to them. But we also should keep in mind that right now we have the third-lowest percentage of low-income seniors in Canada. And so we have to ensure that the housing units that we have for vulnerable people are there and in the various communities.

One of the discussions that I've had recently is where the seniors' units should be. Most of our seniors are saying, for a while they'd like to be in their own home; well first of all in their home, which they can do because of home care now. And when they make the move, they're probably going to move to a location that has a hospital close to it. So that means there could be a shift in what we're doing. So we, as we move forward and plan strategies, we need to look at where will be home for our seniors. I know that since we've closed rural hospitals, there's been very few, if any, homes built in a community where there's no hospitals. That changes life a lot.

So I, in my discussions with my colleagues who are living in these areas, we have to talk about the best way to spend our money as we move forward. I am also well aware that seniors want to stay in the community where their friends are as long as possible. So it's one of the discussions, although we don't have it that often with Health and some of the other ministries, it is really a cross-government discussion on how do we support seniors as we go forward?

So it's a good question and it's something that we think about often. But knowing that government isn't going to be there to build social housing for every senior is apparent because not all seniors need it. So how do we ensure that we are supplying the units for the people that need seniors' units, not necessarily social units?

Mr. Forbes: — Yes, I agree. And I think some of the things that can be innovative are like housing co-ops. I know in Saskatoon they're trying to get one started, or they're going quite well with it I think. And I think there was even one

opened up in Morse. There was a new housing co-op opened up in southern Saskatchewan, a seniors' housing co-op. So different things.

But I know that we were at a conference, and officials were there, in Weyburn. And it was quite clear housing is a big issue for seniors and the whole housing continuum for them, which is quite unique and different than our typical housing continuum. Because at the end of the day, they're not thinking necessarily about getting ownership of a detached home.

So I would say this is something the ministry should look at for sure.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I think one of the things that we haven't touched on that's important is the whole life lease. Because we do have seniors that do need to have support in their homes, but we also have a group that are not quite . . . They can't buy a brand new house or want to be living in a \$300,000 house.

But there are opportunities, and we're looking at it through government, to be able to provide them a unit where they will pay their lease and they will be able to keep it for as long as they need it. And then the next move would be up to them, and the time frame. But there's a whole new thought process in what we're doing. We do have a number of life lease units in the province right now that are working very well. But we need to make the next step to address the group of seniors who are in the in-between category.

Mr. Forbes: — With that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the officials and the minister for their answers. It's been very helpful to help me understand these issues and thank them for being here this afternoon. We're not quite into the evening, but thank you.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — And may I just ask the member, we had talked about two hours for housing. Am I safe to say that the housing officials will be able, we won't be bringing them back in again?

Mr. Forbes: — Well not for Wednesday. Wednesday I think we'll talk about income assistance and income support. And then we'll talk after that. I think we're pretty good.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Okay. I just, I appreciate that. I know that there's a lot of work being done in this area, and I don't like to have officials sitting here if they can be doing something else. So I'd appreciate it if you let us know as quickly as possible.

The Chair: — Madam Minister, if you'd like to . . . any closing remarks and thank your officials and . . .

Hon. Ms. Draude: — I would like to thank the member for his questions, and I would really like to thank the officials that have worked diligently. They've changed the face of housing along with the private sector in our province, bringing forward ideas. And they work tirelessly on the issue. I ask them a lot of questions very often and they come back to me very quickly in giving me the information that not only I need, but the housing authority. So on behalf of a grateful government, we thank them.

The Chair: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And with that, I believe there are no other questions or comments. This committee stands in recess until 7 o'clock this evening. Thank you.

[The committee recessed from 17:23 until 19:00.]

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

Subvote (ED01)

The Chair: — Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. Tonight we will be considering estimates for the Ministry of Education. We now begin with our consideration of vote 5, Education, subvote (ED01).

Minister Morgan is here with his officials. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening comments.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Good evening, Mr. Chair, committee members. I'm delighted to be joined by my colleagues to present the Ministry of Education's 2014-2015 budget.

With me today to help answer questions that committee members may have are Dan Florizone, deputy minister; Greg Miller, assistant deputy minister; Donna Johnson, assistant deputy minister; Clint Repski, acting assistant deputy minister; Robert Spelliscy, executive director, corporate services; Kathy Deck, director of finance, corporate services; Angela Chobanik, acting executive director, education funding; Tim Caleval, executive director, student achievement and support; Gerry Craswell, executive director, information management and support; Edith Nagy, acting executive director, strategic policy; Lynn Allan, executive director, early years; Sheldon Ramstead, executive director, infrastructure; Brett Waytuck, Provincial Librarian, Provincial Library and literacy office; Doug Volk, executive director, teachers' superannuation commission; my chief of staff, Drew Dwernychuk.

Mr. Chair, education is a prominent component of the Saskatchewan plan for growth, and I'd like to discuss how the Ministry of Education is going to achieve the goals set in the plan before we discuss the 2014-2015 budget.

The Ministry of Education has a philosophy and approach to learning called student first, which is about putting the needs of our students at highest importance. It's about asking ourselves every day, in everything we do, in every decision we make, does this put the student first, and what difference will this make for the student?

It also means keeping up with infrastructure demands as well as shining a spotlight on success throughout our sector. We want to ensure everyone is able to benefit from the incredible work happening in our schools. By putting the student first we know we will accomplish the outcomes set forth in our education sector's strategic plan and thus achieve our commitments to the plan for growth.

We are placing reading, writing, and math at the top of our

priority list, and over time want to see 80 per cent of our students at or above grade level in these areas. By collaborating and building partnerships with our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population, there will be significant improvement in achievement and graduation rates. This will reduce the graduation disparity and we will see our Aboriginal communities reach their full potential. We will see 85 per cent of our students walk across a stage at graduation and receive a high school diploma. To do this we need to continue to ensure that our education outcomes are improving.

Our ultimate goal is to have the best education system in Canada. Although there will be challenges ahead, I believe we can achieve this. We all want each and every student to be able to fully participate in all the opportunities available to them in our growing province.

The plan for growth puts a lot of emphasis on education, and I'm pleased that our government has made educational excellence a priority in Saskatchewan. Investment in Saskatchewan students will have a direct impact on their future success and help us reach the goals set in the plan for growth.

Our job at the ministry is to ensure that the education system is well supported, and that students of all ages from all corners of the province continue to be a priority, that the student is always put first.

The 2014-15 budget is focused on securing a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people. This budget controls spending while still meeting the challenges of a growing province by investing in infrastructure and, most importantly, our people. The 2014-2015 budget continues to make students a priority by investing in pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] education, early years, libraries, literacy, and many community-based organizations.

The overall funding for education has increased by 3.1 per cent from 2013-2014. This investment in education is focused on student success and supporting growth in our province. Our commitment is to include the current enrolment factor into the funding distribution model. This allows us to be responsive and recognize enrolment growth, which is something we know is important to school divisions.

The overall funding for school divisions is 1.82 billion — that's billion with a b — an increase of 2.4 per cent. This includes a \$42 million increase in operating funding in 2014-2015. Included in the operating funding is an increase of \$19.2 million to support school divisions' current enrolment growth and projected increases of 2,140 students in 2014.

In terms of school division's fiscal year, funding will increase by 24.3 million or 1.4 per cent. Our 2014-15 budget also includes a commitment of \$96.2 million in capital funding. Included in the capital funding this year is \$4.1 million in new funding to proceed with the replacement of École Connaught and Sacred Heart elementary schools in Regina, major renovations to Sacred Heart school in Moose Jaw and major renovations to St. Brieux School in St. Brieux; \$43.5 million to advance or complete a number of other school capital projects that have been under way for several years; \$15.7 million for co-owned projects with school divisions that are all currently

under construction; \$24 million, a 23.6 per cent increase, for school preventative maintenance and renewal and emergent funding; \$6.9 million for relocatable classrooms; \$2 million to support facility assessment and pre-kindergarten capital requirements. This brings Government of Saskatchewan's overall investment in school infrastructure since November 2007 to approximately \$700 million.

This budget also provides increased investment in support of the Saskatchewan child and family agenda. We understand the impact that early childhood education will have for the future of our youngest learners. Continuing to invest in the early years is critical to student success. This budget includes \$65.7 million in operating funding for our youngest students in the early years. This is an increase of \$2.3 million.

\$1.2 million for 15 new pre-K programs to support the social, emotional, intellectual, language and literacy development of 3- and 4-year olds. An increase of \$2.2 million to create 500 additional licensed child care spaces to help meet the unprecedented demand for child care and to support positive child development, early literacy, and student success. In addition, this will enable parents to pursue their education or employment. One per cent CBO [community-based organization] funding increase for child care to support the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators.

The pre-K expansion will serve approximately 240 vulnerable three- and four-year-old children and their families. Across the province, 5,056 three- and four-year-old children and their families will have access to a pre-kindergarten program. Since 2007 our government has made a significant investment in pre-K, increasing the number of programs from 155 to 316, which more than doubles the number of programs.

Also included in this budget is funding to create 500 additional child care centre spaces, bringing the total commitment to child care spaces in Saskatchewan to over 14,200, an increase of 4,935 since 2007. As a government we have made record investments in this area since 2007, including a 53 per cent increase in the total number of child care spaces.

This budget also includes \$6 million in funding for the continued long-term, integrated, multi-year response to the recommendations from the joint task force for improving First Nations and Métis education and employment outcomes. This is double the amount provided last year.

We also remain committed to highly literate citizens and the important role public libraries have in supporting student success. Public libraries will see a 1 per cent increase, \$82,000 in the budget to the resource sharing grants. Additionally the government will continue its investment in the single integrated library system, \$80,000; the national network for equitable library services, \$100,000; interlibrary loan, \$100,000; and CommunityNet for libraries, \$2.39 million. This funding will ensure that the people of Saskatchewan can continue to access information and resources that they need through their public libraries.

Family and adult literacy-based organizations will see a 1 per cent increase in funding. These funds will ensure that at-risk, vulnerable, and marginalized students, families, and learners

will continue to receive supports in their community. Total literacy funding in 2014, 2015 will be \$2.42 million and will support adult literacy, 814,000; family literacy, 510,000; summer literacy camps, 600,000; and the Saskatchewan Community Literacy Fund, 500,000.

Saskatchewan students will also benefit from \$815,000 in new funding to implement Saskatchewan's action plan to address bullying and cyberbullying; \$588,000 in new funding to expand English as an additional language supports in school divisions; a \$2 million increase for CommunityNet bandwidth upgrades to increase Internet speeds for rural schools and expand capacity in urban schools; \$200,000 in new funding to provide alternate format materials for students with disabilities; and a number of community-based organizations will also see a 1 per cent increase in funding. These are the highlights of this year's budget.

This concludes my opening remarks. We look forward to our discussion on education and the important impact it has on the future of Saskatchewan. Mr. Chair, we are ready to answer questions.

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just first off, thanks to the minister for your time here tonight and thank you to all the officials for certainly coming here tonight to provide some answers but for your work throughout the year. It's really appreciated.

There are some standard questions that we typically go through with each of the ministries. So maybe I'll deal with those ones first, Minister, and then we'll get into some of the stuff that would be specific to education.

Could you just give a bit of a picture as to what's going on with FTEs? I recognize that it looks like the ministry itself is holding the line. It looks like the exact same number, but if you can give me a bit of a picture on what sort of reallocations or changes or new utilizations are going on within the ministry.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to let Clint Repski answer the question.

Mr. Repski: — For the FTEs for the year, there was no change, but there was a little bit of an internal transfer to central, which is subvote 1. There was an additional of eight positions, and again this is an internal transfer. In K [kindergarten], 3, there was a reduction of 5.5. In early years a negative 2. And in libraries there was a .5 reduction. So that does net to zero. So it was an internal transfer.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. And sorry, can we just go back and just with those changes and work through those areas that there are the changes. I apologize that I wasn't tracking it as closely as I should've when you were answering.

Mr. Repski: — In subvote 1, central management and services, there were six positions added to the correspondence and sector support group, one position added for strategic policy, one added for central admin. So there's a plus eight there.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right.

Mr. Repski: — In our K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education, subvote 3 there was an overall reduction of 5.5. There was a reduction of four . . . Now part of this is they moved to the other vote, the other subvote. There was a reduction of a regional service that went up into central, so there's a net zero. And also in the K-12 education, subvote 3 there was a reduction of one central admin that was moved up into central management and there was a point five addition for network and admin services. So overall there's a net 5.5 in that group.

In early years, which is subvote 8, there is a reduction of two, a negative two. Those two positions moved up into central management.

In libraries, subvote 17, there was a reduction of 0.5 FTEs and that position moved up into the K-12. So that was their plus. So it does net to zero.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. Thank you for those answers. The six in subvote 1 that have been added in correspondence and something else, can you describe, Minister, what's going on there? What function are they providing?

[19:15]

Mr. Repski: — In the communications and sector relations, the former stakeholder relations branch is a unit under what is now called the communications and sector relations branch. This branch has two units, one that provides communication support and one that provides correspondence and sector support. Sector relations is responsible for internal communications, correspondence, writing and management, print, web inquiries, and translation coordination, ministry-wide referral coordination, the coordination of sector engagement and communication, as well as case management.

The group provides support for the minister, the DMO [deputy minister's office], and the ministry to engage with the sector and vice versa as required. The casework and portions of the sector engagement would have been done previously through regional offices and the other subvote.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So that is an addition though of six individuals into this area. Is the bulk of that work the student-first task force or review?

Mr. Repski: — I'm sorry. Your question was . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So this area here, are the bulk of these positions, are they required for the student-first activities that the ministry's engaged in?

Mr. Repski: — What the work of the group does is it does provide communications support as well as stakeholder relations. So in terms of supporting the student-first agenda, they would be essential in managing queries from the public as well as providing information back and forth to the stakeholder groups.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Who heads up that division?

Mr. Repski: — The executive director is Jill Welke.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There's the review or the process that you're going through with engaging the sector partners, development of the sector plan, and these different pieces. Are these permanent positions? Do you see the number of people in this role, do you anticipate that that'll be something that you'll maintain in years moving forward? Or is this beefed up a bit to facilitate some of the engagement that's currently going on?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The answer I think is complex because things were sort of moving around, whereas there's no doubt that during the rollout of the sector plan on student-first, that this area would be more resource-intensive during that for probably several positions. And once the program is complete or finished, there would be people that would either return to other work or it may mean a reduction at that time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The strategic policy position, is there a specific focus or mandate for that position?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The position is held by Doug Forseth and it will embrace a number of different functions. He was transferred from Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, and when he was with that ministry his work was as a negotiator/mediator, so this will be a change in employment for him. So he'll have some of his additional duties that will be within this ministry plus the other things dealing with strategic planning.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So what areas specifically in the ed sector?

Mr. Florizone: — To supplement that answer, since the transfer of that full-time equivalent, Doug Forseth has taken on the position of CEO [chief executive officer] of SAHO [Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations]. That position hence has become vacant. Doug provides us support yet under his current position with SAHO. He provides us some support to STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation] bargaining to be able to provide that continuity at the table.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Then central admin, there was a pickup of a position there. Maybe just describe what that was required for and what specific mandate they'll have.

Mr. Repski: — The addition of the central admin was to add an assistant deputy minister to the ministry portfolio staff present.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The reductions in K to 12, the five and a half there, where are they coming from specifically? What function were they providing that's being removed, I guess?

Mr. Repski: — In the K to 12 they were vacancies that were transferred. They weren't encumbered by people specifically.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — As far as private use of private contractors or consultants, where's the ministry on that front? Maybe who's new, you know, what are the changes from last year? So who was added on as contractors last year and then who's being added on out of this budget year and for what role and what amount?

Mr. Florizone: — Just for clarification, as I understood the question in terms of people that have been added under contract, you're referring to personal services contracts?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes. And I might not know all the terminology, but anyone who's consulting or contracting in a private or external way that would have been added either last year or those that have been added this year or that are being planned to be added this year, and what function and role they're providing, and then the amount.

Mr. Florizone: — We have a number of contracted services that were either carried forward or additional this year. One of them that was carried forward was Mr. Wayne Back, who provides advice. He's an adviser to my office, a former director of education who has worked closely with my office. In terms of carrying forward, I've mentioned the contract with SAHO, with Doug Forseth. So Doug, although he's not new to us, he was an employee, he now is under contract to us to continue and provide continuity with respect to STF bargaining.

We also have the new bundling of schools project contract with Group2. This is a group that would provide architectural and service support in terms of the design of those new schools and new bundles. So while they're not individuals, it is a corporation who provides their resource to us, works very closely with our team and our capital branch in terms of the design of the new schools.

We have in project management, three full-time equivalents who are supporting us on the project management basis through Sierra Systems. So that's our project management office that we contract with. And the final that I have on this list is an e-transcript project manager that's consulting with us and providing . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Sorry, it's e-transcript that's consulting with us currently, so that's an individual who provides us support on transcripts. You'll notice that we made some improvements on transcripts this past year in terms of being able to access them online.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for providing those. Of course Mr. Back is a legendary Raymore Rocket as well, a fine hockey player.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll endeavour not to hold that against him.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No, I agree. I agree. The role with Doug Forseth . . . So how does his contract work? He's in his role at SAHO. And then what percentage and what value is the contract with the Ministry of Education?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can undertake to provide it to you. We don't have it tonight.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — He's splitting . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Splitting time between SAHO and the ministry. And I think the long-term plan is that he'll be with the ministry. Is that . . .

Mr. Florizone: — To clarify, long term he'll be with SAHO. What we've done is just bought some of his time. And the

notion here is, by contracting with SAHO he would be able to backfill, to be able to hire sufficient staff to look after the tables that he'd normally have to look after.

Doug has also provided us support across government into Advanced Ed — Advanced Education — so you'll notice that he's doing some work with SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] at the SIAST table. He has been providing us support at the STF table and he will obviously be providing support at the SAHO tables.

Now this is a negotiator who is used to multiple tables so we chose rather than have one individual that's dedicated, to have an individual that's experienced and would provide us with that continuity. The contract was set with SAHO and we have extended it now once. There is a cap, a limit on that contract. I just want to be very accurate with you here. So I don't have the contract in front of me but there was a limit in terms of its dollar value.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That information, would the minister endeavour to ensure that that information is provided back to . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Just asked the staff to make sure we provide it to you directly.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. And he's working . . . His whole focus is the contract, the negotiation of that contract. Is that correct?

[19:30]

Mr. Florizone: — No.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay.

Mr. Florizone: — He undertakes other work on behalf of SAHO but he's at our call. So it would be the equivalent of not only being on retainer but also being at the table for all scheduled negotiations, being involved in providing updates as required, and providing the information and sage advice that he provide both the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] and government in terms of that table.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — But just to be clear, so he, like he has the other responsibilities with SAHO that he's maintaining but the work he's doing for the Ministry of Education right now is focused specifically on the negotiation of the contract?

Mr. Florizone: — That is correct, yes. The negotiation of that STF contract.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you mind just letting folks know when that'll be concluded?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's a really good question and I can tell you it will not be tonight.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Of course I knew you couldn't answer that question. We'll have some follow-up as it relates to that process though in a little further into these estimates.

The bundling . . . Focused on the school bundling project, you have a group . . . Did you say it was called Group2? Just I guess as it relates to Group2, who are they? When did you contract them? Where are they from? What's the focus of their work?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're being joined by Assistant Deputy Minister Donna Johnson, finance director.

Ms. Johnson: — Hi. Yes, so Group2 was hired following an RFP [request for proposal] process in January of 2014. And Group2 has an office in Red Deer, Alberta and an office here in Saskatoon. And we have Craig Webber from Group2 and Laura Plosz out of the Saskatoon office. Craig is out of the Red Deer office; Laura's out of the Saskatoon office. They're our prime deliverers from Group2 on that particular contract.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And have they had . . . Did they have a presence in Saskatchewan before the contract with the ministry here, before engaging in this work?

Ms. Johnson: — They opened their office in Saskatoon prior to winning the RFP, but it was only within the past year and so that they opened their Saskatoon office.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And what are they delivering for the ministry, what function?

Ms. Johnson: — The function that they provide is some technical advisory services and project management services. Primarily the primary work that they do for us though is the development of the core designs for the school bundles for the nine elementary joint-use schools.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Are they architects?

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, they are architects.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Were there many bids from local Saskatchewan architecture firms or architects? You said there was an RFP that was put out.

Ms. Johnson: — Yes, we had a good competition through the RFP. We received five proposals in November of 2013, and we used an evaluation team that included representatives from the five school divisions that are receiving the nine joint-use schools, along with representatives from the Ministry of Central Services, and of course the Ministry of Education. And through that evaluation process it was shortlisted to three firms, and Group2 was the successful consulting group.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Out of the five proposals that came forward, were any of those Saskatchewan firms?

Ms. Johnson: — Sorry, I don't have that information with me here today.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Are you able to share who the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — [Inaudible] . . . provide the information. I would assume that a number of them would've been Saskatchewan. But we could certainly . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't think there's anything would preclude us from providing the list, the names of them, would there . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks, so if you could provide the names and where they're located.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Sure.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The bundling piece, I mean we can talk, you know, again that's another piece. I know we have five hours together and I maybe won't depart into that area as well because there might be a few questions I'd have on that front but certainly I know that this is an area where there's notable concern, both within the education sector but also in the construction sector in the province so I just . . . We'll leave it at that for now and then follow up with some questions at another time. Thanks for the answers there.

So your systems, who are these folks? How long have they been engaged and what are they delivering?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're joined by Greg Miller.

Mr. Miller: — So to begin, the project managers, the three project managers that were discussed are with an organization called ITC consulting. They provide support to the ministry in project management support in regard to the student-first initiative as well as technology transformations and the overall operation of the SAS [student achievement and supports], some initiatives in the SAS branch.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I'm sorry, I don't know the SAS . . . [inaudible].

Mr. Miller: — Oh, sorry, student achievement and supports.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay.

Mr. Miller: — Yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So they're there for the student-first engagement consultation, that piece that you're engaged with, or tech transformation. I'm not quite sure what that is, if you're able to speak to that piece.

Mr. Miller: — So I have a list. So the projects that they're engaged in right now are the ELCC's [early learning and child care] project in the early years which is a technology data gathering project that involves the integration of technology with the operations of early years.

The second project is student attendance. This is a project we've initiated to gather student attendance towards the support of attendance in school divisions across the province.

Next is the teacher regulation project, the project management around schedule and moving that project along.

Next is the Te Kotahitanga project, working with partners in the education sector to explore different ways to support success for First Nations and Métis students. The next piece is Help Me Tell My Story and Help Me Talk About Math. Those are two

assessment initiatives that deal with early oral language development and early numeracy support for students.

Next is anti-bullying, work on the coordination of the anti-bullying initiative for the province to ensure that the plan for anti-bullying is delivered and deployed. The next is support of the work around WNCP, western and northern Canadian protocol in education. The next is item bank, which was an initiative that was put on pause and stopped last fall.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — What's that one?

Mr. Miller: — Item bank refers to the construction of a mechanism to gather information through assessments.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Like the standardized testing in the sense that it's talked about commonly.

Mr. Miller: — So the item bank is a method to put together . . . For example, departmental exams would be one thing that would use an item bank. And then finally a project on the transfer of reading level data between school divisions and the ministry. That's the coordination of student reading levels in grade 1, 2, 3.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — They've got lots of projects they're working on. Where's this . . . It's ITC. It's Sierra Systems, but it's out of . . .

Mr. Miller: — Yes, it's ITC.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Are they a Saskatchewan company?

Mr. Miller: — Yes, they're a Saskatchewan company.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just to be clear, how long have they been engaged with the ministry?

Mr. Miller: — Since October.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And were they a Saskatchewan company before that? Or did they expand and put a presence here and license here, incorporate here? Obviously that's what I think you mean by Saskatchewan company. But before that, were they a Saskatchewan company as well?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The company has been doing work for the ministry since last October. The ADM [assistant deputy minister] listed a number of things that are there, and some of the things are narrow focused. There's a number of things that were put on pause. So they've done no work on the items that were put on pause, but there's some related things dealing with departmental examinations, so they would be doing that type of thing. And my understanding is it's a Regina-based company with Regina-based principals.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I know there was some items that, you know, apparently were placed onto pause. You've cited that some of these items may have been placed onto pause. My question would be, you know, when you place those items on pause, are you still able to get the value you require out of the contract you'd have with this entity?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — This contract was entered into after the items were placed on pause, so there would have been no work that they would have done and no loss relating to that out of the items that were put on pause. And nothing has been taken off of pause other than . . . Well nothing has been taken off of pause that was put on pause.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Other than . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well I was going to say early-year evaluation and . . . [inaudible] . . . but those were never put on pause.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So everything that went on pause is still on pause.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The employee satisfaction surveys are useful tools and can support good management. Has the ministry engaged with an employee satisfaction survey directly within the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Florizone: — We in fact do conduct regular employee satisfaction surveys. What we do, it's a bit of an experiment right now: a series of four very simple questions that are asked every Thursday.

So what I've tried to do with the ministry is encourage them, and this may be a little too frequent, but encourage them to seek today's data today. In other words, what is the latest? How are people feeling? How is it that we're doing? So I'm not sure that the questions are as refined as they could be.

This is only our second, and I think we're entering into the third week of collecting this data. I haven't seen it yet nor has the minister, but the idea is to be able to, rather than a snapshot that is two years old, we'll be able to, in principle, track over time how we're doing and to see how our meetings or communiqués or discussions are working this week. So this is not anything that is being conducted under a consultant or . . . It is quick, simple, and basically something's done every Thursday.

[19:45]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And how's that data collected? And when will it be collected and reviewed in a way that has, I guess, an analysis of the information?

Mr. Florizone: — We've really strongly encouraged both the ministry and the sector to take data out of the computers and put it up on our walls. And the reason we do that is all of our meetings are being converted to stand up at the beginning where we walk and take a look at the data and how it's progressing.

So we do that with our sector planning, the targets and the time frames, leading and lagging measures, but we're also doing it with some operational measures, satisfaction being one of them. Another important measure would be areas like sick time or workplace safety, so that we can see in real time how we're doing and what interventions or types of activity should we be concentrating on today or this week or this month.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And that data, the new surveys that you're conducting across the ministry, when will that information be analyzed or received by the minister?

Mr. Florizone: — Every month we as a ministry will be looking at this. And we will be using our administrative huddles, the ability to go to the wall and monthly look at the data. That data will have obviously four or five points, every week a point on a graph. So we haven't talked to the minister about his interest in looking at that level of operational detail but most certainly monthly is possible. And in fact once we really get going, we may be able to see it on a weekly basis.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And as far as surveying or understanding of the other . . . all the sector partners, for example, one being educators, I guess just what tools are you using to engage teachers directly in their satisfaction? And how much have you factored in the report that was put together by SIDRU [Saskatchewan instructional development and research unit] on teacher time and teacher satisfaction recently that was submitted to the minister and ministry?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The individual teachers, educators are not . . . They're employees of the division, so it wouldn't be appropriate for us to engage with them directly. Over the last summer the Premier, myself, and the deputy minister spent a lot of time travelling around the province meeting with parents, students, educators, and a lot of individual teachers. And that was as a result of . . . you know, in the context of what things we'd put on pause, where the future of education like what the strategic direction should be for the province. So that was the nature of the discussions that took place.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just maybe I didn't hear properly. Were you as minister — or I guess you weren't minister at that point — were you part of those meetings? The Premier had gone out and held a few meetings with small groups of teachers. Were you a part of those?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. The Premier travelled himself. I met with teachers on an ongoing basis since that time, either in schools or wherever I have a chance to talk to a teacher.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Did you say the Deputy Premier was also involved in that?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The Deputy Premier did not travel with the Premier. He travelled separately and engaged a lot of . . . And I think the term that he used was that he wanted to do a lot of deep listening.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes. He engaged with some good people in those meetings that he held.

Maybe just shifting the focus into lean specifically and wanting to know what's budgeted for lean in the Ministry of Education in the current year.

Mr. Florizone: — To supplement just to the last question, there are a number of other sources that school divisions are using to gather feedback from teachers. And we're certainly trying to encourage this. So one is the Tell Them From Me survey. There is a teacher component to that that the school divisions are

actively monitoring.

It was mentioned, and I just wanted to clarify that Assistant Deputy Minister Greg Miller and I travelled the province. It was further, and following teacher time, the report, and post the last round of collective bargaining that didn't result in an agreement. We travelled some 9,000 kilometres, Greg doing the vast majority of the driving and travelling, the great driver. And 18 communities that were visited, I have to tell you that the school boards and their administrations were present, did attend, and it was a very successful round of travel.

Part of what we're trying to do as well with our sector planning, which is a lean-based initiative, is encourage measurement in real time. And I mentioned that we're doing that, in part it's because we're trying to experiment in new ways of doing it within the ministry. But the other is to be able to showcase for the sector the art of the possible. So it's our hope and what we aim for is that the same walls that we'll establish at the ministry — taking the data out of computers and putting it out there — we can have that emulated as well within the divisions.

Now specific to lean, we have certainly a budget that's been established around improvement. We have one full-time equivalent that works within the ministry proper who is dedicated specifically to lean. Others participate from time to time, depending on the nature of the topic. We haven't set out a full project plan for the future year, but if last year is any indication, which we believe it will be, you'll get a sense if I just kind of go through very quickly what we've spent. In fact I'll take it right to 2010, since launch.

Since 2010 the ministry has spent 247,000 for consultant support, and that's for ministry processes specifically. Of that support, of that amount, 216,000 was to support a 3P [production preparation process] event for the school bundle project. So when we brought in the architects, we're talking about group two, part of that, and part of the component was to also do what's referred to as 3P lean.

We gathered a hundred participants — students, parents, teachers, administrators — and spent five days in a warehouse in Saskatoon scaling and mocking up the school of the future. We found that this approach to capital design is highly interactive, very promising in terms of the ideas that come forth, but also it does a great job of capturing the great school designs that we've had in the past in this province and bringing the best of the best forward. That work continues.

Now in terms of the work, we've also since 2010 spent 372 days of people-days participating on lean projects. So this is our staff, dedicated on projects, thinking through improvements. So I want it to be clear that you are aware of that. So there is an imputed budget that is the time of the 299 full-time equivalents that we have, that portion of time that they spent doing improvement work.

We provided 180,000 to school divisions for what we refer to as value stream mapping. To a large extent this is following a process. Best yet, it's following a student — following and mapping and then making improvements. So this is literally a mapping piece that looks at value and waste from the consumer's perspective.

We also now have become self-sufficient as a ministry, so we don't any longer use the consultants for our internal work. The nature of our projects has meant that we have enough expertise within the ministry, with the one full-time equivalent that we have and others who have been trained, to be able to support lean deployment internal to the ministry.

The sector isn't quite at that phase. There's still much work to be done in terms of the improvement activities. I am pleased to say that as a result of my work, our work in health, we had in Education an individual with the Ministry of Education, Karen Henderson, who was very involved in strategy deployment, lean strategy deployment within the health sector. What that has resulted in is her ability to train and to form up and create a sector plan with no consulting support. The support around being able to deploy that tool was all gained in her time with Health. So by building up that expertise, between her experience and my experience and the people that surrounded us, we were able to deploy.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for that information. The 372 people-days, would that be valued sort of at 120,000, or what would the value, rough approximate value, that you attribute there?

Mr. Florizone: — The 372 we could, we could break it down, I'm not sure if it would be a useful exercise, but if you were to think of it as an average wage, average daily wage. The thing is it's not incremental to our work. What we're suggesting here is that it should be part and parcel of each of us who are employed within a ministry or the sector to be able to dedicate time daily for improvement. So we counted up the hours that they spent in lean initiatives and that totalled up to 372 days, the equivalent of a little more than a full-time equivalent. Actually it's a bit more than that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — A bit more because, yes.

Mr. Florizone: — Because 200 day.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. It's almost twice.

Mr. Florizone: — Almost two full-time equivalents.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No, that's my rough math. Do the value processing pieces, when you talk about consumers, in this case are you referring to students or who were the consumers in your . . .

Mr. Florizone: — The ideal is students, but I must say that with a lot of our work we've undertaken, it depends on the comfort level of many of these agencies or ministries. Some of them have decided to look at internal business processes. So they're actually perhaps tracking a widget, or tracking an account. But the goal, the optimum is for them to track students and measure value and waste from a student, parent, caregiver, point of view. That gives us a much truer sense of where the real impactful changes can be made.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And could you cite a few examples of waste that you've identified through that process.

Mr. Florizone: — Yes, I'd be pleased to. So if I were to take a

look at it, let's look at the sector. We took a look at grant and contract payment processes and what they were looking at. The objective wasn't necessarily to save money, but to reduce the time it took to complete a contract. So there was participation and they avoided \$200,000 in costs. That's measurable impact by delving into that particular area.

Service agreement administration process, they improved the Ministry of Education's internal processes for approving service agreements. In this one it was a process improvement. It didn't result in savings but time spent and energy spent and also accuracy was improved. Planning and monitoring and evaluating service agreements — once again very similar. Teacher certification and credentialing, that was make the teacher certificate and credentialing process less paper-based, less time-consuming, and easier to navigate. That had a cost avoidance of 120 working days and \$100,000 in actual savings.

Family child care home licensing, improving the cycle time and client service for potential family child care home providers. And what we did was we saved 55 days and staff time that it generally took in that process by streamlining it. Capital approval processes, we saved \$80,000. Family child care home licensing process, that was internal and it was a review of our annual relicensing processes. That was a process improvement. No hard dollar savings but a big improvement in process. From secondment to general proficiency awards to agreement management to air billing to departmental exam setting to the 3P event with schools, and coming up with that design. And again the list goes on, but those are probably some of the great examples of what we've done.

Probably the biggest example that I've seen on the student facing has been in the area of student supports. So we had a school division take on wait times. And we heard this in spades from teachers that when you're looking for either internal or external support for a student and you have to wait weeks, sometimes months — totally unacceptable. So the wait-list improvements were quite dramatic. They've actually cut them in half and there's still a lot more work to be done there.

[20:00]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I might spend a little more time on that exact piece a little later. I mean this whole, you know, whether it's occupational therapists or ed psych or there's . . . I mean there's huge concern in the sector. So I haven't heard, you know, much applauding of improvements of wait-lists on that front. What I continue to hear is just unacceptable delays. It's good that it's a focus, but I do hear that that's an area where far too few students aren't accessing in a timely way or able to access in a timely way the supports they need. I am pleased to hear that it's of consideration.

Just as far as when you're reviewing the waste . . . And are you focusing that discussion? Because I know when I meet with a lot of parents and students and teachers, one of the areas that often gets referred to in a sort of a wasteful way would be this monkeying around with the extra number of minutes in a day. Many would see that as sort of a wasteful exercise within the sector as opposed to sort of meaningful efforts. Is that one of the pieces that was brought forward?

Mr. Florizone: — We have a number of issues other than just simply wasted as measured on a micro level. One of the areas that was really interesting for the minister and I, as we were new to the sector, were the sheer number of initiatives that were under way. And literally if you counted them up, between the ministry, the divisions themselves, and perhaps the schools and local community initiatives, hundreds of initiatives impacting teachers. So when we heard from teachers that there was not only that but the whole issue around school day, school year, and calendar issues, they were facing an unprecedented level of change. Also their classrooms and the classroom of today significantly different than even three or four years ago. So we certainly heard and can echo those items having been raised by teachers and the need to really work away at all of these.

On the hundreds of priorities, our whole approach to sector planning has been about focus and discipline. It isn't about anything new coming forward, necessarily. But we know we can achieve the growth plan targets if we focus on fewer things and really focus and finish as opposed to spreading ourselves so thinly across multiple priorities. The real challenges are all good things and it's very difficult to convince people that we should set aside some good things in order to focus in on a select few, knowing full well that if everything's a priority, nothing's a priority.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well it'll be something we'll continue to track. You know, I think that when you're looking through the exercises and you talk about some of the widgets and some of the processes that dollars can be saved, those are very reasonable changes that should be considered, should be implemented, understanding their impacts. But I would argue there's just listening to the sector across the province.

And you referenced a number of kilometres. I've put on thousands of kilometres myself, meeting with educators and parents and school boards and the educational leaders in the province. And I think there's just a phenomenal amount of wasted opportunity in how that sector is being interfaced with, how they've been treated by . . . And I don't look to the senior official. I look to the minister on these pieces because I respect the role of the civil service on these pieces. But a lot of wasted opportunities. And it's tough to quantify what demoralizing profession costs for example, moving forward, or what the costs of not focusing on what's going to optimize engagement for students across the province as opposed to an agenda that might be coming from somewhere else.

So as I've said before, I'm pleased to hear some indication that some of these things are in approach or in review and that there's some contrition towards the approach that has been taken by government. But I still think there's a long ways to go.

Thank you for laying out some of the lean examples where there have been some savings that have been highlighted by the deputy minister. As far as the lean piece and its total costs, we have sort of . . . There's the consultant. There's the dollars . . . There's the cost for the 3P event. There's the 1.5 FTEs. What about the entire ed sector and the cost of lean? What analysis was done? What's the cost last year for engaging the broader ed sector — teachers, boards, administration — and what's the projections for this year?

Mr. Florizone: — So since 2012 the ministry provided 180 K all-in to the school divisions, and as a result of that investment, the school divisions have reported 156,000 in hard dollar savings. But in addition there's been a reduction of 690 days in the time spent in activities that would be non-value-added. So those, they're a bit difficult to measure because when you look at it you might say, well why aren't those hard savings? It's because the staff are still there. And in lean we do not promote removing staff because of . . . and having . . . You could just imagine coming up with great examples of spending more time with clients and then only to have those hours stripped from budgets. What they've done is they've redirected that time to value-added activities.

The ministry plans to spend 370,000 in lean consultant support in school divisions in '14-15, and while we have and we continue to still identify the areas, I can tell you that we have some very specific interest in transportation, in unpacking windshield time, the time it takes for the supports to get to the various schools. There's some interesting idea generation around teleconnection and being able to offer . . . For instance in the area of psychology, I'm very familiar with telepsychology and some of the benefits there.

So without pre-empting what kind of ideas may come forward, we have an interest in shifting to more student-centred lean activities. The improvements will be measured in one way which is dollar savings, but much more important will be ease of access, quality of service, and the ability for teachers and students to get the service in a timely way.

We heard examples where teachers were saying even a month wait or a two-month wait in a normal, traditional setting may appear to be fair but that could be next year when it comes to a classroom. These are very important issues that need to be dealt with.

When we're taking a look at what we need today, what needs to be put in place this week, those are the types of aims that we would have in terms of getting timely response to teachers in classrooms for students.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There's been a discussion of sensei being utilized in other ministries. Have sensei been engaged in the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Florizone: — There has not been. We have once again benefited from the training that took place in Health. I certainly have worked with the teachers that have been involved in the health sector and have applied those learnings in my time in Education, but I can tell you we have not had nor have we hired senseis.

We do have a hour and a half that's dedicated to lean estimates and I'll be very pleased as the deputy responsible for lean, along with the minister, to go through, in depth, government-wide deployment.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you. We might come back to some questions there but we'll move along to some of the other areas right now. Maybe just an update. We talked briefly about the teachers' contract. What's the cost of 1 per cent of the teachers' contract right now in the next fiscal year? Is it 10

million?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well there's 1 per cent of this would be in the range of \$9 million, but the officials will verify the calculation. I'm loathe to have any discussion going on during the negotiations or speculation as to what may take place. I don't wish to prejudice anything or say anything that would be inappropriate regarding the negotiations.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — No. That 9 million, that's in one fiscal year I believe for the 1 per cent. Or that was the value from a couple of years ago, so I wonder if it's gone up a bit.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We certainly would have the ministry figure out what was paid on an annual basis for that. So they can verify the amount, and we can certainly provide you with a figure of what 1 per cent of the total salary cost was.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. And then just maybe to understand as well what a settlement will cost right now because of the retro . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The officials are saying 905 million, but we'll verify it. If it's any different than that, we'll get back to you.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure. And then the contract ended . . . When did the contract end?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Summer of '13.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Summer of '13. So then there'll be some retroactive costs that would be factored in there as well.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There certainly will be costs that will be before and after the settlement, but I wouldn't speculate on what those might be.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I didn't see a single dollar of contingency. I know you can't say that we've set aside such-and-such amount. I didn't see a single dollar in the budget of contingency to settle the contract.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Nor would we put anything in the contract that would be an indicia of where we might be. As soon as you put that in, you've essentially tipped your hand as to what the mandate would be. I can assure you that once a contract is settled, we will be back with the supplementary estimates for whatever the additional costs will be if the savings, you know, can't be found within the ministry. But we've never had a contract where we didn't fund it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The funding changes for each of the divisions, are you able to share . . . Do you have a document that you could table here today or provide as it relates to the numbers for the divisions and where they're at per pupil and whether they've received increases or decreases?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't know whether it would show the costs, the payment per pupil. We can certainly provide you with what the payments are to the individual divisions. The payment to them is, you know, the divisions can reallocate a lot of the funds within, they can move from envelop to envelop, but

inside each of the payment there's a portion for preventative maintenance and capital, there's a portion for transportation, and a variety of other things.

So we can certainly give you the total costs, but it would be deceptive to look at it and simply multiply by the number of students because you could have some ongoing capital work that's being completed or unusual transportation or other . . . We'll certainly have . . . The documents we have — which I'll get somebody to make a copy of them — are available on our website as well. If you like I'll get somebody to make you a copy of them, but they are on the website.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — We can, if you leave them here today as well, that's helpful. It can inform some of the discussion. I think we probably have the same ones at this point in time.

What are you hearing from the school boards? Who's struggling out there with the number that they've been provided and who's in a tough position as school boards? I've heard from, you know, more than a few. We've talked about some of them publicly, but I guess I'd put it to the Ed minister to . . .

[20:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We know the formula and the calculation was different this year than it was in previous years. And whether the formula has to be changed or reworked, we have the officials working with Saskatoon Public right now and they may well be doing some work with some others.

Some of the work that may be done will deal with unique or emergent situations because we're dealing right now with two schools in Regina that weren't initially planned. So because those are rebuilds of existing schools, they may have some unusual costs: some that will be regarded as capital, some of it will be regarded as moving or transition costs. So there's ongoing discussion, a number of places across the province right now.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Could you just flesh out a little bit? I mean I've heard from various folks and had various conversations and observed some of the discussion at various school board meetings. Were you able to share where, you know, whom you've heard of your sector partners here that are having some challenging times with the current budget they've received?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well the two that I mention would be, you know, we've had some discussion with Regina, wanting to give them help and that's both school divisions here. The one that we've heard from and the officials are working with right now actively is Saskatoon Public is the other one.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And have you not heard from some of the other divisions that are in a tough spot right now?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Not that I have been engaged with myself directly, but there may be some others that have come to the ministry.

The officials are . . . At this point we're not in a position we can say which ones are unhappy or which ones are struggling. At

this point it's early on in the process. A lot of the school divisions are making inquiries as to why a particular calculation was made, why, are trying to understand it. So we can't say whether those people would be regarded as struggling or unhappy. The one that I know of that had issues was Saskatoon Public. We've already reached out to the two in Regina, saying, if you have issues we want to have those discussions with you.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. They are the Education estimates and it is the budget for Education that we're looking at here. And you know, they're sort of just numbers on the page until they are lived out in the 28 school divisions across the province with the school boards and administrators that are making decisions with the numbers they've been provided, and the students and the teachers and the staff and the parents all impacted by those choices. So I think it's not, you know, I think we need to have a better discussion of the range of concerns, at the very least, that are coming in, and from which divisions.

They are of course education partners. That's a key piece that I think has been missing with this government in this sector. And I think it's important for us to be able to talk about the impacts for those educational partners. So if we could speak maybe as less opposed to saying this division is in a challenging spot, if you could just speak directly to what divisions are facing and what they've communicated to you or what you're aware of. I'm sure before you set a budget you're aware of some of the impacts that they'll be facing. So just some of the nature of concerns and which school divisions you're hearing those from.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I don't think we're able to say with any degree of certainty who has concerns or any degree of dissatisfaction. What we have is people phoning, saying how is this calculated, how is that calculated. It's a new system and the system was developed in conjunction with all 28 school divisions. The formula was struck by way of a consultative process with the 28 school divisions. They accepted it. And then when it was applied, then it was, oh how does this work; how does that work? So an inquiry I wouldn't regard as an area of concern. So whether it'll lead to later concerns or not, I don't know. I can certainly indicate that what we've heard from Saskatoon Public and we know we have some work we have to do there.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. I'm a bit disappointed that we can't have a bit more of a detailed conversation about our educational partners, those in the field that are making those decisions here right now because I think there are quite a few impacts out there that are being discussed in an open way, and I'm disappointed that those aren't able to be discussed here tonight. But this process is being reviewed and refined. I guess the question might be, how many school divisions would see their budget that they've received as something less than status quo?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Most, you know, a lot of the school divisions that have had an increase in enrolment then would see an increase in funding. You would have the answers that we had during question period as to what the increase in enrolment was, what the percentage increase in funding was. And we could, you know, we could certainly, if you choose to ask those questions of other school divisions, we'll certainly get those answers.

We intend to work with all of the school divisions to try and answer the questions that they have, explain them, and identify whether there are other issues that we need to work with on them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Do you as the minister feel that there's need for changes to that education funding formula as it exists right now?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I've yet to see a formula that existed in this ministry or most other things I'm involved in that didn't require change on an ongoing and regular basis.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — So the answer is yes. Yes, it does require refinement. I don't know how much. I know from my meeting with Saskatoon Public that there's issues and methods of calculation there that we're not . . . We appear to be using different sets of numbers. We want to resolve that. And I know there was a meeting by telephone last week on Friday. I haven't heard back from the officials as to . . . And I know at this point it's a work in progress.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Again, so I mean the willingness to accept that there needs to be change is good, but what really assists with that discussion is to be able to identify some of the current impacts, some of the consequences of the current formula. And I guess we can flesh that out possibly a bit more into this meeting but also in the days to come. And certainly it's important. Just what I'm hearing here tonight, I think it's incredibly important for, you know, we have these school boards and administrations across the province that do such exceptional work and are working so hard to better education within their divisions. I think it's really important for those divisions to be making clear the choices, the consequences, the impacts that they're experiencing as school boards.

And I think it would be really helpful for this discussion — of course making sure that that's shared directly with yourself, and then myself as well as critic — so that it can inform this discussion much beyond sort of the, you know, general statements about refinements. Because it's really important to know, you know, which school division is making tough choices around certain services they're providing because of the funding formula and the budgetary dollars that are in place. So I would certainly encourage those education partners to communicate with yourself to assist with that refinement process and of course myself as well.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you that I have yet to refuse to take a call from an education board Chair or a director and will continue to have those and encourage the ministry to work through whatever changes need be made.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — That's great, and I would be astounded if you rejected to take a phone call from a school board or a school board Chair. These are education partners.

But I do have some more questions around the funding here. But I also . . . I know that there's a couple of estimates going on downstairs that I have to tend to for just a few minutes, and I'll be back up to join you here shortly. We have the very important

file that we'd like to keep track of as it relates to initiatives to address bullying. And my colleague from Saskatoon Centre and the associate critic for Education is going to follow up on some of those questions. I'll be back in to join those as well because certainly it's very important work.

Mr. Forbes: — So I'm going to start and ask that . . . We see that there is some money set aside in the budget for bullying. I'd be curious if you could give a brief overview of how much it is and what the plans are to see it rolled out and what the goals and aims are of the initiative.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to let the ADM Greg Miller answer the questions as to the dollar value. We're working towards having the website roll out. Our original target date was late May and it may well . . . The working out is taking somewhat longer than they thought. So they're thinking it may take them somewhat beyond the end of May, but we're putting pressure on them to try and focus their energies on that.

The plan will be loosely based or closely based on the ERASE [expect respect and a safe education] model in BC [British Columbia], and we're contracting with the same entity that provides the model in BC. And as you're likely aware, it will include some online resources and a reporting tool, a telephone help line, and then resources to ensure that parents, teachers know what issues to look for and where to look for supports. So that's in a short summary where they are, but I'll let Mr. Miller provide more statistics than that.

The plan was developed as a result of the work that the Legislative Secretary Jennifer Campeau did, travelled across the province, and certainly heard the seriousness of the problem. And I think the comment that I would make on it is the biggest change in bullying a generation or two ago, it was something that happened in the schoolyard. A principal or a parent would get involved and usually would be able to resolve it. But now with the Internet and cyberbullying, it follows the student home and often right into their bedroom and continues through the course of the night. So there is an absolute violation and intrusion of the person's dignity or their rights as a human. They would wake up however many times during the night.

So the concern with having good tools in place is the horrific anguish that a parent would go through by losing a child to suicide. And I think everyone agrees that that should be, and we will probably never know the success of the program, but I'm hoping that a year or two from now we can say that no more children have taken their life as a result of cyberbullying. But I don't know whether we will ever get to the point where we eliminate bullying or are able to prevent that kind of tragedy completely. But I think as a government it's incumbent on us to take every step that's appropriate to try and understand and try and direct resources to that. So anyway I'll let . . .

Mr. Miller: — So on November 14th of 2013, the government released *Saskatchewan's Action Plan to Address Bullying and Cyberbullying* which outlines a three-year action plan forecasted to expend \$1.4 million. The provincial action plan will provide students, families, schools, with the knowledge, skills, resources, and support to help Saskatchewan children and youth feel safe and accepted at school, in their communities, and online. This fiscal year the forecast is to spend \$815,000 on

the initiative for the 2014-15 time period.

We've already begun to implement many of the recommendations identified in the action plan. In November, 99 youth from across the province attended a student-first youth forum. And we continue to work with our partners to build consistency to develop resources and tools to ensure the safety of youth across the province.

In terms of the recommendations, there were six key areas that were proposed. And these recommendations are as follows: that we work with our education sector partners to ensure greater consistency in the prevention of, response to, and intervention in bullying incidents; to develop an online, anonymous tool to ensure bullying incidents are reported and responded to in a timely manner; as well to assess the implications in Saskatchewan of upcoming federal cyberbullying legislation; and to provide students support to develop appropriate, responsible online behaviour; provide a stand-alone website for anti-bullying tools and resources for students, for families, and for educators; and certainly to engage youth in building solutions to address bullying issues.

[20:30]

Mr. Forbes: — So it's a three-year plan. What year are we in now of that three-year plan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Year one, because it started November of last year.

Mr. Forbes: — Sorry. It's year one because it started last November?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It started last November. So if you call that as year one, we're still in year one although we're in the second fiscal year of it. The resources that we put in this year's budget are for, you can call it, an extension of year one, or you can call it as partial year two.

Mr. Forbes: — But you're not creating a different yearly plan, November to November to November to November?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. That was just the start date, and we do everything on a fiscal year.

Mr. Forbes: — It will end in three years. So that was November 2013. So you're suggesting that the plan will be all wrapped up . . . we'll see things November 2016?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The plan talked in terms of being a three-year plan. It started in November, so we started funding this year. By being a three-year plan, that sort of identified the action items during the three years, but it's a plan and a task that will continue on. It's not something that we assume will ever end.

Mr. Forbes: — So funding will be continuous?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It may be different funding. We've identified the initiatives that need to take place during the next three years, next three fiscal years. And then going forward from there, it may be that it's done in a different manner with

more or less funding as the case may . . .

Mr. Forbes: — The funding that was used for the consultations, and that was sort of like a pre-year, that was minus one year . . . This is the first year, '14-15. '15-16 will be year two. '16-17 will be year three of . . . [inaudible] . . . coming out of a budget.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm told that's a fair statement. But the . . . [inaudible] . . . that it is a three-year ongoing process.

Mr. Forbes: — But you will be spending four years of funding because you've already spent one year in last year's budget.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Some, we've spent some money last year. A lot of the money we spent last year was in budget money that was redirected from other things. We didn't go back for a mid-year supplemental, supplementary estimate last year.

Mr. Forbes: — So this is the first of three years. The reason I'm really asking is I know that there's been a lot of groups who are very interested, very supportive, but they're curious when they've heard the three year . . . Because there's been some talk out there that last year was the first year and this is the second year and next year will be the last year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well we haven't entered into significant contracts with service providers. We don't have the website operational. So if somebody was supportive last year, we thank them for their support. And any work that anybody's done was largely voluntary. But we do have contracts we wish to enter into with groups such as Red Cross and that type of thing going forward.

Mr. Forbes: — So the 815,000 . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Is new money for this year.

Mr. Forbes: — Is the first of the 1.4 million to be spent, right? There's been nothing . . . Last year's activities is not being added on to the 815.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's correct.

Mr. Forbes: — Because I think that's their concern. There's a lot of hope for a lot of stuff. And they're saying, well is this already 1 million's been spent and we're just talking about . . . So good. Appreciate the clarification on that.

So the website you've been talking about that will be up hopefully by the end of May . . . and that would be great, particularly if it was up before the end of June, because really with kids being gone from school you lose a pretty important vehicle there of communication. So I want to get a handle on that. How much is the website costing?

Mr. Miller: — To launch the website was \$35,000.

Mr. Forbes: — And then who is doing the website? What company is it?

Mr. Miller: — So the website will be a partnership with the facilitators of the ERASE tool in British Columbia.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. And then the online reporting, what is the actual, what is the anticipated cost of that?

Mr. Miller: — So the actual tool that students or children would use would be \$250,000.

Mr. Forbes: — And who is developing that and where is that? What company? Or who's . . .

Mr. Miller: — So again this will be done in partnership with the BC ERASE, with the ERASE tool.

Mr. Forbes: — Is that a government or is that a company or entity or is this a private entity that's contracted to BC?

Mr. Miller: — That entity is a partnership between the University of British Columbia and the Ministry of Education in British Columbia.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Good. And then where will this be run out of? Can you describe what this online reporting . . . It's obviously heavily based in technology. And the servers, will they be here in Saskatchewan or will they be in BC or how will this . . . What will it look like?

Mr. Caleval: — Good evening. I'm Tim Caleval, executive director of student achievement and supports branch. So your question was about where the data is housed?

Mr. Forbes: — [Inaudible] . . . step back and explain to me, walk me through how this online reporting looks like.

Mr. Caleval: — So what will happen is a student, if a child goes online and submits a report, once an incident report is put online it goes to a secured database. The database is in British Columbia. And a system of alerts and tracking ensures if the incident isn't addressed within 72 hours or deactivated by the folks that have to deactivate it back at the school division level, the Ministry of Education will be following up.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think we missed a step.

Mr. Caleval: — Sorry.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The student makes a report online, or the witness or whoever it is. So it goes through the reporting tool and then it's directed back from the reporting tool to the appropriate school division. Within each school division is a designated individual that is expected to deal with it either by way of referring the student somewhere or whatever the appropriate matter is, and then there is a system of follow-ups to make sure — technology follow-ups — to make sure that it actually did take place.

Mr. Forbes: — When you say online, it's Internet-based or can a student phone as well?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The ERASE tool is an online one, but there will also be a phone system as well.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. Now is there more to this? I mean, so okay. So they've made the call and they're tracking and there's a 72-hour time period in which something must happen?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If nothing happens then the system sends another notice to another official within the ministry that will follow up — within a division — to make sure that it happens. When the person within the division receives the call, the division is expected to have the resources and people in place that they'll deal with it appropriately. And there's a variety of different ways they'll deal with it. If it's something that comes from a witness, then it's more of an inquiry. If it's something that comes from somebody that's a victim, then they would reach out through a counsellor and say, we'd like to send you to so and so, or whatever the appropriate response might be. So there's sort of different responses that would take place within a division depending on the nature of the call.

Mr. Forbes: — And then I assume there's a lot of statistics that can be generated from this in terms of the types of bullying that's going on. Maybe specific areas or schools that are experiencing a lot of this. Is that the kind of thing you might get?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think the data that would come out at the end of the year, because it's a new system, we would want to track things really carefully to make sure that (a) that the students are getting the help that they need, and then secondly, is the system working as appropriately and effectively as it should? Are we getting good value from the partners that we're contracting with?

You know, there's also the other aspects of the anti-bullying initiative in addition to that, you know, the RAP [restorative action program] program, the Red Cross, and those type of things that are more of a broad-based protective or preventive initiative that take place at the school level.

Mr. Forbes: — Educational type thing. A couple of things. And I assume that working in partnership with BC, that they probably vetted this all through their privacy people as well. This is one thing that I think is critical for all parties involved. Is that the case? Now we haven't . . . We're in between privacy commissioners right now, but we do have an Acting Privacy Commissioner.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes. The work is done, and they've identified the type of data that's collected and have ascertained that there will not be a privacy issue or will avoid, you know, whatever work they need to do to ensure that they don't contravene the legislation.

Mr. Forbes: — Right, very important. But I know, and this is always a challenge with youth and privacy in terms of the need to be involved, but also the need to respect the privacy issues.

So as you were just saying though, this is a new field. But this is something BC has in place right now and has some experience with this, albeit maybe a year or two. I don't know how much ahead they are of us.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm told it's been in BC 18 months, so they're going through the early stages as well. So I think when something like this is developed, you make the assumption that you will probably be making a number of changes as you go through.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Now you had alluded to a couple of groups that, well the Red Cross and RAP you alluded to?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The Red Cross has got some anti-bullying program, and I'm not sure . . . There's still ongoing negotiations or discussion as to what and how that's to be provided, but they have provided some anti-bullying initiatives and training in the past.

The RAP program is the R-R-A-P, it's Rotary restorative action program that takes place in high schools in Saskatoon. So there will be funding coming in this year's budget from two sources: from the Ministry of Justice and from the Ministry of Education. And I'm not sure the total amount between the two. But it will allow for . . . They do a significant amount of voluntary fundraising. But there'll be \$120,000 from each of the two.

A Member: — 100 from us and 140 from Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Oh, okay — 100 from Education, 140 from Justice.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay. And then that's split between those two, the Red Cross and . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No, that's for the RAP, and the Red Cross will be a different one. I understand that's still being negotiated, the Red Cross.

Mr. Forbes: — No, I'm familiar with the RAP program as it was in Mount Royal and the good work they had done with the students there as well. And then as well, the risk assessment training for school divisions, can you explain what that part of the initiative is?

[20:45]

Mr. Caleval: — Risk assessment training is part of a protocol to prevent and address any violent threat risks, any violent activity that might be occurring within a school. So what we are entering into an agreement is to provide training to school division personnel to address and prevent violent incidents within schools and put together protocols as to how they're not only going to work within the education sector but with all their partners as well. So we have several of these agreements that are already in place. And what we're looking to do with this risk assessment training that we're doing right now is creating it province wide so everybody, every school division will have this risk assessment training in place and we can have a blanket of supports for schools to make them safe, healthy places to be.

Mr. Forbes: — Now when you talk about partners, who's all involved in this? The RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police]? Who would be . . . Lead me through this as well. I'm not sure completely . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm not sure what you're asking. Lead you through which part of the process?

Mr. Forbes: — What are some of these . . . the training, the risk assessment training, the protocols to make it consistent, more than just words on a page in a principal's office. What's

actually happening?

Mr. Caleval: — So there are protocols that are put in place to address and prevent violent incidents from occurring and if a violent incident does occur, how people will respond to it, how service agencies will respond to that. So in essence there's training that occurs and there's partnerships that are formed around protocols to address these incidents. So there's been several signings of these protocols between school division personnel and other human service ministries — police services, Justice, other, like remand facilities, situations like that. So what we're bringing together is all of those ministries together, all of the people that provide supports to students so that we have a protocol in place in order to address these incidents.

Mr. Forbes: — You know, but wouldn't they already be in place? I mean like I come out of a classroom and I'm thinking that we would already do that. We've been doing that for many years. If there's a violent . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it's a variation between what would take place between school to school or teacher or teacher. And you might come out of your classroom and have a specific thing that you would do but there would be some inconsistencies. So you might have a child that was suicidal or potentially suicidal, in one school would get a call from a counsellor, and another one it would be regarded as, oh we'll have to talk to the doctor, the parents, whatever else and it would be treated differently. Or somebody may not know that there would be . . . what referrals they could make.

In Saskatoon for example in a high school, they could refer it directly to the RAP program if it was something they thought was capable of being mediated. I'm, as you're aware, I'm a fan of mediation as a form of intervention because it brings both the bully and the victim together and often serves to prevent future bullying. It's not just a matter of treating the victim. It's a matter of trying to prevent ongoing bullying from there. So I think the teachers or the parents would have to know the different resources that were available so they would know what the protocols would be, they would know what the resources were there. And that would vary from community and division to division.

Mr. Forbes: — Yes. I'm feeling like you're spending a quarter of a million dollars on this and I'm not seeing the range of what violence are you talking about — intimidation to gun violence to how quick the protocols are? I mean are these more protocols that'll take weeks to execute because what you're talking about, Minister . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No I don't . . . I would hope they wouldn't because, you know, the online reporting tool talks about things taking place in 72 hours. We'll be looking at the phone service, that it would be something that could be quick enough that it would be treated as if it was a 911 call because you may have a student or a young person contemplating doing something immediately. So in that case you would treat it differently, and you would ignore some of the issues.

The privacy issue wouldn't be as much of a concern as saying, yes, this is a person that's going to take their life or potentially

going to. So you would have the range of options that would exist for a teacher or for a parent would be there and a matter of those who will know what the range of options are and that whatever training might be necessary. So they would know where within that range of options do we . . . I don't know if that's . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Florizone: — All too often, and perhaps this is based on experience in other jurisdictions, but the research basis for this is that when bad things happen, there are early warnings that had occurred. And if we had set up the systems to flag and to respond on an earlier basis — in other words intervening at the most appropriate time frame — we could have, should have, and well hopefully would have avoided a bad outcome.

So the research is still emerging in these areas. But this is a matter of consistent protocol that is research-based, to be able to say that, you know, a sudden change in a student's behaviour, a pattern of behaviour, outbursts, or even carrying a weapon or threatening to carry a weapon into the school. So what they've done is they've worked with the partners — police, Justice, and others — to be able to have a range of responses that are commensurate with the risk, not overdoing it, which sometimes happens, not under-responding, but responding as a collective and also as a team.

So part of it is capacity building. Another part is to build in those early warnings so that teachers and team members are feeling far more confident that they can respond with the tools in the time frame that's necessary. And, yes, immediate response depending on the criticality of the situation.

Mr. Forbes: — What I'm not hearing, and I'm starting to hear a bit of, I guess, is the urgency. And if you're developing protocols it reminds me, and maybe . . . I'm not suggesting Amber Alert, but I mean it's sort of like in that type of thing. When you have a violent situation, all hands on deck type of thing and everybody snaps to attention, as opposed to another set of policies that sits on a principal's desk. And I'm thinking we've just spent a quarter of a million dollars to develop policies that we've . . . I'm just saying that it doesn't sound like you're going to achieve a lot from the way it's being described an awful lot.

Mr. Florizone: — Perhaps it's all in the description. What it really comes down to is if we hit the alarm bells and everything's a five-alarm, we won't get the kind of response that we need when it is a true emergency.

What we're trying to do is get to the earliest point of intervention but know full well that that is a scalable response. Sometimes we'll miss the early warnings and it'll go right into the need for immediacy. So what we contend is that having a consistent protocol that's tried, true, and tested has great benefits in terms of avoiding not only bad outcomes in general but that fear and really not knowing, that difficulty right now where the staff aren't armed with the tools that they need to respond accordingly.

Again with the health care background that I come from, these early warning signals are extremely important when we're dealing with areas such as addictions or mental health or in various circumstances at 3 in the morning when somebody's

coming into an environment. What's really important is that we align our professional development with the policies. If these sit on a desk, they matter not and we shouldn't have gone down this path. What we see is a living, breathing opportunity to continually update our protocols and respond accordingly and again not overreact but certainly react to the right level and with the right escalation given the circumstance.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — With 13,000-plus teachers in the province, there's going to be variations in how a teacher might respond and there'll certainly be situations where the teacher wouldn't know what resources are there. Like there could be a lot of people in Saskatoon wouldn't know what RAP was or the availability of those things. So it's a matter of ensuring that they know what's there, but your point of not wanting to create another dust collector is absolutely valid. The goal is to give kids some support when they need it and prevent tragedies from happening, so I have no desire to see it sit on a desk.

Mr. Forbes: — And I guess one of the examples of, I wouldn't say necessarily sitting on a desk but, you know, when I was teaching, and it continues to be the case, of kids who would come in, who clearly were victims of abuse and the teachers are required to report that. And then that's not an option, but yet we still have that discussion and you know, whether teachers find themselves making judgments when really it isn't about making judgments, it's about doing the right thing. So that's my concern. And so it's a good thing, and I just want to make sure people feel it's alive and they're part of a solution and then this is really important and not sitting on a desk or whatever. Don't need the Amber Alert every time but it is a critical issue for sure, absolutely.

Now the other one that if some people, if you could, maybe the officials could talk a little bit about it in terms of the . . . I know this was talked a little bit about at Breaking the Silence Conference, the work that's been done around gay-straight alliances, just the curriculum aspect of that. I know that there was some officials from the department that talked about the initiatives that are happening in terms of curriculum alignment, better understanding of those issues.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We have some work under way in that area. We've also had discussions with the bishops and with the separate schools, and I'm pleased to report that our meeting with the bishops was a productive meeting. We indicated to them that this wasn't . . . The need for supports for gay, transgendered students was something that wasn't something that we were putting up for discussion. It was something that had to happen. They were remarkably receptive and . . . [inaudible] . . . they indicated, you know, they may have discussions with us about what their program what might look like or be called but they certainly seemed to know what it would have to include.

We also recommended to them that if they had issues or concerns about what their obligations might be that they should have a meeting with Chief Commissioner Arnot of the Human Rights Commission. I talked to the Chief Commissioner myself and indicated that was the discussion that I'd had, and I was pleased to report that they'd already had some discussion with the Human Rights Commission regarding what their obligations were and seemed to be a long ways down the road. So those are

work-in-progress, and I think the supports by and large would exist in most school divisions now — not saying that they're everywhere and that there isn't more work to do.

Mr. Forbes: — Right. As the ministry, would you see yourself as maybe facilitating those conversations? It sounds like you've had some good conversations. But with the folks in the rainbow community who are concerned about GSAs [gay-straight alliance] and . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes, I've met with Chandra McIvor, with Mikayla Schultz, both before I've had this portfolio and since. I certainly understand the need for support for those students and want to make sure that those students have the supports within our system and would certainly be amenable to doing it. It's a different discussion whether there's a need to amend our legislation, but I'll let you have that discussion with Minister Wyant. It's not something that falls within the ministry that I have now.

Mr. Forbes: — We'll have that discussion, I'm sure. But I appreciate if you're having those conversations, and they seem to be productive with the bishops and different folks, that it would be a productive thing to talk about what the supports can be in our schools and what that is. Because I think at the end of the day we all want our kids to be safe and to be who they are. And that's important.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it would be inappropriate if I didn't thank Chandra McIvor and Mikayla Schultz for the work they have done in bringing awareness and being outspoken advocates. They've come here on occasion. They've brought other young people with them. And you have to give credit to those people for being willing to be advocates, not just for themselves, but for others. So I think on behalf of all MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly], we thank them and commend them for the work that they are doing and no doubt will continue to do.

[21:00]

Mr. Forbes: — Absolutely, well said. Absolutely and well said. And I think that if we could take that . . . And I know Chandra's had very good experience being in schools, leading professional development in that. But I know that there's still a challenge of getting it right out there. So maybe previous to what we were just talking about, those protocols could be also part of that in whatever shape that may be.

But I want to get back to the curriculum initiatives around the diversity, the gay and lesbian aspect. Do you have some . . . I see an official ready to go with an answer there.

Mr. Miller: — The ministry plans to work and incur and devote some resources to the establishment and distribution of materials, a handout to promote the establishment of gay-straight alliances and the understanding of LGBTQ, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, to support students in conjunction with the overall bullying initiative. That will be a resource.

Mr. Forbes: — And when will that become . . . When will that come out in the schools?

Mr. Miller: — The dialogue is developing. The resources are ongoing and will be developed as they are delivered and appropriate to distribute out to schools.

Mr. Forbes: — Good. Maybe, you know, I should ask, seeing we touched on this just a few minutes ago, in terms of the Human Rights Commission and the changes, one of the things that did come up was around education in the schools. That was one of I think the four pillars if I can remember the discussion, and the changes of the Act at the time. And one of them was to be very much more proactive in our schools. Is that happening today? Are we seeing anything of the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Any work being done around the fourth pillar? Yes and yes. The work that's being done is, should be done by the divisions and by the ministry officials rather than by the commission. We feel it should be done through the ministry. So the ministry has got some work being . . . [inaudible]. But we have, as you're aware, put everything on pause, and now any new curriculum initiatives would be put on pause. So we're at a point where we're not proceeding with anything until we've worked through things.

And for that matter the work that's being done regarding the GSA piece, while the work is being developed, we would not want to roll it out until we have had discussions with Patricia Prowse, Russ Mirasty because we have not taken anything off of pause and we want to have discussions with teachers and with the divisions before we would go ahead with anything.

The commitment I made when I took the ministry was we were not going ahead with any new initiatives. We can certainly have, you know, discussions about what might take place, direct the discussions through Russ and Patricia, but we'd made a determination that we had too many things that were on top of teachers' plates and too many things that we were pushing down on them. So we said, okay, we're not doing any of them until we've had those discussions. So these items would fall within that. That's not to say they wouldn't be ones that we would want to work through in the future, but right now everything is on pause.

Mr. Florizone: — The Human Rights Commission is working with educational partners in terms of a particular area of citizenship. And what they're doing is not a change to curriculum. What they're working on is a series of supports for teachers in classrooms. And we're very eager to see this work, these supports, brought forward. Now this is a broader category of citizenship, but we see this important work as certainly a key component, being acceptance of diversity, be it respect for people.

It also enters into the cultural mosaic that we're seeing: the diversity there, the ability as citizens, young citizens who are maturing to understand the value of differences and what that means for the future of state.

Mr. Forbes: — Okay, so that's . . . So are you saying that's on hold as well or not?

Mr. Florizone: — No.

Mr. Forbes: — The supports . . .

Mr. Florizone: — What the minister has stated is that curriculum changes are on hold but the work that is being undertaken by the commissioner right now — and it's still months from being concluded — is really about the supports for existing curriculum. As we adjust and unpause, proceed with curriculum changes, the notion here is that they would nestle in. Their supports would become part and parcel of the learning tools that would be available to teachers and students.

Mr. Forbes: — I've got one or two more questions before my fifteen minutes is up here. So I'm curious about, I had somebody from the university raise this issue around certification, the changes to what would it take to get a teacher's certificate. I'm not sure if I'm explaining this as well as I might. But the concern was around the amount of language arts, particularly for the elementary school teachers.

Has that whole process as well been put on hold in terms of the changes to what classes you need to get your teacher's certificate?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I understand there's some work being done at the officials' level, but there's no decisions been made on it.

Mr. Forbes: — Has that been slowed down at all though as well in terms of your review of . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — It's not a part of student curriculum, so the officials are still doing whatever work is on it. If it's something that you would like to have input on it, you're welcome to have it. I'm not briefed on it at all, and it may or may not be something the minister is supportive of.

Mr. Forbes: — So we should . . . Maybe I'll write you a letter to this concern. I know it was one that was brought up a year ago, and then my position was changed and different things happened. But I'm curious in terms if it's ongoing, is there a timeline? Is there a . . . Do they foresee this will be changed?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I guess the question I would have is, if you would like to have some input on it, you tell me when you'd like to have some input and we . . . When would you like to write a letter on it?

Mr. Forbes: — Well I'm not sure that's the most important issue right now because if it's going to be changed by . . . I guess why I'm asking is, is this a *fait accompli*? Is it done? Are there changes to the teachers' certificate program happening, or is there still time to have input?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can tell you that there's discussions at an officials' level. There is no minister decision made or minister direction that's been given. So if you would like to have input, now is your time. And I'm not saying that it would go ahead in any event, but would welcome input from you. And I understand it's at a reasonably early stage.

Mr. Forbes: — And I'll get you a letter as soon as I can. And I'll turn it back over to the Education critic for his . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I won't write you any letters, but I'll ask you a few questions right now. Thanks for the information

you're providing the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Just as far as the sector plan, what are some specific ways or examples of how you'll involve teachers in the implementation of the sector plan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The sector plan announcement is coming soon, so there is some things we're not able to talk to you, but I'll certainly let the deputy minister talk in a general sense.

I can tell you there's been extensive consultation with all the school divisions, SSBA, STF, and a large number of individual teachers. And it's difficult to say when you're, you know, when you consult with them. We have a letter of support from the STF, from the SSBA, and from a number of the . . . But when you have 13,000 teachers, do you have support from all of them, and you have give some a chance to work through it, but I'll certainly let the deputy minister answer.

Mr. Florizone: — So this first round of putting together a plan that provided the focus that the sector needs involved over 1,000 people, and the vast majority of those were teachers. We went through and began at the governance administration levels and drilled into the organizations to the level, consistently across the province, of principal. So over 700 principals were involved. We also had special sessions for First Nations schools and their educational administrators.

Just to give you a sense of the others that were involved, from chamber of commerce as the minister said, the usual players and suspects: the SSBA, the school board officials, LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents], the STF. In fact we had multiple sessions with the STF at a very senior level, and we continue to want to go deeper.

Our opportunity in future rounds is to be able to start at the school, identify what the priorities are at the school level, and use that. In essence, cascade upwards. But we needed to start somewhere, so 1,000 folks was a pretty bold step in that we got all 28 school divisions involved and all 70-plus First Nations schools represented in some way.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If I can, I can add a little bit. I have a letter from Janet Foord, dated March 14th to myself, writing to inform me that it's March 13th, the member boards have voted to approve the education sector plan. And this is the quote that I think is significant: "We are proud of the fact that the 28 locally elected and autonomous public, separate, and Francophone school boards in this province have chosen to unanimously endorse this collaborative and historic undertaking."

A letter from Gwen Dueck, a Saskatchewan teacher dated March 10th: "Teachers see the need for strategic and long-term sector planning and applaud the ministry for the leadership shown in this initiative." And they start off the letter by saying, "It is with great appreciation we write today on behalf of the 13,000 members of Saskatchewan teachers to acknowledge the ministry's recent efforts." They talk about the frequency and number of meetings and look forward to working with the ministry in the future.

So it's our hope that the individual teachers are able to become engaged, but it's impossible when you have that many individuals to say that it's there, but we will certainly want to work through STF and through the school divisions to engage the individual teachers.

The goal, the long-term goal of it is to try and increase our graduation rates by the year 2020 to in excess of 80 per cent and to reduce the gap between First Nations and non-First Nations students by 50 per cent of what the gap is now so that their completion rate goes up by in excess of 20 per cent. So that's the overlying or the overarching goal of the plan. And then we'll focus within on shorter term goals such as early years learning and literacy and then a significant focus in the early year on First Nations and Aboriginal. So that's the direction it'll go, but I should let the deputy minister answer the questions more specifically.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The initial plan . . . I have a document here. It says, "Introduction to hoshin kanri, student first." And it says:

Plan approval of finalized sector strategic plan. A3s are provided to the province's school boards and the Minister of Education for approval and the cabinet for information. The education sector strategic plan is released on budget day.

Of course budget day has come and gone. It's certainly hopeful or encouraging to have the words that you've been able to extend both from the STF and the SSBA to date, but the public hasn't yet been able to see the plan. This date came and went, but when will it be released?

[21:15]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Friday.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Where will it be released?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think at a number of different locations. We'll certainly give you some information. But barring anything unforeseen, it will be later this week, and we'll certainly make sure that you're made aware. And our expectation would be there would be a technical briefing.

Mr. Florizone: — So just in terms of the language and the description, I've sought and received some feedback on the use of terminology and some of the Japanese language recently has . . . That feedback has been received. So we do refer to it as our sector plan. This hoshin kanri title is really a description of a methodology that's lean, but wherever possible we're going to be anglicizing that language and providing it in plain English. So message received.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I appreciate the description of some of the engagement to arrive at the sector plan. I don't know that I heard sort of the concrete actions that would be taken to implement the sector plan, those that would be taken directly with teachers. I think the minister commented that, well with so many teachers you're not going to have them all on board or something. I understand that piece. That's not so much the question. The goal is that when you . . . It's like when you bring

forward a new curriculum, although this is larger in the end, how do you ensure the best implementation of that plan if it's a positive piece to work towards? So with the front-line educators maybe, I suspect you have some plans in place to engage them and ensure effective implementation.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think that's something that will get answered when the rollout happens.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So if there's additional costs to address the specific, and I don't know if it's initiatives or hoshins that are laid out in this plan, will . . . You know, it seems that the budget's tight. And we know the condition for many school divisions is one of status quo or less, or many that are having to make some difficult choices. And I don't see dollars in this budget, as I say, for, you know, much else. Where will some of the dollars be to resource the plan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The plan is really the application of existing monies that are in budget, how things are done within. And part of the plan talks about what the funding levels should be. Having said that, if there are additional costs or there's benefits to be gained by additional costs, it's certainly something that we would want to have that discussion as we went through the process. The immediate process will be the rollout, getting people up to speed and participating in it. And if it appears to be a resource issue, then that's a discussion that we'll want to have with the divisions as we go forward.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So you won't be expecting school divisions to simply shift around the resources and the budgetary decisions they're making right now. There'll be additional resources if required to implement this plan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well let me put it this way. The school divisions participated in the plan and looked at what the resource needs might be as they participated in the plan. So the expectation is that they will redeploy or realign things as is required. But having said that, we're always aware that some things have additional costs that we didn't plan or didn't expect, or there may be successes that we can achieve by committing additional resources. And I think we're a government that's shown that we're more than willing to do mid-year funding where it's required and where it's appropriate. So I'm not saying we're doing it, but we certainly are listening.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I suspect you've researched. It sounds like you've canvassed and worked with your sector partners, the boards on this front. What sort of resources are going to be required in year 1 for this sector plan?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We expect to do things within budget. The resources, we have an increase in funding, both by way of operating and by way of capital, and so we did not fund specifically for this this year.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. There's not any new dollars there, and I think that's going to . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There's new dollars for a variety of new things within the budget. And there are ongoing funding salary that are there, and it's the same people that we expect to do the delivery of this model. This isn't really a matter of doing

something that's an addition. This is a matter of how we are continuing to do our existing business.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I just would be cautious in making sure you understand the, I guess, the impacts with the plan without making sure that the resources are there. I don't know the plan. Right now it hasn't been made public. I look forward to the release, but it's really important that if you're wanting to drive cultural change or some level of reorganization, that the resources are there to implement it. And as I say, I mean it's like curriculum change that we've experienced under, you know, your government in the past few years. You make curriculum change, but then the resources simply haven't been placed there for educators to ensure effective implementation of that curriculum. And without the goal being achieved of effective implementation of curriculum, then what's the point of the change in the first place?

So it'll be very important to us that we see a clear rollout of what changes are being made. And there also needs to be some caution of simply tacking another thing on top of already taxed school divisions, administrators, teachers, certainly students. Certainly I think there's an openness and a willingness to look at how things can be done differently. But I would urge caution in pushing forward change that's not resourced and respecting the needs of divisions or school divisions.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The only comment that I would make, and I appreciate the points you're making, is that this is not our plan. This is the plan that came from the sector. So this is something that the divisions have put together. We're strongly supportive of doing it so they've come to us. Part of the plan is that it's done with, largely with existing funding and measures I think that are there. But in the past, we've always shown a willingness to look at where additional funding mid-year or in subsequent budgets is required, and we'll certainly want to watch that as it goes forward. So I get the point that you're making.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — We'll follow up on those pieces, but just even as far as the additional funding and the mid-year funding which I now hear heralded as an unprecedented move that often, when I see it mentioned, members sort of applaud themselves . . . I mean this is a practical reality of growth and it was something that, to even arrive at that place, it was a lot of discussions as Education critic through committee structures. You weren't the minister at the time, in many years of that work, advocating that sort of change. So I hope we can see more nimble support of the needs of school boards and teachers in this case, because to reference the mid-year funding, that was something that was hard fought for by boards and, you know, a reality of just not properly supporting some of the growth within the province.

There's a few other . . . Well there's lots of important areas to focus in. I will say that I'm very interested in the sector plan. I look forward to it. You know, I'm a teacher and I love the sector and the value of education in this province, and I know there's been many good people that have contributed to it. So I certainly look forward to, you know, it being unveiled.

The whole issue of the standardized testing and what's on pause and what's not on pause and what's waiting for the end of a

consultation, what's not, it's been less than clear through this entire discussion, from the minister, as to what, I guess what these \$5 million that are earmarked for standardized testing as best as we can understand right now, what those dollars are for. How do you earmark dollars for something that you say is on pause? How do you earmark dollars for something when you suggest that you're going through a consultation, when it seems that a decision's been made on the other side of it? So I just look to the minister to maybe clarify some of this.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — In a previous year, they included approximately \$5 million for software for large-scale standardized testing. We put things on pause and the bulk of that money was not spent. I think there was about \$900,000 was spent for software for early year evaluation and Help Me Tell My Story. But the rest of the money wasn't spent. It was either returned or reallocated. So the officials, when preparing budget, used the same dollar number going into this budget cycle, even though no decision was made on what was going ahead.

At this point in time I think it's safe to say that those funds would not be used for any large-scale purchase of software or broad-scale testing. A better use of those funds — and there's certainly no decisions made while we're still working things through — but a better use of those funds would be for supports for learning, for things related to the sector plan and that type of initiative. So we would have to go back to treasury board and repurpose those funds.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And so this is something that we've been calling for for some time. So the roughly \$5 million that are there, is there active considerations or actions then to repurpose those dollars into a way that makes a difference in the life of a student in the way that we've discussed?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There's no decision made and nor will there be until after there's been some significant consultation with Patricia Prowse, Russ Mirasty, and people within the divisions. What I can say is that we do not think it's appropriate to go ahead with any large-scale, across-the-board testing.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — And there's 5 million that you have earmarked right there currently. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 5.4 million, yes.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Why was it placed in that category there at budget time? I guess is this a bit of an admission that this was the wrong place to have it in the budget and you've changed course?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That's what took place in the past. The reason it's included in there is it's actually a capital expense and it's included in the same budget line as capital for daycare. I can't give you the historic reasons but that's the way it's been done in the past. So it's actually the budget line is closer to . . . is in the range of \$7 million because we have something in the range of \$2 million will go to daycare capital. So it will ultimately have to get transferred. If something else is being done differently with the money, it will have to be transferred from capital to an operating fund or something different.

Mr. Florizone: — Just in terms of supplementing that, the fact

that it's the equal amount, 5.4 that was asked for this year, is my doing. I asked for it to remain exactly the same as last year. The notion here was that this was on pause. No decisions at the time of budget preparation had been made. Now what the minister is signalling is that the plan will not proceed as per last year. In other words just simply unpausing a plan that was previously put together. What will proceed as he has indicated? Student supports and sector planning. We have yet to put and formulate exactly what that looks like, and it will be informed by the student-first advisors in the sector plan.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I just know it's a concern to many, when there's so many needs in a practical way in classrooms across the province, that that \$5 million is sitting there earmarked for standardized testing when the public's been quite clear on this front. And certainly many question then, you know, whether or not the consultations are as sincere as they should be. You certainly have good people leading them, no question there. I don't question their integrity. But if dollars are earmarked, it seems that there's a bit of an arrived-upon solution.

I know many feel that, you know, government's so intent on that plan still that they've kept the dollars in the budget. It's strange to include them in there this year if it's not part of the budget plan this year in that there's more of a focus of repackaging and sort of redefining, you know, reframing what you're going to be doing with standardized testing, maybe calling it something different. Is this the kind of stuff that people can anticipate? Are we going to see standardized testing by a different name with a different justification or rationale around them? Or are we going to see those dollars redeployed in a meaningful way?

[21:30]

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think I gave you the answer earlier. We're not going to do anything until we've had the consultation and the discussions with Patricia Prowse, with Russ Mirasty, and with our partners. We're not going to make a rash or a quick decision. Treasury board may well say that the funds would need to go back to treasury board. The funds have to. We have to go to treasury board to have the funds reallocated elsewhere. We know that we have things that are desirable to do within the ministry, and we'll certainly look at those as we go forward.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — How much money was spent last year on this whole standardized testing consideration, some of the work to develop them, some of the public discussion that went on?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it's difficult to say what time was spent or how many hours were spent by ministry officials because it was . . . They're employed by the ministry in any event. But we can say that there was approximately \$900,000 that was spent on the two pieces of software that was used for earlier evaluation and Help Me Tell My Story.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So those pieces I kind of see in a bit of a different light. How much was spent on, you know, the consideration of sort of the large-scale standardized testing as the minister called it here tonight?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Those funds still existed at the end of the year. There's no doubt the employees within the ministry did some work on that, but they don't log their time. I don't think we could put any kind of a realistic number on it other than to say we're not going ahead with it. Those things were put on pause.

Mr. Witherspoon: — So you haven't done any sort of standardized measure to figure out where they've been placing their time to come up with a dollar value?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. We don't have an accurate detail, nor are they . . . I mean it's people that do a number of different things in a day. They're working on a variety of different things within the ministry. And for them to go back through, they would have a difficult time trying to give any kind of a meaningful dollar figure on that.

Mr. Witherspoon: — There were people seconded for that role?

Mr. Florizone: — Well I think when you're talking about secondment, that was the original plan, pre-pause. There were teachers and others who brought expertise into the assessment approach. Now there is a bit of clarification, and I do appreciate the words of our early years assessment and Help Me Tell My Story as not really being this notional testing or standardized testing. These are very active assessments that are conducted. And I'm not trying to be cute with the words.

Standardized testing, everything that I've read about the US [United States]-based approach is contrary to what I've read about in terms of the plan — the previous plan and what we're hoping to be the future plan in Saskatchewan. What we saw was using of testing somehow to compare, contrast, and rank teachers, schools, students, when to be frank with you, what we needed to do was be really, really clear about our use of measurement.

Measurement and assessment was really first and foremost about student success and achievement; second, about giving teachers the support that they needed to be able to share and to support the students in the classroom. The other piece was about, yes, every once in a while we would go to national scoring with PISA [programme for international student assessment] and see where we're at as a diagnostic. But never was there a sense that we would use measurement somehow like it was used in some places south side to somehow punish or criticize those that were struggling. For us, if you're struggling, we ought to go to you with the supports that are necessary.

And so the move and the changes, the approach that we plan to take is really a far more holistic approach, like to be able to go to curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development and be able to provide the full supports that are necessary in the classroom. So more on this to come, but it shouldn't be about testing. And I think that's what you've said quite clearly. What we've been trying to say is I don't think it ever has been, at least not in the US-based definition of standardized testing.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll give you a little bit more of a dollar answer, if you like.

Mr. Witherspoon: — Sure. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The dollar amount that was in both years budget was \$5.855 million. The amount that was spent on the two pieces of software: Tell Them From Me was 525,000, and early years evaluation was 239. Teachers were seconded. They show that as a cost of \$685,000 and project management costs of 375. Now whether that's lost money or not, you know, or whether it's of some benefit for other things . . . So the total cost including the two pieces of software was \$1.849 million, leaving unexpended \$4.006 million.

Mr. Witherspoon: — So 600,000 of seconded teachers for the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — 685,000.

Mr. Witherspoon: — 685,000, okay, from last year. And was there licensing costs, software costs last year as well for the large-scale standardized concept?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Only the . . . [inaudible] . . . 525 and the 239 for the two pieces, and those pieces are being used.

Mr. Witherspoon: — Correct me if I'm wrong here, I heard I think through the deputy minister's words, and I heard something a little different from the minister, that it seemed that there's still a pretty strong focus or feeling from the ministry that some sort of new approach or larger scale assessment is something that — or measurement — is going to be important to the sector. And I guess if that point . . . I guess could the minister clarify that point?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — You know, we look back as to what's appropriate or what's needed. And I think when you do any kind of an evaluation, you ask a few questions. What are you asking? Why are you asking? What are you going to do with the information? So if you have a parent and they need to know how well their student is doing, and whether that be communicated to them by a meeting, by an online tool, or by a written test, I think it's appropriate that that be determined between a parent, student, and a teacher. We also need to know where students stand so we know where to commit other supports or other resources. So there needs to be some form of review evaluation process so you know where to commit resources.

The one thing I'm not in favour of is any kind of a large-scale testing where it's used to evaluate teachers or treated with that. And I know that that was the plan of the ministry and that was the . . . I was surprised to learn that in 2007 when we formed government, there was wholesale, large-scale testing done across the province. We were provided with a briefing note November of 2007 when we formed government, and I'll just read one paragraph from it:

Since 2000 the department has increased its large-scale assessment activity in grades 4 through to 11 in response to increased emphasis on accountability within public administration and to Saskatchewan's standing on international test results. The assessment for learning program has grown from measuring 11,000 students' abilities annually to over 70,000 students in multiple grade

levels since 2003.

So I didn't know the previous administration — and I was a school board trustee before that — were doing that kind of large-scale testing or were ramping it up. So we've said, no, we don't agree with the NDP [New Democratic Party] policy of large-scale testing. We think the NDP were wrong, and we think we should deal with . . . Teachers know what they're doing in the classroom. We expect them to understand what they're doing with their teachers. We trust them and we want to work with them to try and develop some kind of an evaluation method that they are comfortable with and that parents and the divisions are comfortable with. We will not go back to the NDP method.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I always get a kick out of the . . . You sometimes engage as a sort of a rational kind of a guy, and then you go on these little partisan bents that are nothing short of silliness. Anyways I won't even entertain getting into this sort of exchange. What I will say . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — All I'm going to say is it's straight out of the transition binder, and we'll provide it for you. I read it verbatim.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So the reality of course, Mr. Minister, is that your government has . . . And we really shouldn't let this devolve too far. But your record with the teaching professionals across this province, your record with students has been miserable. Your respect for the hard-working professionals in this province has been pathetic.

We can go back to what can be framed by many as attack ads in the last round of bargaining, to pretending that somehow you've resourced classrooms when the reality of today's classrooms is something entirely different. And you can take these exchanges that should be rational ones about today's classrooms, about students, and you can simplify them into partisan goofiness if you want, but the students of this province, the teachers of this province, the boards of this province deserve something better than that.

And there's been this whole focus of your government that has sort of known best or thinks it knows best in education. When I say your government, I don't mean the officials that are sitting here with us here tonight. The officials who sit here tonight are fine individuals who do good work for the people of this province.

When I say your government, I mean the Premier. I mean the previous ministers. I mean you, and I mean your cabinet. And I have some concerns here tonight when I hear in fact that there's dollars that are there and in fact a deputy minister in good faith I think clarifying that there's some intent to move towards . . .

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order.

The Chair: — We have a point of order here.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sure.

Mr. Merriman: — Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to find the relevance of what this has to do with estimates. This sounds

more like a diatribe and definitely some political spin. I'd like the questions to remain about the estimates of the budget please.

The Chair: — I feel the member is bringing forth a just cause, so if you would get back to your questions instead of the . . .

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The concern here tonight again is that there is a focus of reusing those dollars for what I hear are clear intentions of government, I think what I've heard, for sort of a mass evaluation. I am hearing from the minister and I'm hearing from others all the things that they don't want that assessment to be, such as something that measures teachers or punishes teachers or that gets reported publicly. And that's good, but I would just caution that a lot of the standardized testing, the formal testing schemes that have been built out through computer-based systems and otherwise have had similar good intentions in many other places.

And it's not necessarily that the intentions of one deputy minister are, you know, good, bad, or otherwise. In this case, we've had a deputy minister clearly state that the focus of looking at assessment tools, a larger scale one, wouldn't be to punish teachers, wouldn't be to publicly report, you know, where schools are standing, but the concern is that that information often gets used by others. And it changes the focus in education in a way that's not healthy, not productive, and not focusing the resources where they need to be. So I have to say, I have some concerns still with . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, the time for speeches was in the Chamber. So now is questions. So if you would get back to questions, that would be desirable.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — The dollars that are in the budget are, you know, and I'm hearing some less than clear language around what they're going to be utilized for. I would just simply urge great caution in putting millions of dollars into a process that can be an awfully slippery slope and one that doesn't achieve the outcomes that can be some well-intentioned outcomes going into the plan. And I think there's been lots of well-intentioned, very bright people all across North America and other parts that had good intentions going into these sorts of considerations, but there's a lot of concerns that need to be there. So I'd urge caution on that front.

I don't think I have . . .

An Hon. Member: — Ask a question.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You know, it's strange for members to sort of heckle and . . . We have one place to ask questions. We have good officials that have availed . . .

[21:45]

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, let's go back to the questions and everything will run smoothly. Back to questions instead of sermons. You've been warned twice.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Quite the house of democracy. The . . .

The Chair: — Mr. Wotherspoon, that will do. It's either questions or we'll have a break and you can settle yourself

down. The choice is yours.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — [Inaudible] . . . we asking questions?

The Chair: — You can ask questions.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I guess I'd hope that you reconsider your approach on the standardized testing piece. We'll shift to some of these other areas that are also important for discussion for the people of the province.

How are you faring in supporting the supports for learning from the perspective of engaging your educational partners, would be my question. You're dealing directly with the school boards. You're aware of their needs. You're aware of their asks. You're aware of what they're spending for supports for learning, which extend into a whole area of supports for the vulnerable, supports for intensive needs. It's a very critical and important area. My question to the minister would be, from his perspective, how is he faring in meeting the needs of school divisions as it relates to this area of supports for learning or the needs for the . . . intensive needs and the needs for the vulnerable?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'll have one of the officials, Angela Chobanik, answer the question. As you're aware, we don't direct what specific supports are provided by the school division. We provide funding for supports for learning and we let the individual school divisions determine whether they use a teaching assistant or whatever there. I can tell you that the numbers of all of the professionals, whether they're speech-language pathologists, are all up since 2007, but I can't speak to the decisions that were made by individual boards. But I'll let Angela . . .

Ms. Chobanik: — Angela Chobanik, acting executive director of education funding. So we have continued to put in more dollars into the supports for learning funding pool this year. This year we have put in an extra \$9 million. That represents increases for enrolment growth; increases for salary, non-teacher salary inflation; increases for non-salary inflation; as well as an extra \$1 million on the school division fiscal year for increases in supports for English as an additional language.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for that information. It's one of those pieces that I continue to hear from boards as a real strain, you know, for many that are facing a lot of complexity within classrooms, within schools.

The minister referenced the speech-language pathologists, the numbers of different professionals. I'm wondering if the minister could endeavour to provide back to us as committee members, it's maybe not possible here tonight, but a breakout of the number of individuals in those roles in each of the divisions. I know that's posted for educational assistants. Maybe this is provided already, but I think, you know, certainly occupational therapists would be of interest, speech-language pathologists, ed psychologists, all of the . . . so many of the important supports that are . . . community school coordinators . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I will give you the ones that I have. Education teacher assistants, TAs [teaching assistant], 3,601; non-certified educational counsellors, 86.7; non-certified

educator speech-language pathologists, 103.2; non-certified educator psychologists, 12.1; social workers, 88.9; physical therapists, 3.5; occupational therapists, 28.4. You asked specifically about occupational therapists. In '09-10 there was 18. Then it went to 27, dropped to 23, up to 26.7, and this year 28.4, higher than it's ever been. Other medical facilitators, which would have been prior to '12-13, nurses, but it could be others, has gone 18, 27, 21.6, 22.7, and now 22.1.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you to the minister. Would you be able to provide back the range of professionals and just the numbers, tracking back in a similar way that you provide for educational assistants, for each of the school divisions as information to us? Not to read it into the record tonight, more by way of being able to transmit that information in a hard copy form?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We can provide that.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay, that's appreciated. But again this is an important area. We will speak maybe some more about it moving forward. But I know there's some difficult decisions that boards have faced and are facing on these fronts. And I always find it disappointing, whether I hear it's occupational therapists that are not accessible or whether it's community school coordinators that play really important roles. And I know what it is. When you chat with those boards, their needs that they need to fund far exceed the funding that they're receiving. And I appreciate hearing an update of an increase that's in the budget. But you know, I was just playing it out on the ground. It just doesn't seem to be meeting the needs of school divisions or students.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We're aware that we have an increasingly diverse population, so we have more and more students that have got a language issue coming into the school system. We're better now able to identify a high-needs student, so with autism and autism-related conditions, and we know that the earlier that those children receive supports, the better that those children are able to function. So we're continuing to provide more and more supports. And as the needs come forward we certainly want to address them, but we certainly are hearing the requests and we're working to addressing them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Right. And in some cases there were reductions in those important supports as well that divisions are having to make. So I think that, you know, we'll get the numbers and we can discuss this moving forward.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No school division saw a reduction in this area, none at all, nor has there been since 2007. It has been an increase in each and every year in all of those categories.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes. Referenced was the reduction in some of those services and roles that are provided. And I know that what divisions are facing is they have enrolment growth, which is wonderful. They have some complex needs, some of which were highlighted by yourself just a moment ago, but those all take some resources to properly address some of the pressures that divisions are facing. And many divisions are facing a significant shortfall in this area.

In fact they're having, many divisions are forced with the

decision of having to pull from other areas of their budgetary plan to ensure some of the important supports are in place. So this is an area I think that, you know, really needs to be tracked by this ministry. I think there's important dialogue to be had with the school boards of this province, and I think that there's a need to recalibrate and improve some of the funding in these areas that make a critical difference in the life of not just the student that might need some of the additional support, but in the life of all students within that school and classroom when those supports are provided.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We will continue to increase the supports. We'll continue to work with the school divisions. We think it's important that we address the needs of students as soon as possible when needs and issues are addressed. I will certainly take exception to a comment that there's been reductions or pullbacks and take strong exception to you making those statements either here, in the House, or in public because the statements aren't accurate.

We certainly recognize the needs that are there and want to continue to meet the needs. But I will take exception when you make an erroneous statement in your role as critic that we have cut or pulled away from those things. We've always increased and increased greater than the percentage in the amount of enrolment, and we'll continue to do that. And I think where you and I will agree is that those students deserve our commitment and that we should give them the best that we can, to give them every opportunity that they can succeed in life.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Just by way of fact and record, there's been a lot of reductions across many parts, in many classrooms in the province. And you know, the facts will speak for themselves on that front on educational assistants. There's other examples of community school coordinators. There's examples of occupational therapists. So those are all important pieces. And as far as what we saw is some of those supports were actually being reduced a few years back by way of, I'll just use the example of educational assistants at a time where the population was growing and classes increasing in their complexity. And those are simply the facts and they're the facts of the ministry.

Now I know that there's been a gradual increase in those resources, but this is at a time where we needed to better resource classrooms with the growing populations and growing needs that are in place there.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I know you'd indicated you didn't come here for a political diatribe. Let me give you the numbers, the accurate numbers for the facts on teacher assistants: 2009 through 2010, 3,396. In 2010-2011, 3,253; 2011-2012, 3,423; 2012-2013, 3,566; 2013, 3,601. An increase in that period in 2005, and I have the figures going back all the way to 2007. There has never been a reduction in the number of TAs in the province.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Could you just share the global numbers from 2000. You said you have numbers that go back from say 2007, 2008, 2009?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We'll get you the numbers going back to 2007.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Now I think I . . . I don't have them handy here. You don't have them there?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No. We'll get them all for you going right back.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. So I think . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — If there was a variation, it was only because we allowed the school divisions to reallocate the other resources. The funding has never been reduced in that area but we've said to school divisions, if you wish to hire an OT [occupational therapist] or a speech-language pathologist, it's up to you. And for the most part they have gone up, and if not it's been by a negligible amount because they've chosen to reallocate the resources in other ways. And we leave those decisions to them.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. Well I'd appreciate those numbers. And you just may want to go back then and review a statement you made just a moment ago about them never going down because there was a significant . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The dollar value has never gone down. The supports continue to be there. If a school division has chosen to reallocate, I can't control that they've gone down if they've gone down by a small number. But we'll get you the number.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I would just say on that, I appreciate getting the number, but the Minister of Education can't shirk responsibility on these pieces onto the school divisions. There was a funding formula change. There were changes in how those dollars could be used and how the envelopes were opened, and there's ownership and accountability that must be had by the Minister of Education. I mean, it's like sending your . . . You know if you have a kid, sending your kid to go buy bacon, eggs, and milk but only giving the money for two of them and then blaming them which one they don't bring back.

So you know, you're in this together with your sector partners, and it's important to understand that they have some very tough budgetary choices that they are facing under the current environment.

I'd like to get onto the area of portables. Last year your ministry or your government took over the portable process and there were some glitches and problems with that. I guess I just look to what changes you've implemented here this year to address or respond to some of those concerns.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Last year there was a decision made within the ministry to try and have central buying and the ministry was going to control all of the acquisition of portables. They chose to purchase from a company in Alberta that, due to the flooding or whatever the issues were in Alberta, was not able to deliver as much product in a timely manner.

We've now said to the divisions, if you wish to purchase in bulk or do it within province, we're fine. We just don't think it should be the role of ministry to try and seek it out. I can understand the logic of wanting to try and do it in bulk across, but it just isn't, it wasn't . . . It didn't work out the way we

wanted it to. The divisions wanted to do it themselves. We felt that was the best use of it.

So this year we have allocated I think it's \$6.9 million for portables this year, and the portables were allocated based on what the utilization was in the school. And it was 129 per cent, if they were at 129 per cent, then they were entitled to receive portables sufficient to bring them down to that level. So that was where they . . . how the numbers worked out for this year. And what we did was we didn't provide the portables. We provided the dollars for them to get the portables, and we've got standards that we expect them to meet.

[22:00]

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thanks for sharing the changes in that policy. And I guess, in a forthright way, I mean it didn't work out very well last year. And I'm pleased that there's other options that are going to be made available this year.

What about the total number of requests from school divisions for portables? I know we hear different examples that have been shared where, you know, we've discussed on the floor where Saskatoon Public requested 11 and received two. We hear in Regina where just over half of what was requested was fulfilled for Regina Catholic and Regina Public. We heard of Greater Saskatoon Catholic, if I'm remembering correctly, requested 14 and got — four? I guess you can correct me on that one.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — They will not do as well on getting the portables if they're slightly over, spread across a large number of areas. They'll do better getting portables if they're way over in specific areas because we think they're better able to absorb.

But I'll give you the numbers that we received. There was applications from 17 school divisions for 102 new portables. So what we're providing is \$6.9 million in funding which will provide 29 new relocatables and 10 moves in nine school divisions. So it certainly wasn't what was asked for, but when we looked at where people were at with how far above on a utilization rate, we felt that was a manageable approach.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — You know, there's a point of difference on this piece here. And we've highlighted it, we've talked about it on the floor of the Assembly here, but we do believe that the school boards know those needs best. And the realities for many, many classrooms and many schools are ones of being overcrowded, overburdened.

And you know, I know sometimes when you apply certain mathematical formulas to it, it may not fully capture the sort of lived experience within a community or within a school. And it's an area that certainly will require further attention moving forward.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We are certainly always amenable to going back and looking at what the utilization was. If our numbers differ from the divisions, we certainly want to look at that. And we're cognizant of the needs within.

This we felt was a reasonable cut-off, given the fact that we're doing all of the new schools. As the new schools come on — and we realize that a projected completion date for that is not

until of fall of 2017, but that will, if the joint-use schools come on at that timeline — Connaught and Sacred Heart come on, we expect that that will take off some of the pressure for portables. But we also know that if the growth continues in the province, some of the new schools will need portables as soon as they're open. So your point's well-taken.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Your government, before you were the minister, pushed forward with changes to the school day, tacking on minutes to the school day on either end or add minutes to the school day and divisions were forced to decide how to achieve that. From your perspective, is that a decision that should stand and are you receiving value from that decision?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We started with the assumption that the greater amount of pupil-teacher contact the better. We've got enormous confidence in the teachers and we feel the more time they spend with the students, the better. Having said that, the school day is subject of ongoing negotiation which is part of the collective agreement, so I don't think I would want to comment, other than it's under discussion with STF at the present time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay. My caution on the point: it sounds good that, you know, more time between student and teacher is going to have somehow better outcomes, but it doesn't really get at the issue of student engagement, student attendance which I heard mention of here tonight. And just how are you maximizing that engagement?

So I hope that, and I suspect some of that consideration may be reflected now in the sector plan, and maybe some of the work of the . . . Maybe some of that's being heard in the consultations that are out there. So I hope there's an openness to look at this, because I just . . . It was a quick decision, arguably dismissive of a lot of the other factors in place, impeding students' success or barriers to students' success. And you know, it would be my contention that it missed the mark. And sometimes a good thing to do when you miss the mark is to just address that issue and admit that it's the wrong way, or forget the admitting, make the changes, and move forward.

My concern, it was interesting you said that it was collectively negotiated. I missed that piece where teachers collectively negotiated or bargained . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — What I said was, it was under negotiation at the present time, because negotiations are under way. I don't think either you, nor I, would wish to become embroiled in the collective bargaining process when it's under way right now. But I will let, I will let the deputy minister provide some more.

Mr. Florizone: — Most certainly, through our consultations with teachers, we heard about the school day, school year, and calendar issues. Part of the tension right now is that many of these provisions are locally bargained — in other words, the work day, the work year, the work calendar.

What we did in legislation was set out instructional time. And that was prompted, that move was prompted first of all by the Provincial Auditor, an audit that was conducted that looked at the school divisions and saw some fairly substantial variation

among the divisions.

You're correct. What did proceed from there was consultation. It was with the School Boards Association, with LEADS, and a variety of players. STF did not feel that they had been as well informed, as highly involved, and there were unintended consequences as a result.

So what we're doing is working very closely right now with the SSBA and with the STF. More to be said on this in the next short while, but it's something that we're willing to explore and figure out how best to do it. The other comment that you made, that I wanted to also support is it isn't about time, at least not alone. It is about attendance. It's about engagement. It's about the quality of instruction.

And so when we talk about dealing with the sector in a much more holistic way, we want to look at everything. Obviously quality and instruction; if you're not present, it's not going to matter much. So we've got some really interesting work that we believe needs to be done around attendance. In order to tackle attendance, we need to look at engagement. And in order to tackle engagement, we need to make sure that these are safe, caring environments that respect diversity and culture.

So in terms of the whole evening and line of questioning, it certainly is starting to come together that there are many aspects and complexities within the sector that need to be dealt with. The best place for us, and I hear this . . . By the way, I'm not off-page with my minister. What he says would always trump me anyway. But what he says in terms of the need to engage teachers to be able to work very closely with the sector, that large-scale assessment is not where we're headed, those are all givens.

My job is to now figure out how we can get to 13,000, get to the other 10,000 that work in the sector, but start to make these changes and improvements that matter most for students. So there's the challenge. Hopefully next week, this Friday, by the way, with the release of the sector plan is one small step towards getting there.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Well thanks for that. Thanks for that information as well. I just would be cautious in the whole piece around like collective bargaining. And suggesting now that, you know, if it's the school day piece, somehow that, you know, that this is . . . I mean this was something that was changed unilaterally by the government, and now, you know, it's certainly not some gimme or gift to teachers. Teachers aren't looking to work a shorter day. What they're looking to do, the teachers I know are looking to be as effective as they can be in reaching students. And a lot of that work in reaching students, preparing for students, reaches — as I suspect or I hope you know — well beyond the instructional hours defined by the minister.

So you know, just be cautious that, you know, this was something taken away by government unilaterally. It didn't make sense from my perspective. And changes are important, but this isn't some sort of a gift to teachers. And I will see how things move forward, but please be open to change in this area because it had a host of unintended consequences as referenced.

As far as bargaining itself, where is the ministry at on some of the local bargaining for teachers: LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] agreements, these processes, supporting those agreements? I know it's been sort of a challenging environment for school boards to negotiate without having revenues under their control.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Well once again it's not something we would want to comment on while negotiations are under way. There's a great disparity between the LINC agreements across the province and how school boards deal with them. It used to be when school boards would set a mill rate, it became a lot of local issues, but now we're looking at how things should be done on a province-wide basis so it becomes increasingly complex. And we're aware that there's historical issues as to how some of the LINC agreements were negotiated or arrived at, and we're also aware of the disparities. So those are all discussion points or ongoing points, but it wouldn't be something we would want to make any kind of comment on while the discussions are under way.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I know there's some concern from some about having some of what's been arrived at walked backwards, such as prep time for example. Would the minister commit to not walking back prep time that's been allocated and arrived at collectively for teachers in various divisions of this province?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think neither you nor I would want to participate in this room in collective bargaining.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There's other pieces around local agreements that relate back to professional support staff or support staff education workers. There's been a discussion around this table in the past around provincial collective bargaining for provincial education workers. I guess, where are you at as minister for provincial bargaining for the education workers of the province?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think neither you nor I would want to engage in bargaining those contracts in this room either. I think those things are best left for being put forward by their unions and being dealt with at a level where they're dealt with between the divisions. And you know, we'll certainly work with the divisions to try and get settlements.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Sorry. Maybe I wasn't clear. As it relates to the ed workers, I mean, there's the local agreements and then there's a thought that they might shift to provincial agreements on that front. So I'm not looking to sort of negotiate terms of a contract here. Are you amenable? Are you working with the education workers? Are you looking at models that would support provincial bargaining for the education workers in the province?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I haven't been privy to any of those discussions.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — There was a reference earlier, and I don't know how to pronounce it properly, but it's a concept or a plan that came out of New Zealand, and it looks as though it's an interesting program. I don't know a whole bunch about it and I don't want to pronounce it improperly. I almost should get . . .

Mr. Florizone: — We used the acronym. Just the TK [Te Kotahitanga], TK project.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — So TK . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Right. Where is TK out of New Zealand, where is it in the sort of the considerations of the ministry? I think that there seems to be some merit that's heard, but then I've also heard some questions about some changes in New Zealand for . . . towards its level of support. And I don't know what's motivated those changes. So if the minister could just speak to those pieces.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I'm going to have one of the officials come up. There has been interest expressed by people within the ministry and within our First Nations community that the New Zealand program regarding Maori education, that there has been some great successes by engaging at a higher level with the teachers, where the teachers would try and work and engage students on a more individual basis.

There would be a coach or an additional resource brought into each of the school divisions. And there's been a number of the First Nations people that have gone to New Zealand to see that and I think one or two of our officials have gone. And there is one of the people from New Zealand that is actually in Saskatchewan this week that I had met with briefly earlier today talking about how things were done in one of the schools with high Maori . . .

The situation's that their demographic is very similar. Their challenges that they face are similar to ours. So it appears to offer some good methodology. But Tim Caleval is here and I'll let him give you a bit more of detail on it.

[22:15]

Mr. Caleval: — So would you like me to just describe the program and the impact?

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Yes, and just where the ministry is in its support for this program. Dollar-wise, is this something that you are wanting to support? If so, how are you doing that? And then some of the . . .

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I can answer that part of it.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There is no decision made on any part of whether to go through with it. If we did, it would be part of what was being done in response to JTF [joint task force] and whether it would be done with new dollars or as part of the initial . . . But it appears to be an interesting concept, and the officials are looking at it now and having discussions with different First Nations groups. So that's sort of where it's at, but no decision made whether it's good, no decision to commit resources to it. But I'll certainly let Mr. Caleval give you a background on . . .

Mr. Caleval: — The research, it's a research-based professional development program that's happened in New Zealand to deal with disengaged Maori youth. It began in 2000-2001 and has been in place for about 13 years and seen significant growth in the outcomes of Maori students and

significant changes in terms of teacher practice within the classroom. And it's really a professional development program for teachers. It supports teachers in terms of how they would better engage Maori students.

And it's actually dealing with something called culturally responsive pedagogy of relations. So there's a lovely long term that really says, how do we build relationships with students and have high expectations for them and work on our own pedagogical practices within the classroom? So that's the program, and we've been able to investigate that program and take a look at the underpinnings of the work that's been going on in New Zealand and taking that work and seeing its application within our own province.

Mr. Florizone: — So I think it would be important at this time to supplement that with some of the interesting research-based findings that have begun to emerge, have emerged over time with the New Zealand project because that really is instructive in terms of how this could inform a potential similar approach in Saskatchewan.

So what I'm told by some of the folks that went over, and Tim will supplement this because he has seen it first-hand, is that they're in their fifth cycle of three-year cycles targeting high schools. And what they've seen through this fulsome approach is that within a three-year period, within a single cycle, students who were below average, struggling, are brought up to average. And those that are average are brought up to high performance. That kind of a shift, statistically, over a three-year period is profound. And part of it, I mean at the root of it — and Tim will do a far better job than I could of explaining it — is that there's such engagement, it's so culturally relevant that the attractiveness of being at school, being welcomed into that environment, feeling part and parcel, and knowing that this feels like home culturally has meant the difference.

So what we're hearing through some of our early days with student-first consultations — Patricia and Russ — is that they're saying they're finding students who want to learn. They want to achieve. They want to succeed. And they're feeling very much like the system isn't ready for them. What the Maori have taught us in these early days is that some of our approaches have been deficit-based. It's deficit thinking. And those that have come back, our First Nations colleagues who have told us what we need to do is really think about how we change the system to better serve students as opposed to thinking that students should somehow change to fit into a standard type of setting — school, classroom, and rigid structure. Tim?

Mr. Caleval: — I think you did a bang-up job on explaining that actually. Wonderful.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — I do have a question. Has there been some changes in New Zealand's support of this model? And if there has been either a departure or change in its support, what's caused that or what's motivated that?

Mr. Caleval: — There has been a slight change in it, but the tenets and underpinnings of Te Kotahitanga continue and will continue to go forward. So the teacher-embedded professional development program now is a part of two other components

going forward. One of them is about leadership development and the other one's called star path which is really about data and using data to inform decision making.

So although TK or Te Kotahitanga is changing slightly, the tenets and underpinnings of all the work will continue to go forward. And the researchers, the people that have actually created Te Kotahitanga and have been the head of that, Dr. Mere Berryman, she has been working very closely with the Ministry of Education in New Zealand to ensure that the tenets of that program are moving forward and working closely with other universities that have actually been in charge of those programs, to bring them all under the ministry's umbrella.

So although there's been changes to that, the work will still continue to go forward in much, what I would say it would be, sort of the triangle of what they're trying to do to bring together leadership with data and with a strong teacher professional development program that uses research to continue to change and update the work that they're doing all the time.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for that. It sort of segues into, well it's a discussion, you know, as part of this as well is the Aboriginal student outcomes, Aboriginal student engagement. An important area of course was a body of work done with the task force, which is important, and I look forward to fleshing out some questions there.

And then there's the other piece, of course. There's federal jurisdiction, there's provincial jurisdiction. You know, a piece that I just . . . And I know it's not just about money on these fronts. It's a lot more than just money, but money does make a difference. And you know something that I just find to be one of the greatest injustices of our current time is the federal funding for on-reserve education, and how that's sort of accepted, you know, across society. And I don't think it is when most identify it, but it's the reality and so it is accepted by society at some level.

I guess I just look to you as the minister. I don't know if you've taken specific actions on this front with the federal government or if you've taken any specific, looked at any specific actions around the funding disparity, but this is a great injustice for which I suspect 20, 30, 40 years down the road, we'll all be looking back at and saying, how was that, how was that acceptable? How was that something that people allowed to happen?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I met, discussed it briefly with Chief Bellegarde just at a function we were both at shortly after the changes came out. At that time FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] was still looking at or trying to assess whether they were net positive or not, as a result of the changes. Because a lot of the funding that was flowing was going directly to the different bands or different divisions. So I can't speak to that. I suspect as they get into it, they'll make a decision or they'll take a position on it, so I'll let them speak for themselves.

I worry about specific programs that we had worked with them on. One of them was ECIPs, early childhood intervention programs, which was for us about an \$11 million program, about 10 per cent of it supplied by the federal government.

They've indicated that that funding will come to an end. That's problematic to us because the services that were provided on-reserve, we believe, were of significant value. These are the ones that identified children that were at risk of leaving school, at risk of dropping out. So that's something that we will have to work through, or come to terms with, later this year because it's a program that we think keeps kids in school.

You talked about the jurisdictional issue. We worry about children that go back and forth between being on-reserve and off-reserve, and I think as a province we have to accept the fact that it's the same child, whether the child is on-reserve or off-reserve. So the Premier's made the comment we will provide supports for the kids whether they're on- or off-reserve. So we provided software, which we announced last week, for on-reserve. We've also announced a variety of different things that we're willing to do as part of JTF that would be on-reserve.

I don't think we would ever go so far as to invest in capital on-reserve. But the jurisdictional issue or what should or shouldn't be done on-reserve . . . And we also recognize the autonomy of First Nations people and their divisions to direct their own future. So we don't want to look like we're stepping in as a funder and going to control something where there was a lot of autonomy. So my counterpart is Vice-chief Bobby Cameron who I've had a number of discussions with and respect and value that relationship and want to continue to work with them wherever we possibly can.

I've written to my federal counterpart, Minister Valcourt, and expressed my concerns about some of the issues, and we've had one face-to-face meeting where I've said, these are the issues that are important to us. And the response was they are working with their officials and will have the officials work with ours.

But right now we don't have anything that indicates where we're at or how the funding is going to be. But we know that we are committed to increasing the success of First Nations students, and we know that dealing with the jurisdictional issue will be a challenge. So your point's well taken.

Mr. Florizone: — Just perhaps to supplement that, we know that when we look outside of the province to other jurisdictions — we just were talking about New Zealand — that while these frameworks are interesting and hold promise, that the real answers are actually right here in the province. And I know that sounds like, you know, just kind of a straightforward, reasonable answer. But what it comes down to is there isn't a target that we've set as a province that hasn't been met at a local level, either in a classroom or in a school, somewhere in Saskatchewan.

Part of our challenge has been trying to lift that promising practice. And I've got to tell you that in spite of all of the constraints, these partnerships that we've formed with First Nations schools have taught us we have a lot to learn from them. There is some really promising practice and leadership that has occurred there. We've just set out, as our response to joint task force, and set up 10 invitational shared services tables. Now what ideally we'd love is over 70 of them, but we needed to start somewhere, so by inviting First Nations to the table to start to share, use resources, provide student supports on-reserve, the thinking is that by working together in this way

we'll be able to move the dial in terms of student achievement for First Nations and Métis students. Again a lot of work to be done. But the early days are that if we can start working in collaboration we can achieve these targets.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you for those comments. And you know, I think on this piece around the disparities in funding and treatment for First Nations and Métis students, the First Nations on-reserve, it's an area we're just going to have to have a full-court press on and then certainly any support, you know, of this Assembly in a constructive way, you know, that we can bring together is something that certainly you can count on the opposition to be there with you pushing towards, because it's a great injustice.

I am interested in the cut that you identified with the ECIP program and the 10 per cent that's contributed by the federal government. And I'm wondering how much is that on an annual basis, that cut.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Approximately \$1 million or in excess of \$1 million. And it's a significant amount of money, and it's a program that we see as of great value. So it's something I want to have ongoing discussions with the federal government because it's not a program that I want to see lost.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — It's important advocacy and it puts the pressure back on to the province of course, as well as to whether then you have to look to fill the gap when you see a program that's effective. So it's an important area for us to be moving forward with.

So I hear that time has been called. I know we have another hour and a half or thereabouts coming forward, so I look forward to that. Thank you to the minister for the time here tonight, in most parts. Thank you to the officials of course, who do great work every day.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the members. Thank you to the officials for coming out. We've made a number of undertakings to provide information. And I just want to reiterate that we've always provided additional funding for supports for learning in the event that numbers have gone down for a short period of time. It's solely because we respect the autonomy of school divisions. But we'll certainly provide those numbers to you with a breakdown by division. And the other things that we've undertaken to provide, we'll get those to you as quickly as we can. So once again, thanks to the officials for what's been a long evening. So thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, one and all. Now being past the hour of adjournment, this committee stands adjourned until April 9th at 3 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 22:31.]