



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

**No. 18 — April 13, 2022**

Published under the  
authority of  
The Hon. Randy Weekes  
Speaker



**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

**Twenty-Ninth Legislature**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

Mr. Ken Cheveldayoff, Chair  
Saskatoon Willowgrove

Ms. Meara Conway, Deputy Chair  
Regina Elphinstone-Centre

Mr. Ryan Domotor  
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Mr. Muhammad Fiaz  
Regina Pasqua

Mr. Derek Meyers  
Regina Walsh Acres

Mr. Hugh Nerlien  
Kelvington-Wadena

Ms. Alana Ross  
Prince Albert Northcote



[The committee met at 15:25.]

**Procedural Clerk (Mr. Park):** — Okay. Welcome, everyone, to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Robert Park. I'm the committee Clerk for this committee. Today the Chair is unavailable to be here for the committee meeting. And the Deputy Chair, Ms. Conway, is going to be asking questions. So it is my duty as the committee Clerk to preside over the election of an Acting Chair.

I'd like to remind members of the process. I will first ask for a nomination. Once there are no further nominations, I will then ask the member to move a motion to have the committee member preside as Acting Chair for this specific meeting.

I now call for nominations for the position of Acting Chair.

**Mr. Domotor:** — I nominate Hugh Nerlien.

**Procedural Clerk (Mr. Park):** — Mr. Domotor has nominated Mr. Nerlien to the position of Acting Chair. Are there any further nominations? Seeing none, I'll invite the member to move the motion. Mr. Domotor. It has been moved by Mr. Domotor:

That Mr. Hugh Nerlien preside as the Acting Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services for the meeting of April 13th.

All in favour of the motion? All opposed? I declare the motion carried and invite Mr. Nerlien to take the Chair.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Thank you, committee members. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Hugh Nerlien. I'm the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Kelvington-Wadena and will be acting as Chair for this meeting. We are joined today by Ms. Meara Conway, Mr. Ryan Domotor, Mr. Muhammad Fiaz, Mr. Derek Meyers, and Ms. Alana Ross as members of the committee.

**General Revenue Fund  
Education  
Vote 5**

**Subvote (ED01)**

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Today the committee will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Education. We will now begin with vote 5, Education, central management and services, subvote (ED01).

Minister Duncan is here with his officials, and I would ask that officials please state their names before speaking at the microphone. As a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn your microphone on when you are speaking to the committee. I would ask officials not seated at the table who wish to speak to take a place at the table prior to speaking. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. At the table with me to my left is Donna Johnson, deputy minister; to

the right is ADM [assistant deputy minister] Gerry Craswell; and to his right is Rory Jensen, ADM as well. And we have other officials as well. Rather than introducing all of them, if they come to the table, they'll obviously introduce themselves.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Minister, do you have any opening remarks?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — No, I really don't, Mr. Chair. We have already proceeded with a couple of hours of the Education estimates, so happy to move right into the questions.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Ms. Conway, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Acting Chair. I am critic for child care, so today's questions are going to focus on child care and then I understand that we'll move back on to the other subvotes after today's session, 5:15. So I'll be focusing on (ED08).

And I'm new to my role, and so many of you are new faces to me. So it's nice to meet the officials here tonight, and I haven't had the pleasure of sitting across from the minister in estimates before.

Just in terms of, before I get into my questions, I think the significance of this moment is not lost on anyone. I don't think we've had an estimates on this area since the Canada-wide agreement was entered into. So my questions will mainly focus on that agreement, specifically workforce challenges, affordability, and accessibility, as well as expansion plans. Just we're seeking a little more clarity on that. But I didn't want to miss this opportunity to say how full of hope and anticipation I know that the entire NDP [New Democratic Party] opposition is around this project to build an accessible, quality early learning and child care program across Saskatchewan.

[15:30]

So my work today will really focus on ironing out some of the details around how we can achieve this very ambitious plan, and I guess to that end, you know, fleshing out how this is a credible plan given the current challenges in the area.

So I want to just start. My understanding is that through the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, there will be a total of a 1.1 billion investment over the next five years from the federal government. And my understanding is that in 2021 through 2022, there was a \$114 million commitment, plus change.

My first question is, how much of that amount we were able to spend given our workforce challenges and our capacity challenges?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Ms. Conway, thank you for the question. So I'll maybe talk a little bit about the three agreements that we have with the federal government. So of the Canada-Saskatchewan child . . . Sorry, I want to make sure I got the right one. So the new agreement, the \$114 million that was allocated in 2021, we were able to allocate 46 million of that. There's also the 2021-2022 workforce agreement. That provided \$17 million

to the province, just over 17, and we were able to spend 12 of that. And then there's also the existing 2021 to '25 Canada-Saskatchewan bilateral ELCC [early learning and child care], and what we were allocated for that was 13.5 million, and we spent nearly all of that.

**Ms. Conway:** — What happens to that funding when it's not utilized?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So all of the unexpended funds from 2021-22 is able to be carried over as a part of the agreements.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. I see in one of the agreements here there's a number of full-time equivalent licensed child care spaces. As of March 31st, 2021, Saskatchewan had 17,665. What is that number currently?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Just over 18,000.

**Ms. Conway:** — Just over 18. And how many total licensed facilities are operating at the moment, inclusive of all types?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So as of January 31st, there are 228 licensed family child care homes and 357 licensed child care centres.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. So my understanding is the target is 28,000 spaces by the end of the agreement, and that would include 6,100 in this current budget year. Perhaps you could just speak more generally to what the plan is. That's quite an ambitious goal. I'm wondering if you can provide any more meat on the bones in terms of where those spots will be created, whether there are any capital investments to create those spots. My understanding is that the ministry sent, you know, a letter to unlicensed providers sort of attempting to recruit them as licensed spaces. So if you could just speak to maybe the success of that initiative as well.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So I'll give a bit of an update to Ms. Conway in terms of where we're at right now. So 80 homes have applied to be licensed. And maybe just a quick correction. So we didn't send letters to the homes that were unlicensed. That's part of our challenge. We don't really know who they are because they're not licensed or registered with the system yet.

But through an education campaign as well as through, I think, pressure that parents have put on their facilities to consider the new agreement and what the benefit might be, not only for the facility but also for obviously the parents on the affordability issue . . . So we'll continue to do that work and educate folks that are in the sector already to consider becoming registered under the new agreement.

So as of February . . . No, sorry. So 30 new family child care homes have been licensed between April of 2021 and February of this year. We anticipate that another would have been licensed, another 10 would have been licensed prior to the end of the fiscal year. We did also work through the wait-list that we did have from facilities that had requests for funding for additional spaces.

And so that would have been part of the I believe 1,800 spaces that were approved out of the 2021-2022 agreement. And so

we'll work with those facilities that we didn't . . . We weren't able to get all of them off the wait-list, so we'll work with those facilities to see if they still have an interest and a demand from parents across the province. And then obviously work with other organizations as we proceed through the agreement to see where the interest is and the demand is for additional child care spaces.

You're right. Twenty-eight thousand is a big number. It's an ambitious number. Sixty-one hundred this year is a big number. And if I could quickly, Mr. Chair, credit to the ministry officials that have done a great deal, amount of work since the agreement was signed in August.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you, Minister. On those numbers, you mentioned 80 homes had applied and 40 have been licensed — like 30 and likely 10 more have been licensed. So is that 40 have been licensed and 80 additional have applied, or is that 40 of those 80?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — It would be part of the 80. The 40 that have already received their . . . that have applied for the licence is a part of the 80.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay. That's good to know. And you kind of anticipated my next question. So we don't really know how many unlicensed potential spots are out there floating in the universe. Okay.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — It's true. It's one of the challenges. I think there have been attempts to estimate that number in the past, but to actually know there are X number across the province or in the specific communities . . . Unless, frankly unless there has been a complaint in the past, that's really the only involvement that the ministry is involved with those folks. And so right now it's really just trying to get the word out through an education, through some information into the communities around the province, and again hopefully influence some pressure from parents that would like to take advantage of the affordability.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. And on that, so . . . And I think that incentive will be a powerful one, speaking as a parent with two kiddos under five. And you know, I was one of the beneficiaries of the significant fee reduction, so I can't imagine that many of these providers aren't, you know, moving towards this model.

But with that number, 80 homes . . . Correct me if I'm wrong. I think a home-based daycare can have a maximum of eight children. Just doing some rough math — well actually I didn't do rough math, I did it on the calculator on my phone — that's 640 spaces. So that's great but, you know, it's not enough to get us to that 6,100.

[15:45]

Beyond the strategy of licensing unlicensed home daycares out there, what else is the ministry looking at, at creating these 6,100 spaces this budget year?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So it's a great question. I know it's something that the ministry and our officials are working very hard on in terms of how do we fulfill the commitments that are set out in the agreement. So I'll maybe just repeat a little bit and then maybe add some additional

information.

Certainly working with existing organizations, seeing what their demand is, particularly in light of the fee reductions that parents are already experiencing. Working with organizations, municipalities as an example and really being able to show the incentives that are really there, not only for the parents in terms of affordability but also for the centres themselves, or potential centres, so for example, a capital grant of \$8,000 per space to be able to, you know, get their space up and going.

And just quickly to return just in terms of our estimates. So on the 28,000 that number is, you know, there's not a real . . . As I indicated before, it's based on best estimates. One of the estimates that we do use is that the number of children that are claimed in their parent's tax returns through the Ministry of Finance is roughly that number — 28,000. So it gives us a bit of an idea, but it's an estimate at this point.

**Ms. Conway:** — Sorry, the 28,000 number, how was that arrived at?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So that would be the number of kids that are claimed as a part of parents on their tax returns, the child care benefit that they . . . So for a little bit more clarification, the number 28,000 comes from the federal government target of 59 per cent availability. And that 28,000 number aligns quite well with what we see through the Ministry of Finance here in the province in terms of the number of children that are claimed on their parents' tax forms.

**Ms. Conway:** — So that 59 per cent of all children, like having 59 per cent availability to . . . Like having 59 per cent of all children in Saskatchewan have access to licensed child care? I'm seeing nods, yes.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Under six, zero to five. And that was the number used by the federal government in crafting the agreements with all the . . . well with our province.

**Ms. Conway:** — And based on declarations, it's thought that if all folks that are currently relying on child care were to transfer to licensed spaces, that would be the number even today?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — That's correct.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay, thank you. I just want to stay on this topic for a moment and really parse out kind of the strategy. Is it a strategy to enhance capacity in current licensed child care facilities? So I'm talking now of school-based or centres, not home facilities. What is the strategy around that? And what incentives and supports are being provided to those facilities at this time to reach that 6,100 mark?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So in terms of doing the work to meet our goal, not only in the short period of time in 2022-23 for the 6,100 new spaces but then as well as a part of the five-year agreement, first and foremost, going back to that wait-list to see if there still is interest from those that were

not able to be cleared off with the last round of 1,800 spaces that were allocated, going to those facilities to see if they can expand that are already in the system as well.

What we're also doing though as a ministry, and work is beginning soon on this, is creating a strategy to identify needs as well as the resources through the agreement that's going to be necessary to get us to that 28,000 by the end of the fifth year.

**Ms. Conway:** — Do you know what the potential for those wait-lists to offer would be? Like do you have any ballpark number of if you were able to license folks on the wait-list, how many new spots that could create?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. We'll confirm this number but I believe it's about 1,000. Now keep in mind that some of those could go back perhaps five years, and so we have to confirm whether or not that interest is still there in the time that has gone by.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. You also mentioned just now a strategy. What is that going to look like? Who are you going to bring to the table? I'm certainly hearing from stakeholders that they want that strategy to be, you know, stakeholder led. They have a lot to offer in terms of identifying the challenges in this area.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. And I'll just confirm that the 1,000 number is correct. So we'll likely be proceeding this year first and foremost working with stakeholders, but likely engaging through an RFP [request for proposal] some outside help. One of the challenges that I think is going to be required to help reach our goal is right now we're just relying essentially on groups to come forward, engaging with groups that are already in the system. And it's really looking at more of a systematic way that we can kind of change that process rather than just us relying on people to come forward, groups to come forward, tell us that they have a need, tell us that they have an interest in identifying it more as a systematic approach.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. You mentioned I believe — correct me if I'm wrong — there are just over 18,000 licensed spaces in the province. How many of those are currently actually filled?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. I think the best that I can do at this point is just to maybe talk about the number of spaces. You're right, it's 18,112. And so that could be six-year-olds that could be included in that number of spaces. We paid out grants in January that would represent just over 12,000. And again we can only pay out based on zero to five, so that's probably the closest I could give you in terms of number of spaces that are filled right now, knowing that there would be some that they wouldn't be receiving a grant based on this agreement for.

**Ms. Conway:** — Of course. And so to get at a kind of closer approximation of where things are at, of the 18,112 spaces, can you tell me how many of those are for zero to five?

[16:00]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Can maybe, Ms. Conway, if we can try to find that answer and provide it back to you after? Okay, thank

you.

**Ms. Conway:** — Absolutely. That's how I like to do this as well, so I appreciate that. I'm also wondering whether you indeed track this. I'm wondering how many open positions there are in licensed child care facilities today, whether that's something the ministry is aware of or tracks.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We don't track that.

**Ms. Conway:** — On that subject, what are the current average wages for ECE [early childhood educator] level I, II, and III?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. And this is prior to . . . there would have been an increase that was provided through the agreement. But the average wage of an ECE I, an early childhood educator, was 15.56. The average for an ECE II was 18.06, and the average for an ECE III was \$20.43.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. The increase that you mentioned, can you talk a bit about that? Was that the top-up? And how did that work?

**Mr. Craswell:** — Gerry Craswell. We provided a wage enhancement grant to facilities to increase the wages by up to \$1 for an ECE I, up to \$2 for an ECE II, and up to \$3 per hour for an ECE III.

We did have a cap, so that if they were already a certain amount over the provincial average for that category they were capped at that amount. So some people didn't get any raise if they were already, for example, \$3 over the average. But if they were at average or below, they would have got the full \$3-an-hour raise. And yeah, so they were capped at a certain amount.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. And I confess I did hear from some of the facilities that that was an issue, you know. Some of their more experienced providers that may not have the qualification weren't eligible for that top-up. So now I understand a bit more about why that was.

**Mr. Craswell:** — So I can just add to that. There were 78 per cent of the ECEs in the province that got at least some raise, and 22 per cent that didn't see a raise. This was again just a first step in addressing the wage issue with ECEs, and as we move forward we'll be making further adjustments.

**Ms. Conway:** — That's great to hear. And I do have a couple of questions about this area, because of course we know that early learning educators, child care providers are not well remunerated, and that has presented some challenges for the area. And in addition to that, without a comprehensive plan to staff these spaces, these targets will all be academic of course.

I guess because I am sort of a new critic to the area, if someone could just speak a bit about how the exemptions work. My understanding is that . . . and this is a rough estimation and I may be wrong about this, but at licensed facilities at least 50 per cent of the staff have to have level I, 30 per cent have to have a level II, and 20 per cent have to have a level III. Could the minister or an official speak to that and just provide a little bit of information about how those levels are differentiated?

**Mr. Craswell:** — So the difference between a level I, a level II, and a level III, is that your question? So a level I will have taken three classes through an ECE [early childhood education] program, so nine credit hours. An ECE II has a full year of training, and an ECE III will have a full two-year . . . I think it's a diploma.

**Ms. Conway:** — Do we have any idea, of the current workforce, what percentage makes up level III, II, or I? Do we track that?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Ms. Conway. So I just want to make sure that I'm clear on what I've told you. So when I gave you the average wage, that was for the early childhood educator positions. So I didn't include supervisor, assistant director, and directors. But if you would like, I could give you that number for those that have an ECE I, ECE II, and ECE III even amongst all those different categories if you'd like.

**Ms. Conway:** — I think the more meaningful number for me was the one I got, but I'm happy to get additional numbers.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Okay. Just one second, please. Thank you for the question. So that we're talking about apples to apples, early childhood educators, so the number of those with an ECE I is 1,016; ECE IIs are 539; and ECE IIIs are 525. And that's as of March 31st, 2021. I was going to say 2015. Be a little dated. 2021.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. And maybe I'll just ask a cluster of questions and then we can break them down. Part of recognizing, you know, the value of early learning and child care is to ensure we have a qualified workforce. And I know that many facilities have only been able to function because of these exemptions. And I think part of the issue has been that folks don't necessarily, because of the low wages, they haven't necessarily had an incentive to really go and get that full year, you know, that degree at Sask Polytech or what have you.

I guess if you could speak to the plan around the workforce challenges, because they are great. Do you have targets in terms of recruiting staff to reach the 6,100 goal? Do you have targets that they be qualified up to a certain level? What are the incentives to get the current providers really achieving that full qualification? And I guess my final question in this little cluster — and I'm happy to break them down — is the wage grid. Can you tell me a bit about what that's going to look like and when you expect to roll that out?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for your question. So we are planning to allocate \$17 million as a part of the 2022-23 Canada-wide early learning agreement. So I'll touch on probably three areas. So wages, I'll start there. So we are continuing to provide a wage enhancement of up to \$3 per hour for qualified early childhood educators. And as you mentioned as well and as you've noted, we have made a commitment to develop a wage grid and make progress on implementation. And I would expect that that work's going to take us through probably to the end of 2022.

In terms of having that work done, we are going through a process of an RFP to find some assistance on that. And so that's, I think that's certainly what we're doing on the wage side.



[16:15]

In terms of formal qualifications, I'll maybe just go into a little bit of detail on this. We do have three agreements with post-secondary institutions in the province. The first one is with Sask Poly; it's going to provide them with 2.5 million. So there's going to be an accelerated ECE level III training. This will be up to 300 individual learners or approximately 30 learners per course. A cohort-based ECE training, level I training for up to 150 students; a dual-credit ECE I training for up to 60 high school students; delivery of a ECE leadership skills certificate of achievement that will be for up to 150 students; the delivery of an autism certificate of achievement that would be for 60 students; as well as the development of up to 16 micro-credentials. So that's Sask Poly. That's about \$2.5 million.

We also have an agreement with Collège Mathieu . . . Did I say that right? Pardon me . . . \$255,000. So that's to develop and offer an accelerated ECE I francophone opportunity for up to 10 students, as well as develop and deliver a francophone training opportunity which will focus on children with autism.

And the final agreement that I would touch on is a \$2 million agreement with Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. Part of it will be for an accelerated program offering leading to an ECE II or an ECE III for up to 60 students; essential skills learning with, and a focus on, ECE level I for up to 84 adult learners; and develop up to 12 micro-credentials or other professional development opportunities. So that's on the formal education side.

As well, we are exploring the development and the delivery of professional learning opportunities to provide ECEs, to provide them with grants, for example, to participate in professional development opportunities. And so that's really a lot of the work that's going to take place this year on the workforce side.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. The accelerated program, so when would it be anticipated that someone would graduate fully qualified? Like because currently it's, what, a two-year program full-time. So what would that look like, the accelerated program for 300 folks across the province and then the 60 students at the Indian Institute?

**Mr. Craswell:** — With the accelerated program, typically we were looking at people who were ECE IIs becoming ECE IIIs, and they were doing essentially a full year of completion while they're working full-time over 18 months. And so we're also providing grants to the employers to be able to cover off some time when those people are taking classes, so it will not be a burden to the facility if they have somebody that's away taking classes. Also providing tuition top-up grants to those people taking the classes, and we're looking at providing some bursaries for students enrolled full-time in order to make it more affordable for them to do that as well.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. And these sound like very good initiatives. I would just note that they're probably initiatives that will result in, you know, increased licensed providers into the future so that that 6,100 remains very challenging. I guess . . . You know, I heard the minister say that these are very much targets, and I think that the opposition recognizes that this is a significant challenge reaching these targets. And we really hope

that . . . We're not pressing in order to sort of make the point that this is not possible; we're pressing because we don't want these to be aspirational targets. We want these to be realized targets.

On the wage grid, I just want to confirm that I heard the minister right. You're hoping to have that in place by the end of 2022, Minister? And if you could . . . Sorry, I made myself a note, and I've . . . Right. You're hoping that that will be confirmed by the end of the year 2022 and the current RFP, that's to obtain some direction in terms of developing that wage grade. That's the current RFP that's closing any day?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, so the RFP is greater than just on the wage grade side. It's for an entire workforce strategy for the sector. And certainly it's the hope that that work will be completed by the end of 2022. Not sure at this point if it will be implemented at the end of 2022 or just ready to be implemented by that time, but certainly the bulk of the work, it's my expectation it'll be done by the end of the year.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. And sorry, just to go back for a minute to my earlier area of questioning, you mentioned that there's an \$8,000 capital grant available for new spaces. Can you just speak a bit more about that? Is that available to any provider across the province?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — The \$8,000 is available for centres to help them with their start-up costs.

**Ms. Conway:** — Do you currently know . . . Sorry.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Pardon me, 8,000 per space. I should have clarified that.

**Ms. Conway:** — Per space. Yes, that was my understanding. Do you currently know the number of graduates each year from Sask Polytech with a diploma?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So I don't have specific numbers for the last year, but I do have information related to an average over the last 10 years. And so through Sask Poly's ECE training program, they've averaged 163 graduates annually, producing seven ECE certificates and three diplomas for every 10 graduates.

**Ms. Conway:** — Does the ministry have any sense how many additional ECEs they have to recruit in order to staff those 6,100 spaces?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So I don't think we can provide that number just in terms of . . . It would depend on what the breakdown of the 6,100 would be, in terms of not only in homes or in centres but also depending on the age of the children. Because the different ages of the children — infants versus toddlers, for example — will have different staffing ratios. So I would say just 6,100 is too broad of a number for us to say yes, it's going to be X number based on those factors.

**Ms. Conway:** — I understand that. But in order to realize this goal of 6,100 spaces, I'm just hoping to learn a bit more about the ministry's understanding of what they need in place to achieve that. So is there any thinking around how many additional people need to be recruited this year?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, thank you for the question. Again this would be just rough estimates, depending on if it's a centre that would require 3 to 1 or even up to 8 to 1. So just really rough numbers here: 1,000 spaces created in centres across the province could range anywhere from 125 to 300.

**Ms. Conway:** — Sorry, can you say that last part again? Sorry, can you repeat that?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, so just really rough math. For every 1,000 spaces, we'd need somewhere between 125 and 300 ECEs, depending on again what the ratio is. Is it 3 to 1? Is it 8 to 1? It's obviously going to be some blend of that, but you know, we'd be somewhere in that range of 125 to 300 per 1,000 spaces.

**Ms. Conway:** — So that's a significant gap. And I think the number you just gave me about average graduates with a diploma is about 163. Can you tell me anything else about the strategy to recruit staff to staff these spaces?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah. No, absolutely. That's why we're adding the \$17 million, and a lot of that is going particularly to the three post-secondary institutions to increase the number of spaces and try to accelerate completion as well. So certainly know that's part of the challenge that's before us with the agreement.

**Ms. Conway:** — Am I understanding correctly that a lot of those initiatives, through the 17 million you mentioned, are targeting current folks that are already providing early learning education? Or would that be not accurate to say that? I mean the accelerated program you mentioned seems to target folks that are already in the workforce.

[16:30]

**Mr. Craswell:** — Thanks for the question. So you're correct that some of the training opportunities are provided to people who are currently working in the profession. Some of those people will be working without any training, so it will be to get them to an ECE I or further up.

Some of the plans that we have — we're offering bursaries — will be to attract people into the program who are not in the industry at all. A couple of other pieces that we're anticipating is that, with a wage grid that provides a more adequate salary or wage for ECEs, we'll both retain more people . . . The child care sector is pretty well known for a retention issue, I think, because of the salary. And so with a better wage grid, we'll be able to retain people and hopefully even attract people back who have worked in it for a while and have left to get better wages somewhere else. They'll come back to the wages that we can provide.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. Yeah, I'm just doing again some rough math, and our current workforce is a little over 2,000. And to staff these new spaces it would be, based on the numbers you gave me, between 750 to 1,800 more staff. So that's extremely ambitious, right?

**Mr. Craswell:** — That would be if all of the spaces were put into centres.

**Ms. Conway:** — I see.

**Mr. Craswell:** — And we're anticipating that a significant portion of those 6,100 will be either new homes or currently operating homes who are unlicensed, becoming licensed. And so those people don't need the same level of training to operate a home.

**Ms. Conway:** — I see. Okay. Is there any plan to adjust the exemption? Like I guess it's not guidance. I think it's in legislation, right? Or the licensed, their regulations. Is there any plan to revisit those exemptions as this project takes flight and we hopefully get more qualified ECEs, and as the wage increases and some of these issues get resolved over time? Or is it too early to say?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, we're not anticipating any changes at this point.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay. My understanding is that the province . . . Sorry, I should make sure I have the . . . Under the Saskatchewan-wide early learning agreement, I believe the province has committed or aspires to provide 11 million in increased compensation to support providers this budget year. Is the government on track to provide that increase? This is under table 5. Priority 4: quality, component 1.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, thank you for the question. Between the lump sum that was paid as well as monthly payments, 4.7 of the 11 has been paid out in the previous fiscal year. And then the difference between the 11 and the 4 gets carried over as a part of this year's agreement.

**Ms. Conway:** — And there's a plan to spend that with this increase that isn't accounted for. Okay. And my previous question was about whether there's any changes being contemplated to the exemption ratios. And looking further down at component 2 under that table, I'm reminded why I asked that question. My understanding is that as part of the agreement, Saskatchewan will aim to improve or increase the overall percentage of staff holding a full certification. So in light of that, why are you not contemplating any changes at this time?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So at this point there's no change being contemplated. But certainly there's, I would say, a hope to reduce the number of exemptions over the course of the agreement that are allowed. But I think right now just it's not feasible from a workforce perspective if we just eliminated the exemptions. We would have pretty significant staffing challenges.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. Can you speak a bit about the subsidy? I know that this is the Ministry of Social Services' wheelhouse, but I got a bit of a song and dance in those estimates. And I'm wondering, in light of the agreement and the commitment to addressing early learning, particularly amongst vulnerable populations, has there been any discussion or thought given to just addressing this under one ministry? And is there any collaborative work going on? Yeah.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So I would just start by saying that certainly Education and Social Services are working collaboratively and having discussions about the subsidy and what happens to the subsidy. And we want to ensure

that certainly no one's going to pay more than they are right now.

And as we get closer to getting to the \$10 a day . . . And we'll certainly have to have more discussions about then what's the future of the subsidy, knowing that there would be likely far fewer people that would then be eligible under the current system once we're down to \$10 a day. But we haven't made a decision on what that would look like.

**Ms. Conway:** — I think I'll move on from that. One of the pieces of feedback I've gotten from stakeholders is the desire to really be involved in how this entire project kind of unfolds, make it a really, as they call it, a stakeholder-led and democratic process. Can you speak to plans for bringing in stakeholders, as they have much to offer in addressing these challenges?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So we certainly do consult with stakeholders in the sector prior to this agreement, and obviously now the interest in seeing the agreement executed and implemented in Saskatchewan. I know I've met with SECA [Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association] on a number of occasions for example, and I know the ministry has an active working relationship with that organization. As well the ministry does meet twice annually with the child care directors from across the province, from the centres. And so they certainly will be a part of consultation as we unfold and develop and implement the agreement over the coming years.

**Ms. Conway:** — Will the ministry be changing its approach to consultation or beefing it up in any way, given how ambitious this project is?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, I think the scope and the nature of the agreement is going to require us to consult with the sector probably more than it has had in the past, just because of again, the five years, \$1.1 billion nature of it.

[16:45]

I know that SECA will be reaching out to their members and getting feedback from their members. And we certainly expect them to provide that feedback to us. So I think it's fair to say we'll be working closely with the sector.

**Ms. Conway:** — And of course there are stakeholders beyond SECA? Yeah. My understanding is that there's been a new innovator brought on as part of the child care group. Can you speak to what experience that person brings and what that role is hoping to accomplish?

**Mr. Craswell:** — Thanks for that question. I don't think we've labelled it quite that way, but we have established a new branch within the ministry called the early learning and child care renewal branch. And we're just in the process of doing some staffing on that. We have hired an executive director for that position who has a wealth of experience in managing large, multi-pronged projects that involve front-facing aspects and stakeholder engagement. So we're very confident that even though . . . doesn't have an early childhood background, certainly is familiar with the human services sector. And we're very, very confident that she will be an outstanding leader in that area.

**Ms. Conway:** — Sorry. The branch is called the early learning . . . the new branch's name?

**Mr. Craswell:** — Early learning and child care renewal.

**Ms. Conway:** — Renewal. Thank you. And how many full-time equivalents do you hope to have staffing that branch?

**Mr. Craswell:** — So we're expecting . . . I believe the org chart has nine spots on it right now. We've also added some child care consultants who work with child care facilities and homes in the field, because of the increased demand there as well. They're not part of that new branch, but they're part of the additional staffing component that we've added as a result of the project.

**Ms. Conway:** — And that's great to hear, given the scope of this project. I'm just turning to the estimates, the (ED08). There are four line items under allocations. I'm just wondering if the minister can speak to how much of those funds are provincial funds and how much of them are federal funds, under those four line items.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So for early years (ED08), I'll just maybe use that as kind of the reference point. So operational support is 4.461; that's all provincial dollars. KidsFirst is 16.629; that's all provincial dollars. ECIP, early childhood intervention programs, is 5.208; that's all provincial. And then the child care, the 287.831; that's broken down to 61 million provincial and 226 federal.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. Of the previous year under child care, the 2021-22 estimates, can you tell me how much of that was provincial funding? I'm just looking to understand the change in provincial funding.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — In 2021-22, of the 75.526, it would've been roughly the same number, 61 million. There would've been a little bit of federal money from the previous agreements. But yeah, it would be roughly 61 in both years.

**Ms. Conway:** — I'm wondering about the number of spots for children experiencing disability this year, or your most recent numbers on that.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. I'll maybe start with . . . Because there are a number of programs that would promote inclusion in the early years for children that do have intensive needs. So for example, there's the ELIS program, the early learning intensive support program. That provides opportunities for 242 children that require intensive supports to attend pre-K [pre-kindergarten] in 23 school divisions.

Obviously I think you are aware of the ECIP program and the, you know, over 1,000 children and families that are impacted by that program.

I won't go through all the pre-K and kindergarten, but specific to child care it looks like 364 children were supported through the enhanced accessibility grant and 69 children were supported through the individual inclusion grant. And that was in 2021-22 through the first three-quarters of that year.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. And I'm near the end of my time,

so I just have a couple of questions that are not necessarily connected. So just bear with me. I did want to go back. There's one thing I forgot to touch on in terms of the Canada-wide agreement.

On the affordability piece and the getting to the \$10-a-day goal, is there any indication when you'll get to that point? Are you hoping to get there by the end of five years, or do you think you'll get there sooner? What's the plan in terms of reaching that \$10-a-day benchmark?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So we are planning for another reduction later this year that should bring some families closer to that \$10 or to the \$10. We do have to, as a part of the agreement, we do have to be at the \$10 by the end of the agreement. And I suspect we will be there well before the end of the agreement.

**Ms. Conway:** — Thank you. I have two questions that are just questions around hard numbers. So maybe I'll ask them both in case, you know, different people have to find them. The first is the number of kids starting kindergarten that are not ready. And if you would indulge me because I'm a new critic, if I could get the comparison, so dating back to maybe 2019 because it'd be great to get a pre-COVID number.

And I'm also wondering how many children we have in Saskatchewan age zero to five, and how many we expect to have by the end of the Canada-wide agreement.

[17:00]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So using the EYE [early years evaluation] data that is collected, we don't have data obviously for spring of 2022. So using the last year that we had data for, we don't have data for the 2021-22 year, so using '20-21 is 78 per cent. That's roughly consistent with what it's been. It kind of fluctuates between that 78, 79, 80, kind of, in that neighbourhood. The assessment was suspended during the beginning stages of COVID, so we don't have numbers for '19-20. But '18-19 would have been the first pre-pandemic year that we have numbers for, and it was 79.2. And the last year it's 78.7. So pretty consistent.

In terms of number of children between the ages of zero to five that we expect in the province by the end of the agreement, I think, was the question. We typically use about . . .

**Ms. Conway:** — By the end, right.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah. We usually use about, typically use 15,000 per age. So 75,000 is kind of the number that we're looking at between the ages of zero to five, I think, at any given point during this agreement would be fair to say.

**Ms. Conway:** — And with those kindergarten readiness numbers, I understand they have been relatively flat, but hopefully those will improve as the early learning is beefed up over the years.

Did I get an answer to my question about the spaces for kids zero to five? I know we were going to come back to it.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So of the 18,112 spaces, just over 16,000 are zero to five.

**Ms. Conway:** — So across Saskatchewan we have roughly 12,000 of the 16,000 available spaces actually staffed?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So I guess I would just indicate that either those spaces were vacant or the facilities themselves couldn't locate the parents to provide the rebate. Because I think the information I gave you was based on the rebates that were given to families, so likely vacant spaces though.

**Ms. Conway:** — That's a pretty significant number of vacant spaces, which only reinforces the challenges in staffing these 6,100 spaces. Is there any indication of where those vacancies would be, based on community? Like would you be able to break down that data at all?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We don't have that information. We don't do a head count like we would do similar in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] school system, so we wouldn't be able to provide that number. And you're right to a point in terms of some of those vacant spaces may be staffing-related, but not necessarily. It may just be that families haven't accessed those spaces. So I would say that not 100 per cent of the vacancies are directly related to a staffing issue.

**Ms. Conway:** — So you can't provide that information because it doesn't exist? Or you just don't have it at this time?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We don't collect that.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay. Yeah, I mean as critic in the area, it's just a little concerning not to have access to that kind of data because we hear anecdotally about, you know, spaces not being able to be staffed. So I think that has significant consequences in terms of being able to make good policy because why would we announce a bunch of new spaces if we can't staff the ones we have? And if we don't know where those issues are, it's hard to target. And then we know also that Saskatchewan has a very high number of child care deserts in certain communities, right? So tracking this kind of thing, I would think, would hopefully be a priority going forward, you know.

And I'll also note, you know, I again am the new critic in this area, and I did go back and review some prior years of estimates. And the retention and turnover issue is something, it's a drum we've been banging on this side for a long time. And my understanding looking back at those estimates is we don't, for example, track turnover and retention issues. We haven't been measuring that. So we might be better positioned now if we had some of those data points, and I did notice that the Canada-wide agreement spoke to, you know, collecting data. So I mean, in order to kind of do good policy going forward, it is my hope that some of this information will be collected going forward.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, absolutely. So that's part of the agreement that we have to report to the federal government, and so we're going to be building that as a part of the ministry to be able to track that.

**Ms. Conway:** — Okay. I'm going to finish early. I want to thank the officials and the minister. This has been a bit of a contrast to some of my earlier experiences in estimates, in terms of the time it takes to answer questions. And that's surely a testament to the

minister and the officials. So thank you so much.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Thank you, Ms. Conway. We are now in stand in recess until 6:00 p.m. Thank you.

[The committee recessed from 17:07 until 18:00.]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Welcome back, committee members. We will now resume consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Education. Substituting for Ms. Conway is Mr. Love. Mr. Love, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Love:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks to the minister and all the officials here. Good to see you again. And I realize that you've been here for a couple hours before the break. I'm the new guy in the room. And I know that the last time that we met, we finished with a question posed from myself to the minister. And since I wasn't here before the break, was that answered earlier with my colleague? Or would you like to answer that now?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — It wasn't answered. I think Ms. Conway focused all of her time on the child care section. So if you'll just give me one moment.

Thanks, Mr. Love, for the question. So with respect to the funding questions that we left off the last time that we met, so a couple of things I would note. So the funding increases covers two years of enrolment growth. We are increasing the budget for we think at least one that was funded at 50 per cent in the budget last year but is going to 75 per cent. Actuals were higher in '21-22 than what were budgeted for, so the actual incremental funding is less than in the budget. And I'll maybe have Assistant Deputy Minister Rory Jensen maybe speak to that as well.

**Mr. Jensen:** — Rory Jensen, assistant deputy minister. So what the minister is explaining is that when we prepared our budget for '21-22, we had expected enrolment at the qualified independent schools and historical high schools. That enrolment is higher than what we had budgeted for. So there's been approximately just around a million dollars in growth of actuals higher than what our budget is in this current year. So that makes up about 140 students in '21-22.

We are anticipating about another 143 students in qualified independent schools and historical high schools. So while our budget is going up by 2.3 million, 2.4 million, the actual incremental spending will be less than that on these categories because we are catching up to where enrolment is projected to be in those schools.

As well as the school that's going from 50 per cent to 75 per cent, that school was formerly an associate school. And there was transition funding while they moved away from associate school to become a qualified independent, to help them manage their transition in their funding. In '21-22 they are currently being funded at 80 per cent, and the actuals for next year, they will actually be going down to 75 per cent. So there will actually be an incremental decrease in funding related to that one school.

**Mr. Love:** — So in the last meeting we talked about a projected enrolment increase of 290 students in qualified independent schools and an unknown number in historical high schools. What

you're explaining tonight as an enrolment increase spread out over two years — you just mentioned numbers of 140 one year, 143 the next year — is that where that number comes from? Or is that the projected increase for next year, that you're projecting those schools will increase by an additional 290 next year?

**Mr. Jensen:** — The way you described it in the former, where it's approximately 140 students that experienced in this current year, so '21-22, that's part of it. And then it's an additional 143 students approximately. That's an estimate of 143 students, FTEs [full-time equivalent] in '22-23.

**Mr. Love:** — So the additional funds in the neighbourhood of 2.5 million . . . And I'm looking at the *Hansard* record from last time. The minister said that we're seeing a 15 per cent increase in enrolment compared to, you know, a smaller increase in all other 27 school divisions, and that it was due to that increased enrolment that funding was going up, in other words tying increased investment into increased enrolment.

So I just want to make sure that I'm really clear on this. How many students are you expecting into this category which will now include historical high schools, qualified independent schools, and the new category of certified independent schools? How many students is the projected increase for next year that the ministry's decided to increase spending by 2.5 million? Because we've had a few numbers batted around. So is it 200, or are you still catching up over a year where it increased more than expected? But for this budget year, the increase of 2.5 million, what's the increase in enrolment that justifies that?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question and for your patience. So in the qualified independent and certified independent, we're projecting total enrolment of 2,156 FTEs. So it's accounting for approximately 140 for this year and 143 for the upcoming school year. On the historical high schools, we're projecting a total of 650 FTEs and an enrolment increase of 23.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, thanks for that clarity, Minister. I mean there's obviously been discussion in here during question period. And you know, we had a statement earlier this week from the Justice minister that I was misrepresenting the funding that these schools get. So just for clarity's sake . . . And I mean this sincerely as critic, you know. I want to understand this file as best I can. Minister, can you and your officials just walk me through the different levels of funding for historical high schools, qualified independent, and certified independent schools for the new category that you're creating, including changes that have happened in the last couple of years?

So I'm hearing us talk about one school moving from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. They actually got 80 per cent when their actuals came in, but they'll be going back down to 75. So just for clarity, I'd appreciate that. And also can you just confirm, is that one school that we're talking about — I believe Rory was speaking about this — is that Saskatoon Christian School? Because you said that used to be an associate school, and that's kind of just where my mind is going.

[18:15]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So the qualified independent, certified independent, historical high schools, as

well as associate schools, are funded on a per-student basis. So it's different than school divisions' funding. So the amount is tied to the overall funding that school divisions receive when you take capital out. Historical high schools and associate schools are funded at 80 per cent of the provincial average, per-student average. The new certified independent school will be funded at 75 per cent, and qualified independent schools are funded at 50 per cent.

And you're right. The one that we expect is going to apply to be a certified independent under the new category would be Saskatoon Christian School.

**Mr. Love:** — Thanks, Minister. So in these categories, they're funded per student. Is there any consideration given for students with intensive support needs? Do they receive any additional funding if they attend any schools that we're discussing right now?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So maybe just to distinguish between . . . Because associate schools are associated with a school division there may be some support that they receive from the school division just based on that, in most cases, long-standing relationships.

In terms of the historical high schools, the certified independent, and qualified independent schools, they don't directly receive money, say for supports for learning, kind of as an individual kind of dollar amount. But because supports for learning make up the formula and their percentage is based on a percentage of the overall operating grant, I think you can make the argument that there is some recognition of that. But it's not a straight QIS [qualified independent school] or CIS [certified independent school] or a historical high school gets X amount for supports for learning.

**Mr. Love:** — So if a student with significant intensive support needs applied to attend a qualified independent school, do they have the ability to accept or reject the student? And if they choose to accept the student, will any additional funding be there to help meet the needs of the student?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So with respect to those categories, so I think that it would be up to that school to make the decision to accept or not accept that student. And obviously if they accept that student, you know, they would have to provide the supports that that student would be required. You know, I would say it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility that, for instance, families that have individualized funding for autism, for example, that might want to dedicate that towards their enrolment at a school. But I can't say that for sure. You know, it's possible that that could happen in some cases.

**Mr. Love:** — I think I know the answer to this question, but do public schools in our 27 divisions have the ability to accept or reject students with intensive support needs?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I would say technically, no, they don't have the ability to reject them.

**Mr. Love:** — We'll maybe come back to this concept in a bit. Thinking about all of these independent types of schools, historical . . . And I understand associate schools are a little bit

different situation where they have an agreement with the school division. But in particular, historical high schools, qualified independent, the new category, how does funding work?

So you talk about per-student funding, but a lot of these schools . . . And we have other programs, I realize, in the other 27 divisions to invite international students to come and study here and take part. How does the funding work in these categories of independent schools for international students?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — The historical high schools don't get funded based on international students. It's strictly on their Saskatchewan-enrolled students.

**Mr. Love:** — And that includes out-of-province students as well? They have to be Saskatchewan students?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay. So I know last meeting, I asked if all 22 schools charge some form of tuition, and the minister said they had the ability to, but they don't, but that there's no cap. There's no regulation in terms of how much tuition they might charge.

But theoretically can these schools, if they're getting, you know, between 50 to 75 per cent of the average for per-student funding, you know, charge — we might have different ideas in this committee what would be a large sum of tuition, what would be affordable — but theoretically could they charge significantly above what they would be receiving if their funding was at 100 per cent? And I guess the question that I'm getting at is are they able to essentially be bringing in more operating funds per student than what our other 27 school divisions have to work with?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So with respect to the tuitions that these schools would be able to set, so there is no prescribed limit in terms of what they can set. I think they have to, you know, judge that according to what families that choose those schools have the ability to afford. I think one of the important distinctions though is that those facilities and therefore the people that are attending them — also in the case of all of those examples, with a minor difference for historical high schools — but they fund their own capital. So they have to factor that in as well.

They don't receive PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal] from the province. They don't receive major capital dollars from the province. So that's one of the factors that they have to factor in, not only affordability but also some of their costs that are outside of what they receive from the funding.

And I want to correct myself on a previous answer. So I've been informed that the individualized funding for autism cannot be used for tuition for these schools. It has to be used in a community-based for . . . to procure a community-based service, not a school.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay. Thanks for that correction, Minister. So I know you mentioned some exceptions for capital funding for historical high schools. But I will note that Athol Murray College of Notre Dame is receiving capital funding this year for a project. Is that abnormal, or is this . . . When those requests come in from

historical high schools, which you know, and I've said in the past, some of these schools have been in the province for over 100 years. They've been here since before we were a province. So you know, I know that they're rooted and serve our province well. Please don't misinterpret my question.

But as far as providing capital funding, were there other requests from historical high schools that have been denied? Do you get requests? Do you typically fulfill those requests with funding like we did this year? If you can provide a little background, that'd be appreciated.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — It's not common. It's fairly rare. But they could go through the same process as the capital in terms of looking at health and safety, those types of things. And their funding from the province is capped at 20 per cent of the project, so they have to fundraise the other 80 per cent. Athol Murray, Notre Dame college at Athol Murray is one that is currently being part of our capital budget, but I think the most recent one before that was about 10 years ago, something like that, 15, if we funded it at all. But certainly it's not a common thing.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, thanks for that, Minister. And you hit on something there that I was going to ask about next. I think that my understanding is most historical high schools don't rely on tuition for funding capital projects, but they engage in fundraising, which is something unique to independent schools, to fundraise for their facilities and something that our public system doesn't have access to.

[18:30]

I want to come back to just my question that we left off with last time, and just to get a little clarity before I move on to topics. So at the end of our time last time, what we began with today, Minister, was looking for an explanation where we have, you know, I understand two years of increased enrolment for which 2.5 million additional dollars is being provided to independent schools, and yet we have a projected increase of 1,300 spread across 27 divisions, 625 schools by your ministry's own numbers. In the supports for learning operational funding there's 1.1 million of unaccounted for investment there. So can you explain the discrepancy between significantly more funding per student going to independent schools than our public system?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question and for your patience. So I think a couple of comments that I'll make, and some of this will be familiar from our last committee meeting. So there is \$6 million that is going to go toward supports for learning. Four million of that, approximately 4 million of that is for non-teacher salaries. So that does cover the increase in salaries that aren't covered by the CBA [collective bargaining agreement].

There is an additional . . . Sorry, I'll just find my place here. There's an additional \$2 million for additional vulnerability factors. That could include low income, lone-parent status, transiency, children in foster care, or student refugees. And again, so that's on top of the funding that had been provided as a part of the CBA. And then we probably at some point will get into the \$7 million fund that we've created for additional EAs [educational assistant] in the classroom.

And that is on top of . . . Even with an increasing enrolment, because I know you mentioned the increasing enrolment, we are still down from the peak enrolment in 2020-21, and those funds were not reduced by school divisions in that time. And so that represents an additional 9 to \$10 million. And so just, you know, I will probably have a bit of a debate or a difference on this. But your phrasing of the 1.1 million unaccounted for, I have to account for all of that when I go to treasury board, when school divisions get their budget. And so I understand the point that you're trying to make, but all of that is included in our budget submission and the budget that we receive from treasury board.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I'll clarify my comments, Minister. My perspective is \$29.4 million in additional operating costs. What we discussed last time was 4.9 million for non-teaching staff, 23.4 million for just the 2 per cent increase on the teachers' contract. That doesn't account for incremental increases or other costs in terms of pension costs and things like that. And so that leaves . . . It's not 1.1 million unaccounted for. It's just 1.1 million remaining to cover all other additional costs, including increased enrolment, including inflationary costs, fuel costs, all these other, you know . . . natural gas costs, you know. And we're seeing school divisions speak out about all those additional costs of \$1.1 million for an entire public education system — province-wide, 625 schools — \$1.1 million compared to 26 independent schools with \$2.5 million. That's the discrepancy that I'm looking for clarification on.

Now if I can, I can move on. And I don't think that we'll see . . . I don't think we're going to sit here and talk this out and, you know, see things the same way. Like that's not the point of what we're doing here. I get that.

But I'm wondering if you can . . . Just going back to our conversation about funding for independent schools, you spoke about the province-wide student average. Can you report to the committee what that average is for, you know, whatever numbers you have available? Maybe the last three or four . . . If you can go back as far as 2016, that would be great, and what that projected per-student average will be for the next school year.

[18:45]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So the per-student amount for the '22-23 year is 11,364. Last year it was 11,156. The year prior to that it was 10,868. And the prior year to that it was 10,871, to give you four of the most recent years.

**Mr. Love:** — That's helpful. Thank you. I want to move back to another discussion, actually I think what we started with last time. And I asked the minister and the officials if any calculations are made to account for the cost of inflation year over year at the ministry. And the answer was no, that the Education ministry will find efficiencies and look inward to cover those increased year-over-year costs. But interesting.

And I know on this side of the House there's not as many of us, so we have to wear a lot of hats. And I know Minister Duncan has filled a number of roles as minister of Health, Environment — way too many to remember. It's okay. We don't need to run them off.

But as critic for Parks, Culture and Sport, I had a conversation

the other evening, and I asked the same question: how does your ministry account for inflation? And the response — and I'm paraphrasing; I'm not quoting here — was basically, of course we account for inflation within the ministry. Of course costs go up year over year. We have to consider those and make budget increases and changes to account for that. Essentially I was responded to like that is a no-brainer. All of our organizations will do that. Parks, Culture, Creative Sask, everyone is thinking about this and budgeting for it.

So my question is, Minister and officials, why would one ministry treat that as a no-brainer while this ministry doesn't account for a single dollar of increased costs year over year? And in your experience, Minister, on various files, which one is the norm? Which approach would be seen as normal in this government?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So I think to continue on with our discussion from last week . . . And I think when this came up last time, we had indicated that there are a couple of things that we have to budget for in terms of an increase in the education budget. Really that's related to central services, just the cost of the lease space that we do have. And we do have additional positions, particularly in the child care area of the ministry, and those are being funded through the federal agreement.

We in the ministry and the deputy and her officials, her staff, do a great job of managing any of the internal pressures that we may have outside of those. When we go to treasury board, we're looking to get dollars into schools.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay. Thanks for that, Minister. I want to ask about some comments that you've put on the record, Minister Duncan, about cost savings for divisions when experienced teachers at the top of the pay grid retire or move on and are replaced by younger teachers. Is this a comment that you stand behind? Do you see the changes in incremental increases for teachers resulting in year-over-year savings for school divisions?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question, Mr. Love. So not unlike within government budgets as we develop our budget and provide that to school divisions, it's based on the average salary, which is refreshed every year. And so in theory some will be above the average and some will be below the average. We don't get detailed information in terms of every single school division, what every single teacher, where they're at on that. But certainly some will be above and some will be below.

**Mr. Love:** — So, Minister, do you consider the incremental steps in a teacher's first 10 years of service as being part of the contract?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes.

**Mr. Love:** — And how much does the government estimate incremental increases will cost school divisions in next school year? I can elaborate, but the letter from Saskatoon Public School Board Chair estimated that, and I don't have it in front of me, but I believe that she estimated 42 per cent of their teachers will be receiving an incremental increase next year. And that will cost that division alone 2.3 million. So I'm wondering if you have an estimation, province-wide, what these contractual and negotiated

increases will cost school divisions next year.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So maybe a brief explanation from me. So we know what the total teachers' salaries is going to be. We know what the increase is going to be. We make our request; we take that total; it goes into the funding formula. And then that divides that to the school divisions who ultimately are responsible for managing their budgets.

[19:00]

**Mr. Love:** — So do you think that when the government messages that they have fully funded the teachers' contract, that they should calculate the cost of the 2 per cent increase and the incremental increases before announcing that that contract was fully funded?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. But doing what you're suggesting, we would be double counting it.

**Mr. Love:** — Can you explain that statement?

**Mr. Craswell:** — So when we look at the salaries of teachers and the proportion of teachers that are in each level, the number of teachers at step 1 on the scale across the province generally is very, very consistent. The number of teachers at step 2 is very consistent. So even though there's some that went from step 1 to step 2 and get an increment, there's also a number that have been at the top of the scale that leave the profession and new ones come in at step 1, and it all sort of balances out. So on any given year, the percentage of teachers at any level is consistent. So the increments are taken into account, and it just works out to be a net-zero change.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, so without calculations from the government, what I have to discuss in the committee are the calculations from the largest school division in the province, which is Saskatoon Public Schools. And their public letter from last week stated that this budget will not cover increased cost of the teachers' contract because incremental increases cost that division alone an additional \$2.3 million next year than they spent this year. So in their words, you know, the way that I read it, it doesn't equal out. And as the largest school division in the province, you'd think that the law of averages might apply there as it does province-wide. But it doesn't line up with the reasoning that you've brought to the committee today.

They indicate that roughly 42 per cent of their teachers are not at the top level. They're getting year-over-year increments. Or perhaps they're pursuing a master's degree and receiving that classification step increase. Either way, the contractual increases outside of the 2 per cent raise — which, you know, incremental increases are part of the negotiated contract — will cost the largest division 2.3 million additional dollars that are not funded in this year's budget. Would you care to respond directly to Saskatoon Public Schools?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I think part of the challenge is we don't have the information that they're basing that calculation on. So I mean we'll certainly get a better idea once they do submit a budget later this spring to the ministry. But difficult to, for us to kind of assess all the information that they are including and information that we will learn more about



when they do submit a budget. So it's hard for us to comment on numbers that we're not privy to at this point.

**Mr. Love:** — Is this the first year that the ministry has been challenged to include incremental increases in its funding? In other words, let's say that you don't have the information they brought forward. This couldn't be a surprise; this couldn't be a new consideration for the ministry. Has this been brought to the ministry in previous budget years in response to challenges in school divisions?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I would just say generally speaking this is certainly something that school divisions manage as a part of their budget on an annual basis. All school divisions will have this as a part of their budget deliberations. I would say it is early though. School divisions will start identifying their staffing levels in May into June, and so I think in fairness to the ministry we don't have all the information they're dealing with.

And I think in fairness as well, you know, the budget is still . . . We're in estimates. The budget only came down a couple of weeks ago. And they're working through that process — as all school divisions are — and have, I think, put out some messaging as they have taken their first preliminary looks at what their budget may look like. But we're a long ways away from approving a budget.

**Mr. Love:** — So you're correct that they have put out their messaging, and the Government of Saskatchewan has also put out its messaging. And one of those messages is that this budget fully funds the teachers' contract. Would you say this evening that you're still confident in that messaging from the government, given the fact that you haven't calculated for incremental increases?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes.

**Mr. Love:** — Can you explain that?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well I think as one of the ADMs has explained, there's a number of factors that go into the overall teachers' salary. We factor that in when we ask for our increase, knowing that the same percentage of teachers are at the same point in the grid year to year.

And so I think what isn't being factored into this discussion is — I think it's been pointed out and where, I think, you started in this line of questioning — we don't yet know from any school division, including Saskatoon Public, how many teachers are going to retire, likely at the top of the grid, and how they're going to replace those teachers. And that is a staffing decision.

You know, I think a lot of those teachers — generally speaking, not Saskatoon Public but generally speaking — a lot of new teachers get hired and they come in at the bottom of the grid. School divisions can make different decisions and hire more experienced teachers, but that's something they have to manage as a part of their budget.

**Mr. Love:** — I want to move to a new topic here, around intensive supports funding. The most recent number I have is the 2020-21 school year, that there were 9,391 students province-

wide requiring intensive supports. Can you provide an updated number from the '21-22 school year of all students requiring intensive supports?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — As reported by school divisions, students requiring intensive supports in the 2021-22 year are 9,274.

[19:15]

**Mr. Love:** — Thanks, Minister. Can you tell me how intensive — we discussed this earlier a little bit; let's come back to it — how intensive support needs are calculated as part of the funding formula?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So the supports for learning subcomponent of the funding model is really based on a number of data points that we collect from third parties to just have independent verified information. These data points include low income, lone-parent status, transiency — so that's two or more disruptions within a school year — children in foster care, student refugees. So we collect those factors by community sites, and we factor that into the distribution of the funding model and what those communities are experiencing for those vulnerability factors.

**Mr. Love:** — So those factors would be calculated community by community, and then would be used to potentially increase the funding provided in the education budget for the operating funds for that community?

**Mr. Jensen:** — Yes. That information would be used to factor into the funding distribution model, so within the boundaries of the school division. So we would not go . . . for example, Sun West has Rosetown, Outlook, those. We wouldn't go down to that level for distribution, and direct school divisions to distribute the funding to those communities. But we would factor in the group of communities within the boundaries of the school division and use that to calculate how the funding model distributes those funds, based on the third-party data that we received from ICT [Immigration and Career Training], Social Services.

**Mr. Love:** — So you mostly listed a number of, you know, social determinants or socio-economic factors that may be used to predict needs within a community. What about like specific, you know, intensive support needs for students with a variety of challenges in learning, mobility, you know, when it comes to a physical disability, or other challenges that may require extra support in the classroom that have nothing to do with these other social determinants? Does the ministry account for that in the funding formula?

**Mr. Jensen:** — Yes, those items are factored into the calculation of the funding distribution model. They come based on the enrolment piece of the funding model. So as students enrol with identified high needs, that's also factored into the funding distribution model.

**Mr. Love:** — And if that student changes schools or school divisions, does the funding follow them to a new school division? Essentially, if they've been identified in one school division, Sun West, as needing intensive supports, and they move somewhere else, does the ministry track where those intensive support needs are concentrating? Or when they move, is there any funding that

follows that student to their new division?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So we wouldn't track the individual student, but we would track the enrolment. So as enrolment changes, the funding model would take that into account.

**Mr. Love:** — So the funding model would follow enrolment changes on average, but not the needs of the specific student?

**Mr. Jensen:** — That's correct.

**Mr. Love:** — So is the ministry aware of any concentrations of students with intensive support needs in specific divisions, or does it just simply rely on an equal distribution of those needs across the province?

**Mr. Jensen:** — Thank you for the question. So the process behind using the funding model and the drivers behind the funding model is really using the high-quality, third-party-verified data. We've worked with experts and they've reviewed supports for learning factors and how we use that distribution in the funding model. And they've let us know that we're using the highest quality of data.

So as students with higher needs — we work with population health; we work with Social Services; we work with Health and ICT — and as the populations move about the province, the funding distribution model will factor in kind of where those higher needs populations are concentrating and distribute the funding appropriately to those sources.

We really do focus on using that high-quality, third-party data to ensure that we are equitably distributing the dollars that we have.

**Mr. Love:** — And where specifically does that high-quality, third-party data come from?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So, as I mentioned, we use population health provides us information. We use some on vulnerability factors on socio-economic we receive from Social Services. The Ministry of Health provides us information on demographics for high-needs students with physical, cognitive, physiological challenges. And ICT provides us information on immigration and where those populations are settling within the province.

**Mr. Love:** — So one of the concerns that I have is that we could potentially have somebody living in one community but choosing to go to school in a different community where supports for, potentially supports for their child are available. And then we could see a constant, you know . . . So using the metrics that you've described, you know, we could have folks again living in one community where this data might show up, but choosing a different school division because they have, again, more supports or schools that provide programs to students with specific physical or cognitive or physiological needs.

Is there any accounting for this movement within the province, essentially folks shopping for a school division that supports the needs of their child? Is there any accounting for this in how school divisions are funded?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So I would just say, generally speaking, we have approximately

180,000 students living around the province. I would say by and large the vast majority of them would be attending a school in their school division in which they live. So I don't know if we're talking about the large number that you're referring to or not, but it'd be difficult to, I think, you know . . . We're getting down to some pretty — if it happens — pretty small numbers.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, we're not talking about all 180,000 students. We're talking about the 9,274 with intensive support needs. And I guess that I'm wondering if there's any work being done within the ministry to simply ask, where do those 9,000-plus students attend? And do we see any trends in where families are choosing to go to find those extra supports that these young people need? Now a follow-up question that I have is, does the ministry track the number . . . Does this 9,274 include students attending historical high schools, qualified independent, or certified independent schools?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — If I could just interject for an second. We're approaching the midpoint of the evening session. If anyone would like to take a break, please let us know. If not, we can power through. Thank you.

**Mr. Love:** — I could use a very quick, if we did a very quick two, three minutes. I'm warm. I know the minister came in and had the temperature turned up and I'm hot in here.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I'll maybe just please say before we . . . if we're able take that break, it only includes school divisions. School division schools were included in that number that I gave you, not anything outside.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Thank you. We'll take a five-minute break.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Welcome back, Minister and committee members. Mr. Love, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Love:** — So just before our short recess I asked about the number of intensive support students. The 9,274 is only within those schools fully funded in the public system. Does the ministry track the number of intensive support students at independent schools?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — No.

**Mr. Love:** — Is there a reason for that?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We don't provide any additional supports to those schools. I think, as we indicated before, it's a percentage based on the provincial average.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, but you also indicated that within the provincial average there is . . . part of that provincial average and part of the funding would account for students with intensive support needs. So part of that funding is to fulfill the needs of intensive support students. But you don't know if there are any in independent schools?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We don't collect or track that information, so we can't say for sure that there would be.

**Mr. Love:** — So the assistant deputy minister was commenting on some of the data that is collected by community or by division, including a number of social determinants, socio-economic factors — low income, lone parent, foster care, status refugee — and that that all would be included in the funding formula per student. But we've got this challenge here where independent schools that are charging sometimes really high tuition or even any tuition at all, I think would specifically exempt folks coming from challenging economic situations to be able to afford that tuition. But yet that's accounted for in the funding that they receive.

So I guess what I'm asking is, how is that a fair system where all this data that you collect and feeds into a formula community by community, but maybe doesn't represent the actual needs of the student population, can you comment on that at all? And you know, the lack of tracking of students with needs or the lack of tracking of students with low income, foster care, refugee, who are attending public schools but yet you don't track those in independent schools.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. Again, it's not something that we track, but I don't think we can assume that there aren't students attending qualified independent schools or historical high schools or others in the province that would be able to identify with some of the criteria that we've discussed tonight.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, and I guess I'm not, you know, supporting a position that there are no schools with . . . or no students, sorry, with intensive support needs or who fit some of the other criteria. But you know, in the words of the officials and you, Minister, the funding is based on an average. And within that average there might be students with specific needs or social determinants — again, low income, coming from a foster care situation, refugee status, intensive support needs. That all gets piled into an average.

Is it the ministry's belief that the same average of those needs applies in the 27 divisions as what applies in independent schools, many of which charge large sums of tuition for students to attend?

[19:45]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you very much for the question. Again I would, I guess, just go back to say that while we may not track that information, it doesn't mean that students that would be identified through the criteria that we have talked about wouldn't be attending independent schools or historical high schools, or qualified independent schools. Some schools, in fact, will waive tuition or have tuition programs to provide for that support for a student.

A good example here in the city of Regina would be the Mother Teresa associate school under the Regina Catholic School Division, who my understanding is, they don't charge tuition. And certainly I've toured that school, met some of the students. And certainly I know that that school is intended to provide supports and education for students that otherwise, might not otherwise have that support that they need.

And so I think there are lots of examples that do show that, I

think, it's a generalization and one that probably doesn't bear out to say that independent schools or historical high schools or associate schools are only about high tuition and don't provide supports for students that otherwise, through the funding formula, would likely be supported in their school division through the supports for learning funding.

**Mr. Love:** — So, Minister, you've commented publicly — as did the Justice minister — that you support a parental choice in choosing what type of school their children will attend. But I think that the question I'll pose to you is, do you support school choice in choosing what student or what type of students they allow to attend their schools?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So I think it's probably not . . . I think lots goes into this question and answer. I think there's lots of reasons why schools form where they do and when they do. And I think that ultimately they're organizing a school to, for whatever reason, to provide education for a group of students. We're a diverse province, and we want to ensure that we meet the needs of the students where they're at. We do as a government, this government does believe in providing for that choice. But we don't fund it the same as we do school divisions, and we don't fund it even at 100 per cent of the provincial average, understanding that those schools will make choices in terms of how they organize and form and operate. And ultimately parents will choose whether that's the option that they want to provide for their families or not.

**Mr. Love:** — But just to be clear, you support a category of schools . . . Essentially two systems where one system is here to serve the public no matter how much money they have, what their needs are, what those social determinants are that they might be bringing into the school every single day, and another system that can pick and choose, that can choose students that, you know . . . One system that takes everybody and makes their budgets work, and another system that chooses who they'll take to fit their budget. You support those two separate categories to exist?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Well again, Mr. Love, I think we're making assumptions about schools excluding students. We may surmise, but I don't think we have that for sure. And there likely will be schools that have formed to serve a particular need or a particular population in the province, and we support that.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, I'm going to move on to a new category, and I do want to talk about EAs. And I'll say I have, I think personally and professionally, some mixed feelings on the funding for 200 additional EAs. But as a premise, any way that we get extra supports into the classroom to support our students who need that extra professional in the room, EAs are remarkable professionals. I've had the honour of working with some, knowing lots. And they provide really important support within our classrooms to our young people.

But I do have some questions about the program, and I want to get into some of that here tonight. Can you maybe just start by providing some comments on . . . Well first of all, I actually want to ask about some numbers. Can you provide, like, how many EAs are working in our 27 school divisions each year? And again, if you're able to go back to 2017 up until this year and what the projection would be for next year, that would be great. But really, whatever data you have available at your fingertips

tonight will suffice.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — In 2017-2018 there was 3,383; in '18-19 there were 3,560; in 2019-2020 there was 3,645; in 2020-21 it was 3,777; and in '21-22 it was 3,832.

**Mr. Love:** — And is that FTEs?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yes, that's correct. It's FTEs.

**Mr. Love:** — And then maybe I lost track of the other ones. What would be the projection for next year? Do you have that . . . the idea of that number?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — We don't project staffing levels by category. This is more of a looking back at the staffing profile, but we don't project forward.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, that makes sense. And just talking about these additional 200 in this program and how that might be in addition to staffing decisions and budget decisions that boards will have to make this year, what conditions do divisions need to meet to access these funds to hire new EAs?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So the funding is, it's conditional. It's not to be used for other types of programs or initiatives. Boards will receive an allocation upon agreeing to hire the additional EAs, and it's our expectation that there will be 200 hired through this program.

**Mr. Love:** — And is there a commitment beyond this year for those EAs to continue working in our school divisions?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So not precluding the '23-24 budget, but certainly, we'll be working with school divisions to measure how they have done in terms of the hiring of these 200 positions, the effectiveness of the dollars that had been spent over this year. And certainly if there's an opportunity to continue with it forward beyond this year, that's certainly my hope. But we'll judge that at the next year.

**Mr. Love:** — So I guess one of the challenges that just one year of funding presents is asking people to enter into a new career, perhaps leave an existing job to begin work as an EA on what I think amounts to like a casual position without promise of employment in the future. So how does the ministry suggest school divisions meet this challenge when recruiting and hiring these 200 new EAs?

[20:00]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I guess just generally speaking, as I was able to indicate, over the last number of years this government has provided for funding that has allowed for school divisions to hire additional EAs. This was a specific targeted program that we announced in the Throne Speech and have delivered on here in the budget. It, I think, is going to support obviously teachers that are going to benefit, and you've indicated that, the resource that they do provide.

Certainly we have prioritized, made a priority this year, targeting as a part of our interim education plan, particularly reading levels at the early ages. And so certainly it's my hope and expectation

that some of these 200 EAs will be helping out particularly in classes that may have more kids than some.

And so again, commitment in the Throne Speech delivered in the budget. And certainly it's my intention that this is going to carry on in future years.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I guess the question here is about the challenges of recruiting these EAs in what amounts to a casual contract. You know, this isn't a full-time permanent position. And I think that . . . You know, don't get me wrong. I hope that we recruit them all. I hope we've got awesome, caring, professional adults coming to work with our young people. But there are a few concerns here as far as, where will these 200 come from? And are they going to be willing to come into a position that may only exist for a year without an annualized commitment to this funding?

And the question again posed to the minister is, how will you help school divisions meet these challenges of recruitment?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Yeah, thanks for the question, Mr. Love. Certainly, you know, I think school divisions have done a good job over the last, as I indicated, five years, hiring 449 additional EA FTEs.

And so 200 is a large number. It's dedicated funding though. That's the purpose of the funding. And I would say that even in some of the years in that five-year span that I've talked about, there were years where they got close to hiring 200 in a single year. So certainly looking forward to them having that additional \$7 million to be able to provide those supports.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I guess my point, just to be clear, is that this is different than previous hires. You know, it's a different contract that these new EAs are looking to sign to come and work in our schools. Thanks for the numbers previously on the EAs. Would you have the number present for '16-17?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So that would be in the '16-17 year. There were 3,408 FTEs.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, thank you. Thinking about the new 200 additional EAs that we're hoping to see, has the ministry communicated at all to school divisions about any monitoring of these hires? Like how will the ministry monitor? Or are you seeking any data or information coming back from school divisions on the effectiveness of these EAs, if they're helping to meet any outcomes in the classroom? What's been communicated to . . . or has anything been communicated? Or is there a plan to monitor the work of these 200 in any way that's different than a typical EA?

**Mr. Jensen:** — So in terms of what we've communicated to school divisions — and thank you for the question — is we've talked to them about, we're not really . . . The ongoing effect on student outcomes is broader than just having an EA in the class. We really are looking on this targeted funding as it's really about making sure that the increase in number of EAs has been hired. And that's how we're monitoring and working with school divisions on the . . . That's the conditionality of this funding. The effect of the outcomes of students, as I said, it's broader than just having another EA in the classroom. There's other factors that

would impact that.

**Mr. Love:** — I agree, so that's good to hear. A question for the minister. So you know, again we've discussed this in question period, if you can call it a discussion. Not many people would. But you know, the funding for EAs seems to go somewhat counter to previous messaging, which supported the autonomy of local boards to make decisions based on their expertise and knowledge of what their students need. But this funding is very much conditional.

Is this a new direction for the ministry to dictate to school divisions how to use the funds that they receive? And if this is not a new direction, then why are you as minister venturing into territory of dictating for school divisions what's best for their students?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So I think generally speaking, while overall the funding for school divisions is by and large unconditional, there are a number of conditional pools of money within the funding formula, pre-K for example. There's others. We use the funding formula as the basis for the distribution model, so it is reflective of the funding formula.

[20:15]

And really wanted to provide, particularly after two years and now three academic years where the pandemic has had an impact particularly with our early learners, responding to, I think, those concerns as well as concerns from parents and teachers that wanted to see some additional supports in the classroom. And so I think it's not unusual for us to have conditional funding as a part of funding for school divisions, and this is one that we have decided to make conditional.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, a new topic. I've got lots of questions left and our time is moving quickly. I want to talk about mental health supports. And my question is, how much was allocated for targeted mental health supports through the Ministry of Education this year? And is there any targeted funding or conditional funding for things like in-school counsellors, educational psychologists, or other positions to support mental health of our young people?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So I'll speak to some specific initiatives and funding that we've provided. The second part of this is the supports for learning funding. We'll maybe if you want to get into that in a little bit . . . But I'll maybe talk about some targeted programs that we have this year.

So in the '22-23 budget, we have \$603,000 related to bullying prevention, positive mental health, and student safety; that's an increase of 25,000. So this is providing grants for school divisions to support training to build capacity in their staff related to mental health and student safety, provides funding for Kids Help Phone, as an example, the Be Kind Online, mental health first aid.

As well, we are a partner with the Ministry of Health in the mental health capacity-building initiative. They've provided for an increase of \$800,000 to increase that program that now annualizes that to \$2 million. And as a part of that, there will an

increase to the program for new sites and/or positions with this initiative. So there will be some new positions related to that.

And then I don't know if you want to get further into . . . So those are specific initiatives, and then obviously, through the supports for learning budget, that's where a lot of that work would happen as well.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I'd invite you to inform the committee on what we would see in the supports for learning that would be specifically targeted to mental health in schools.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So I think, Mr. Love, in terms of where dollars would have been spent in terms of the supports for learning component of the funding formula, I think we would be getting into I think a retrospective obviously because staffing decisions haven't been made by school divisions. And so we can provide some of those numbers if you're looking for where school divisions have targeted supports.

We also are working as part of an inter-ministerial team on something called the Integrated Youth Services. Integrated Youth Services is a national and international movement aimed at reimagining and transforming how youth and their families find access to resources, services, and supports they need. And so we're working with a number of other ministries and working on developing that for the province. And I think that will in time, as it is built out, will certainly provide a benefit for families and youth around the province.

**Mr. Love:** — So I guess my response to that is, Minister, you know, we're a few weeks out from the budget now, and you've heard and I've heard and your officials have heard that school divisions will be making really, really tough decisions after yet another year where they, you know, in their words, not getting the support they need to maintain the status quo — the status quo for all supports for our students, including mental health.

So if we're leaving school divisions to make these difficult decisions, is it your belief that they'll be able to maintain, even maintain the status quo for mental health supports in schools coming out of a time during the pandemic when mental health challenges facing our students have been at an all-time high? Is it your belief that they'll be able to maintain that status quo as division after division is saying that they won't be able to maintain status quo due to lack of funding this year?

[20:30]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So I guess to go back to something that I had said earlier, understand that a number of divisions are starting to muse about the decisions that they may have to make, but we are a long ways away from a budget being finalized by school divisions around the province. This does provide for \$300 million, nearly \$300 million for supports for learning for a student enrolment that we have not even come back to from 2020. And so you know, it's hard for me to comment on decisions that at this point haven't been made by school divisions.

And I would say as well, you know, we're only talking about obviously the education budget. It's Education estimates. But there are a number of supports within the health budget, mental

health and addictions budget, that will perhaps have a positive impact for students, for young people across this province, including students that are in our schools and maybe need that support in the community or wherever that support may be found. So the supports for mental health in the education budget and in school divisions' budget is one part of it, but I don't think it's the entire picture in terms of the supports the province provides to our young people.

**Mr. Love:** — Well, Minister, if we start looking at system-wide around the province, the supports for mental health for young people, it gets pretty grim. And the provincial Advocate for Children and Youth weighed in on this a couple of weeks ago and painted a pretty dark picture of the challenges our young people are facing in getting the help that they need. So in this committee, you know, it's unfortunately to your advantage to only focus on the education sector, because the options out there are just completely inadequate. And again the independent advocate highlighted those challenges for this Assembly in her report.

I'm going to move into kind of just some random topics here. And if any of my questions might require a longer consultation process, if you could just let me know and I'll move on. It's going to be a little bit jumping around topics just to fit things in in our last 25 minutes.

But the first thing I want to ask about is the budget line for libraries and literacy programs, if you could provide just a brief breakdown, in particular the amount of funding that goes towards literacy projects and what a breakdown of that funding would be, which organizations are receiving funding, what the conditions or criteria is for that. I'm just struggling to . . . And I have looked at previous years. I think it's around \$1 million for literacy, maybe 900,000. But any brief comments you can make on literacy funding would be appreciated.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — In terms of family literacy, we do fund eight family literacy hubs across the province — and that's 559,000 in this year's budget — as well as literacy camps. And there are eight school divisions that receive funding to operate literacy camps, summer literacy camps, and one library system to offer the same as well.

**Mr. Love:** — Can you tell me what the eight literacy hubs are, and even how much funding each of them receives?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So the family literacy hubs are Collège Mathieu; Great Plains College has two hubs; Lloydminster Learning Council Association; the KidsFirst Northern Family Literacy Hub; the Moose Jaw & District Chamber of Commerce; the Prince Albert Literacy Network; Read Saskatoon; the Regina Region Family Literacy Hub; as well as there's funding for the Saskatchewan Literacy Network.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay, thanks very much. Completely different topic here . . . actually we'll stay on this line and I'll ask about libraries. Can you give even just some brief or high-level comments on library funding in the province, which is under the same budget line as literacy? And I think that was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 14 million. And can you just provide any kind of remarks on trends over the last few years? My understanding is that that amount, it's seen some small changes

but more or less kind of like flatlined over the years. Have you received any specific requests for increased funding in this year's budget that were either met or unmet?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question. So the nearly 8.5 million is distributed amongst the municipal libraries, the regional libraries. So 1.386 to municipal libraries, regional libraries received just over 6 million, and the PNLs [Pahkision Nuyeh Library] receives just under a million dollars. And then for the balance of the funding, CommunityNet is 2.3 million, SILS [single integrated library system] is 114,000, multitype initiatives is 138,000, out-of-province interlibrary loans is 100,000, and digital resources for print disabled is an additional 100,000. So that gets us to the 11.3 million.

The percentages have stayed roughly the same over the last number of years in terms of the percentage of funding that goes to Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert public libraries as well as the regional library system. At the same time, we've been working on a provincial library sector plan.

One of the initiatives that has been identified, and I think is one that you're maybe perhaps speaking to, is the system's sustainability, looking for some long-term stability in the library sector. And so year-one initiatives will be looking at a benchmarking and some cross-jurisdictional work as we move forward with year one of our sector library plan.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah thanks, Minister. You know, I think that libraries in our province saw increased usage during the pandemic for lots of reasons. But one question I want to ask before moving on to a different topic is just the role that libraries play as community hubs, and that looks different in different communities. But several years ago I was at a presentation on poverty reduction in Saskatoon at Station 20 West and a question was posed to the crowd: what do you think is the number one service, government-funded service used by homeless people, people experiencing homelessness in Saskatoon? And it was the library. Number one place, number one institution.

So I guess that, you know, considering that librarians and staff in libraries are front-line workers for people experiencing poverty and homelessness, and you know, in that type of community hub, how does the Government of Saskatchewan support workers? Is there any allocation for training for front-line staff, support for urban libraries who are faced with increased demand on their services due to challenges from other ministries, like the impact of SIS [Saskatchewan income support] in terms of the current housing crisis and the increase of homelessness that we've seen?

[20:45]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — So thanks for the question I'll try to be really brief with this, but I do want to start with, I do want to thank the work the libraries did around the province. I know that during the pandemic there was lots of innovative work that went on to ensure that patrons could pick up books and return books and still have access to what they needed from their library, as well as the work the libraries have done as being a part of one of the organizations across this province that have done things like being able to procure a rapid test at a library.

I guess I'll just back up and say that in terms of the large

municipal libraries, we are a pretty small player in terms of their funding, and I did want to note that as well. But certainly I think there's an interest in all the sector partners in the long-term stability that the plan will provide. And so we're looking at five priority areas around sustainability, technology, literacy, reconciliation, and library services. So that work is under way, and we look forward to working with the library sector as we implement this plan over the next five years.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, thanks. Thanks, Minister. I'll move on again. These are going to be kind of some random, you know, popcorn-style questions for the next bit here. But something I wanted to get in tonight is just ask you . . . I was not in estimates, but I was watching my colleague in estimates in the Status of Women.

My colleague Jen Bowes was asking questions about consent education in schools and education centred around consent, interpersonal violence, and how some of these subjects are discussed and communicated, I think, in high schools in particular. And the official spoke about a meeting with Ministry of Education officials to move some of these priorities forward through, you know, curriculum renewal or other initiatives in schools.

I'm wondering if you could just update the committee specifically on consent education and interpersonal violence. What initiatives are being considered or undertaken by the ministry?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question, Mr. Love. I'll try to get through this as quickly as possible. There is quite a bit of information.

So I did touch on a couple of initiatives through our student achievement and supports as a part of this budget. That's the \$600,000. So generally speaking, that supports organizations like Saskatoon restorative action program; Kids Help Phone, as I indicated; the Be Kind Online program. We also over a two-year period had provided for respect-in-school training. That occurred over a two-year period from 2019 to 2021.

In 2018 the ministry released a child abuse prevention education and response policy statement. This statement demonstrates our ministry's commitment to ensuring that students develop the skills necessary to lead safe and healthy lives. In April of 2019 the ministry released a model administrative procedure for boards of education on child abuse prevention education and response to support school divisions implement CAPER [child abuse prevention education and response].

The Saskatchewan child abuse protocol describes what constitutes child abuse under the law. It describes roles and responsibilities of service providers and describes the process of which they must respond. So CAP [child abuse protocol] and CAPER work together to support Saskatchewan children and youth.

I'll mention just really quickly, so certainly our health curriculum, health education, that's where you would find a lot of information, particularly grades 1 to 9, on maintaining a healthy mind, body, heart, spirit, and to develop healthy relationships with others.

So some of those concepts can include maintaining personal safety, including the prevention of violence, abuse, and bullying; learning basic skills to exercise avoidance, caution, and/or refusal in potentially dangerous situations; recognizing violent and other harmful behaviours; examining the impact of violence on the well-being of and the supports needed for self, family, and community; as well as analyzing how the well-being of self, family, community, and the environment is enhanced by a comprehensive community approach for safety regarding violence, abuse, and exploitation.

And with respect to high schools, just quickly, so for example, in wellness 10, students can examine risk factors and strategies to improve personal and community safety, behaviour patterns of self and others to enhance well-being. In life transitions 20 and 30, students can learn about strategies to build and maintain healthy and safe relationships. In psychology 20 and 30, aggression, gangs, interpersonal and other forms of violence are examined. In health sciences 20, students look at health care philosophies and ethics and their impact on all aspects of health.

And in fact, just to add one more: in arts education 10, 20, and 30, students develop and convey their ideas through the arts and explore how various artists have represented or interpreted similar ideas on topics such as being a teenager, making choices, and the effects of one's life on psychological emotions and motivations.

**Mr. Love:** — Yeah, I've taught a number of those classes that you just listed off, and I'm familiar with the outcomes and the way that some of these topics fit in.

My question was specific to a meeting between officials from the Status of Women office and the ministry about new initiatives on consent education, specifically consent around unwanted sexual advances or interactions and how this is being . . . You know, it's a conversation that's happening with our young people. There's conversations that are already happening in schools, and I think it's an important one. And just wondering if there's an update on new initiatives and the communication with the Status of Women office.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Okay, thank you, Mr. Love, for the question. So it's my understanding that the life transitions curriculum is being renewed and the Status of Women office has been engaged on that work.

**Mr. Love:** — Great. Thanks for that. I have a question about a recent order in council that was signed. Can the minister or an official explain the \$65,000 for legal services from Miller Thomson for the litigation process involving Conseil scolaire fransaskois?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question, Mr. Love. That's related to a long-standing dispute that had been occurring between the CÉF [Conseil des écoles fransaskoises] and the Government of Saskatchewan. Through that process we have developed a funding formula that they have agreed with.

And so as a part of that, because legal proceedings had been happening and we had issued reference questions to the court, they asked as a part of that agreement for us to withdraw the reference questions, and as a part of that, pay their legal fees that

they'd incurred as a part of the court proceedings.

**Mr. Love:** — Okay. Thanks for the explanation. Coming back to an earlier item from last week. Thinking about the, you know, incredibly high fuel costs that we have and the impact that that does have on school divisions, especially larger rural divisions. I heard from one division recently whose buses run 27 000 kilometres per school day. Is the government engaging in any efforts to reduce the impact on divisions — even divisions that maybe buy their fuel in bulk — to, for example, remove the provincial fuel tax to provide some relief at the pumps for divisions that have no control over how much they drive each and every day?

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thank you for the question. So I think I've indicated this in the past, but I mean certainly we are aware obviously of the price of fuel. I believe there's a bulk fuel agreement or purchasing plan that's in place that does I think provide some relief, but obviously I know that fuel prices have increased.

What we've said is that we're going to be watching that. High gas prices, diesel prices over the next number of months would have a . . . likely because of the high price of oil which then has a corresponding positive impact on the provincial finances. So no commitments have been made to school divisions other than we are understanding of the pressure, that we're going to watch that with them.

But as far as any changes to the fuel tax as it relates to school divisions, certainly we're not considering that as the Ministry of Education. That's out of our purview. I don't believe Finance is as well, but certainly that would be a question for the Finance minister.

**Mr. Love:** — I've got just one final question for the minister. Minister Duncan, what is your vision for education in Saskatchewan? And do you believe that your government is resourcing that vision adequately?

[21:00]

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I will try not to belabour the answer, but it's a big question, and I want to give it, I think, obviously the respect that it was asked.

So you know, I think first and foremost I want to, in terms of my vision . . . And I'll say this and I think you know this as well, I'm not a schoolteacher. I've never been a school board trustee. But I'm the dad of three kids that are about to enter . . . one in the school system now and two that are about to enter into it. And so you know, I look at it from kind of the lens through that. What do I want for my own kids? And I should have that same expectation that I want that for every kid in this province.

So safe, welcoming, inclusive environment where they get a great education — and I think they do in Saskatchewan — supported by great teachers and other staff that they are surrounded by each and every day. You know, I think about ensuring that for my kids and every kid in this province that they have the knowledge, the skills, the character to succeed in life, to find their place in life, and find a place in Saskatchewan. And I believe we have the resources in this budget, as we have in the

past. And I look forward to working with school divisions to meet that challenge. Thank you.

**Mr. Love:** — Thank you, Minister Duncan. Thanks to all of our committee members for another late night. Thanks to all of our officials for the work that you do. And thanks to our staff, our Clerks, and Hansard staff. And I appreciate the discussion tonight.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Thank you, Mr. Love. Minister, do you have any closing comments.

**Hon. Mr. Duncan:** — I do, Mr. Chair. Really quickly again, knowing the time and it's been a long day for everybody. First and foremost I do want to obviously thank the committee for their questions, Mr. Love, for your questions.

I want to thank the officials that are here with me tonight. Obviously they represent a number of people that don't come to committee but certainly provide the support to them to be able to provide the support to me. And I feel incredibly supported by the team that I have around me. And I'm very grateful to that and to them for that. I want to thank my staff in the office here providing the support that they provide to me.

And I do want to thank our teachers, our administrators, our EAs, our bus drivers, custodians. I know I'm probably missing a lot. There's lots that goes into providing education to the people of this province, to the kids of this province. And I couldn't be prouder to be their minister. I know it's a big job. And I want to thank them especially over the last . . . especially these two years, last three school years for rising to the challenge in extraordinary times. And so thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Thank you, Minister. And thank you, Mr. Love, again. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Education. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Domotor has moved. All agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Nerlien):** — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 21:03.]