



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

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Mr. Warren Kaeding
Melville-Saltcoats

Mr. Hugh Nerlien
Kelvington-Wadena

[The committee met at 15:30.]

The Chair: — Good afternoon and welcome to the Standing Committee on Human Services. My name is Terry Jenson. I am the committee Chair.

With us this afternoon are committee members Mr. Muhammad Fiaz. We have Mr. Doug Steele substituting for Mr. Marv Friesen. We have Mr. Joe Hargrave, Mr. Warren Kaeding, Mr. Hugh Nerlien, and substituting this afternoon for Ms. Meara Conway is Ms. Nicole Sarauer.

Today the committee will be considering three bills followed by the committee resolutions for the 2023-24 estimates and the 2022-23 supplementary estimates no. 2.

Bill No. 91 — *The Saskatchewan Employment (Part III) Amendment Act, 2022*

Clause 1

The Chair: — We will begin with Bill No. 91, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Part III) Amendment Act, 2022*, clause 1, short title.

Minister Morgan is here with his officials. I would ask that officials please state their names before speaking at the microphone for the first time. As a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn your microphones on when you are speaking to the committee.

With that, Minister, you can go ahead and please introduce your officials and make any opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to join the members today to discuss Bill 91, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Part III) Amendment Act, 2022*. I'm joined with a number of officials from the ministry today. Morgan Bradshaw, my chief of staff, this will be his last time appearing. He's leaving the building and so this is his last time in committee. I'm also joined by Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister; Bryan Lloyd, executive director, occupational health and safety; Pat Parenteau, executive director, corporate services; and Anastasiia Solovka, director of policy.

On November 3rd, 2022 our government introduced Bill 91 which makes several amendments to the occupational health and safety provisions of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*. The amendments came as a result of stakeholder and public engagement that occurred between August and October of 2021.

Mr. Chair, the amendments in this bill will help address some key issues and ensure that we are creating an environment that is fair and balanced, that we are improving health and safety in workplaces, and that we are setting a path forward for economic growth in our province.

The amendments for discussion include, number one, definition of workers. We are clarifying the definition of worker to ensure secondary and post-secondary students who are permitted to work or who are being trained by an employer as part of an educational program are covered by the provision in part III of the Act. In January 2022 amendments came into force that

extended protection from harassment to students as well as volunteers and independent contractors.

Number two, harassment investigation. This amendment clarifies the employers' duty and responsibility to ensure that incidents of harassment are investigated. It is not enough for employers to simply have a policy. They must enforce that policy, which includes appropriately investigating all reports of harassment.

Number three, violence policy on investigations. We have amended provisions to require all employers to have a violence policy and investigate incidents of violence in the workplace. Currently only prescribed workplaces are required to have a violence policy and prevention plan. Having a violence policy for all workplaces will help in reducing injuries and create safer, healthier spaces. In addition these provisions will apply to students, volunteers, and contract workers.

Number four, officers' authority for photos and recordings. We clarified the working authority of occupation health officers to take photos and recordings during workplace inspections. This amendment will bring Saskatchewan in line with other jurisdictions in Canada. Officers often do this now but we want to ensure that we are building an environment of fairness, and by making this amendment we are being open and transparent about the activity.

Number five, authority to exclude nominees. We are authorizing officers to exclude nominees from investigation interviews so the process is not influenced by third parties and workers are not led to believe that they are represented by a nominee who does not have the workers' best interest in mind. It is essential when a workplace-related fatality, serious injury, or harassment that the officers have all the facts and information to understand what has happened and if there were violations of the legislation. Individuals will have the ability to nominate another person to attend the interview.

Number six, housekeeping and general amendments. Housekeeping and general amendments are always necessary to keep the legislation relevant and aligned with other legislative requirements. We will amend provisions to ensure that there is alignment with the changes made to the Canadian *Hazardous Materials Information Review Act*. We will also discontinue the practice of reducing the amount of money owed to a worker by the amount of money earned in an alternate employment. This will ensure that workers who suffered discriminatory action receive the full amount of wages that a worker would have earned.

Mr. Chair, that concludes the amendments to the Act. Our government believes that the amendments address the comments from the stakeholder engagement and will meet the changing environment that employers and employees are working within. With that, Mr. Chair, we would be pleased to hear from the committee members and to answer any questions that they may have.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. So with that I'm going to open the floor to questions, and I recognize Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister,

for your opening comments. You have mentioned at the conclusion of your remarks and you also mentioned in your second reading speech that some of the changes in this legislation are the result of reviewing some feedback from stakeholders. Can you speak a little bit about the stakeholder engagement that occurred, whether or not it was formalized or whether it was individuals or organizations coming to your office?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — There was some of each, and then I'll let Sameema Haque give an answer with the numbers in it. But there was engagement that was done online, and there was several hundred written responses, and those came in through that process. I reached out and spoke with Lori Johb and a number of other people. We also have the minister's advisory committee, which should meet three or four times a year and meets actually one or two times a year. And some of the issues were discussed at that process. But if you've got the numbers . . .

Ms. Haque: — Absolutely. So besides the minister's advisory committee as well as we also consulted with OHS [Occupational Health and Safety] Council. In addition we posted an online paper which was responded to, and we sent 133 letters to stakeholders as well. We got 393 submissions back in response to that engagement, which are part of our consultation.

Ms. Sarauer: — And what was the time frame for that engagement, that consultation?

Ms. Haque: — The time frame was August 16, 2021 and it was concluded on October 18, 2021.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay.

Ms. Haque: — Sorry, I should have said my name. Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister.

Ms. Sarauer: — Obviously you got quite a bit of feedback so this might be a difficult question to answer. But in broad strokes, were there recommendations that were made through the course of that feedback by stakeholders that aren't included in this legislation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — We had a bit of discussion about that. We anticipated that question. I think by and large the issues that came out of the feedback were addressed or were included in this. There was minimal that would have been formally rejected that, you know, may have been replaced staff members or whatever else. But by and large, the responses that came in were consistent, aligned with each other, and certainly consistent with the direction that the ministry officials wanted to proceed with.

Ms. Sarauer: — The bill, as you state, will explicitly state the employer's duty to ensure that incidents of harassments are investigated as requested from stakeholders. Was there an issue with compliance that stakeholders were seeing, and that's why they're making this request?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — By and large, things were taking place that would be consistent, and the employers for the most part were good. But the recommendation that came from the OH [occupational health] workers was that they had a preference that it be included in the legislation so that it would never be an issue or never be questioned.

Ms. Sarauer: — Similarly the requirement that the expansion now for the violence policy to include all workplaces, not just prescribed workplaces, have there been issues with compliance for prescribed workplaces?

Ms. Haque: — Not from a regulatory perspective; however we have seen an increase in claims so this was part of stakeholder feedback too.

Ms. Sarauer: — So now that the requirement is expanding, I'm assuming you'll see an even larger increase in claims now that it applies to all workplaces.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Unless having it in the legislation serves as a deterrent that people know about it. I don't think we're able to give a meaningful comment on what the level of compliance is or was. The idea in having it in the legislation is that it's there. Our hope that the compliance is high enough that we don't see a significant uptick, but there's no doubt it covers a broader number of workplaces and employee groups.

Ms. Sarauer: — Do you have stats available for the committee for number of complaints received with respect to these types of claims?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — The process goes by report numbers, so it doesn't necessarily mean there was a complaint because the report could include several workers or more of an inquiry. But there was . . .

Ms. Haque: — 486 reports that had some element of violence that was part of the complaint for the entire fiscal year.

A Member: — That's a 10-year period.

Ms. Haque: — Ten-year period? 2013-14 to '22-23, in the 10-year period we've had 486.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay, so not in one year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — No.

Ms. Sarauer: — In 10 years, okay.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — But in the same period of time, just for context, protection against falling, 1,770; fire safety plans, 1,744; electrical panels, 1,160; training of representatives and committee, 1,002. So it's a comparatively low number compared to them. But I think it's a matter that it's an emerging issue, and I think if we want to do our best for employees. So . . . Is it the full or is that partial?

Ms. Haque: — Just last year.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Last year there were 44.

Ms. Sarauer: — What about reports of harassment?

Ms. Haque: — So for the total of last year, we have a total of 178.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — I think it goes back to . . .

Ms. Haque: — Personal harassment complaints, and 16 . . . This is for the year-to-date.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yeah, go ahead.

Ms. Haque: — So 16 on prohibited grounds of harassment. These are inquiries. So we actually split our complaints into inquiries and complaints. The complaints for prohibited grounds were four for prohibited grounds; personal harassment, 11. We did not have any sexual harassment complaints, and we didn't have any complaints concerning the expansion of harassment provisions for volunteers, students, and contractors to date. But we've had a lot of inquiries, and so that was the original number.

Ms. Sarauer: — Now that the definition of “worker” is being amended in this bill to clarify that it includes secondary and post-secondary students, does the ministry feel confident that all of those who do work in Saskatchewan are now covered under this provision of the legislation?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — That was the goal, was to make it as inclusive as possible. There was no intention to exclude any particular class or whatever. And if it appears there's a gap, I think we'd want to correct the gap if there was a gap that became apparent.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you for that and thank you for your work. As you well know, we in the opposition are very supportive of this move. We were very supportive of the initial legislative change, and of course this is only going to — from what I can tell — provide more protections and supports for workers. So I'm glad to see this work being done, and we do hope that it will result in a safer workplace for the people of the province. I have no further questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Sarauer. And not seeing any other questions from the committee, we're going to proceed to vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[15:45]

[Clauses 2 to 22 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Saskatchewan Employment (Part III) Amendment Act, 2022.*

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 91, *The Saskatchewan Employment (Part III) Amendment Act, 2022* without amendment.

Mr. Hargrave moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Minister, do you have any closing comments you'd like to make?

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Chair, thank you. I'd like to thank you and all of the committee members who are here. And then would like to thank the Legislative Assembly Service staff, broadcast services, the building security, building staff for the work that they do, not just today but all year long.

But because this is a bill dealing with the people from Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, I'd like to thank the staff that are here today and the ones that work making workers safe and making workplaces better throughout the year. Some of these people are out dealing with some very adverse circumstances. They're travelling to remote locations, and these are some of the best, brightest, and hardest working people. So I thank them all.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Ms. Sarauer, do you have any comments you'd like to make?

Ms. Sarauer: — Well I don't think I can top the minister's. I'd just like to echo the minister's comments. I thought it was very well spoken. But I do want to add a thank you to yourself, Minister, and your officials for answering my questions this afternoon and the prep work that it took to prepare for this bill committee this afternoon and all of the work that led to the introduction of this legislation. Just thank you so much for that in addition to all of the work that you do and all of your staff do each and every single day. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Sarauer. At this time we're going to take a 15-minute recess for this committee and return in 15 minutes.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

**Bill No. 134 — *The Education Amendment Act, 2023*
*Loi modificative de 2023 sur l'éducation***

Clause 1

The Chair: — Welcome back. We will now begin our consideration of Bill No. 134, *The Education Amendment Act, 2023*, a bilingual bill, clause 1, short title.

Minister Duncan is here with his officials. I would ask that officials please state their names before speaking into the microphone the first time. As a reminder, please don't touch the microphones. The Hansard operator will turn on your microphone when you are speaking to the committee. Minister, please introduce your officials and make your opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon to committee members. I'm joined by Clint Repski, the deputy minister, to my far right; and to my right is Rory Jensen, assistant deputy minister; and Mitch Graw, my chief of staff, is with me as well.

We're looking forward to the discussion on *The Education Amendment Act*. And so with that, Mr. Chair, I'd just be happy to take questions from the critic.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. So at this time, I'll open the floor to questions. And I recognize Mr. Love.

Mr. Love: — Thanks, Mr. Chair. And thanks, Minister, for those

very brief opening remarks. We've had a chance to engage in this dialogue already and looking forward to continuing that today.

I'll just take a minute to welcome Mr. Repski to his role and to this committee as we engage in these discussions about what's needed and decisions being made by this government in support of education in Saskatchewan. Welcome here and appreciate all the work that our public servants do throughout this province.

I'll start with a question here. So just for the minister's sake, for his officials, my plans today will be to ask a series of questions that . . . still some lingering issues from our time in budget estimates, about the Sask Distance Learning Corporation as well as questions that have arisen since as more information becomes public, as far as how the Sask DLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation] will operate and what some of the specifics are.

[16:00]

But I just want to start, Minister Duncan, by returning to the question that I think maybe the question I began with in budget estimates, which was the consultations that took place before this was announced. And at that time you noted, in referencing the need for changes to distance learning, your response was, "And this is something too that had been flagged repeatedly by our provincial youth council."

So my question is, how many members are there on the provincial youth council? You indicated at that time it had been in place for about four years. What's the makeup of that youth council? When was this first flagged? When was this first brought to your attention, as minister, as something that was of interest to students and families in Saskatchewan? And then when was the first time that you brought that suggestion to our school boards through the SSBA [Saskatchewan School Boards Association] and to teachers through the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation]?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Love. So we have had a provincial youth council in place for four years now. There are typically 12 students that are appointed to each of the iterations of the provincial youth council. It had been raised by members of the youth council in the first three years of the council in various meetings, particularly and typically by rural students that were looking for a similar or same amount of flexibility in terms of course selection that you might see in a large urban setting. And so this had been flagged a number of times.

We did announce the move towards a provincial online policy in the 2021 Throne Speech, and so subsequent to that there was consultations with a variety of stakeholders in various means after that period of time.

Mr. Love: — And can you provide the names of the stakeholders that were consulted with after it was announced in the 2021 Throne Speech?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question. So the ministry would have consulted with the 27 school divisions, SASBO [Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials], LEADS [League of Educational Administrators, Directors and

Superintendents], the SSBA, after the announcement was made in 2021. So that would have been the fall of 2021.

So beginning in February of 2022, there was an opportunity for feedback to be provided, including those organizations as well as students and parents who would provide feedback to the ministry as well. That took place in the months after February of 2022. In, I would say, between then and now there has been continuing dialogue with those organizations that I've mentioned as well as the STF, the First Nations education authority. So that's taken place since the Throne Speech in 2021.

Mr. Love: — And, Minister, what was the basis of those consultations? Was it on developing policies related to improving flexibility and choice for distance learning, or was it fulsome consultation on the complete centralization of online learning in the province?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks, Mr. Love, for the question. I think it would be fair to say that we were focusing on certainly understanding what the current state of online learning was at the time as well as putting a particular focus on ways that we could include or ensure that there was greater access and equity in terms of the ability for students to access online learning. It wouldn't have been a consultation at that time on a centralized approach because we hadn't decided that that was the approach that we were going to take.

Mr. Love: — So you said that the youth advisory council had been in place for about four years now, so that's — I'm guessing it doesn't include 2023 — say 2019, '20, '21, '22. And as this was announced in the Throne Speech of 2021 . . . And of course at the time I mean learning here and everywhere was adapting on the fly to challenges of the pandemic. Was the youth advisory council meeting during 2020 and '21? Was it meeting virtually? Can you provide any details on where these conversations about these changes originated?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So the youth council did during COVID meet. Typically their meetings at that time were virtual. I don't know if they met at that time monthly or quarterly. We can certainly follow up with you after that. But there would have been several meetings between the ministry officials that were assigned to work with the youth council and the youth council members.

I know that in my first year as Minister of Education, I would have met with them virtually. In my experience — I don't know how previous Minister Wyant, I don't know his interactions with the youth council — but typically what I have done is I have met with them kind of for their final meeting of the year where they present kind of their three items that they want to present to the minister. Usually it's, you know, they summarize it into three. But there will be meetings all throughout the year with the ministry officials kind of looking at areas that they have an interest in. Sorry, that was a bit of an aside.

But I would say that my first meeting with the youth council would have been virtually at the end of the . . . I guess that would have been the '20-21 school year. And then the last youth council, I met with them in person in Saskatoon. I think we timed it with the SSBA . . . I think it was the SSBA spring assembly last year. We just had a side room that we met with them before

going in to the assembly. I think it was the SSBA. I'll correct that if I am wrong. And for this school year, I haven't yet met with the youth council to kind of complete their work for the ministry.

Mr. Love: — Okay thanks, Minister. You mentioned a moment ago that the consultations following the Throne Speech with school divisions did not include discussions of a full centralization of distance learning. When did school divisions first become aware that this was the direction your government was going?

Mr. Jensen: — Assistant deputy minister, Rory Jensen. The consultation that was done through February and March of 2022 focused on the potential options of online learning in the future. So it was looking down kind of three options: the status quo option, fully centralized option, and then a hybrid model. And we received input from the stakeholders that the minister outlined there. From there the ministry took that work, worked with the minister to formalize that down into what we are going down and with the announcement that was made in July of 2022.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Now, Minister, you've mentioned really publicly — or maybe I read in media somewhere — the expectation of seeing distance learning grow in Saskatchewan. I'm wondering if you can comment on that, especially in light of the history that locally developed distance learning, that's to this day been done through local school divisions, certainly prioritizes reconnecting students back to in-person learning as much as possible. That's, in many cases, one of the goals, to reconnect students back into that in-person classroom environment.

So in light of that history, can you provide some comments on your goal to see growth in the number of students engaging in distance learning in Saskatchewan?

[16:15]

Mr. Jensen: — So where we anticipate growth on online learning to be is, we primarily anticipate growth in part-time students. The ministry and the minister believe that face-to-face learning is the best place for students to learn and grow. However there are opportunities that students may not have in the face-to-face environment that will help them continue to expand their education, to supplement their face-to-face learning.

In rural school divisions, often opportunities are not available to students that there might be in urban divisions. There also can be situations where online learning may be a more appropriate place for the student or just work in their timetables to make sure that they can get all their classes and continue on their graduation path.

Also when we were consulting with school divisions and looking across the province at the various established online learning schools, we did see that as school divisions matured in their online school, they definitely started seeing a shift from full-time students to part-time students and saw growth there as students sought out those new opportunities to supplement their educational experience.

We also have heard of some ancillary benefits of student engagement in the class, disciplinary issues being reduced with

students being interested in the courses they're taking. We've also heard a lot of school divisions using online learning to re-engage students back into the classroom that may have disengaged, that they can engage them through online learning and then start transitioning back into the classroom and to face-to-face learning where they can be more successful.

So we've looked and consulted with a lot of school divisions, learned a lot of lessons about where, how online learning can best be used. And really as the province grows and continues, growth in the classroom also would lead to growth in online learning as well. We anticipate as we have more students, there will be more demand for additional courses to be delivered.

Mr. Love: — So, Minister, as the demand and the options and choice increases, according to your plan, can you guarantee that there won't be any impact going forward on the current services provided by boards, especially in rural and northern areas? Can you guarantee that individual schools and students won't lose access to programming that they currently have?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I think certainly it's my expectation is that the move to a centralized Sask DLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre] is not going to negatively impact divisions or schools in their ability to deliver education and other services to students.

You know, I would just say, look at some of the existing models that are already, that have been established in the past. Chinook School Division would be a good example of this, where online learning has actually helped to supplement the education of students in a geographically large school division that, you know, has a pretty small, in some cases, student population.

And so, you know, I would say that this is really a way to supplement the learning that is taking place in school, in classrooms, and shouldn't be seen as, you know, in effect, a way that's going to reduce services or reduce classes or even lead to school closures. In fact, a number of school divisions have used online learning to keep services and classes available to students even if it's meant in a different way than what maybe you and I were used to as students.

Mr. Love: — Yeah, Minister, I agree that we can look around the province and see a number of divisions that have done an exemplary job, in particular during COVID years, providing online learning opportunities that are engaging and continue to move the learning forward for students. But many of those boards and their online schools, cyber schools, distance learning, are now being taken away from them and their ability to deliver those. Looking back, can you point to any divisions that you feel, as Minister for Education, have done an exemplary job delivering distance learning, and how will you be incorporating their best practices into the new centralized school?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks, Mr. Love, for the question. And so I guess to answer the question, I would begin by saying, well certainly the people and the physical assets that are being incorporated in the Sask DLC from Sun West School Division, the Kenaston campus, certainly that serves as the, I think, the core, if you think of a hub-and-a-core-type of model.

Certainly there were lots of learnings that we did gather from

other school divisions that had, you know, fairly mature online schools, so ensuring that there's an accountable adult in the classroom at each of the campuses. That was something that had been not only a best practice out of Sun West School Division but also South East Cornerstone through their cyber school as well as North East School Division.

So with the plan going forward with the SDLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation] that, you know, we'll be replicating that with the online learning facilitator positions in each of those campuses. Northwest School Division emphasized the connection to a local school, and so we really pursued that with that campus-type of model, where there will be 10 campuses around the province.

The Northern Lights School Division obviously stressed for us the uniqueness of delivering services into the North, and so we wanted to ensure that that northern context remained. And so that's why we certainly were very open to hearing from them as well as ensuring that we do have a campus that has formerly served the students in Northern Lights. That will continue.

And then so, you know, those are I think a couple of structural or administrative ways that we did incorporate the feedback from school divisions in planning this through. And I think just on the course selection kind of side of the ledger, you know, we're not taking away any opportunity for those regional campuses to deliver programs that they would have normally delivered in the past. In fact we are just opening that up to students regardless of which school division is their home school division.

So for example, Northwest School Division had an internationally renowned northern lifestyles class. That will continue going forward. Prairie South School Division had a number of power engineering courses that were I think particular to their school division. And so that now is open up to any student regardless of where they live in the province.

So what we really tried to do is, you know, work with school divisions to not only ensure that we had opportunities and continue to have opportunities for teachers that enjoy teaching online and want to continue to teach that way as a part of their career planning, but also incorporating classes that, you know, would maybe be unique to a different part of the province but might be of interest to students in other parts of the province.

It really wasn't just a matter of taking the course selection that was available through the former Sun West DLC [Distance Learning Centre] and saying, this is your courses that you have available to you. It was really about incorporating the best of what's being done all around the province and really saying to students, this is now an option for you regardless of where you live. School division boundaries shouldn't be a barrier to ensuring that students have access to a wide variety of compulsory or elective courses.

And so, you know, I think that that's really what we want to be able to say to students and families around the province, is that this is really trying to take the best of what was already offered in online learning and just expand it to the greatest number of students possible.

Mr. Love: — Do you have any projections for the number of

students for the coming school year and however many years in the future? Are you projecting numbers for, you know, 3 years, 5 years, 10 years? Do you have any numbers that you can report?

[16:30]

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. We are anticipating, for the first year, roughly 30,000 class courses would be taken through the Sask DLC. And I think you asked to reference the number of students: likely 10,000 unique students. But obviously, you know, it will depend on what registration looks like for both of those numbers. That's the number that we are using right now, but obviously we'll see what registration looks like over the next number of months.

And then over the next couple of years, as more and more students become aware of what their options are, you know, that likely will grow over time. But that's the number that we're using for this upcoming school year.

Mr. Love: — So did you say 30,000 courses? What would be like the full-time equivalent number of students? Is that like 3,000 full-time students?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, it would be approximately 3,000 full-time students.

Mr. Love: — Okay. And previously in committee, we talked about staffing and you indicated 368 full-time employees, 150 teachers, you know, maybe minor adjustments based on enrolment. You indicated that there would be superintendents and EAs [educational assistant] and support staff. I'm wondering if you can provide a more detailed synopsis today of all professional designations that will support SDLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre] students. And what supports students will go back to their home divisions for?

Mr. Jensen: — So the SDLC is going to — on top of the approximately 150 teachers, another 20 kind of front office staff-type positions, the anticipated 100 to 150 online learning facilitators — there are going to be a number of professionals: a speech language professional and an educational psychologist to help assess student needs as they're entering online learning.

However we're really trying not to create redundancies in the system with assessments being done both by a local school division and the SDLC. So those professionals that may be in place in both locations will be sharing information about students, but the SDLC . . . If we anticipate the majority of the students are going to be part-time where they're home-based in a school division where the school division is providing that support on an assessment on speech and language, we anticipate that that information will be shared back and forth between the SDLC and the school division to meet that local student's needs, their unique needs.

When students are full-time, there will be initial assessments done by the SDLC and shared with the home school division to ensure that they get their local supports that they need to ensure that they're going to be successful in their education where they can actually meet with local professionals and receive that support that they need to be successful in their education.

Mr. Love: — So again to my previous question, are there any, you know, professional designations that are commonly employed in one of our 27 divisions that you'll be asking SDLC students to go back to their divisions to receive those services?

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. The primary supports students will receive at the home school division through the supports in place at the 27 school divisions. The anticipation is that students primarily are going to be part-time and they'll already be receiving the support from their local school division.

Where there are full-time students, the funding is following the students. So they will be registering with their home school division with funding following that student. And the school division is paying tuition into the SDLC, but they also will have additional funding that is available to provide the supports to those students.

So the primary support will be through the local school division for those professionals to help those student needs. But funding is following students to the local school division to help provide those supports.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Now a few more questions about the staffing plan. Government has recently announced hiring of 129 teachers of the 150 expected. What information can you provide about where these teachers are coming from? Is the ministry or the new treasury board Crown corporation tracking which school divisions they're leaving to ascertain the impact on the ability to keep teachers in classrooms, in particular in hard-to-recruit areas like northern Saskatchewan? So kind of a broad question, where are these teachers coming from? Are there any potential unintended consequences that you're tracking and helping school divisions prepare for?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I'm told that of the existing teachers that have been hired, the vast majority — I think it's over 90 or above in terms of actual teachers — do come from the existing online schools that had already been operated by the public school divisions. As an example, Northern Lights School Division, the SDLC has hired every single one of their online teachers.

So you know, I think for the most part this is really just bringing those teachers that were already teaching online into the system. In terms of the others I think, you know, the same would be true. When a teacher moves within a school division or between school divisions, we don't really . . . we're not tracking where they come from. But certainly we do know that the vast majority were already teaching online in their public school division.

Mr. Love: — Okay. So I heard a number earlier from your official, Minister, of looking at the role of online learning facilitators, that there would be roughly 150. Are these teachers? Non-teachers? These aren't EAs. I don't gather that they're teachers. What training do these individuals have? What will they bring to the learning environment to support students and teachers?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So the online learning facilitator role, this is something that has, I think, been documented in . . . A lot of research around online learning

and the success of online learning is that idea of having an accountable adult in the class or attached to the student.

And so I think, you know, it'd be similar, I think, to an EA role, in that the online learning facilitator is there to help the student manage their time to, you know, if it's technical support they need, to help be that liaison between the online school and their home school in the event that they are a part-time student. So they're back and forth between being in class and being online as a coordinator type of position.

This does come from school divisions that have employed this type of position: Sun West being one, South East Cornerstone, I believe North East as well. In some cases it's been a teacher. In other cases it's not necessarily been a teacher.

[16:45]

But I think what the officials have pointed out to me is that the literature doesn't really show a distinction in terms of the outcomes because it's not really a teaching role; it's more that coordinator role. So I know, all that to say is that divisions have taken different positions on terms of who staffed these positions. But that's really what we're looking at, based on the practice of other divisions and based on the literature that this is really one of the keys to ensuring that students have success.

Mr. Love: — Thanks. I have a number of follow-up questions on that, Minister. Previously in committee, your official, Mr. Jensen, who's here today, discussing the role of learning facilitator said, "It's really that person that's in the building to help students and ensure that they're keeping up with their studies, similar to what a teacher would do in a normal classroom . . ."

So will you have learning facilitators carrying out the duties of teachers?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question. So no, these positions, these individuals won't be the teacher. What they will be doing is ensuring or helping to ensure that the students have that connection between their online teacher, their classroom teachers in the event that they are part-time teachers, ensuring that they are keeping up with their workload, handing in assignments, coordinating where that needs to take place.

So that's really what was envisioned. I think the comment that was made in committee previously by the assistant deputy minister was, I think, more in reference to the work that a teacher would do to ensure that, you know, the student was handing in their assignment on time, that sort of thing, not the actual teaching of the class, because that's not what the role is for.

Mr. Love: — So in a typical school division, I'm told — I'll look to you to see if you agree — the typical expenditures for staffing would be between a quarter to a third of their staffing that's spent on non-teaching staff. Is that . . . I think I'm kind of in the ballpark. But here at the SDLC, again this isn't expenditures, I understand. I guess one of my questions is, what will be the rate of salary for learning facilitators? I'm curious to know.

But as an additional question, we're looking at, according to your numbers, 368 total FTEs [full-time equivalent] of which 150 will

be teaching staff, leaving 218 non-teaching staff. So there seems to be a big discrepancy between a typical school division where, you know, 70, 75 per cent is teaching staff, and you know, a quarter to a third non-teaching staff. There's a big discrepancy in the numbers here with the majority of staff in the SDLC being non-teaching.

Can you provide any comments on the discrepancy and the need for different . . . You know, for really like one facilitator for every teacher ratio, with additional EAs there as well? Why such a big difference for distance learning compared to classroom learning?

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. The number of teachers employed is based on a PTR [pupil/teacher ratio] of 24 to 1. So we have a . . . staffing this at a similar rate or higher rate than most school divisions on teachers. The reason for the number of online learning facilitators through this model is this: the geographical dispersion of the students will be much greater than any geographical dispersion of any school division.

Typically how a school division would operate to ensure their students are successful in both face to face, you have a teacher that's accountable to make sure that Laurie shows up to class. For online learning, they will have someone in their school building, be it an online-learning-type facilitator versus a teacher or a school administrator.

This model is trying not to put that burden onto school divisions. So we're looking at hiring these online learning facilitators to ensure that students are supported in that classroom, but also ensure that teachers are not being asked to do additional work to support the SDLC's work of ensuring those students are successful, engaging in their classes, handing in their homework, logging in to their exams, assisting them with technical reports. So those teachers that are in those local schools can focus on their face-to-face learning and not add the additional burden of having a number of students in the back of their class that are taking a different class.

Mr. Love: — And what would be the salary rate for a learning facilitator or even a range for those individuals?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. We are still working with CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] developing the classification. We haven't posted any of these positions yet. So I don't have a number that I can share with the committee, but we are working with CUPE on the classification right now.

Mr. Love: — And would your projections estimate that that would be similar to an EA? And to revisit a previous question, will these individuals have any training requirements? What's in the job description when you look for these individuals?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So we are, as I said, we are still working through that process to determine the qualifications, the duties that would be involved. So developing that as we speak. So in terms of the classification, the credentials, we are still working through that process, working with CUPE on that. So at this point I don't have much I can share on that.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Minister, as far as the start-up costs, which in this year's budget were \$23 million, will we see that . . . is it your expectation that that will be a regular budget line and annual cost moving forward, or will that be reduced or increased in the future?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks, Mr. Love. So obviously this will be something that we'll be monitoring going forward. So I wouldn't want to give a prediction in terms of what the annual budget ask will be in terms of a grant from treasury board to the new treasury board Crown, but I would say there are some one-time costs that we will incur as a part of asset acquisition, those sorts of things, that will just be a one-time. But you know, I think it'd be too early for me to kind of project out what the annual grant would look like for the SDLC.

Mr. Love: — All right, Minister. Can you comment on what the impact will be on separate Catholic school divisions through the creation of SDLC?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question. So through the process of developing the online learning policy, we did develop a quality assurance framework that those organizations that wanted to continue to offer online learning would have to go through.

So we've had, I believe, two Catholic school divisions that have gone through that process and been approved, so Regina Catholic and Greater Saskatoon Catholic are approved to deliver online learning. So the creation of the SDLC doesn't affect that or it doesn't change that.

The only potential impact that there could be is that, in the event that a student of a Catholic school division wished to take a class from the SDLC, and let's say it wasn't offered by the Catholic school division that was offering their online school, in the event that that student was able to take that class, it would cost their division \$500 per class per student. But outside of that, this doesn't really impact them.

Mr. Love: — And what feedback have you received from Catholic separate school divisions on the impact of these changes for their students and their finances?

[17:00]

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. We received feedback from a number of school divisions, including a few of the Catholic school divisions, about concerns over setting tuition course estimates in advance and not updating at a future point in the year. We've made that commitment that we would all do a reconciliation on course registrations and update the funding model there. Other than that, we have not heard really any concerns from the Catholic divisions about this.

Mr. Love: — Have you heard those same concerns from public school divisions?

Mr. Jensen: — From the public school divisions we've heard similar concerns about the completing a reconciliation of course registrations. And we have committed to those school divisions that we will be completing a reconciliation.

Mr. Love: — Yeah, I'll come back and ask about that in a minute. But for now, Minister, in your opening comments during budget estimates you noted that "separate school divisions, the Conseil des écoles francosaskoises, and independent schools interested in offering online learning can apply." This evening you've indicated two schools have successfully — two divisions, sorry — have successfully applied. Has there been interest? And where is this process at, either with the conseil scolaire or independent schools, in particular I imagine Flex Ed?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So as I said before, there's the two Catholic school divisions that have gone through the process and have been approved. The one independent school, Flex Ed, has gone through the process and has been approved to continue to operate. The Conseil, we are working with them as they determine what their interest is in continuing with online learning, and so they haven't at this point submitted an application but they have been in discussions with the ministry.

Mr. Love: — Thanks, Minister. Just to return to the previous answer from Mr. Jensen on the topic of estimated uptake from divisions in terms of full-time students and, I think more contentiously, part-time enrolment. School divisions have expressed discrepancy between the number of students that have taken part in online learning and the estimates that your ministry has made.

So my question is, in response to . . . And I guess let's use an example. Prairie Valley School Division has estimated that your ministry is — the term "clawing back" is used — but withholding \$600,000 in operating funds to account for estimates for the number of students you expect to be enrolled in online learning.

Can you table for the committee how much has been withheld from every school division, including separate school divisions? You've indicated tonight that they have also expressed frustration. Can you table the amounts held back from every school division and what your estimates are for enrolment in distance learning from each division?

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. We are happy to table the information that we've provided to our school divisions over the estimated course fees. As well with this, the general thought is that we are committed to reconciling what actual course registrations come in at when we have that, the actual data on what school divisions and making sure that school divisions are paying for the services they're receiving. With that, though, is based on what we have seen from information provided to us by school divisions from the past history of online courses accessed by their students.

We do see that there are school division operating costs for operating their existing online schools exceeds the amount that they will pay tuition revenue to the SDLC under the new model, so there will be additional funds available for school divisions to redirect into face-to-face learning. So this is based on the number of teachers that they've allocated to their online schools, and the number of courses that they've historically accessed, both internally and through Sun West or other online schools such as Saskatoon Catholic or other large ones in South East Cornerstone.

So based on that, we do see that there is going to be benefits to school divisions, accessing courses through Sun West or through the Sask DLC by being able to redirect those resources back into classrooms and face-to-face learning opportunities and supports for students both that are accessing both face to face and online.

Mr. Love: — Thanks, Mr. Jensen. Minister, using Prairie Valley as an example and the \$600,000 that's being withheld from their operating funds to pay for their projected enrolment in distance learning as an example, I understand that the estimates that you applied to Prairie Valley see an enrolment of 1,315 part-time online high school credit courses even though the annual average for that division has been approximately 110. How can you explain the discrepancy between those two numbers?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So in looking at the estimates, you know, what we really tried to do is look at what is the provincial average when it comes to the number of online courses that the average student would take across the province, knowing that school divisions were not equal or they weren't equal in terms of the number of courses that they offered to students. So that might mean that historically they'd maybe be below the provincial average compared to a South East Cornerstone or Chinook or Sun West that had a pretty robust online offering, as well as whether or not there were restrictive policies in place that maybe didn't see students having access to online courses in other school divisions on a part-time basis.

And so what we tried to do is look at . . . Okay, if you look at the provincial average in terms of what the uptake is in online courses, applying that across the province, you know, that's some of the factors that we looked at in looking at putting together those estimates.

I think what we've offered to do though to school divisions is relook at those estimates, particularly in light of the fact that, for a student in a school division that maybe didn't have let's say as open of . . . in terms of course selection in their online school, or perhaps had a more restrictive policy when it came to students accessing online school. Maybe in those school divisions, that uptake isn't going to be as immediate as maybe just applying the provincial average across the entire student population.

And so, you know, I suspect that over time we likely will see the provincial average being achieved in terms of part-time enrolment in classes, but it probably won't be in the first year. And so that's what we've made the offer to the school divisions that have offered those concerns, is that we will certainly be looking at those estimates again and working with them to refine those numbers.

Mr. Love: — So as we get to the time of year when school divisions and boards are making what has been an annual time of difficult decisions, we see again . . . As an example, we can look at Prairie Valley as a division that has seen per-student funding drop to 2015-2016 levels, not accounting for inflation or enrolment growth and other challenges. In their division they'll be looking at difficult decisions.

And as they appear to have a significant discrepancy in these DLC [distance learning centre] tuition clawbacks that's having an impact to a division of \$600,000, they'll have to make decisions now, at this time of year. And so the promise of

reconciling those numbers at some point during the school year is cold comfort perhaps to the folks looking at losing their jobs to make this year's budget work.

[17:15]

So what can you commit to this evening in terms of a timeline for reconciling those numbers, and to a division like Prairie Valley and many others who are staring down budget cuts, reductions in FTEs for teaching and non-teaching staff apparently to make space for distance learning that they may or may not subscribe to?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So I would just say that, first of all, as we've already said, we are willing to work with school divisions in refining the estimates that we have developed. We're happy to do that.

I would just say, in terms of reconciliation, this is very much a similar process to the way that we do reconciliation normally through the budget process, based on enrolment. And so that is a process that school divisions are accustomed to. It's one that they are familiar with.

Currently it's \$600,000. Again we'll be refining the numbers and looking to the school divisions to provide input on that. But just to put it in context, it's a \$101 million budget that this particular school division is dealing with. And so I have confidence that they will be able to manage this while we work with them to refine the estimates and while we work with them on the reconciliation process like we do every year.

Mr. Love: — Minister, I would counter that \$600,000 in a school division that's already been cut to the bone over successive years of cuts to per-student funding is a significant amount. Even when dealing with such large numbers, it's a significant number of caring adults like teachers and EAs and school admin and bus drivers and all these other folks that do such a good job in our schools, that they'll be having to look at reducing to make distance learning work for students from other divisions. I'm not sure that I understand the fairness in that.

Is it possible for the treasury board Crown corp, for the SDLC, to run a deficit to make room for these enrolments and put the responsibility financially on the Crown corporation to take that responsibility, so that school divisions don't need to make cuts to only have that funding reconciled several months into next school year?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I guess I would just say that while I understand . . . And we have recognized the concerns that school boards have put forward in terms of where they think the estimates, in terms of the holdback, maybe need to be refined, and we've made that commitment. But I would just say, this is . . .

In the case of I think it's Prairie Valley that you've raised, so even if their holdback is \$600,000, the information that they've provided to us is that they formerly employed seven full-time teachers and spent nearly \$700,000 to provide online learning. That is a cost that they no longer have. And so even before any reconciliation even takes place, we have just saved them nearly \$100,000.

So in terms of the concerns that when reconciliation takes place and what reconciliation takes place, that will be largely defined on how many students from their school division take courses through the SDLC, whether that is the number that we estimated that it will be, whether that reconciliation is up or down in terms of whether they pay more or pay less than that. But in terms of where we sit right now, I would just say for them to be concerned about \$600,000 in a \$101 million budget, keep in mind last year they had a cost of nearly \$700,000 for online learning that no longer exists. So even before reconciliation takes place, they're to the better.

Mr. Love: — So it's your position that the school division, its director, and board Chair are incorrect about their own financial situation?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — No, what I'm merely doing is trying to ensure that everyone has the full context. So certainly, the information that we've sent out does provide an estimate in terms of what a holdback would be, and that there would be reconciliation based on what that estimate going forward is. So we're putting \$23 million as a grant from the GRF [General Revenue Fund] to the treasury board Crown, and the balance of the budget for the Sask DLC will be made up of tuition that will be paid by school divisions.

So there's money coming from, you know, if you call the GRF one pot, and if you call collectively what the school divisions will pay the second pot. And you know, the grant has been determined from the government; the tuition that will be paid, right now is an estimate. There will be a reconciliation based on that.

And so I understand the divisions that have put forward publicly to their ratepayers, to their student population through letters to parents and through the media, but what has been absent in this is the fact that in the case of Prairie Valley School Division, the information that they have provided to us is that last year they had seven full-time teachers at a cost of nearly \$700,000 out of their budget to provide online learning. And frankly, what nobody has said is that that cost no longer is borne by them.

Mr. Love: — Well in many cases, I mean most school divisions that were operating online schools were doing those out of buildings that still exist. These are, I think economists would call them sunk costs. They're not getting a lot of money back for the technology that they've purchased; the incredible amount of professional development, professional learning that's gone into their teaching workforce; those rooms that they operated out of.

You know, we can use an example out of Saskatoon, where I'd like to go to next in this discussion. Many of those teachers worked out of Marion Graham Collegiate, City Park School where they operate their online learning centre out of. They're still heating that building. They're still employing many of those people, so I'm not sure that it is 100 per cent savings in the numbers that you've delivered tonight.

Minister, I'd like to look at Saskatoon as an example. And with the numbers that you've given tonight, you talked about two pools of money. One, you've gone to treasury board for \$23 million, and that's a pool of money; and then tuition as a separate pool of money for what is roughly the equivalent of 3,000 full-time students in distance learning. If we add those

pools of money we get, and these are my calculations . . . We add those two pools of money — I understand that there's some one-time costs involved in setting this up — but the investment this year in our distance learning students is about \$12,600 per student.

Saskatoon Public Schools will be getting a grant; their per-student average is 9,896. So that's significantly more, you know, well a little over \$2,700 more per student invested into SDLC students compared to Saskatoon Public Schools students.

In the news recently we've seen examples of the complex needs that Saskatoon Public Schools finances at places like John Dolan School. I'm not sure if you've had a chance to visit there; it's in Saskatoon Eastview. Students with incredible complex needs, needing one-on-one support throughout the day. As well as, you know, we've canvassed this well, newcomer needs, EAL [English as an additional language] needs. You know, Saskatoon is a public school division. They accept every student that comes to their doors, and yet their funding of \$9,896 per student is well below what these SDLC students will be funded at.

Can you comment on that discrepancy as it relates to meeting the needs of every child in a publicly funded school in Saskatchewan next year?

[17:30]

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I would just say that right now what we're estimating is that the per-student funding for the SDLC will be about \$10,000, which is among the lowest when compared to our 27 school divisions. And keep in mind it will serve the largest geographical area — every single square part of this province.

In terms of the way that the SDLC will operate, it will operate very much like school divisions have to operate in terms of that every student that has an interest in attending the online school, the SDLC will be responsible in meeting their needs regardless of what they are.

Again I would just use this as an example. And this is numbers that the school division has provided with us. They have indicated that they had 49 full-time online teachers, and the cost to operate their online school was just over \$5 million. \$5.05 million.

If as an estimate — and again, we are very willing to refine our estimates — but as an example, let's say there are 4,000 courses taken by Saskatoon Public School Division students at a cost of \$500 per class per student in tuition. And that's roughly the estimate that we're forecasting for Saskatoon Public. And again, if they think that that's high or low, we'd be happy to have that discussion. But at \$500 a class per student, that's \$2 million. So we are helping divisions avoid costs that they have had in the past when it comes to online learning.

In the case of that example, if that estimate holds true — and again, the \$5 million is the number they gave us in terms of what their costs are — if those numbers and that estimate holds true, that's \$3 million in funding that doesn't get clawed back. They're able to redeploy that anywhere they want, including the John

Dolan School if they chose, which I have had the opportunity to tour in the past.

So again I think that right now a lot of the focus has been on what the costs will be or potentially could be to school divisions, and I don't think we're focusing enough on what the cost avoidance will be for school divisions.

Mr. Love: — Well based on that logic, Minister, you would expect school divisions to be jumping at this opportunity and celebrating it.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, I'm surprised that they're not yet.

Mr. Love: — Doesn't that indicate to you that perhaps those divisions, with directors and CFOs [chief financial officers] and boards who have become experts at finding every dollar available for learning, perhaps have a perspective of value at this time when they're not jumping at the opportunity?

I mean in particular I'd point out that none of our Catholic divisions have opted to trade in their online school for this one, and there's many reasons for that. Obviously the infusion of a Catholic world view is very important, and I can't, you know, put a dollar value on that. But the response from school divisions has not been one of celebration that you would expect if you had found them 3 million additional dollars. So how can you explain that lack of enthusiasm?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Well, you know, I think a couple of things that I would say. One, again we are very much keeping the door open for the Catholic school divisions that have an interest in this. We can demonstrate to them what we think it will save them in terms of what they have told us that operating online schools independently has costed them in the past and what, through a tuition system, it will cost them in the future. Catholic schools in the past have used Sun West DLC so that would not be a new relationship. And so again that door remains open, and at this point that offer to at least explore that further remains on the table.

I would say that we've had a couple of school divisions that have gone through the SDLC headquarters in Kenaston in the last week and a half. I know one of the trustees indicated during that tour that for them to replicate what is being offered through the new Sask DLC would cost them millions upon millions of dollars.

And so I think this is a matter of opening those doors and inviting, whether it be trustees or directors — and in one case a director attended the tour — for them to get a better sense of what this means to, first and foremost, the students that will have access to 180 courses, over 100 high school electives, 40 dual-credit courses in partnership with Sask Poly and other post-secondary institutions. So I think it's just, you know — a bit of a pun but — to help educate some folks in terms of what this will mean.

And I think ongoing discussions as well with the ministry and with directors and CFOs so that everyone can get a really good sense of what the benefits are to the students but also what we believe will be a financial benefit to the school divisions.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Now, Minister, this evening and in the past

you've talked about this change in policy as one that can bring a more equal playing field and equity of choice to every student in the province. Now a minute ago you said that one of the reasons why greater per-student funding might be required here is because it will reach every corner of Saskatchewan.

Do we have the technology available to every student in every corner of Saskatchewan in terms of access to reliable broadband internet and technology required to facilitate online learning? And if not, then what is your ministry doing to equal that playing field?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. Again I would just reiterate that the per-student average, the per-student funding for the SDLC will be among the lowest when compared to the 27 school divisions at around \$10,000 per student. So I just want to be clear on that.

I think that I would just say a couple of things. We work closely with SaskTel through the CommunityNet program, the CNET program. It's, I believe, reviewed or renewed I think every three years . . . typically every three years. As a part of that review we look to see whether or not the bandwidth needs of schools are being met by that agreement, under that agreement, but we do have high-speed internet going to all of our schools as a part of the CNET program and the CNET agreement in terms of ensuring that students have the ability to access online learning, so that's an important factor.

Again I think the conception, certainly my conception was that online learning, it's something that's done primarily in someone's home — which can be the case — but in many cases this would be a student, a part-time student taking a class in a school as a part of their normal timetable, and so they would have access to that. I would say that, you know, I think very well one of the functions of the online learning facilitator roles that we could have is working with the students to ensure that they have what they need in terms of the hardware that would be required to take online classes.

[17:45]

The other thing too that I would note is that we, collectively with the federal government, as well as the savings that school divisions found when schools were closed in the spring of 2020, over \$155 million was dedicated towards obviously the safe restart to school and all that went with that. And many school divisions dedicated a lot of resources to buying Chromebooks and laptops for students. You know, I think in one case a school division, at least one school division has one Chromebook for every student that is in their school division, and so those assets still remain. They can be obviously utilized or should be made available to students in the event that that is a barrier. And I think that again I think freeing up dollars, certainly the fixed costs that are associated with running an online school which will no longer be borne by the school division, you know, perhaps that's an opportunity if they see the need.

And again, you know, I can't to speak to this specifically, but in the event that that's an area that they want to look at providing support for students, that's an area that school divisions can. Again, I don't know what the division's plans are, but I would say we are funding and taking over the cost, you know, largely,

a large part of the costs of providing online learning. And the school divisions don't lose that funding that has formerly been associated with them.

So if a division sees a need for a student that maybe wants to have access to an online class, whether at home or in a school, and that's a barrier, then, you know, we'd be certainly happy to have that conversation with them.

Mr. Love: — Minister, I'd like to get into a number of questions related to either specific clauses in the legislation or other regulations and legislation in this province.

First question: is there a need to amend *The Education Regulations* of 2019 and *The Teacher Salary Classification Regulations* to include those teachers employed by Sask DLC? Or alternately will the Sask DLC have a unique set of regulations? And if there is a need to change any of these to accommodate these teachers, what will the timeline be?

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. Right now we are doing the work on evaluating all the changes, the additional regulation changes that need to be made to accommodate the changes that are being made to *The Education Act* and the education consequential Acts. That work is ongoing right now, which we will anticipate that this work is going to continue over the coming months to ensure that we have all of the necessary changes to regulations to ensure the operations of the SDLC.

Mr. Love: — And what opportunities will there be for key stakeholders to provide input into that process?

Mr. Repski: — Deputy minister, Clint Repski. Thanks for the question. In terms of when we are making additional amendments, in typical fashion it would be our practice to consult with the impacted stakeholders, and I don't see why this would be any different.

Mr. Love: — Minister, we may have previously canvassed this question in committee; I'm trying to jog my memory here. But for teachers employed, I understand there's an agreement that they'll be STF members. Will there be a local agreement, and how will things that are typically negotiated with locals be applied to these teachers? In particular I'm thinking of things like prep time and professional development days.

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. Similar to any other school division, teachers have all the rights to form a local association and negotiate with the SDLC local terms and conditions to their employment. So the teachers will have all the same rights and bargaining powers that a teacher working in a school division will have.

Mr. Love: — And will those opportunities be restricted to the entire province-wide DLC, or will they be available to each of the 10 satellite locations in the province?

Mr. Jensen: — It would be one agreement for the entire Sask DLC.

Mr. Love: — Minister, I'll start with my questions, then I'll kind of provide a little bit of background on this. But the question is, as a treasury board Crown corp which has an appointed board, of

which I understand from previous committee you are the only member on that board, what mechanisms will be in place to ensure accountability with Saskatchewan taxpayers, families, and students?

Now we did discuss this previously, but specifically, you know, one of the things that our other school divisions that have elected trustees, they have that accountability. We discussed that previously, but something that they do is they have annual reporting requirements. They have meetings open to the public that folks can attend to hear reports from the board; often celebrations of excellence, you know, exciting reports from students or teachers or families, good things happening within the division; and a chance for transparency and public accountability.

So what measures will be in place for the Sask DLC and opportunities for families, parents, or concerned citizens to receive this information? And I guess the question is, will it be similar to our other 27 public and separate boards?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. So yeah, I would just say a couple of things in terms of accountability with the new treasury board Crown. Certainly there are annual report requirements that are required of all treasury board Crowns. The SDLC will be no different.

In terms of the ability for there to be that engagement with communities, what we intend to do is establish parent advisory committees in each of the campus locations so that parents have a direct, not only a direct point of contact with the SDLC to provide their feedback or to get their feedback, but also so that there is that, I guess, two-way communication between parents as well as the SDLC.

SDLC will have all the same requirements in terms of LAFOIP [*The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*] freedom of information requirements.

We certainly will be highlighting the successes that students do see through the SDLC. We have tried to do that already, highlight some of the early successes. For instance, the significant interest that teachers have expressed in terms of the number of teachers that have applied to join the SDLC, the recent one-year MOU [memorandum of understanding] that we signed with the Saskatchewan Auto Dealer's Association last week.

So we highlighted that just to show some of the early work that the SDLC is trying to do to increase not only course selection for students across the province, but also provide a real tangible to parents and prospective students in how we're, in some cases, going to work with industry to not only provide the virtual in-class learning, but also the on-the-ground experience that some students are looking to gain access to.

I think in terms of, as the board, my accountability or whoever's in my chair, certainly we have 25 minutes of accountability four days a week, two times a year. We have committee opportunities like this, or whether it be the estimates during the budget process. And I would also just note that while trustees enjoy four-year terms in terms of security in their positions, as the sole board member of the SDLC, as you know, Mr. Love, my boardship could end right now if one person in this building requested it.

And it's not you, Mr. Love — I'll just, I'll put that on the record — as much as you may like that. But certainly I'm accountable to the Premier in my role as Minister of Education.

Mr. Love: — Thanks, Minister. Looking at some of the, obviously a number of changes in the legislation before us this evening. Regarding section 152 of *The Education Act*, why . . . Here's my question, and again I'll go into further detail here. Why is the Sask DLC being held to a lower standard regarding the general discipline of pupils?

So section 152 reads:

Every board of education and the conseil scolaire shall make provisions [the key word there is "shall"], which are to be set out in its bylaws or administrative manual, applicable to the schools in its jurisdiction for the expeditious investigation and treatment of problems arising in the relationship between a pupil and the school.

But the new subsection 152(3) reads:

The SDLC may establish an administrative manual with respect to the general discipline of pupils that is applicable to the school operated by the SDLC, including for the expeditious investigation and treatment of problems arising in the relationship between a pupil and the school.

So on one hand, schools "shall" — they're required — and with the SDLC, they "may" do it. Can you explain why the SDLC is being held to a lower standard?

[18:00]

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. School divisions . . . Part of the model is having students connected to their home school division. That includes for local supports, but they're also connected to their home division for their registration. There is a physical site, so there is a "shall." As we work through with the SDLC it is most likely there will be administrative policies and procedures.

However we do need to work with local school divisions to understand where those policies . . . how the SDLC will interact with school divisions and their administrative policies that apply to their students that are connected to their home school divisions, and find out where there may be additional policies that the SDLC may need to adopt going forward.

Mr. Love: — So, Minister, would it be your perspective as well that you would expect to see administrative policies and procedures for the SDLC?

I want to put on the record that in some of the QIS [qualified independent schools] schools that we've examined thoroughly in this committee, the lack of administrative procedures certainly created gaps in terms of safety for students. One example being, without any administrative procedures that any one of our divisions would have that would prohibit a staff member who had been charged with a crime that included offences against young people, would be immediately removed from the learning environment. But without administrative procedures, certainly we had people . . . And I don't need into get into the details of

that. I bring that up as an example to say that administrative policies and procedures certainly matter. And I know that your government has taken effort to provide those for independent schools.

But now we have a new school being created by your government that isn't currently, according to the legislation before us this evening, required to have that manual. So what kind of timeline can Saskatchewan people expect to have those administrative procedures in place?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So the SDLC will be continuing to work with school divisions. I don't have a time of when I can say when that work would be complete, but I would just note that one of the intents of structuring it this way is that the students remain students of their home school division. So there are 27 administrative procedural manuals that would guide the administration of the student.

You know, we're still working through kind of what this relationship looks like between the SDLC and the school divisions. You know, I think that there likely would at some point be administrative procedures for the SDLC, but I can't give a time of when that will be or what that will look like.

And I think, you know, part of the benefit of having Darren Gasper as the CEO [chief executive officer], he has run an online school as a superintendent for one of our school divisions. He has built those relationships with school divisions in his time in doing that. And so I think this is certainly one of the things that we're working through with the divisions as we gear up for the upcoming fall.

Mr. Love: — Okay, thanks. Thanks, Minister. Under section 154(11), it's on the topic of discipline and a principal's ability to suspend a student. Under 154(11)(b), can you please explain the reasoning behind adding the language of "unanimous report"? Why is it important that the decision to suspend a pupil be unanimous?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Sorry, Mr. Love, can you give me the subsection reference again?

Mr. Love: — 154(11)(b).

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you.

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. This is really about clarifying some wording in the legislation. So what the change is referring to is under subsection (8), when there's an appeal of a student disciplinary or suspension, the director can appoint a committee which is made up of the director or an appointee and the principal of the school. And this is ensuring that the principal and the director or their appointee are on the same page before making a recommendation to the board on the next steps for that appeal of that suspension for that student.

Mr. Love: — And when you say they make a recommendation to the board, would that be to the minister?

Mr. Jensen: — For the SDLC, yes.

Mr. Love: — So in what way will the Minister of Education be

involved in making decisions on school discipline of the SDLC?

Mr. Jensen: — The board of the SDLC will be involved the same way a school division trustee is involved receiving a report from administration on the discipline of a student.

[18:15]

Mr. Love: — Minister, have you ever been involved in the discipline of a student previously?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Other than my own kids, no.

Mr. Love: — I knew you were going to say that. Okay. Moving on. Looking at the regulations on school year, section 163(7) states that the school year will comply with any requirements prescribed in the regulations.

My question is, is this referring to *The Education Regulations of 2019* or are there any new regulations being drafted, as this could have significant implications regarding the definition of the school year and further implications for teacher contracts and working conditions?

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. This is clarifying and adding the Sask DLC to the same requirements that the school division or the conseil need to apply with, to submitting school calendars to the ministry and ensuring that the regulated number of days for education are being applied to all students.

Mr. Love: — And will that be the same for every location of the SDLC in terms of school days, you know, minutes and days of instruction?

Mr. Repski: — Thank you for the question. The purpose of the calendar section on here is to make sure that there's equity in application of school calendars. Obviously the school calendar for the distance learning centre is going to look a little bit different than other school divisions, but the purpose behind this is to make sure that there's equity in how we're counting instructional minutes. So as we're reviewing school division calendars, the online courses are going to be subject to the same method of counting instructional hours that regular school division calendars have.

Mr. Love: — Minister, when will the forms for things like offers of employment, acceptance of employment, notices of termination — which are found in *The Education Regulations of 2019* — when will they be updated to apply to SDLC?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, that work is ongoing now. We're working to finalize that as quickly as we can, and certainly they would be in place before the beginning of the school year.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Also looking at some of the changes in terms of employment and continuity for someone already in the profession. The new subsection 205.1 states:

If a teacher employed by a board of education or the conseil scolaire transfers to the school operated by the SDLC, for the purposes of employment, salary, salary increments, benefits and other entitlements, with the approval of the SDLC [that's the important part — with the approval of the

SDLC], that teacher is deemed to have been employed by the SDLC from the day on which the teacher entered into a contract of employment with the board of education or the conseil scolaire from which the transfer is made.

So there's a little bit of ambiguity there in this statement regarding, you know, that phrase that I highlighted: "with the approval of the SDLC." Does the approval speak to the transfer only, or the recognition of salary, salary increments, benefits, and other entitlements from the previous employer? Yeah, I'll kind of pause my question there and see if you have any comments on helping me to make sense of this subsection.

Mr. Jensen: — Thanks for the question. This section applies to teachers that we have transferred from a school division into the SDLC at the operation, not a new contract hire. So this is standard contract language that ensures that teachers' years of service are being recognized as they transfer into the SDLC from their division.

Mr. Love: — So in your opinion, Minister, does that phrase, "with the approval of the SDLC," put any, you know, salary, increments, benefits, or other entitlements into any jeopardy for any professional teacher transferring to the SDLC?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — No. This is a reflection of transferring the teacher's contract from their existing school division employer to their new employer, the SDLC.

Mr. Love: — Okay. I'd like to move to section 241. Just give me a minute to get there. Well the question is, in section 241 . . . Oh, sorry. Of *The Education Act*, sorry, not in these . . . I'm not sure if I see it in these explanatory notes here. Will there be any change to the Educational Relations Board to ensure representation from the Sask DLC?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — At this point in time we're not contemplating changes to the board.

Mr. Love: — So would it be fair to say that the membership would have to come through teachers nominated by the federation of the two representatives that they have?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah. So the teachers would be and will continue to be members of the STF, and so it would be the same process as it is.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Minister, a question: you talked earlier this evening about ways in which parents may engage. But my understanding is that the SDLC is not required to establish school community councils in the way that every other school in Saskatchewan is, which is a sharp turnaround from the parents' report, when government stated that SCCs [school community council] are a vital mechanism for public engagement: "School community councils provide a critical opportunity at the school level for parents and community members to have a voice."

Do you care to comment on that? And specifically, will Sask DLC be required to establish a school community council? And what will that look like given the 10 satellite locations that will exist?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you for the question, Mr. Love. So

as I said before, we will have an avenue for parents to be able to be active in the school in terms of the campus location and providing feedback and have that direct two-way communication. So we are establishing parent advisory councils in the campus sites. Essentially they'll function like a school community council, but I have directed that parent advisory councils, committees be established in all the sites.

Mr. Love: — And will they be identical or similar to school community councils? What will be the difference?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah. The intent is to operate very much like a school community council would.

Mr. Love: — Minister, I want to ask about subsection 370, specifically looking at the broad regulation-making power that could exempt the SDLC from *The Education Act* or the regulations in their entirety.

Why were these provisions added in subsection 370? Yeah, if you could just go into that. What was your intent in adding and making these amendments in 370?

[18:30]

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. The changes made to section 370 really are about ensuring the SDLC and the operations of the SDLC and the ability to make regulations similar to those of school divisions.

So some of the reg-making authorities would be assigning the powers of the board of the SDLC; providing the responsibilities of the QAF, the quality assurance framework; and approving online providers, online learning providers; creating the regulations related to the funding mechanisms in which the SDLC can receive funding from the government; establishing the reg-making authorities for local bargaining; and to adopt an existing LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] agreement while teachers of the SDLC enter into local bargaining with the SDLC; vote-setting regulations related to the qualifications of the CEO of the SDLC; of setting course fees related to . . . that will be charged to school divisions; and then just overall operations of the SDLC.

So this really is about creating similar powers and the reg-making authority that the minister has over school divisions and the conseil.

Mr. Love: — Anyway, just in your opinion, is it similar to the powers that the minister has over qualified and certified independent schools in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So these amendments are really trying to, through regulations, allow for and devolve the power to the board, to the minister, much like you would see in a public school division or the conseil, as opposed to independent schools which would be under different regulations.

Mr. Love: — Maybe one more question on this subsection here, Minister.

Is it your opinion, would you agree that subsection 370 gives the

Lieutenant Governor in Council power to make regulations, specifically the ability to exempt the SDLC, schools operated by the SDLC, or an approved online learning provider from any of the provisions in the Act and the regulations? Does the Lieutenant Governor in Council have the power to make those exemptions for the SDLC?

Mr. Repski: — The legislation that's been drafted is really giving Lieutenant Governor in Council the same provisions that apply to other school divisions. So they are in fact the same.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Thanks. Is there anything in these regulations and changes to *The Education Act*, you know, which the Sask DLC will have different duties and powers different from other school boards? Specifically, I understand that in here I made note that the SDLC includes a clause in the list of duties stating that they may perform any duties or exercise any powers prescribed in the regulations, that boards and conseil do not have this same provision. So to your knowledge, Minister, and with the support of your officials, will the DLC have any different duties or powers than school boards?

Mr. Repski: — We don't anticipate the powers to be different. We don't expect there to be a lot of differences in responsibilities and powers and authorities that are differing between typical school divisions and the SDLC. But the section that was referred to now, it does give us the ability . . . obviously it gives Lieutenant Governor in Council the ability to make regulations. The difference is, this is for an online learning environment.

And as we've been talking about through this session is, sometimes we don't know what we don't know yet. And so we want to make sure that the power and privilege is there to make regulations that reflect an online learning environment. And that is different than your typical school divisions which are largely geographically based. This has components of that, but this gives us the ability to make amendments and regulations as the need arises. But at this point in time, I can't tell you what those are.

Mr. Love: — So looking at subsection 85 and 86, that lay out the existing duties of conseil scolaire. Yeah, I think it's clear that they're, you know, virtually identical to the duties of SDLC to a board or conseil with a couple discrepancies. In two places, board duties are prefaced with "subject to the regulations," but the DLC duty is not prefaced with such.

In particular when it comes to selection of resources and providing textbooks, library books, reference books, or other learning resources, physical or virtual, which is added to the DLC regulations, do these differences between board, conseil, and DLC, do they create any conditions that might allow the Sask DLC to operate independently from approved Saskatchewan curriculum and resources, for example, resources that are used by independent schools or curricula and resources provided by corporations external to our province?

Mr. Jensen: — Thank you for the question. The SDLC will be subject to the same curricula requirements as every other school division and conseil, and there will be no exception, including resources.

Mr. Love: — And when it comes to having things like board-approved resources . . . so you know, we saw much public debate

in this province over anti-hate resources that were prescribed by the minister to not be used in classrooms but are typically, you know . . . Those are decisions made with, you know, board-supported resources. And I'll point out again that those resources in question there were not for use with students. They were professional supports for teachers and adults who work with young people.

But how will that work with the SDLC in terms of selecting board-approved resources when the board is only the Minister of Education?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I think first thing I would point out is that like every other board in the province that rely on their professional administration to make recommendations, I would be in the same position.

You know, I'm pretty confident with the leadership that we have at the SDLC with Darren Gasper, 22 years of experience. He's been leading the largest online school in the province that has, you know, frankly attracted students from many parts of the province in its previous iteration under the Sun West School Division. I expect that the way that he operated the SDLC under the Sun West School Division will continue to be the way that he operates the new Sask DLC. And whatever interactions that I have with him with respect to resources and curriculum will be the same as that he had with his senior administration and board at the Sun West School Division.

[18:45]

And on top of that too, I certainly have a lot of confidence in the senior team that I have at the ministry that provide me advice whether it be on curriculum or other areas as well. So it will operate the way it has, similar to how it has operated under a school division in the past.

Mr. Love: — So your expectation as the sole board member is that you won't be directing which resources are appropriate for use in the school?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, I think that certainly that would be my expectation is that. I think right now 180 courses are offered. Many of the teachers that have been teaching online under their previous school division employment will continue.

You know, I certainly will be looking to work with Mr. Gasper in areas like, you know, what we did last week with working with the Sask Auto Dealer's Association in signing an MOU with that organization. They then, as the professionals, work together, you know, in the event that there's courses that are created out of that. But you know, I will be certainly relying on his advice as well as the advice of the ministry when it comes to curriculum and resources, whether it be through the SDLC or through our public school divisions.

Mr. Love: — Looking at the MOU that was signed last weekend with the automotive dealers, can you provide any more details on what you're hoping to see in terms of opportunities for Saskatchewan students through the SDLC and any, you know, financial arrangements that are being made to provide those opportunities?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. So last week's memorandum of understanding between the SDLC and the Saskatchewan automotive dealer's association essentially will see students that take an automotive class through the SDLC, they will have the opportunity to do a work placement in an auto dealer that has, you know, an autobody part of their operations.

So I believe the \$40,000 that SADA [Saskatchewan Automobile Dealer's Association] has dedicated towards this, this will pay for basically a part-time work placement coordinator position to help coordinate the students that are attending SDLC and taking the applicable classes with finding a work placement. I think, if I recall correctly, SADA has 133 member dealerships across the province so, you know, they span geographically much of the province. That will open up an opportunity for those students to take that.

Very similar to what the former DLC Sun West School Division did in terms of signing an agreement with the western equipment dealers association, or WEDA . . . So this is farm equipment dealerships that went to the DLC. And I don't exactly know how this really started in terms of who went to who, but it was really identifying a need between the DLC that wanted to offer innovative classes, especially to rural Saskatchewan students that maybe wanted to gain an understanding of a different side of the agricultural industry and certainly WEDA who, you know, frankly over the last number of years have expressed concern about just not having enough qualified technicians. And so trying to match up students that have an interest in that field with the opportunities that exist.

And so there was work done. And I don't know the dollar amount that was provided by WEDA members through their association, but essentially developed together a curriculum that was, at the time, a locally developed curriculum. We in fact have just gone through a process to make that a province-wide curriculum, so it's moved from the locally developed curriculum to a provincial curriculum.

But those are a couple of examples that we have working through the former DLC and now in the Sask DLC. And I can say that there's a number of industry associations that have already reached out that would like to discuss with the Sask DLC with Mr. Gasper and his team about potential partnerships into the future.

Mr. Love: — Thank you. Getting to the end of questions here, which I'm sure is good news to everyone in the committee tonight.

Minister, in your opinion, is it your intention, and does this legislation and *The Education Act* and regulations have the ability for the Sask DLC to, at any time in the future, accept students from outside Saskatchewan and to charge them, you know, tuition beyond . . . to charge them tuition that school divisions are paying now?

Mr. Repski: — The quick answer to this one is yes, theoretically. There are existing pilots that exist within school divisions today. Those authorities were granted as a pilot through the Minister of Education's authority. And those same authorities apply to the DLC. There's no contemplation of using that same pilot methodology for the DLC, but theoretically and legislatively the

minister does have those authorities.

Mr. Love: — And if that were to change, what consultation with key stakeholders, with the public would take place before Sask DLC would open its doors to providing Saskatchewan education to, you know, international students or students in other provinces? What would take place before that change would be implemented?

Mr. Repski: — Again if we are to enact that authority, the consultations would involve the usual suspects which would be impacted. It could be post-secondaries in this case. It could be existing school divisions, other interested parties. We would have to take a look at what the extent of the considerations would be, and we'd have to define what the stakeholder consultation would look like at that point in time. It could look very different depending on the scenario.

Mr. Love: — Minister, during budget estimates we had a discussion on any provisions as this was constructed. We were discussing the decision to construct this as a treasury board Crown corp as opposed to through the ministry, and you listed several advantages to that. I asked if there was any commercial considerations as far as generating profit, which certainly as we've heard tonight is theoretically possible by offering Saskatchewan courses for a fee to students outside of Saskatchewan, outside of our country. Is it still your position that there is no interest and no future for that commercial element to this treasury board Crown corporation, or has that changed?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, certainly the thought behind the creation of the SDLC in this form is to serve the students of Saskatchewan. That's the priority. That was the intent behind it. That certainly is my thoughts going forward. Offering students in Saskatchewan the ability to have access to, as I said before, 108 courses, over 100 high school electives, 40 dual-credit courses at this point, up to the age of 22 without paying tuition out of their pocket, aside from what a school division would pay, as we've discussed, with the \$500 per class. So that certainly was the intent and remains my intent on this.

Mr. Love: — So there's no commercial interest in making this a profitable Crown corporation?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — No. I mean we certainly expect the administration of the SDLC to operate within the budget allocation that they're allowed. But we certainly have had no discussions or I haven't had any thoughts about opening this wider to what I've already said to the committee tonight, and that's to serve students in Saskatchewan regardless of which school division is their home school division.

Mr. Love: — So I do want to point out that we have one, as you know, we have one qualified independent school that provides similar services — might be seen as competition for the Sask DLC. I'm not sure if it's appealing to the same base. But they receive 50 per cent funding on most of their students, and then a reduced amount on those over, I think, over 299 . . . 399.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — 399.

[19:00]

Mr. Love: — So they're receiving 50 per cent per-student funding, but they generate enough profit to make it, you know, keep their doors open and employ teachers and directors and all that.

Sask DLC is budgeting roughly twice that amount, much closer to the province-wide . . . You said they're in the lower end, but you know, getting more per student than Saskatoon Public Schools, the largest division in the province. So my concern is that this might be looked at as something to be privatized in the future. At that rate, that there could be profits to be gained.

What assurances do you have for students, families, and taxpayers in this province that this treasury board Crown corporation could not be privatized in the future?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thanks for the question, Mr. Love. I think a couple of things.

First I would just note the distinction between the independent school that does operate in this space. I don't know off the top of my head if they do charge a tuition, but that's something that would be afforded to them. They have that option. It looks like they don't do that.

That's certainly not something that we're pursuing as a part of the SDLC. In fact, I think, as we talked about the regulations or the amendments this evening, you know, as you can see, we have tried to structure the SDLC to look and operate very much like a school division, not a for-profit organization. So you know, I think that that's an indication of the intent of how I would see this operate going forward.

I think too the other thing that I would just suggest, that if somebody thought that the motive of the government was to essentially privatize the online school space, there already was an option available. We could have turned to them and basically made this happen through that organization. We didn't do that.

You know, I would just say that this has been a lot of work and a lot of . . . both the legislation in front of you but also the work behind the scenes in moving this through the committee process internally to government, the cabinet process, the treasury board process. I certainly have a lot . . . I don't want to say invested because I don't want to mix my metaphors, but put a lot of work into getting this this far across the line.

And I did so really with the belief and the understanding that this was really about providing the best service that we can to students, regardless of where they live in the province, so that we don't have students that are put in a position where they have to choose between course selection and extracurricular, or course selection and graduation, or other ancillary opportunities within schools. This is really about providing that student experience to students regardless of where they live in the province, certainly from my standpoint not about privatizing online school.

Mr. Love: — Okay. Thank you, Minister. I mean it's very clear how much work has gone into this on behalf of your officials and all those who work in the ministry, not to diminish that in any way. It's been somewhat remarkable to see how fast this has come about, you know, after being, I think, first really announced publicly on, I think, October 6th of last year, somewhere around

there.

I guess my final question . . . I signalled to the Chair that I'd be done. My final question: you indicated in budget estimates that the top priority from all stakeholders in the province in terms of what needs to be addressed in education, it wasn't distance learning, you know. And again it's not to minimize the work that's gone into this, but that wasn't . . . The priority was complexities in the classroom, meeting the diverse needs of our students that are unfortunately going unmet in every corner of this province. Why wasn't that effort — the hours, the resources — put into addressing the number one priority, which is classroom complexity?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Yeah, I think, Mr. Chair, if I could on this, I would just say to the member that there has been considerable time and energy and thought by a number of people, not just the ministry, but a number of stakeholders including representation from the SSBA, the STF, I believe LEADS as well, in discussing the complexity issue that we see in the classroom.

As I indicated, I think if not on budget day, after budget day, my expectation is that committee will wrap up their work by the end of this month. What I had indicated to school divisions on budget day was that when we have a better idea of what that work may culminate in, then, you know, I certainly will be raising this with my colleagues as well. So I would just say that there's been a lot of work behind the scenes on moving distance learning, moving the new SDLC to this point, and that work continues. But certainly you see the culmination of a lot of that work in terms of the amendments to the legislation.

I would just say to the member we still have a little bit of work left to do on complexity. And not to say that we'll solve it in one day. I think you as a schoolteacher will probably agree with that, that there's not a single solution and a one-day fix. But that's not to say that there hasn't been work and that there isn't work in progress on that file as well.

The Chair: — Thank you. Are there any more questions or comments from any committee members? Seeing none, we will now proceed to vote on the clauses. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 to 84 inclusive agreed to.]

[19:15]

The Chair: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Education Amendment Act, 2023*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 134, *The Education Amendment Act, 2023*, a bilingual bill without amendment. Mr. Kaeding. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Minister Duncan, do you have any closing comments you want to make in regards to the bill?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to committee members this evening, to Mr. Love, to the officials that are here with me this evening, and of course the officials that they are representing that aren't here but that, as Mr. Love I think agrees, have put a lot of work into moving not only the amendments forward but also the creation of the SDLC in a pretty quick time. So thanks to all them. Thank you to Mr. Love for his questions.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. And Mr. Love, anything for comments?

Mr. Love: — Yeah, I'll just say thanks to everyone tonight. I know it's been a long time. Thanks to Hansard for staying late, to our Clerks, all the staff here. And thanks to Minister Duncan, Mr. Jensen, Mr. Repski for the answers provided this evening. It's part of our democratic process, and I appreciate the answers that you provided and the detail here tonight. Thanks.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Love. We're not done yet so if there's any officials you need to change out, feel free to at this point.

Bill No. 135 — *The Education Consequential Amendments Act, 2023*

The Chair: — But we're now going to begin consideration of Bill 135, *The Education Consequential Amendments Act, 2023*, clause 1, short title. Minister, any comments on that bill?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — No, I think we're good for comments on that one.

The Chair: — So with that, I'm going to open the floor to questions. And Mr. Love, do you have any questions on that bill?

Mr. Love: — I'm okay. I think we canvassed everything thoroughly with the last one. Thank you.

The Chair: — I like that answer. Not kidding. So without any questions or comments from any committee members, we're going to proceed to vote on the clauses. So clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

[Clauses 1 to 9 inclusive agreed to.]

The Chair: — His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Education Consequential Amendments Act, 2023*.

I would ask a member to move that we report Bill No. 135, *The Education Consequential Amendments Act, 2023* without amendment. Mr. Steele. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I'm going to guess, Minister, you're

good. No further comments?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: — I'm good.

The Chair: — Terrific. Mr. Love, same? So before we move into our next item of business, if your officials want to leave, we're going to be doing some other budget business . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Don't believe so.

**General Revenue Fund
Advanced Education
Vote 37**

The Chair: — We will now proceed to vote off the committee resolutions for the 2023-24 estimates and the 2022-23 supplementary estimates no. 2.

Vote 37, Advanced Education. Central management and services, subvote (AE01) in the amount of \$14,728,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Post-secondary education, subvote (AE02) in the amount of 700,837,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Student supports, subvote (AE03) in the amount of 48,792,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount \$400,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informal purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Advanced Education, vote 37 — \$764,357,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there may be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2024, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of \$764,357,000.

Do I have a mover? Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Education
Vote 5**

The Chair: — Vote 5, Education. Central management and services, subvote (ED01) in the amount of \$14,300,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education, subvote (ED03) in the amount of 2,232,780,000, is

that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Teachers' pensions and benefits, subvote (ED04) in the amount of \$23,954,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Early years, subvote (ED08) in the amount of \$386,879,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial Library and literacy, subvote (ED15) in the amount of \$14,917,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Education, vote 5 — \$2,672,830,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2024, the following sums for Education in the amount of \$2,672,830,000.

Mr. Hargrave. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Health
Vote 32**

The Chair: — Vote 32, Health. Central management and services, subvote (HE01) in the amount of \$10,401,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Saskatchewan health services, subvote (HE03) in the amount of \$5,028,748,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial health services and support, subvote (HE04) in the amount of \$307,724,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Medical services and medical education programs, subvote (HE06) in the amount of \$1,040,221,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Drug plan and extended benefits, subvote (HE08) in the amount of \$478,746,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of \$1,465,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be subvoted.

Health, vote 32 — \$6,865,840,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2024, the following sums for Health in the amount of \$6,865,840,000.

Mr. Nerlien. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Labour Relations and Workplace Safety
Vote 20**

The Chair: — Vote 20, Labour Relations and Workplace Safety. Central management and services, subvote (LR01) in the amount of \$5,117,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Occupational health and safety, subvote (LR02) in the amount of \$9,675,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Employment standards, subvote (LR03) in the amount of \$3,111,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour Relations Board, subvote (LR04) in the amount of \$1,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Labour relations and mediation, subvote (LR05) in the amount of \$680,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Workers' Advocate, subvote (LR06) in the amount of \$943,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of \$92,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, vote 20 — \$20,526,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2024, the following sums for Labour Relations and Workplace Safety in the amount of \$20,526,000.

Mr. Steele.

[19:30]

**General Revenue Fund
Social Services
Vote 36**

The Chair: — Vote 36, Social Services. Central management and services, subvote (SS01) in the amount of \$56,830,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Income assistance services, subvote (SS03) in the amount of \$647,390,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Child and family services, subvote (SS04) in the amount of \$379,087,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Client support, subvote (SS05) in the amount of \$12,963,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Housing, subvote (SS12) in the amount of \$24,062,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Disability programs and services, subvote (SS14) in the amount of \$310,909,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Non-appropriated expense adjustment in the amount of \$7,610,000. Non-appropriated expense adjustments are non-cash adjustments presented for informational purposes only. No amount is to be voted.

Social Services, vote 36 — \$1,431,241,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2024, the following sums for Social Services in the amount of \$1,431,241,000.

Mr. Kaeding. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Lending and Investing Activities
Advanced Education
Vote 169**

The Chair: — Vote 169, Advanced Education. Loans to Student Aid Fund, subvote (AE01) in the amount of \$80,000,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Advanced Education, vote 169 — \$80,000,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2024, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of \$80,000,000.

Mr. Fiaz. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — No. 2
Advanced Education
Vote 37**

The Chair: — Supplementary estimates no. 2, 2022-23, vote 37, Advanced Education. Post-secondary education, subvote (AE02) in the amount of \$9,875,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Student supports, subvote (AE03) in the amount of 4,500,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Advanced Education, vote 37 — \$14,375,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2023, the following sums for Advanced Education in the amount of \$14,375,000.

Mr. Hargrave. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — No. 2
Education
Vote 5**

The Chair: — Vote 5, Education, K-12 education, subvote

(ED03) in the amount of \$9,491,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Teachers' pensions and benefits, subvote (ED04) in the amount of \$6,009,000. There is no vote as this is statutory.

Education, vote 5 — \$9,491,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2023, the following sums for Education in the amount of \$9,491,000.

Mr. Nerlien. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

**General Revenue Fund
Supplementary Estimates — No. 2
Health
Vote 32**

The Chair: — Vote 32, Health. Saskatchewan health services, subvote (HE03) in the amount of \$84,974,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Provincial health services and support, subvote (HE04) in the amount of \$7,760,000, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried.

Health, vote 32 — \$92,734,000. I will now ask a member to move the following resolution:

Resolved that there be granted to His Majesty for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2023, the following sums for Health in the amount of \$92,734,000.

Mr. Steele. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Committee members, you have before you a draft of the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Human Services. We require a member to move the following motion:

That the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Mr. Fiaz.

Mr. Fiaz has moved:

That the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Human Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. That concludes our business today. I'd like to thank the committee for the hours that you've put in during this estimates period and also to the opposition members for their hours put in as well. Also like to thank Hansard, the Clerks, building security, yeah, I guess broadcast services as well as the custodians and everybody else that keeps this building running smoothly.

At this point I would like a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Hargrave. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 19:40.]