



STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Regina Rosemont

Mr. Michael Chisholm, Deputy Chair
Cut Knife-Turtleford

Ms. Pat Atkinson
Saskatoon Nutana

Mr. Dan D'Autremont
Cannington

Mr. Warren Michelson
Moose Jaw North

Ms. Laura Ross
Regina Qu'Appelle Valley

Mr. Lyle Stewart
Thunder Creek

[The committee met at 09:59.]

The Chair: — Good morning, we'll convene our meeting at this time. Just to recognize committee members that are joining us here this morning: Mr. Chisholm is Vice-Chair, Mr. D'Autremont, Ms. Ross, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Michelson, and Mr. Nilson who's substituting in for Ms. Atkinson.

This morning the primary agenda will cover off discussion as it relates to the 2009 *Report of the Provincial Auditor* volume 3, specifically Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, chapter 2; and Education, chapter 4.

I'd like to welcome our Provincial Auditor's office and staff of the Provincial Auditor's office and Acting Provincial Auditor Brian Atkinson to the table here today. And I'd like to welcome Terry Paton and Chris Bayda from the Provincial Comptroller's office here this morning. Thank you for joining us.

At this time I'd like to simply make notice of tabling of a document titled, Ministry of Finance reporting of public losses for the period from January 1st, 2010 to March 31st, 2010, dated April 30th, 2010. So that document is tabled.

We had discussion within the Assembly and formal presentations to recognize outgoing and retiring auditor Mr. Fred Wendel in the previous week within the Legislative Assembly. We would appreciate at this point in time to — from this committee table where Mr. Wendel provided a great service to the province of Saskatchewan — to thank Mr. Wendel for those contributions through a long history of service to our province and the past decade serving in the role of Provincial Auditor. I would like to simply say thank you for that great service.

And I would urge a motion at this point in time to offer a formal thank you from this committee. And I will introduce a motion and see if we have somebody who would consider moving that. The motion reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Public Accounts desires to record their respectful appreciation for the 39 years of distinguished and dedicated service given by Fred Wendel to the province of Saskatchewan including 10 years as an officer of the Legislative Assembly.

Do I have a mover?

Mr. Chisholm: — I'll move that motion.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm, and I see there's many hands. I see both sides of the table would be willing to move, and that shows the kind of support that Mr. Wendel has. And Mr. Chisholm has moved that motion. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All agreed. So moved.

Mr. Chisholm: — We want to report it was unanimous.

The Chair: — With of course unanimous support for Mr. Fred

Wendel and thank you, Mr. Wendel. I wonder if Mr. Wendel's at home watching over the proceedings here right now, and he might be able to give us his opinions at different times here on the proceedings. But thank you, Mr. Wendel.

Advanced Education, Employment and Labour

The Chair: — We'll move along because we do have quite a bit to get through in a rather short period here this morning, and we'll move directly into consideration of chapter 2 of the 2009 *Report of the Provincial Auditor*, volume 3, specifically as it relates to Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. And at this point in time, I welcome acting auditor Brian Atkinson or his officials to make a presentation.

Mr. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. Sitting next to me is Ed Montgomery. Ed is the deputy in charge of our education group. Also with our office is Kim Lowe sitting over against the wall there. Kim is also a principal with our office in the education group, and she is also the liaison to this committee. She makes sure that our office has the correct people here at the right time. Sitting beside Kim is Mark Anderson. Mark is a principal with our education group as well, and he'll be here to support us if we need his assistance. Ed will be making the presentations for our office this morning.

Mr. Montgomery: — Thank you, Brian. In this chapter, we report the results of our 2009 audits to the ministry and its special purpose funds. We also report on the audits of SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], three regional colleges, and the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trades Certification Commission.

We make one new recommendation concerning the ministry. We recommend the ministry prepare an information technology strategic plan. The ministry needs an IT [information technology] strategic plan to ensure its use of IT resources support the ministry's strategic direction. It also helps management determine if it has addressed all the threats and risks to the ministry's security.

We also carried out a follow-up of a 2004 audit on the ministry's processes for completing capital construction projects. In 2004 we recommended that the ministry document its assessment of the processes that its partners used to identify and mitigate significant risks or set its own processes to identify and mitigate significant risks on approved capital projects. This assessment would help reduce potential risks at each stage of a capital project. For example it would help address risks with design or cost overruns. At October 2005, the ministry was developing a project checklist to help it standardize its risk assessment process among its partners. At October 2009, the ministry still has more work to do to improve its processes to address our 2004 recommendation.

Finally on pages 32 to 35 of our report, we include a status report on outstanding recommendations of this committee that had not yet been fully implemented as at March 31, 2009. We plan to follow up on these recommendations in 2010.

Thank you, that ends my opening comment.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Montgomery. And I would invite a response from Deputy Minister Isman.

Ms. Isman: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First of all if I could, I'll introduce the officials that are here with me. On my left is Reg Urbanowski, the assistant deputy minister of advanced education and student services and more specifically the Chair of our ministry's information technology management committee. And on my right is Karen Allen, the executive director of corporate services.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today and we always welcome the input and the recommendations from the Provincial Auditor's office as an area to highlight for us areas where we can make improvement within the ministry.

The report as it stands, I think, we will find we've made some significant progress in other areas and incremental progress in others and all of which, I think, are demonstrations of our commitment to continuous improvement within the ministry. As well we continue to work with other ministries including the Information Technology Office as well as our stakeholders, SIAST and the regional colleges, to implement changes to address some of the areas that the Provincial Auditor has noted.

With that I'll finish up my remarks and be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: — Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — Could you explain, I guess, either the Provincial Auditor's office or the department, when the report would have been completed. So like when was the last part that's recorded in this report?

Mr. Montgomery: — This report is for the year ended March 31, 2009.

Mr. Nilson: — So basically it would be last summer then.

Mr. Montgomery: — One entity I can think of and a regional college is SIAST and . . . have June year-ends. So we go right to the June 2009 for those entities.

Mr. Nilson: — So I guess the reason I asked that question was that last year the budgets available for your department were substantially more rosy, if I can put it that way, than they are this year. And so there's a number of things that are in progress here. Are there any of them that have had to be stopped because of the budget for this year?

Ms. Isman: — I don't think so. I think the areas where we've focused our attention is mostly with regard to process, review, policies, and those areas which would all be administrative matters, either the institutions were within the ministry itself, and all of that work continues to be ongoing.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay, well the specific reason I ask this is that there's quite a list of recommendations around SIAST and predicting their courses for workload and for opportunities for students. And as we know, some of the announcements in the last number of weeks probably reflect the fact that some of the

Provincial Auditor's comments from three years ago weren't implemented right away, and so it becomes a big surprise to faculty and also students when there are fairly dramatic changes. Could you address that, please.

Ms. Isman: — Thank you. I'll address it at a high level, and I'll ask Karen to follow up if there's something more specific that you're looking for. As I read through the materials from the Provincial Auditor's report, the key areas related to their human resource management practices within the institution — the ability to ensure that they had effective human resource plans in place, that they were identifying any potential risks in terms of the ongoing nature of the institution. And I believe that SIAST has put in place a very robust HR [human resources] strategic plan, and I think that has been noted by the Provincial Auditor in terms of the follow-up.

I think as well the SIAST board has implemented an enterprise risk management system which they are now working on and reporting on which was identified as one of the areas that needed improvement. And as well, that reporting is ongoing and has also been acknowledged and recognized subsequent to that period in time.

And I think the last area is with regard to increased dialogue and discussion with regard to workforce planning and including staff in the planning process of their human resource management plan. And in 2008 SIAST implemented, with their plan, a fairly robust communication plan across the organization that included not only ground-up input into the HR plan but as well then two-way communication of the plans and the expectations going out.

Mr. Nilson: — Well thank you for those comments, but that goes directly to what I think many people perceived as an issue this spring where students and faculty were totally surprised by announcements that were made. And it seems to me that some of the suggestions made three years ago were to actually make sure that everybody understood what the longer term plans were for the institution. And so when it says, well we plan to follow up in 2010 on some of these things, it's a little bit late. A lot of things have happened already. So maybe you could comment on that, please.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Nilson. Questions? Mr. Chisholm . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh sorry, thanks for helping out the Chair.

Ms. Isman: — Okay. I think I'm differentiating in terms of the recommendations in terms of how I'm reading them and the internal management of SIAST and what the Provincial Auditor was identifying in terms of effective human resource planning: making sure that the plan was robust, that it was inclusive, that it included two-way communication, that it allowed in terms of their human resource capacity in terms of both management and faculty of the organization being available so that they had a plan that involved both recruitment and retention as well as their ability to sustain the workforce to deliver the plans with regard to SIAST as well as any internal risk management processes within the organization to report back to the board. And I think those areas that the Provincial Auditor has noted have all been addressed in terms of what we have seen reported and what has been communicated back to the Provincial

Auditor's office.

Mr. Nilson: — Well I would just comment that, you know, the institution's about the students and the future of the province and what they can provide to the economy. And when I read these things, it's about making sure that everybody in the community understands both internally and externally. And it seemed to me that there were some substantial issues around, as you say, the communication internally and externally, but more importantly about the expectations for students. Thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Nilson, I believe Mr. Chisholm had a . . . You don't have questions at this time. I guess just specifically to the recommendation, could the deputy minister please provide us just a progress report as it relates to having a strategic plan in place for the calendar year. Is that in place? Or where are you at as far as having that in place?

[10:15]

Ms. Isman: — Let me just clarify. You're talking about the human resource plan for the ministry or with regard to SIAST?

The Chair: — Sorry. Specifically the recommendation of the auditor as it relates to the information technology plan. I'll read the . . . We recommend the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour prepare an information technology strategic plan.

Ms. Isman: — Thank you. Yes, and actually I'm pleased to report that the ministry, through our information technology management committee, has established a three-year information technology plan for the ministry that covers the years 2009-10 through to 2011-12. And that was approved by our executive management committee as well.

The Chair: — And that would, from the ministry's perspective would address the potential threats and risks to information security?

Ms. Isman: — I think it goes an initial way to doing that, and like every plan, I'd say that we are getting better at our ability to identify and assess risks when working with the Information Technology Office. And we will continue to modify the plan to ensure that it's as robust as it needs to be.

The Chair: — Thank you. And I guess it would . . . Question, Mr. D'Autremont?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. I guess to the Provincial Auditor as based on the deputy minister's response: does that meet the requirements of the recommendation?

Mr. Montgomery: — Well certainly they prepared a plan from the response, but I think we'd have to look at it to make sure it was an adequate plan, and we haven't done that yet.

The Chair: — I would at this point in time seek a motion from a committee member here. Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Chisholm: — I would move that we concur with the recommendation and note progress.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm moves that we concur and note progress. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's agreed. It is agreed that this committee concur with recommendation no. 1 of chapter no. 2 of the Provincial Auditor's 2009 volume 3 report and note progress towards compliance. Thank you very much.

At this time, that concludes our questions of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. Thank you, Deputy Minister Isman and your officials for coming before us. Is there any closing comments at this time? No closing comments at this time? No. Thank you very much. We'll have a brief recess, and Education will be up in a couple minutes.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Education

The Chair: — Welcome back, committee members. And at this point in time, we're going to move along with our meetings as it relates now to Education, specifically chapter 4 of the 2009 *Report of the Provincial Auditor*, volume 3.

And it was brought to my attention by committee members that we should always bring to the attention of the many, many individuals who observe this from home . . . What we know is that many people across this province tune in to Public Accounts Committee's meetings. So I would like to highlight that these reports can be found at www.auditor.sk.ca.

And at this point in time, I would like to welcome Deputy Minister Roadhouse and her officials from Education here this morning. And I would invite comment from the Provincial Auditor as it relates to chapter 4.

Mr. Montgomery: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. In this chapter, we report the results of 2009 audits of the ministry and its special purpose fund. We did not report on the audit of the Teacher's Superannuation Commission because the commission had not completed its financial statements in time for us to report. We will report on the commission in our 2010 report, volume 1.

We make several new recommendations concerning the ministry. We recommend the ministry require public libraries to prepare their financial statements using standards recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. The libraries' financial statements were not adequate for users to be able to assess the libraries' management of their capital assets.

We recommend the ministry prepare an information technology strategic plan. The ministry needs an IT strategic plan to ensure its use of IT resources support the ministry's strategic direction. It also helps management determine if it has addressed all the threats and risks to the ministry's security.

We also audited whether the ministry had adequate processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the minister. We concluded that the ministry did not have adequate processes and made

recommendations to improve the ministry's processes.

The minister sets out time requirements for core subject areas. School principals are to allocate time to courses in accordance with the minister's direction. One problem is that the ministry has not clearly defined instruction time to permit it to set out clear responsibilities. The ministry's policy specifies 1,500 minutes instruction time per week; however, we note that teachers and students spend significant amounts of time in activities other than direct instruction and learning. Time for these activities comes out of the 1,500 weekly minutes available for allocation. This leaves less than 1,500 minutes available for subject instruction.

We recommend that the ministry define instruction time to allow it to set clear expectations for delivery of the core curriculum. The ministry does not require school divisions to report on whether they're providing required instruction time in all subjects. We recommend that the ministry require school divisions to publicly report on their performance in meeting the ministry's instruction time requirements. The ministry has monitored instruction time for three grade levels in the subject area of maths and reports for this one subject area that a significant number of classrooms do not receive the required time of instruction. We recommend that the ministry monitor for all core curriculum subject areas, not just the one subject area where the school divisions are meeting their ministry's requirements.

Finally we recommended that the ministry take corrective action where necessary to improve school division compliance with the ministry's requirements for instruction time. We also carried out a follow-up of a recommendation from a 2004 audit on the ministry's processes for completing capital construction projects. We concluded that the ministry had met our recommendation.

Finally on pages 65 to 67 of our report, we include a status report on outstanding recommendations of this committee that had not yet been fully implemented as at March 31, 2009. We plan to follow up on these recommendations in 2010. Thank you, Mr. Chair. That ends my opening comments.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Montgomery. At this point in time I'd invite response from Deputy Minister Roadhouse.

Ms. Roadhouse: — Thank you very much. Joining me today are Helen Horsman, assistant deputy minister; Darren McKee, assistant deputy minister; Dawn Court, director, financial planning and management; Sue Amundrud, associate executive director, curriculum and e-learning; Sonya Leib, senior financial manager, financial planning and management; and Darryl Hunter, executive director, accountability, assessment and records.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Provincial Auditor's 2009 report volume 3, released on December 15th. We welcome the auditor's report on our ministry operations, and we continue to enjoy a good working relationship with the auditor's office. We value the auditor's opinions.

We are pleased that the auditor noted the ministry had adequate rules and procedures to safeguard public resources with the

exception of matters reported in volume 3. The ministry complied with authorities relating to financial reporting, safeguarding public resources, revenue raising, spending, borrowing, and investing. The 2009 financial statements are reliable.

As an opening comment, I would say that the ministry accepts the findings of the auditor and agrees with each, with the exception of the finding related to the reporting of incorrect pension costs where the Ministry of Education is bound to follow directions from Treasury Board.

Now with regard to the new findings by the Provincial Auditor, library financial statements, we agree with the auditor's recommendation that public libraries prepare their financial statements in accordance with the standards recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. Since early 2008, ministry staff has been working with library systems and the public sector accounting board to find a solution to the issues faced by the libraries in reporting their collection items as capital assets in accordance with those standards. A potential solution is currently under review, and we are confident that, if accepted, this solution will result in the implementation of the reporting changes by December 31, 2011.

Information technology strategic plan — the Provincial Auditor is recommending that the ministry prepare an information technology or IT strategic plan. The ministry's information technology management committee recognizes the need for an IT strategic plan and has identified it as a priority for the development by June 30th, 2010. The ministry's in the process of increasing its focus on IT management and is rebuilding its business analysis capacity that was lost in the centralization of IT services. That capacity will support the development of an IT strategic plan.

Instruction time — the following recommendations were made regarding the achievement of compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the minister: define instruction time, require school divisions to publicly report on their performance in meeting instruction time requirements, monitor for all core curriculum areas of study, the extent to which school divisions meet the instruction time requirements, and take corrective action where necessary to improve school division compliance with instruction time requirements.

In the months ahead, the ministry will be working with partner organizations within the provincial panel on student achievement towards greater clarity and consistency in legislation and regulations in understanding instruction time. We will also investigate new means for gathering information to ensure provincial standards are met across the province in each required area of study.

[10:30]

I would also like to provide an update on the status of prior recommendations. School division financial statements — the Provincial Auditor recommended that the ministry should require school divisions to prepare their financial statements in accordance with the standards recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, CICA. The ministry initially

set August 31st, 2009, as a target date for school divisions to be fully compliant. The progress of the school divisions toward this target has been complicated by the education funding changes that resulted from property tax reform. The ministry subsequently revised its requirements to require school divisions to be in compliance with standards related to employee future benefits and school-generated funds by August 31st, 2009, and to be in compliance with standards for tangible capital assets by August 31st, 2010. These revised requirements are in accordance with the CICA handbook that outlines the standards and transition period applicable to local governments. School divisions have agreed to these timelines.

Following procedures for user access to system and data — the ministry has revised its procedures to ensure that when staff move to new positions or leave government, their access is removed or adjusted in a timely manner. The ministry is also seeking to improve communication with the Public Service Commission regarding employee turnover as an additional mitigating control.

Proper support for payments made to teachers' superannuation commission — we agree with the auditor's findings and have moved to ensure that the ministry receives and reviews proper support for payments requested by the Teachers' Superannuation Commission. The ministry receives adequate support for payments to the teachers' superannuation plan and the teachers' group life insurance plan. The Teachers' Superannuation Commission will continue to work with the insurance carrier to receive additional documentation for the dental plan to support payment requests.

Monitoring of ITO [Information Technology Office] security controls — the ITO has hired a private company to monitor the status of the firewalls and generate monthly security reports for each ministry. The ITO started sending the monthly report in May 2009. We trust that this action will satisfy the Provincial Auditor's recommendation.

Human resources plan — the ministry worked with the Public Service Commission to develop a human resource plan for '09-10 and had an approved plan in place. The plan was not sufficient to satisfy the Provincial Auditor's recommendation. We are utilizing a more thorough and inclusive process for the development of the 2010-11 HR plan. The result will be a substantially improved HR plan for our ministry.

Service level agreement with the ITO — in 2007 the Provincial Auditor recommended that the ministry sign a service level agreement with the Information Technology Office. In late November 2009, the Information Technology Office indicated that it is developing a new service level agreement format that reflects recent and ongoing change in its service delivery model. The ministry will enter into a service level agreement with the Information Technology Office when the new agreement format is finalized by the ITO office and reviewed by the ministry.

In regards to the follow-up by the Provincial Auditor on capital construction, we are pleased that our efforts to improve our processes to ensure that our partners meet the requirements for completing approved capital construction projects have satisfied the recommendations of the Provincial Auditor.

This concludes my opening remarks. I would again thank the auditor for his work, for their work. And I would invite the committee to put forth any questions that they may have.

The Chair: — Thank you, Deputy Minister Roadhouse. Questions from committee? Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — Are you going to go recommendation by recommendation?

The Chair: — It would probably be most effective if we did that.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. I guess I'll just ask a general question, but it relates to this first one. Are there extra costs involved for the library to comply with what you're working on? And do they get an extra budget to help with that, or is just assumed to be part of their administrative budget that they get already?

Ms. Roadhouse: — I'll ask Darren to respond to that as the Provincial Library report was to him.

Mr. McKee: — I think the conversation happened and the conversations that have been happening with PSAB [Public Sector Accounting Board] are around those costs that are involved because the assets that they're talking about are numerous. The potential solution moves that to a manageable number that can be done under the administrative budgets that libraries currently have. And so that's what they're talking about now.

Mr. Nilson: — So effectively you're working out a system of taking an appropriate percentage and assessing that and assuming it covers the whole of the assets. Would that be a way to describe it?

Mr. McKee: — Yes, I'd describe it that way, moving away from sort of an individual object to a collection.

Mr. Nilson: — And so is this — kind of, money that's needed — included in your budget, like, for this year and going forward? Or is it just, like, once again part of the overall administrative costs?

Mr. McKee: — At this point, it's part of the ongoing costs or the administrative costs that libraries have now.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: — Any other questions? At this point in time, we've had some progress reported . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Number one.

Mr. Chisholm: — If there aren't any other questions, I would move that we concur with the recommendation and note progress.

The Chair: — Thank you. At this point, we have a motion by Mr. Chisholm to concur and note progress towards compliance. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is agreed. It's agreed that this committee concur with recommendation no. 1 of chapter no. 4 of the Provincial Auditor's 2009 volume 3 report and note progress towards compliance. We will move on maybe to the evaluation of the second recommendation.

But I just noticed that our gallery filled up in the room here as we were speaking. And I'd like to welcome to the room the parliamentary program for public service employees. I welcome each of you here today. I thank each and every one of you for the service you provide to our province on a daily basis as well.

Just by way of background, this committee's different than the other committees which are there from a policy field perspective. This is here to evaluate the efficiency and economy of government programs, those for which you're likely a part of. And it provides a safeguard and protection of public resources, and it is all based on an after-the-fact audit. And here in the room today we have the Provincial Auditor's office, the comptroller's office, and Education, the deputy minister and officials that are responding to specific recommendations. So we thank each and every one of you for being here today. We hope you find your visit productive here today.

We'll move along to the second recommendation of chapter 4. Are there any specific questions? Mr. D'Autremont.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. Madam Deputy Minister, you noted that there was a new service platform being developed by ITO. When do you expect that to be completed? And will you have that signed off before the next auditor's report?

Ms. Roadhouse: — Are you referencing the strategic plan or the service level agreement?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well both I guess. They're tied together actually but . . .

Ms. Roadhouse: — Okay. The strategic plan, we believe we will have this developed by June 30th, 2010.

Mr. D'Autremont: — And the service level agreement, you'll have that signed off, will you?

Ms. Roadhouse: — Well we will. We are still waiting to receive their new format and work with that. They have a new plan in place.

Mr. D'Autremont: — But you will be signing off on that this year.

Ms. Roadhouse: — I'll let Helen actually speak to that.

Ms. Horsman: — That would certainly be our objective. As you know, last summer when significant changes were made to the ITO, we have been working with them. And the service level agreements in the past were around 100 pages, and now we're looking at a four page document that's very concise, to the point. And we are going to be working on that together as soon as they have completed the format. We don't see any reason why it would not be signed off because it's going to be a collaborative effort.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — So on this same topic, so you end up with a four page agreement with ITO which obviously each page represents 25 pages. So you have to be really careful when you sign that, speaking as a lawyer.

But one of the questions that I have, it says, you said, in some of the outstanding things that you're doing, that you've now hired a private company to do the security reports that relate to the ultimate arrangement with the ITO. Is that correct?

Ms. Roadhouse: — The ITO has hired a private company and then . . .

Mr. Nilson: — Oh, okay. So that you're just signing on to whatever arrangement that the ITO has made.

Ms. Roadhouse: — Right because I believe this recommendation was given to a number of ministries, and it lies with the ITO. And they've hired the private company, and then they give us the reports.

Mr. Nilson: — So which private company is the one that got the overall contract?

Ms. Roadhouse: — The ITO would know that. I'm sorry; I don't know.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. Perhaps you could get that information and provide it to the committee.

Ms. Roadhouse: — Oh, we do know the answer, Securis.

Mr. Nilson: — Securis, sounds like a good name. Okay, thank you very much.

The Chair: — I think at this time I would seek a motion to concur and note progress.

Mr. Chisholm: — So moved.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm moves that we concur and note progress. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — It is agreed that this committee concur with recommendation no. 2 of chapter no. 4 of the Provincial Auditor's 2009 volume 3 report and note progress towards compliance.

Moving along to the third recommendation and inviting questions. Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Chisholm: — Perhaps we could, in that item . . . 3 through 6 are all related to the same topic. Maybe if there are any questions on any of the specific ones, then we could deal with them as a single group.

The Chair: — Sure. So as the questions were on instruction

time and core curriculum, the recommendations, we'll deal with them sort of 3 through 6 here. Do I have questions from the committee? Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — This is a question both for the department and for the Provincial Auditor's area. Is this ever an issue that's been audited or looked at before? Or you know, have there been discussions around this particular topic? And I guess the corollary to that is, have there been specific problems that have arisen that have resulted in these recommendations?

Ms. Roadhouse: — I can't comment if this has been a recommendation before. It hasn't been in the three years that I've been here, but I can't speak historically.

Mr. Montgomery: — This is a first for us, and we also understand it hasn't been done in any of the other provinces.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay, so this . . .

Mr. Montgomery: — The audit of instruction time is a new item.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay, and this is a new item, and it hasn't been done in any other provinces or territory in Canada.

Mr. Montgomery: — Yes.

Mr. Nilson: — I guess that reflects . . . Just my reaction reading this, it sounds a fair bit like the US [United States] President Bush's initiative. And so I was just wondering if that's where some of the ideas have come from. Can anybody explain that?

Mr. Montgomery: — It didn't come from there from our point of view.

Mr. Nilson: — Well I mean any time something new shows up — and that we're going to be asked to recommend — we should know what pushed it or why it's here.

Mr. Montgomery: — Mr. Chair, in the legislation, it says that, you know, school divisions are to comply with the minister's direction. And we conducted an audit to determine whether or not they were complying and what may be the problems in terms of the issues.

In fact the ministry had already reported in its reports that there were problems with the subject of mathematics. And I think, you know, page 59 of our report, we refer to three grade levels and give you a percentage of how much of the actual instruction time that the minister required was being complied with, and — I think from memory — one of them was less than 5 per cent, but I'd have to turn to the relevant page.

Mr. Nilson: — Okay. No, I mean the reason I asked the question was that it struck me as relatively new, and obviously it is first place/time in Canada. And then you know I can see where . . . But basically it has a lot of the characteristics when you read this of No Child Left Behind, President Bush's program, which you know has very specific instruction requirements in it when it gets down to the school level. So that's why I asked the questions.

The Chair: — I have a question as Chair here, as committee member I should say. I heard a little bit in the deputy minister's response, something as it related to legislation and regulations and looking at changes on that front. Is it the intention of the ministry to make changes that I guess render these recommendations not as something to be measured, or is it the ministry's intention to comply with the stated recommendations 3 through 6?

[10:45]

Ms. Roadhouse: — It is our intent to comply with the recommendations. We agree with the recommendations. I can share sort of progress to date. We have met internally. We have met with the directors.

We have begun to look at this definition of instructional time. And just to give, for example, if it's a conference around student report card between a parent and a child and the teacher is at it, I think most would agree that's instruction. But maybe a pep rally doesn't fall under instruction. So just to have those discussions around where's the black and white and where's the grey in this.

We also have looked at what are the processes that we currently have in place and could enhance to satisfy the reporting requirements. For example, we do meet with school divisions on the continuous improvement framework. That could be a vehicle for doing that that we already have in place. We also are exploring electronic options because that's also available to us. And so we have made some progress around plans to meet those recommendations.

The Chair: — Mr. D'Autremont.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you. Just like to note on this that in the auditor's report, it talks about this being under *The Education Act* of 1995 plus *The Education Regulations* of 1986. The audit was done in 2008, so it would have been done in the year 2007 or 2006 perhaps even. Because it's the *2008 Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report* that audited the time in the classroom that was spent — the 46 per cent, 63 or the 4.3 per cent — so 1986 was hardly George W. Bush's time, and 1995 was hardly George W. Bush's time either. So the regulations were put in there a long time before Bush was president of the United States and No Child Left Behind was put in place.

So I'm glad to hear that the ministry is looking at coming into compliance with regulations that are almost 25 years old now. Our outcomes might have been better had we been meeting those requirements in the past.

The Chair: — Just a question, and remembering here that the reason that this is before us here today is because the auditor is in fact evaluating an aspect here. So it's brought out of the auditor's report to make sure that compliance occurs. It hasn't been brought forward in the past. So this is a new recommendation that's on the table here before. It hasn't been raised by government or opposition or the Provincial Auditor in years past. So this is a new piece for us to ensure compliance on. Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — One question based on what you just said was, are you consulting with the teachers?

Ms. Roadhouse: — The information initially actually is teachers' self-report. And so that is actually one of the conversations that we've had with the directors around . . . the information came through self-report of teachers through the assessment for learning program. And so what we've talked about with directors is your point about how your conversation with teachers around maybe their interpretation of reporting that information and so forth.

Mr. Nilson: — The reason I just raised some of the questions, some of the comments, and the language, I'll stick by what I said before. But I just know, as somebody who went through obviously lots of schooling, that instruction time wouldn't be necessarily identified as, you know, junior high and high school athletics. But if you think about the amount of one-on-one time you get from your teachers as coaches and other things like that, that wouldn't show up in something like this unless you really think about it.

And if you look back and reflect, many of us have those kinds of activities, whether its theatre, whether its music, all these other things. So you have to be really careful with this. And I'm quite uneasy actually with the way this recommendation is worded, and I would encourage both the department and the auditor's office to take another look at how this is worded as you move forward because you can get stuck with doing this number crunching and then miss the whole point. So that's why I asked the questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Chisholm: — Perhaps another side of this. I would like to commend the auditor's office for . . . In the past I think a lot of people understand that the auditor only deals with dollars and cents. I think this is an example of measurable results based on ministry directives. And whether these are being followed or not being followed I think it's like the whole risk management that we've seen our auditor's office get more involved in. Those are exactly the kinds of things that I think we would expect from our auditors. So I welcome the recommendations, and I'll be supporting them.

The Chair: — Mr. Nilson.

Mr. Nilson: — Just to respond to that. I'm not opposed to the recommendations, but I think the results of these things can be quite dangerous in how you make plans, and so be extremely careful. And like in many things, it's the results that you're interested in, like how well did the students do in different activities. And I think that's reflected in the auditor's comments about this. But if you just add up all of the hours or things, you know, that you do or the minutes, you're going to miss the point of this. So it has to be a combination of looking at results and then going back and saying well, that 4.6 per cent in math instruction, there's something wrong in that. You know, fix it.

But it's a much bigger and more difficult issue, and it's one that's an issue worldwide, I guess I would say. So I appreciate and commend the auditor's department for being the first in Canada. Just recognize that when you're working with them

that you're going to have to be really careful when you're doing it.

The Chair: — Mr. D'Autremont.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Okay, thank you. I would like to agree in part with Mr. Nilson. On page 59 of the auditor's report it states, "The 2008 *Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report* states that Saskatchewan students are performing below the performance of other Canadian provinces."

So clearly the indicators are saying that there is a problem here and that maybe we need to be looking at how much instruction time and what's happening within the school system. So I think this is a valuable tool in pointing that out. And we need to be conscious of the results that we're getting from our education system, not just the amount of time, not some of the other politically correct issues that are coming out of our schools but the actual educational results as well.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. D'Autremont. I think we're getting a bit off . . . It's a good discussion, but I think where it fits best is the policy field committees specifically as it would relate to education because now we're looking at the instrument and how to improve outcomes that we're desiring.

But it's been in a good discussion here this morning, but what we need to look at here is simply measuring what the ministry sets out and how do we know that that in fact is being achieved but good discussion and I think a discussion that could go on in length with good presentation at the policy field committee for Health. And I'm sure our Health, sorry, Education, and I know our Education officials would likely welcome that discussion.

Is there any more . . . what we've noted that there's a plan to progress. I think it's one that is, you know, one that has some challenges to achieve, but it seems that at least there's meetings that have been set out here. We're certainly not anywhere close towards compliance. We've had, you know, some cautionary recommendations around the table as well. But where are we at as far as a committee, and would someone like to place a motion?

Mr. Chisholm: — I would like to move that on all the items, 3 through 6, that we concur with the recommendation.

The Chair: — All in favour? Moved, sorry moved by Mr. Chisholm that recommendations 3, 4, 5, and 6 that we concur with the recommendation. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — So moved. It's agreed that this committee concur with recommendations 3, 4, 5, and 6 of chapter no. 4 of the Provincial Auditor's 2009 volume 3 report. And at this point in time, that concludes our questioning of ministry officials. I would invite Deputy Minister Roadhouse to offer any other concluding statements.

Ms. Roadhouse: — Just thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you. At this point in time I'd invite a motion of adjournment. Moved by Ms. Ross. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — So moved. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:54.]