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Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Monday 18 June 2001

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Lundi 18 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Responsible Choices for Growth
and Accountability Act
(2001 Budget), 2001

Loi de 2001
sur des choix réfléchis
favorisant la croissance
et la responsabilisation
(budget de 2001)

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

Président : Marcel Beaubien
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Monday 18 June 2001

Lundi 18 juin 2001

The committee met at 1000 in the Holiday Inn, Sudbury.

**RESPONSIBLE CHOICES FOR GROWTH
AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT
(2001 BUDGET), 2001**

**LOI DE 2001
SUR DES CHOIX RÉFLÉCHIS
FAVORISANT LA CROISSANCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
(BUDGET DE 2001)**

Consideration of Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 45, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures mentionnées dans le budget de 2001 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Chair (Mr Marcel Beaubien): It's 10 o'clock and I'd like to bring the committee to order. I'd like to welcome everybody. Good morning, everyone. This is the resumption of the hearings on Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes.

**CONSEIL SCOLAIRE DU DISTRICT
DU GRAND NORD DE L'ONTARIO**

The Chair: Our first presentation this morning is from the Conseil scolaire du district du Grand Nord de l'Ontario. Je voudrais inviter le présentant de se présenter, de donner votre nom pour le record. Au nom du comité, bienvenue. Vous avez 20 minutes pour votre présentation ce matin.

M. Jean-Marc Aubin : Merci, monsieur Beaubien. Je m'appelle Jean-Marc Aubin. Je suis un conseiller scolaire d'un conseil public de langue française. Je me suis porté volontaire comme porte-parole du conseil ce matin.

Welcome to Sudbury. I'm the first person to address you. This is the friendliest town in Ontario, and this will be a friendly presentation; it's meant to improve our lot as Ontarians.

Your text has a translation that I did freehand. It's not an official one, but you can rely on it as far as meaning goes. There are probably a few errors in it. Merci beaucoup.

Je dois vous indiquer que réunir les conseillers scolaires pour discuter de la question que je vais aborder ce matin, ce n'est pas chose facile, étant donné que la géographie de notre conseil s'étend de Sudbury à la frontière du Manitoba. Nous avons des conseillers scolaires de Thunder Bay, de Marathon, de Wawa, de Blind River, de Sault-Ste-Marie, de Sudbury et de Noëlville. Alors, étant donné les contraintes de l'espace de temps, nous avons fait table ronde avec quelques-uns des conseillers scolaires pour inspirer cette présentation.

C'est avec étonnement et consternation que les conseillers scolaires du Conseil scolaire du district du Grand Nord de l'Ontario ont appris l'intention du gouvernement de l'Ontario d'offrir des crédits d'impôt aux parents qui voudront envoyer leurs enfants dans des écoles confessionnelles privées.

La question de l'éducation confessionnelle est certes d'importance, comme en fait foi la recommandation du comité des droits de la personne des Nations Unies dans son rapport sur les soi-disant pratiques discriminatoires de la province de l'Ontario à l'endroit des non catholiques dans le milieu éducationnel. Mais justement pour cette raison, parce que les implications sociales sont profondes, les conseillers scolaires du CSDGNO sont d'avis qu'il importe d'avoir un débat de fond sur cette question et que pour cela, il y a lieu de tenir des audiences publiques complètes, couvrant tout le territoire de la province et selon un horaire qui permettrait à ceux qui veulent se faire entendre suffisamment de temps pour préparer adéquatement leur opinion.

Nous tenons cependant à dire qu'à première vue, ce projet de loi n'est pas fondé sur les valeurs qui, depuis toujours, animent l'intention de l'éducation publique en Ontario. Notre province est une terre d'immigration, accueillant des gens venant des quatre coins de la planète qui arrivent ici avec une culture particulière et, souvent, une religion particulière. Le rôle historique essentiel qu'a joué le système public d'éducation en Ontario a été de joindre les enfants des immigrants dans les mêmes écoles, dans les mêmes salles de classe, permettant à chacun de se familiariser avec des cultures et des religions différentes. Cette tradition de l'éducation publique a permis à chacun de se constituer citoyen de la province et du pays, de développer des valeurs communes, dont le respect et la tolérance, qui se sont érigés en valeurs dominantes.

Le projet de loi du gouvernement Harris va à l'encontre de cet acquis historique en matière d'éducation. Nous pensons que de permettre la création d'écoles confessionnelles, de favoriser leur développement en accordant des crédits d'impôt aux parents de ces enfants, risque d'isoler les communautés religieuses et culturelles les unes des autres et risque de conduire à terme à une plus grande incompréhension des différentes communautés, à un plus grand isolement et éventuellement à une plus grande intolérance les unes envers les autres. Nous pensons que l'harmonie sociale serait à risque et que d'importants problèmes sociaux pourraient résulter d'une éducation fondée sur une panoplie de dogmes religieux souvent contradictoires et mutuellement exclusifs.

L'Ontario a besoin de maintenir, de développer et de consolider son système d'éducation public de manière à assurer une éducation de qualité et une instruction publique propre à favoriser le développement et la consolidation d'une civilité commune à tous les Ontariens.

La somme totale du montant des crédits d'impôt avancé dans le budget du ministre Flaherty tourne autour de 300 \$ millions. Ces argents ne seront pas investis dans l'éducation publique. Invariablement, lorsque des argents sont retirés du système d'éducation public, ce sont ceux qui en ont le plus besoin qui sont le plus affectés.

Le gouvernement continuera sans doute à dire que le système public ne perd rien et que l'équation ne consiste pas à retirer de l'argent du système public pour financer un système confessionnel. Mais, nous savons tous que chaque fois qu'un crédit d'impôt sera accordé à un parent qui envoie son enfant à une école confessionnelle, c'est un octroi de moins pour le système public. Au total, c'est plusieurs centaines de millions de dollars qui seront soustraits du financement du système public. Cela est inacceptable, car comme nous le disons, ce sont ceux qui ont le plus besoin de ces sommes qui seront le plus durement affectés. À la longue, contrairement à ce que dit le gouvernement, c'est un effritement du financement global du système public dont nous parlons, sans compter que la structure du système de financement proposée est à l'avantage des citoyens déjà économiquement privilégiés.

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D'expérience, un de nous, et c'est moi en l'occurrence, a déjà vu il n'y a pas longtemps l'effet cruel que peut avoir sur un enfant le retrait de services de besoins spéciaux. Une mère en pleurs m'a appelé un jour à la fin du mois d'août parce que sa petite fille ne pouvait plus, faute de personnel, faire changer son cathéter à l'école. La directrice, qui le faisait l'année précédente, ne pouvait plus le faire à cause d'une importante augmentation de sa charge de travail. Elle enseignait maintenant à demi-temps et il n'y avait pas d'aide-enseignant dans l'école. La petite a dû changer d'école et côtoyer des enfants avec des problèmes d'apprentissage, parce que c'était le seul endroit où le personnel avait le temps de s'occuper d'elle. Quel est donc le sens de ces économies de bouts de chandelle pour cette fillette ? Quel

sera le sens de l'érosion du financement du système public ?

La menace qui pèse sur le système d'éducation public est celle d'une importante perte de financement. Mais il y a plus, car en plus de réduire la part publique du financement, on réduit encore là où les besoins sont les plus grands. Assurément, je comprends qu'il y a un maximum d'argent que la société peut investir dans l'éducation publique. Mais il y a également un minimum, et nous sommes actuellement au point où nous frôlons dangereusement ce point. La menace d'un sous-financement de l'éducation publique est véritable et le projet de création et de financement d'écoles confessionnelles vient exacerber une situation déjà passablement tendue.

Ces très brèves considérations que je fais ce matin témoignent de la complexité et de l'ampleur du problème envisagé par ce système public. Cette question, qui n'était pas au menu du programme politique du gouvernement Harris, est traitée trop rapidement et est introduite de la mauvaise manière. On ne propose pas de transformer si radicalement une politique sociale d'une telle importance dans le cadre de la présentation d'un budget. Cela frôle l'amoralité quand on pense que l'éducation, cela affecte des individus. Il semble que le besoin premier soit celui d'un débat de société pour éclairer la population sur les enjeux réels de la place de la religion dans une société laïque et dans le système d'éducation et sur le financement public d'un système d'éducation confessionnel.

Le Canada se place bon premier parmi tous les pays de la planète dans l'échelle des indices de la qualité de vie de l'Organisation des Nations Unies. Un des indices considérés est la qualité du système d'éducation public. Il nous semble donc qu'il nous faut être prudent dans les transformations des paramètres de notre système, sans compter qu'il y a bien des gens qui revendiquent des écoles confessionnelles qui sont venus ici au Canada précisément pour fuir les conflits religieux et les persécutions religieuses qui les accompagnent. La religion est une question qui relève de la sphère privée dans une société laïque comme la nôtre, et dans une telle société, l'État ne doit pas financer les écoles confessionnelles. Le projet du gouvernement Harris sur le financement des écoles confessionnelles est mal conçu, il est irréfléchi, dommageable à toute la population ontarienne et risque de saboter les fondements de la qualité de vie que nous avons atteinte avec l'éducation publique.

Je vous remercie de votre attention. Je suis ouvert à des questions et je peux entretenir des questions dans les deux langues facilement.

The Chair: Merci, monsieur Aubin. We have approximately three minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Thank you very much for the well-thought-out presentation. You started off in your presentation talking about the United Nations decision and the problem that creates because we have one denominational school system but we do not provide the same for all others in our society and how we need to

address that. I'm not sure that this tax credit goes the full length, in fact I'm sure it doesn't go the full length, of addressing that, because the United Nations says it should be equal and acceptable to all or to no one. This tax credit doesn't do that. But in your opinion, would this not go some way to provide some freedom of choice and fairness to parents who have decided that what we provide in our one secular school system is not sufficient education for their children?

I just want to say that it isn't just new immigrants. I'm personally a first-generation immigrant, and my children's children are not first-generation immigrants, but a lot of those people feel that what we presently provide in the secular system is not meeting the needs of their children. Don't you think this goes some way to do that?

Mr Aubin: It might, but the damage it causes doesn't justify it. I don't think it's the right approach to solve the problem that was identified by the United Nations. There are other ways to address that kind of situation. There are examples in northern Ontario of people who learned to compromise and adjust. There's a maximum of what society can do in a lot of instances, and this is one of them.

I'll give an example of that: when these new district school boards were put together, in the town of Longlac there was a school that, after 10 years of struggle, the francophones finally obtained and put together. Because of the existing law at the time, it was a single-school community so it was a public school. With the advent of the new district school boards, the feeder schools were Catholic and the secondary schools were public. So we agreed with the Catholic board out of Thunder Bay that if children who registered at the high school for grade 9 desired to have religion courses taught to them, we would agree—the two school boards—to do the scheduling that was needed to accommodate that, and that the funds generated by these students would be turned over to them and they would supply the teachers for religion.

So there's the compromise that is possible in situations like this. I think that if you supply spaces for worship—public schools have said that for a long time. The public school association said, "Listen, if you want a space to worship, you can have space to worship." But to turn a school into a church is something else.

Mr Hardeman: So you're suggesting that the school could provide all that's needed.

The Chair: Gentlemen, I have to bring it to an end. We've run out of time and I have to go to the official opposition.

M. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Merci, monsieur Aubin. Vous savez aussi que ce n'est pas seulement une planification pour les écoles confessionnelles.

M. Aubin: Oui.

M. Kennedy: Il me semble que si c'est l'intention du gouvernement de créer un nouveau système privé séculaire, c'est peut-être un problème spécialement pour les écoles dans les régions rurales. C'est un problème peut-être pour les petites écoles. On perd les ressources, comme vous l'indiquez. Avec chaque étudiant qu'on

perd, on perd cette ressource. Peut-être que le conseil a déterminé que c'est un problème spécialement pour les petites écoles ?

M. Aubin: Ce qui arrive dans un conseil comme le nôtre, c'est que si quelqu'un met en place une école privée, par exemple, ici, typiquement une école privée accepte ou invite des enfants d'un calibre élevé. Ça draine les meilleurs élèves des écoles déjà existantes. Alors, ça devient encore plus difficile, parce que tu restes avec la clientèle avec le plus de besoins. Tu restes avec toute cette clientèle typiquement et tu as moins d'argent pour en prendre soin. Or c'est ça l'effet.

M. Kennedy: Mais généralement il y a un problème avec, par exemple, une nouvelle école catholique avec peut-être 20 étudiants, ce qui peut être un problème avec le conseil qui a décidé de commencer une nouvelle école. Ce n'est pas des restrictions, ce n'est pas des réglementations ; c'est seulement l'indication de commencer une nouvelle école et recevoir le crédit d'impôt.

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M. Aubin: Bien, je ne sais pas du tout quel effet ça peut avoir dans une petite communauté, parce que pour la plupart d'eux autres, c'est tellement difficile de faire la livraison d'une éducation acceptable dans le moment que d'en enlever encore, c'est presque du ridicule.

Je sais qu'à Toronto puis à Ottawa typiquement, on nous dit d'employer de la technologie dans les distances. Mais, par contre, quand un ministre a quelque chose à annoncer à Toronto, il peut faire venir des centaines de personnes à Toronto pour faire une annonce de 15 minutes, parce que l'adaptation, la technologie, c'est toujours pour les autres. Mais allez vous asseoir dans une école à Wawa puis à Longlac puis tous ces endroits-là, puis essayez de faire vos cours de CPO, les deux tiers de vos cours, par vidéoconférence. Il faut que vous ayez beaucoup de confiance.

M^{me} Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Merci, Jean-Marc, pour venir ce matin. Je voudrais parler à propos du besoin d'avoir des audiences publiques partout pour que le monde puisse y aller participer. Peut-être que vous savez clairement qu'autour de la province en ce moment, il y a plus de 880 personnes qui ont demandé l'opportunité de participer. Bien sûr, avec les audiences publiques limitées, on ne peut pas en accommoder la moitié. Pourquoi est-ce que vous voulez avoir des audiences publiques partout pour que le monde puisse dire quelque chose et participer ?

M. Aubin: Je pense qu'il y a des changements importants qui se passent dans notre société puis qu'il faut en discuter d'une façon très informée. Un des changements qui est indiqué récemment, c'est dans le contexte des Amériques. Dans le contexte des Amériques, notre pays insiste à ce que des autres pays d'Amérique aient des minimums en éducation et des minimums en services sociaux et de santé. Ils insistent là-dessus pour d'autres pays avant d'entreprendre des ententes quelconques ; on insiste là-dessus.

Maintenant, si on insiste là-dessus à un niveau de notre pays, puis qu'à un autre niveau on encourage le

contraire, on s'en va dans la même direction que d'autres pays, où les gens en éducation privée sont vraiment beaucoup plus privilégiés que le reste de la société. C'est la direction contraire qu'il faut prendre. On ne peut donner deux messages. Puis si on est pour faire des changements de cette sorte-là, il faut en discuter longuement pour faire les bonnes décisions, parce que le système public nous a quand même bien servi. Il nous a très bien servi jusqu'à date. Alors, quand on veut changer ça puis qu'on veut multiplier les écoles religieuses, les écoles privées, on s'en va dans la même direction que les Amériques, où il y a beaucoup, beaucoup de problèmes de société et où on insiste pour qu'on fasse le contraire avant de s'entendre sur des ententes.

Alors moi, je vois que le débat de société est très, très nécessaire à plusieurs échelles à cause de l'impact que ça va avoir.

Le Président : Au nom du comité, merci pour votre présentation ce matin.

M. Aubin : Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much.

MACLEOD PUBLIC SCHOOL COUNCIL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the MacLeod Public School Council. I would ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Ron Lessard: Ron Lessard, chair of the MacLeod Public School Council. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to you on behalf of the school council members of MacLeod Public School, parents and the school community at large.

I have three major concerns that I wish to raise with the committee this morning. However, before embarking on these three issues, we need first to set the context for this presentation from the MacLeod school council. As chair of the school council, I was requested at the annual general meeting of council, held on Wednesday, June 6, by a formally approved motion, to make a presentation to you and submit the views of the school council, parents, community business partners and others in attendance at the AGM.

MacLeod Public School is the largest elementary school in Sudbury, with over 560 students and a staff of 31 professionals. Our school community is very active and vibrant in support of this learning environment. For example, this year's annual fun fair, held on May 3, raised over \$14,000 to support school activities.

MacLeod Public School offers a world-class school program to all students, from JK to grade 8. All of the partners associated with implementing the educational and learning activities at the school are very proud and very committed to the ongoing enhancement and improvement at MacLeod. We see Bill 45 as an impediment to our vision for MacLeod.

The three issues I wish to raise for your consideration are, firstly, the philosophy of private versus public. This issue is not about what's right or wrong, better or worse,

rich or poor; it's all about the principle of a public education system. The public education system has always been a hallmark in this province. Our fathers and grandfathers had the right to an adequately funded public school system and, until recently, it was our dream and the dream of our children that this system would remain intact. The public education system recognizes the equality for all children, regardless of financial ability, background, ethnic origin, religion, colour or creed.

The principles and integrity of our publicly funded educational system cannot be jeopardized or distracted from by the proposals in Bill 45. We believe there is a fundamental error in the approach to utilizing public tax dollars—our dollars—to support a private, independent education system. We certainly cannot support our tax dollars or loss of tax revenue in this province being used to subsidize the private sector in the educational arena.

Think about it. Begin with the end in mind. Do we, in Ontario, want our provincial education system to be designed as a competitive marketplace? That is exactly what is being proposed. What is being suggested is equating our children to commodities. When my children's children attend school 20 years from now, can you imagine the monster we are considering creating with Bill 45? Think about what it will look like. Think about the consequences and risks associated with Bill 45. Think about an educational marketplace competing for tax dollars and tax credits to produce a commodity, and output targets measured in units of kids. I do not believe that those who look beyond the short-sighted view of Bill 45 can, in clear conscience, support it.

We're talking about our children's well-being, their education and learning opportunities, their right to a public school system, with standards of excellence in learning, with values, with credentials and testing for educators—the system based on our diverse multicultural society, with equality for all. Our public school system must remain intact and improved, without public dollars supporting the competitive, private degradation of what is already a public system in stress.

We believe the consequences of the proposals outlined in Bill 45 not only put at risk the public education system as we know it today, but it will develop into an unfair, prejudicial, racist approach to our education system. It will be the start of a journey down the road of dismantling excellence in education, without approved curriculum, adherence to accepted standards of learning and provision of qualified, competent teachers. What is being proposed will only lead to the demise of our precious public education system.

The right of choice for parents exists today for the public education system, private independent schools and home schooling. People have a choice today. Bill 45 is not necessary and jeopardizes what we, as citizens of the province, cherish for the future, our legacy, what we leave for our children: a strong, adequately funded public school system for all.

We believe a fully funded public education system should not be placed in jeopardy and therefore cannot support the bill as it stands.

The second concern is dollars and sense—and that's not a spelling error, although there are some in the transcript. I used a naturally speaking voice recognition system when I dictated this, so there are spelling errors the computer doesn't correct and I apologize for those.

This issue is the need to promote a public education system, adequately funded with tax dollars. The issue is not to support realignment of tax dollars and/or tax credits at the expense of our public education system. I'm not going to bore you with a lot of figures this morning—I'm sure you're going to hear lots of them and probably already have—but there are a couple of figures that I think are important locally.

1030

In 2001-02, the Rainbow board will receive some \$2.2 million less in overall funding than last year. The Rainbow board is having to use \$1.2 million—half of our education reserve fund—to conduct the educational program next year. However short-sighted this may be, it is clearly not sustainable and is the result of inadequate provincial funding.

The proposals in Bill 45 will only compound the dollars-and-cents—and that's spelled correctly—financial issues in Sudbury and across the province. As well, these proposals are counterproductive and will lead to further loss in provincial funding for the public education system. Then why is it being proposed? Big savings for the provincial coffers. Again, I believe it's a very short-sighted view, without a vision of the future.

The economics are very simple. For every student in the public education system, about \$7,000 is provided to the school board. Offer tax incentives for students to attend unregulated independent schools and save the \$7,000, but at what cost? Further erosion of the public education system as we know it today in Ontario and providing lower-quality, uncontrolled, unregulated education via profit-making private schools funded by our tax dollars through a tax credit system.

And there is a much greater cost: the true, real cost of depriving all our children at MacLeod and other schools in the public education program of their right to an education and learning environment second to none in the world. Sure, it would produce dollars for our provincial coffers, but it makes no sense. The true cost is far too great at the expense of my children.

We respectfully submit this is not the way to meet the government's and our objective that "every student in Ontario deserves the best education possible." That is taken from the Honourable Janet Ecker's statement to the Legislature on May 16.

This brings me to the third and very important point of true equality and equity. This issue is one of producing widgets of our children or investing in them as human beings and leaders of tomorrow. The human values, the people-learning skills of life, are alive and well at MacLeod Public School. These values and skills are not

part of the EQAO standardized testing results for my sons, Adam—grade 3—and Andrew—grade 6—who just completed the testing this year. In many cases, there are no standards or measurements of these critical social values, behavioural expectations and moral fibre. These are the inherent building blocks in the foundation of our youth.

I recently attended a one-day workshop here in Sudbury on the Ministry of Education safe schools initiative. This is an excellent example of the government's commitment to public education in this province. Unfortunately, the proposals in Bill 45 will negate most, and certainly many, of the positive aspects of safe schools. Bill 45 will provide a totally reversed outcome to the safe schools initiative.

For example, at MacLeod school, which we have chosen to be a world-class school, the school council, students, parents and teachers have selected the values we believe are critical, not only to our learning institution but to the community. These values include tolerance and understanding of each other regardless of our background, culture, religion, colour or creed. We, with our children, believe and practise respect for ourselves and for each other within the dynamics of a multicultural society.

We strongly believe that the proposals of Bill 45 will segregate and stratify our children. The proposals will not build bridges of tolerance and understanding but will create obstacles of discrimination, harassment and divisive values. It will provide forums for building fences and barriers between the kids of different cultures, backgrounds and economic stature. And again, at what cost? The real human cost, not in dollars, but measured in polarized groups of children based on wealth, colour of skin, ethnic origin and the other variables which we are now trying to treasure and appreciate. In the last century, we tried residential schools to assimilate native people into the white man's culture. Today, we are proposing to segregate our valuable differences so that they might be less understood and appreciated by all.

Bill 45 will lead us down a road I truly do not want my children to have to travel. Please let common sense and good judgment dictate that we move forward together in a fully funded public education system in this province which still allows for parents' choice and desire for independent or private schools and home schooling, as they have today.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to make the views of MacLeod Public School Council known. We respectfully request your consideration of the concerns raised.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for your presentation and thank you to the council for taking an interest in this subject. We know it hasn't been the best of conditions under which to come forward. There's not been a lot of notice. We don't have a lot of time. We wish we could

hear from everyone in this particular connection, but the government thought otherwise.

I just want to reinforce some of what you said particularly and then ask you to put it in terms that will help all of us to understand. Our analysis that we're releasing today does show over \$2 million missing from your board, another half a million dollars missing from the other board in Sudbury, the Catholic board, and, even more so, \$18 million—almost \$19 million really—gone missing from the schools in terms of inflation and enrolment impacts since 1995. Just on a per student basis, the average between the two boards is \$819 less.

As chair of a parent council, I would like you to reflect for the committee on where you would see money better spent in your school were the government not to proceed with this private voucher initiative but to make that \$300 million available to help make up some of that cut that's taken place and some of the shortfall you may be experiencing.

Mr Lessard: I personally have some very strong views on this because my youngest son, who's nine years old, has some minor special needs. At school council, I'm extremely concerned that there are a lot of children falling through the cracks today in our public education system. I think this money should be invested directly into those children who don't have the supportive nature of strong parents to help them through the system. The system owes it to them to make that investment.

Ms Martel: Mr Lessard, thank you for coming today. How long have you been involved with the school council at MacLeod?

Mr Lessard: I've just completed my third year, and first year as chair. I will be running again next year as chair.

Ms Martel: Why did you become involved in the first place?

Mr Lessard: I've moved around the province a fair bit in my career, and when I came to Sudbury—my two boys are the most important thing in my life. As I moved from Sault Ste Marie to here, I became very concerned that I didn't take an opportunity to participate more fully in the conduct of the educational system. I feel very strongly about the partnerships in education that parents must play.

Ms Martel: In the three years you've been involved in the school council, can you tell the committee whether or not you've seen consequences, positive or negative, with respect to the funding of the public school system?

Mr Lessard: Yes, there are consequences. I think more kids are falling through the cracks. Particularly at MacLeod this coming year, I see children going into grade 3 classes with 31 or 32 kids in a class, and I don't think that is right.

Ms Martel: What makes you think the government will have that \$300 million to invest in the tax credit that will come from what should be funding of the public education system? The government has tried to say the money will come from somewhere else, that it won't be

at the expense of the public education system. Why do you feel otherwise?

Mr Lessard: A wise person once said, "If you get your foot in the door, eventually the door will open wider." I really believe this is just the start of a major shift and change, and 20 years from now is where my concerns lie for my children's children. I see that as apples and oranges. You can do what you want with the dollars. People can play with them. I'm sure there will be lots of folks addressing you who could answer that question a little better than I, but certainly I have great concerns about the difference between the systems.

The Chair: The government side.

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): Thank you for your presentation. On page 2, you talk about "our tax dollars." I'm just trying to clarify that. What about the people who are sending their kids, by choice, to independent schools, religious schools or strictly private schools? As you know, they are paying tax dollars to the education system. What about their tax dollars? Should they not have any choice in selecting?

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Mr Lessard: I believe they have a choice today. As a parent, I personally looked at the private school system on two occasions, particularly for my younger boy. I think the argument could be forwarded somewhat by suggesting—I mean, my father supports the system as a grandparent, yet doesn't reap direct benefits. I'm not sure you can isolate. Those people who have the choice to use other avenues to provide education for their children are doing it by choice, and they have that choice today.

Mr Gill: You talk about "world class." As I understand it, throughout the world there is this choice, systems in place where people can take their tax dollars and spend them wherever they want to. When you talk about "world class," can you specify what you mean?

Mr Lessard: World Class is a school program the Rainbow board embarked upon two years ago. MacLeod was one of the first schools that entered the program. We're now in our second year. What it does is reflect the community. It reflects the social values of our community, the mix of different people, from different backgrounds, cultures, races and economic availability. When I speak of World Class schools, I'm speaking particularly about this program, but I think it speaks highly in meaning when it says it takes a whole community to raise a child. That's the philosophy. As opposed to taking children and putting them into boxes based on whatever criteria Bill 45 would present or offer, we feel it's much better to have a world-class school which reflects the multicultural society, particularly here in Canada.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF SUDBURY

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Montessori School of Sudbury. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the

record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Ms Lynn O'Brien: Good morning. I am Lynn O'Brien, the administrator at the Montessori School of Sudbury.

Dear committee members, at the outset I would like to thank the panel, on behalf of the staff, students and parents of the Montessori School of Sudbury, for the opportunity to share with you our thoughts concerning Bill 45 and the tax relief it would afford those parties concerned. The enthusiasm that the above-mentioned staff, pupils and parents have for our school has no bounds, and we welcome any and every opportunity to share with others the unique and special nature of our institution.

To explain this unique character, we must go back in history to an Italy over 130 years ago, where a visionary woman named Maria Montessori would become the first female physician to graduate in that country and who, as an anthropologist as well, would set forth an educational methodology and philosophy which would revolutionize teaching and which henceforth would be associated with her name, the Montessori method of education. Through her meticulous observations and much trial and error, she arrived at her methodology of teaching, which was child-centred and rooted in early childhood education. Dr Montessori's legacy has been the establishment of Montessori schools, run according to her principles, worldwide from Asia and Australia to Europe and North America.

Suffice it to say that an analysis of her pedagogical philosophy is beyond the scope of this presentation, but much material is available concerning the Montessori approach and its unique place in teaching. For our purposes, it might suit us better to show how all this is manifested in the classroom, how the Montessori method actually unfolds in the real-world setting of our lovely school here in Sudbury, Ontario.

At the age of three, our pupils begin the program and ideally will have the same teacher—or, in Montessori terms, directress—over the course of the entire three-year length of school. They will be in a specially equipped classroom with children of ages three, four and five, working not with toys or dolls or playthings but rather with concrete materials and manipulatives: beads and cubes, sandpaper letters and water-pouring devices. They are in a unique classroom, full of materials which guide them through the curriculum and in which the teacher is just a directing force. He or she does not even have a desk in the classroom. This room belongs to the children. They leave their parents at the door, greet the teacher with a handshake and embark on their educational journey. By the time they complete the so-called preschool—or, in Montessori terms, casa level—the child will have more than a rudimentary grasp of both literacy and numeracy, as well as many practical life skills. I can't begin to tell you in words how uniquely and creatively this all unfolds. As a corollary to that, I would

encourage all parties interested in childhood education to observe a Montessori classroom in action.

Fortunately for these youngsters, the opportunity to further their education utilizing the unique Montessori methods they have already embraced exists in our elementary school program. In the Montessori School of Sudbury, we are currently offering up to grade 5 and our plans for 2002 include a sixth grade as well. Students enter grade 1 having three years of Montessori education under their belt, so to speak. Our elementary program again is founded upon unique materials and manipulatives, as well as a blending of grades in groups of three, so that the junior elementary classroom would comprise those students in grades 1, 2 and 3 and senior elementary would bring together grades 4 through 6. As in the casa or so-called preschool phase, the students will have the same directress to guide them over the span of a three-year term.

Here in Sudbury, it was through the hard work of dedicated staff and parents that we have managed to expand our school to the elementary level, and our projected enrolment for the coming school year is close to 110.

Perhaps it is time to review our history. The Montessori School of Sudbury heralds back two decades to 1978, when it was incorporated as a non-profit institution. It was and continues to be recognized by Revenue Canada as a charitable organization. The school is registered under the Day Nurseries Act of Ontario and must renew its licence annually with the Ministry of Community and Social Services. We meet the requirements of the Ministry of Health, as well as the Sudbury health unit, as to the cleanliness of the school. Our not-for-profit school is administered by a voluntary board of directors, comprising both representatives of the parent body as well as the Sudbury community at large.

Since 1988, the Montessori School of Sudbury has been recognized by the Association Montessori International, AMI, perhaps the pre-eminent arbiter worldwide of what is meant to meet or exceed the Montessori standard. Over the course of the past few years, the Sudbury school has been working toward accreditation through the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators, the CCMA.

Our teachers study at a specialized educational institute, such as the Toronto Montessori Institute, and as such are steeped in the unique methodology and teaching philosophy that the Montessori classroom requires. Our teachers are specialists in the Montessori approach. May I add as a sidebar that in our classroom, we also utilize as assistants teachers who are registered with the Ontario College of Teachers. However, it is mandatory that the overseer of the classroom activities and curriculum be Montessori-trained.

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Our teachers and allied staff undergo ongoing continuing education and professional enhancement as part of a lifelong learning approach. Annually, they will attend conferences intended to enhance their professional

development. You will find that the Montessori teacher is an enthusiastic proponent of education, someone who sees this career as almost a calling, and their devotion to and boundless energy for the Montessori way embraces all aspects of their lives.

Who are the parents of our children? In their ranks you will find many ordinary citizens: single parents, stay-at-home moms, working parents. One thing they share is an amazing dedication to the school. From those who volunteer to sit on the board to those who organize fundraising activities, our parents commit a lot of time and money to the school. Without this selfless dedication to the school by many groups of parents, we wonder if the institution would have survived its two decades in Sudbury. These parents have chosen a unique method of teaching for their children and are so committed to it that they pay extra for that privilege.

Our students come from the ranks of our so-called preschool or casa level, and we do not raid students from the public system for our elementary ranks. In reality, we turn them away. May I stress once again that we are a non-profit organization with over two decades in the Sudbury community and with philosophical affiliations to other Montessori schools worldwide. We offer a different teaching methodology to youngsters than what is otherwise available. Perhaps it is time that our parent body receive a bit of tax relief for their financial commitment to the Montessori approach.

In closing, I would like to make available to you our parent handbook and other materials which will more thoroughly and more eloquently explain our distinct nature of learning as a learning institution in Sudbury. Once again, thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: We have approximately three minutes per caucus. I'll start with Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Ms O'Brien, for coming today and expressing your point of view. I probably won't ask a question as much as make a comment.

I don't challenge your right or the right of parents to establish Montessori schools or to establish Christian schools or other private schools, for that matter. That is a right that parents should continue to have. What I disagree with, and this will not come as a surprise, is the use of public money to support that. I clearly believe that the \$300 million the government is talking about to support the tax credit plan is a minimum amount of money, that when it's completely rolled out it will actually be a much bigger amount of money. That will come directly at the expense of funding the public education system in the province. Second, I also very clearly believe that the move to the tax credit scheme is but a first move to charter schools in the province.

I oppose the government scheme on those grounds, which I'm sure you are aware of. I continue to think we should be not just propping up the public education system, which is where I think we are, given the government's cuts to education since they were elected; I think we should be very actively investing in the system. But I

remain convinced that we won't be able to do that if we use public money to essentially support private schools.

You were good enough to give us your view, and I wanted to tell you where we're coming from.

Ms O'Brien: I appreciate your comments.

The Chair: The government side?

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Thank you, Ms O'Brien, for your presentation. Just a couple of quick questions. Montessori is non-denominational, correct?

Ms O'Brien: That's correct.

Mr Spina: Second, you indicated—please correct me if I have not understood it properly—that your curriculum would clearly and easily meet Ministry of Education standards.

Ms O'Brien: It does. It's the method we choose to teach it to the children that's very different and distinct.

Mr Spina: Would you be willing to submit your children, for example, to the standardized testing procedure that the public system is now incurring?

Ms O'Brien: We, for the first time this year, did grade 3 testing. It wasn't the ministry's source we used; however, we do submit our children to standardized testing. The CAT method is what we use.

Mr Spina: OK. Your teachers, many or most, are registered with the Ontario college. Is that correct?

Ms O'Brien: Two out of my 12 staff are, but in a Montessori world it's essential that each of my main directresses are recipients of Montessori training diplomas. In some cases, these teachers have gone to teachers' college and then decided to take Montessori training. That happens. Most of my directresses are either recipients of BAs or not necessarily teaching degrees, but they have to take the specific training.

Mr Spina: It's clearly a pretty good system. Mr Kennedy's kids are in it right now—we know that; he's said that to us—and I have a niece and a nephew in the system back home.

Do you view the tax credit as a threat to public education, as Ms Martel has indicated?

Ms O'Brien: I just see it as an opportunity that our parents, who pay their taxes for the other school boards, because they've chosen Montessori or a private system now have that opportunity for that bit of a tax break. Frankly, I don't think it's going to make a difference with any of my parents whether this bill passes or not. They're there because they've chosen a different alternative.

Mr Spina: So you don't see a mass exodus?

Ms O'Brien: I see very little.

The Chair: The official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: I'm sure Mr Spina meant to mention that my daughter is in a program in a public school, the école Montessori in Toronto, which is both a preschool and a school based on the Montessori method in the public system. That's what I want to ask you about. Why isn't your school in the public system?

Ms O'Brien: Our school started out as a nursery school.

Mr Kennedy: And I see you interact with health and with Comsoc—

Ms O'Brien: We do, and we're funded—

Mr Kennedy: —but nothing to do with the Ministry of Education?

Ms O'Brien: Except that we're registered as a private school with the Ministry of Ed.

Mr Kennedy: You filled out that one-page form to register.

Ms O'Brien: Yes, that's right.

Mr Kennedy: But why isn't this method available as an option within public education? This is not-for-profit, correct?

Ms O'Brien: That's right.

Mr Kennedy: So why wouldn't it be a possibility within public education?

Ms O'Brien: Maybe because we just never thought about it. Maybe because our roots were with a daycare, then we grew into—

Mr Kennedy: How much do you charge, may I ask?

Ms O'Brien: For which level?

Mr Kennedy: Say for primary.

Ms O'Brien: Our 3-4 casa level?

Mr Kennedy: That's preschool.

Ms O'Brien: That's right. Our casa level half-day program is about \$3,800 a year. The full-day casa level, who are four and five years old and who have the opportunity to come a full day, is approximately \$5,600 per year. Our elementary level, which will be grade 6 come this fall, is \$6,100 a year.

Mr Kennedy: So the cost per student is not out of line with what the publicly funded systems are receiving.

Ms O'Brien: Not at all.

Mr Kennedy: Has anybody connected with your facility looked into the possibility of being part of the public system and maybe spreading some of those methods within the public system? That's what the French school my daughter attends is trying to do.

Ms O'Brien: I would question if her school is recognized as a true Montessori setting. We're very clear about the guidelines we—

Mr Kennedy: They belong to both the associations you mentioned.

Ms O'Brien: And are they accredited as a—

Mr Kennedy: Yes, in both those associations.

Ms O'Brien: Really. That's an interesting make-up. I'm not aware of that.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Thank you very much, Ms O'Brien, for your presentation. I am truly interested in special-needs children. I devoted my life in education to ensuring they were treated fairly. In your enrolment of approximately 100, how many special-needs children do you have and how do you address their individual and peculiar needs?

Ms O'Brien: We have some hearing-impaired children and some speech-impaired children. Other than that, we have none registered with our school for the fall.

Mr Bartolucci: Would you refuse a parent who has an autistic child?

Ms O'Brien: No. We work according to a waiting list. We're very much in demand in Sudbury. If this child

found their way on the waiting list and I had an opening, there is no—

Mr Bartolucci: How would you service an autistic child's needs at the casa level?

Ms O'Brien: I know there are dollars out there available to parents who have autistic children. They would have to work in conjunction with my Montessori directresses. We've certainly not had a lot of experience with autistic children, but we would have to figure out a way to get our program across to this little child that wouldn't—

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The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

Before I go on to the next presenter, we have a cancellation this afternoon at 2:40, apparently. We have a couple of people who want to present and if there are any more who submit their names, I suggest, if the committee's agreeable to this, that we put all the names into a hat and let the clerk pick a name so that we can fill that spot. Is that fair to everyone? I'll instruct the clerk to do so. If we have anyone in the audience who wishes to make a presentation at 2:40 this afternoon, please submit your name with the clerk.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): Mr Chair, on a point of clarification: You say we have a couple of people. Were you suggesting that the 20 minutes be allocated between two people or many people—

The Chair: No, for one person.

Mr Kwinter: For one person but as many who want to, you'll pick your name out of those. OK, thank you.

RAINBOW DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Rainbow District School Board. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward. Please state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Doreen Dewar: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have copies of my presentation that are available if you would like to distribute them.

My name is Doreen Dewar. I am currently chair of the Rainbow District School Board. I would like to begin by thanking the members of the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning on behalf of the Rainbow District School Board.

There has been a large number of changes to the governance and delivery of education in the province of Ontario and indeed across the country. Each province is convinced that the model they have chosen will provide our young people with excellence in education.

The changes to Ontario's education system can indeed be called radical, but only history will determine whether these changes have been improvements to the quality of education or simply measures to halt what was perceived to be unbridled spending of tax dollars.

I know from first-hand knowledge that my own four children, as well as their peer groups, have taken their

places in society as productive, caring, intelligent human beings, due in no small measure to the public education system that this government has chosen to dismantle.

Boards, educators and parents across the province, and certainly within the Rainbow District School Board, are expressing a great deal of concern regarding the recent announcement that the Harris government will be providing tax credits to parents who enrol their children in private schools.

Trustees of Rainbow District School Board feel that this is a step in the wrong direction in the ongoing reform of Ontario's educational system. We respectfully implore the government to reconsider this decision, as we believe it will have the effect of eroding public education for our students.

Rainbow District School Board is concerned about the impact the private school tax credit will have on funding to our board. We have written the minister on several occasions to inform her of the flaws in the funding formulas that do not consider the special needs of large geographical areas and sparse density that is so prevalent throughout the north. We have attempted to point out that southern Ontario solutions to southern Ontario problems do not benefit northern Ontario.

In the case of the 2001-02 increase in funding to district school boards—that's the \$360 million that has been talked about—after you deduct \$120 million allocated for increases in enrolment which are occurring only in southern Ontario, we are left with \$240 million, or 1.9%. This increase in funding does not cover the increases in the areas of personnel, utilities or travel. The \$300 million required to fully fund—and it has been mentioned that may be a minimum—private school tax credits would be better utilized by district school boards as they attempt to implement provincially mandated programs and services.

As well as financial implications, however, it is important to consider educational issues. These also will be impacted by the proposal. This government must maintain the standards it has set for education in this province by requiring that private schools be subject to the same improvements that have been applied to the public school system.

Private schools must be accredited, and accreditation must include all of the following: new rigorous curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12; safe schools requirements, including mandatory criminal checks for every individual employed and working in regular contact with children; student evaluation, including the use of the new report cards and EQAO standardized testing; teacher certification from the Ontario College of Teachers; teacher testing to ensure that teachers keep developing and improving their skills; the formation of school councils to enable the active participation of parents to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of education—I hope some of these words sound familiar—the use of textbooks approved by the ministry; mandatory co-curricular programs and plans submitted to the ministry to ensure the delivery of same.

One item stands out above all else, and that is the possibility that tax credits may be made available to parents who enrol their children in junior kindergarten and full-day senior kindergarten offered by private schools, as you've heard in the presentation prior to mine. That is the clearest indication of inequity and erosion to the public system. In order to provide parents with an equitable choice, as well as in the interests of improving early childhood education in the public system, the ministry must begin to provide funding for full-day senior kindergarten to enable public schools to offer these much-needed northern Ontario parent-requested programs.

Members of the standing committee, each of you must ask yourself and your colleagues how this government can profess to fund private school tax credits under the guise of providing parents with a choice of education while failing to demand that private schools implement what have been touted as necessary reforms to improve education.

Consider that district school boards receive \$6,900 per student from the province. I understand that may be lower. But it will only cost the government up to \$3,500 in tax credits to parents who send their children to private school. These examples must cause some concern as to whether the public school system in the province is in jeopardy.

Surely there can be no doubt that tax credits are a form of incentive. Encouraging parents, through the tax credit, to enrol their children in private schools can in no way be misinterpreted as supporting public education. Encouraging parents, through tax credits, to enrol their children in private schools that do not provide the required standards set for public schools is irresponsible.

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If we are to believe that the legislation previously enacted is aimed at—and I quote, as did previous speakers—"setting high standards to ensure that students receive the best education possible," then you must be prepared to set the same high standards for private schools. However, the fact that the government appears unwilling to demand these same high standards of the private school system casts doubts on the motive of having enacted the radical changes to education in Ontario. Added to this is the proven underfunding of public education, and it's no wonder that boards, educators and parents across the province are demanding that you vote in opposition to the private school tax credit.

In summary, there is an issue of the basic philosophy of education which must be considered, and Mr Lessard also spoke of this. The strength of the public education system is based on core values—core Canadian values. Those values consist of universality, equality of access and a high standard of educational goals. Public education values every child, regardless of financial status, individual ability, race, religion or ethnic origin. Public education values diversity, not segregation. Public education teaches respect and tolerance for others. It teaches

an appreciation of our differences and a celebration of our commonality.

Public education is the only system that satisfies the concerns raised by the United Nations. Any move toward a system that would promote segregation should be, and is, abhorrent to our basic Canadian values.

The fate of public education in Ontario lies in the hands of our elected representatives. One fully funded public system of education is not only worthy of your protection, but it is worthy of your promotion, both philosophically and financially.

I thank you very much, and I would like to just add one other comment. Having listened to the presentation just prior to mine, I have to tell each and every one of you, as chair of the Rainbow District School Board, I would be absolutely overjoyed if we could equip every single one of our junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten rooms with the kind of equipment that was being presented as part of the Montessori program. I would very much spend the money, if we had it, to do just that.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Bob Wood (London West): Do you support the continuance of funding for the Catholic system here in Ontario?

Ms Dewar: I didn't think that that's what I would have to address today, but I did make myself very clear that I feel one fully funded public system is the answer to providing the best possible education.

Mr Wood: Do you think parents who choose an independent school for their child are making the right decision for their child?

Ms Dewar: I value the right of choice; I value it for parents choosing their school. I currently live on a lake in the city of Sudbury. I pay exceptionally high taxes. I am very blessed to have been able to afford the choice. I have no city services—I have no sewer, no water—but I'm not going to the taxpayers of this city and of this municipality and saying that because I've chosen to live there I want a tax credit. I'm not getting the services that I pay taxes for, but I feel very blessed that I'm able to do it. I think everyone should have the choice. But are tax credits an incentive? Are we in fact encouraging people to remove their children from the public system?

Mr Wood: Why is it you think only some choices should get recognition in the tax system?

Ms Dewar: But do any of our choices get recognition in the tax system?

Mr Wood: All charitable choices do.

Ms Dewar: All charitable choices do?

Mr Wood: You get a tax deduction for a charitable donation.

Ms Dewar: Yes.

Mr Wood: You choose the charity.

Ms Dewar: That's right.

Mr Wood: Yes.

Ms Dewar: We agree.

The Chair: We've run out of time. I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Bartolucci: Doreen, thank you very much for your excellent presentation.

Ms Dewar: You're welcome.

Mr Bartolucci: You might want to inform the members of the government of some of the constraints that you're under because of the roughly \$2 million less in funding you are receiving as a school board and paint the real scenario of what is happening with the Rainbow District School Board.

Ms Dewar: In the area of funding, it's horrendous. Because we are a large area, we have a lot of community schools. Funding formulas are based on large urban centres. Most of our schools are not built to hold 450 students at the elementary level, and yet the funding formula only provides funding for schools with 450 students in the areas of secretarial and of principals and vice-principals. We have just gone through the most horrible—and I wish everyone could go through it—school review process of 10 schools this year. There are people in communities that have one school, and we're having to close those schools. We don't have the funding to keep small community schools open.

Now, is that right or is that wrong? The choice is not ours. We don't have that choice, because we have a certain amount of money. It is earmarked and we darned well have to do the best we can with that money. The other choice is to cut programs, things like full-day senior kindergarten. We choose not to cut that. There are our choices.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Doreen, for coming today and making a presentation. I'll wrap all the questions into one. If you could just highlight again some of the other constraints. You fund JK; that costs you to do that. You've had extraordinary hydro costs over this whole year; you haven't gotten funded for that. There are other costs that you have that you have not received funding for from this government, which has led to cuts right across your board. Maybe you can describe cuts in teachers, special ed, librarians etc. Given that, how long do you think it will be before people in the community will start to say, "I am not being well served by the public system because of the cuts and the constraints; I'm going to use the incentive of \$3,500 and take my child elsewhere"?

Ms Dewar: You've virtually touched on many of the cuts that we've made. We don't have the money for textbooks. We have the same number of students moving from grade 10 to grade 11. We've been given half the funding for those grade 11 textbooks. They cost more. We have to provide these things. We've made terrible cuts to maintenance of our schools. We have aging buildings. They have to be maintained. We don't have the money to maintain them.

As I say, we have to continually make choices between the numbers of buildings and the bricks and mortar, and the programs. Of course, when it comes to those kinds of choices, we choose the programs every time.

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But the funding itself, please, ladies and gentlemen, don't forget the other side of it, and that is, yes, people have a right to choose. But is it at the expense of the public school system? Can you guarantee me that it's not? Can you look back three years from now and say not one cent was removed from the public system? Because every cent that's removed impacts on our programs and makes us less able to offer the kinds of programs that people need, especially in the area of special education. That's an area that is constantly underfunded and it's a program that needs our attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much; we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

Ms Dewar: I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

CAMBRIAN COLLEGE

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Dr Frank Marsh, so I would ask the presenter to come forward, please. If you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Dr Frank Marsh: I'm Frank Marsh, president of Cambrian College. I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak about Bill 45, but I wanted to address another area of the budget than the one that was addressed by the previous speaker. In particular, what I want to speak to are the post-secondary funding announcements that were made in the budget, I guess to put a perspective on them for you.

In fact, there was substantial text in the budget about the post-secondary system this year. There was a \$293-million announcement by 2003-04, direct and proportional to enrolment growth, that would deal with what we refer to as the double cohort, but in fact the flow out of the OAC system in Ontario in 2003. In 2001-02, there was approximately a 2% increase for enrolment growth in the budget. There was a 0.3% increase for key performance indicator funding and accountability in the post-secondary system, as well as a 10% increase in the northern grant. That seems to be a substantial increase. There was new funding of \$33 million to double the number of entries into the apprenticeship system to, essentially, a level of 22,000 annually, and over a five-year period, a \$50-million apprenticeship enhancement fund to upgrade and enhance equipment and facilities. There was another \$60 million for a new Ontario Institute of Technology at Durham. Of course, the Public Sector Accountability Act impacts colleges and the university system as well, and there was an announcement of deferred maintenance for \$140 million this year.

I'd like to speak to the nature of these items, to put some perspective on them. College funding in 1990 was \$772 million. It was based on 122,000 funding units—that's full-time-equivalent students—for essentially, with the mathematics, \$5,775 per student. In 1999-2000, the budget was \$692 million. There were about 200,000

students, and the funding unit was \$3,474. If you put inflation on that—very low-level inflation—the actual grant is \$2,951 per student. So from 1990 to now, we've gone from \$5,775 per student to \$2,951 per student.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, in a report that was tabled with the Investing in Students Task Force on post-secondary education in February, noted that the college system in Ontario is the most efficient institutional system that exists in the country. So the colleges have addressed the financial impacts that have been placed on them and recognize the need to ensure that there's fiscal responsibility within the system and within government. However, there are some substantial facts that also come out of that report; one is that Ontario now funds its system at 60th out of 60 North American jurisdictions. It's not a fact that one should be proud of.

At what price did these efficiencies occur? They occurred from a cut in instructional hours, increases in class size, changes in program offerings and positions lost. But there comes a point when economies of scale have been reached and growth can't happen at the level of funding that's provided. The cost of growth is in facilities, it's in faculty and it's in resources. The budget allocation is on the basis of future growth, not on the basis of addressing the size, so we have a bit of a problem here.

What we note, as well, is that the programs we implement within the college system have to be at the level of the skills, expectations and outcomes that industry has, because we prepare people for industry. That's our role. The cost of mounting new programs is about three times the cost of changing from a program that we currently have, because of the nature of the new programs, all based on logic control. What can I tell you? At the funding levels we currently have, this growth that's been funded is certainly not adequate.

I just want to speak to the college funding model in northern communities. Essentially, the model for colleges that has been put in place has a fixed amount of dollars, so the more students who enter, the less money we get per student. The growth that occurs has occurred essentially in the greater Toronto area. That's where the major growth is, in the high population areas; not in northern Ontario, not in rural Ontario, but in the major centres. So what occurs is that we have a mixed blessing. When they grow, we lose money, and when they grow they do not get sufficient money to fund the growth, so it's not assisting any of us.

In any case, in the northern communities, since 1996-97, northern colleges have lost 1% of the market share of the college system. While some of us grew, we didn't grow as fast as some of the other areas. We lost 1% of the market share and that translates into a \$6.32-million annual loss in operating grants to northern colleges. If you were to look at the northern universities, which also have a northern grant proportion, you will find that the same thing is occurring. Growth in the GTA outstrips growth in all of rural Ontario put together and, of course, is what has caused some of this problem. What has

occurred essentially is a transfer of the \$6.32 million out of the north and into the system in other areas.

The northern grant was developed about 10 years ago to address this anomaly of growth in the larger regions and the mandate difference that exists in a northern community for its college system. One has to address economic development and other issues, as well as the level of education that needs to be provided in these areas. As a note, it was addressed at \$4 million. A 10% increase in the northern grant for this year, announced in this budget, was a good first step, but it brings the grant from \$4 million to \$4.4 million, far short of addressing that \$6.32-million loss that occurs as a result of growth in another sector; not a loss of enrolment in the north but growth in another sector. If you were to take that amount of money and look at it from an inflationary aspect, the grant essentially should be \$11.32 million, if we looked at it at 1991 levels. It is not an amount that would cause the Ontario government not to balance its budget but an amount that would make a substantial difference to the level of services in post-secondary education in northern communities. It's a matter of choice.

In 1999-2000, there was a major announcement through SuperBuild that provided funding for addressing double cohort and enrolment growth, new funding needs and new facility needs. The announcement of \$140 million for infrastructure in the post-secondary system is made up of a \$100-million one-time adjustment and a \$40-million ongoing budget item. This is a positive move. Colleges will get approximately \$50 million of that \$140 million. The rule of thumb in the post-secondary system is two thirds to universities, one third to colleges. However, our deferred maintenance costs are estimated at \$317 million. What I would indicate to you is that there's a need to continue the program at least at this \$140-million level for the next six years if we are going to address just what we know now to be deferred maintenance.

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The skills initiative was a very positive one for Ontario and the north. The Conference Board of Canada notes that by 2010 more than one million jobs will go vacant due to a lack of skilled technology and trades workers. The engine of Canada's economy, as you know, in this sector, is Ontario, so many of these jobs that go vacant will be in this province. Studies by HRDC note that 70% of the new job growth that's occurred has been through immigration over the last five years and could go as high as 100% through immigration by 2010.

One of the initiatives taken was an investment to attract young people to the skilled trades. A \$33-million announcement was made to increase the number to 22,000 people in the skilled trades area. If you do the math on that, you can appreciate that you're not going to meet the needs of the industry, but at the same time it's a very positive step. There was also an investment to ensure that the public college system is market-ready. That has been occurring through partnerships with industry which have been blossoming and also the investment of

the \$10 million per year over five years for a capital equipment fund. These are steps in the right direction that occurred in the budget.

Mr Chair and committee, I have a message for you. The post-secondary system's ongoing operating grants are inadequate to address growth that is anticipated and, for that matter, the continuance of the system at the level that's occurring. It doesn't address inflation or additional costs and it will not allow us, in the long term, to be able to meet the needs of Ontarians and Ontario competitiveness. The issues that face northern and rural post-secondary systems must be addressed by an adjustment in the northern grant. It is not a substantial amount of money, but on principle and on choice, it is a substantial effort that could be made with a small amount of dollars. The investment in facilities renewal must be committed to for a substantial period of time if we are to address the maintenance issues of the system. And the investment in apprenticeship and skills announced in the budget is a positive first step in addressing what will be a critical human resource issue in the next several years.

One of the matters I didn't address is the Public Sector Accountability Act. I note that the college system has operated within the intent of this measure for most of its 30-year history and expects to continue to do so. It finds itself, however, in the context of inadequate funding and a fixed tuition that is set by government at 2% up to 2005, having to beat the market for additional dollars in order to support itself. Whether it can continue in the future will depend on the response and recommendations of your committee and the response the government makes to the issues that are brought forward. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus. I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Bartolucci: Frank, thank you very much for your very balanced and fair assessment of the budget, I thought. I'd like to zero in on the differences in per pupil funding through 1990 and now. It is roughly, when you consider inflation, approximately \$2,900 per student. That has an enormous impact on your programming and your availability to deliver programming. How would you assess the future of Cambrian College if this isn't addressed in a substantial way?

Dr Marsh: Very simply, what it means is that if we cannot generate revenues of our own outside of what are the normal post-secondary services we provide for our students, then we have a number of choices. We will either cut more programs and reduce the level of staffing we have, at a time when we are expected to have potential and significant growth as a result of the number of graduates coming out of high school, particularly during the double cohort year, or we will be caught making a decision that will run a deficit in the system. That's the choice we will deal with, as you know, under our act, with our minister. But we won't be making the investment in equipment, maintenance and all the other things that are necessary to provide people with the skills they need for the workplace of today.

Mr Bartolucci: We have a world-class centre with regard to our special-needs centre at Cambrian College. Probably it's the model for anyone in the world to follow. What type of constraints are you facing with regard to that excellent programming?

Dr Marsh: To give you a sense, we have at the college more than 700 students who access the centre as part of their regular program. These services got impacted in the same way. I guess the choices and decisions you have to make are based on the level of education and services you provide. If you have to make cuts, they're broad. We try to maintain, as the first level of decision-making—because students are our clients and that's the reason we are here. The ones which least impact them are the decisions that we would make. Eventually, though, there comes a spiral that you get into.

Ms Martel: Thank you very much, Dr Marsh, for attending today. I just wanted to be sure that I had your numbers correctly. Over the decade, the system went from \$772 million to \$692 million?

Dr Marsh: Yes.

Ms Martel: That's a cut of about \$80 million. At the same time, you went from 122,000 funding units, full-time equivalent, to 200,000 students, so 78,000 more students. And if I got the grant correctly, it was about \$5,775, down to \$3,474. I went with your higher number and not the number for inflation. That's a cut there of about \$2,300 per student over that course. Do you feel confident about your numbers?

Dr Marsh: Yes.

Ms Martel: Very confident?

Dr Marsh: Yes.

Ms Martel: OK, because I'm sure the minister would challenge some of those numbers. I just want to make sure you feel very clear about them.

Dr Marsh: They are reported by PriceWaterhouse-Coopers and, as well, KPMG.

Ms Martel: Is that a recent study?

Dr Marsh: Yes, the Task Force on Investing in Students, February of this year.

Ms Martel: How much more money in total would the northern colleges need to have the northern grant adjusted so that you could do the job you're supposed to?

Dr Marsh: The northern grant alone, as I said, if it were brought to the 1990 level, would be \$11.32 million. That would include inflation. If it were brought to somewhere in the order of \$9 million to \$10 million, that would take the inflation factor out. We are not talking substantial amounts of money at all.

Ms Martel: You've made this case to the minister?

Dr Marsh: We have made this case, and it was addressed by a 10% increase this year. I think it is the largest increase that was given to any sector.

Ms Martel: Were you given a guarantee that you would see a similar increase in the next number of years to bring you up to where you need to be?

Dr Marsh: I found in public life that there are no guarantees.

The Chair: The government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you, Doctor, for the presentation, particularly for the balanced presentation as was mentioned across the table about the good and the not so good as you see it in the budget, recognizing the solid investments that are being made this year in operating but even more so in building more infrastructure and paying on in the college system for some time. Regarding Ms Martel's question, I just wanted to know very quickly, the reduction in support from government over those years, did the college also reduce spending per pupil by that same amount?

Dr Marsh: Generally there were two things that occurred. Of course, the first is that tuitions increased a significant amount during that period, but there were significant reductions in the amount of spending. Tuition would have increased by somewhere in the order of 200% over that period, so more than double.

Mr Hardeman: The other thing—and I would be the first to agree with you that much more needs to be done—

Dr Marsh: I should tell you that the other part was that there was a significant amount of ancillary income, which is the income that colleges particularly receive for doing community training, training for industries on a private basis, activities in the international world and so on. So that did offset some.

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Mr Hardeman: I appreciate that.

I think it's important to recognize the deferred maintenance. It's an area where quite often we get caught up and, if we haven't got quite enough money to make ends meet, we defer the maintenance.

Dr Marsh: Exactly.

Mr Hardeman: Eventually it does catch up with us all, and that's why I'm happy to see there is some recognition of that in the budget. I can assure you that further consideration will need to be given to deal with that.

The Chair: With that, Mr Hardeman, I must bring it to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION
OF ONTARIO, RAINBOW TEACHER
LOCAL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the ETFO, Rainbow Teacher Local. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Ms Pat Gordon: Good morning. My name is Pat Gordon. I am president of the elementary teachers of the Rainbow district.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Rainbow Teacher Local, represents approximately 600 teachers in 47 work sites across the Sudbury, Manitoulin and Espanola area. These teachers work tirelessly on behalf of their students to provide quality education for

all children within their school community. We strongly oppose the use of public funds for private school tax credits as proposed in Bill 45. A policy passed at the first annual meeting of ETFO also supports this position.

We do not deny that parents have the right to send their children to private schools. However, public money should not be used to fund private choices. The public education system was established to ensure that all children were provided with quality education free of charge. This was one of the foundations of our modern democratic society.

The members of the Rainbow Teacher Local believe that our public investment should be directed to improving the public education system rather than using it to encourage attendance at private schools. We believe that equity is achieved in a strong public system that provides free access to high-quality education for all children.

We believe in an education system where every child is valued, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, creed, family status or belief system. We believe that the public education system is the foundation for a democratic and prosperous society, one that is the prime source of integration in our multicultural society. Our public schools teach and practise equity.

Private schools follow their own rules. They do not have to accept all students who apply, they do not have to hire qualified teachers, they do not have to follow the Ontario curriculum, they do not have to use the provincial report card and they do not have to administer the provincial standardized tests. No accountability to the government is required, but \$300 million of public money will be supporting them through the proposed tax credits. There's something very wrong about that picture.

The government is misleading the public by claiming that it is putting more money into education. Since 1995, adjusting for inflation and enrolment, over \$2 billion has been cut annually from the publicly funded education systems in Ontario. Cumulatively, this amounts to almost \$10 billion. A June 14 Globe and Mail article stated, "On average, public boards now spend \$741 less on each student in real terms than they did in 1997."

This has had a dramatic impact. Our teachers know first hand how funding cuts have impacted on their classrooms and on the children they teach. They continue to cope with insufficient textbooks and other learning materials for students and insufficient resource materials for teachers. They continue to cope with school closures that have caused communities to lose their neighbourhood schools for no other reason than funding cuts. I think anybody who has gone through a school review program or who has lost their community school will attest to the fact that it's very heart-wrenching. It's very difficult on everybody involved; not just on teachers, not just on the school board but it's extremely difficult on children.

They continue to cope with class sizes that are too high for effective learning. We have some schools that have smaller classes, admitted, because we have a very

broad area that we're working with, but we also have some classes that are dealing with very large numbers.

They're coping with a loss of special education programs, resulting in more special-needs students being returned to the regular classroom, often without adequate support. That doesn't even address the fact of the students who are in the grey area and who perhaps need extra help but don't fit the funding formula to get the money for it. It doesn't address those children who are now needing extra support because of the curriculum. It's not available to them through resource teachers.

They continue to cope with more fundraising being required, sometimes just to buy resources for the school or additional things that will help the children, such as software for computers. They continue to cope with cuts to secretarial and custodial times, and with insufficient funds to replace teachers when they're absent. I can tell you that's one of the things that is most troubling to teachers right at this moment. The stress level is very high and quite often they find they're not able to be at school because they are ill. There just isn't enough money in the board budget to ensure that there is a qualified teacher all the time to replace them.

An intermediate teacher told me recently that she became a very popular figure in her school after attending a publisher's workshop promoting a new geography text that would support the new curriculum. They've had to wait a fair bit of time to get this new geography text because I gather these texts have not been available up to this point. It's very difficult to teach a curriculum without having the support material. Having been a teacher in the classroom until just this past year, I can tell you that trying to run around and find all of the material you need to fill in a unit that addresses the new curriculum is very time-consuming and almost impossible to do when you're dealing with the number of curriculum changes we've had.

At the end of the workshop, several draws were made and this teacher won \$1,000 worth of this new text. She was very excited. But why was she so popular with her colleagues and students? Quite simply, they would now have at least one class set of geography textbooks to use even though they would have to share them with two other classes. Her students felt it would be a marked improvement over having a partial class set that required them to share with another student. This is what the school had proposed being able to fund as far as the geography text was concerned.

I had to share 15 science textbooks at one point with two classes. That was fun. It was quite an exercise in creativity, I have to tell you.

School closures have become an unwelcome reality, for no other reason than lack of funding. We have lost several small community schools in the past few years and can expect to see the trend continue unless some funding changes are made.

In an effort to replace or add some needed resources and programs, the Rainbow District School Board will be forced to use 50% of its reserves in 2001-02. The only

other option to meet the budget shortfall was to close a large number of schools. They chose to close as few as possible and to use some money from the education reserve fund, but what will happen next year?

To now propose taking at least \$300 million from public finances to give to parents for private school tuition is objectionable. This money should be used to improve the public education system. It could be used to put programs back for students. It could keep smaller schools open. It could provide needed resources. It could be used to enhance public education. It is public funds.

When fully implemented, this latest move will encourage more parents to remove their children from the public education system for a variety of reasons, including getting away from the damage being done by the lack of funding and other education policies of this government. For every student who leaves the public system, the government will save money, up to \$3,500, and this, we think, is the government's real agenda: saving money.

For every student leaving the public school system for a private school, approximately \$7,000 would be lost. Consider the loss if 10 children were to leave. Think of what this \$70,000 could provide: several class sets of textbooks, computers and software, or perhaps even help keep a community school open. In this board we are already experiencing declining enrolment. Further erosion of the student base would be detrimental to the public system.

Parents should be able to rely on the public education system to provide the high-quality education they want and deserve for their children. This government's attacks on the public education system have been unrelenting. The private school tuition tax credit is clearly designed to further destabilize public education and pave the way for significant expansion of private education in Ontario.

We do not want a two-tier education system. We want a strong, high-quality public education system accessible to all, not just for today's children but for future children of Ontario. They deserve it. We call on this committee to recommend that the education tax credit provision of Bill 45 be removed. That would be a responsible choice.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you this morning.

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The Chair: Thank you. We have approximately three minutes per caucus. I'll start with Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Pat, for being here this morning. Except for this year, how many years have you been teaching?

Ms Gordon: In total, probably over 30, taking in classroom teaching and supply teaching.

Ms Martel: Can you describe to the committee what changes you may have seen over that time? I'm speaking particularly about a full-time to a part-time principal and shared principal, whether or not the schools you've been in still have libraries, art classes, music programs, part-time or full-time custodial staff, resource teachers in a classroom or not in the school at all. Can you talk to us

about those changes and pinpoint, if they are dramatic, when they became dramatic?

Ms Gordon: Probably the most dramatic changes came when this government came into power and we lost as much money as we did in the education end of things, and certainly the other reforms that were being put into place were put in very quickly. I can remember being told that the new curriculum was going to be introduced in one year, but we didn't get the curriculums they were introducing until the day after school finished in June. Our understanding and the public's understanding, according to news releases, was that this new curriculum was going to be put into place the following September. So first of all, we didn't even have the curriculum in our hands to take a look at, we had no in-servicing, we had no backup materials, that sort of thing.

Another thing I've noticed happening here is that we don't have full-time principals in our schools. We have principals who are often in the classroom, so they're not available to handle problems. More and more teachers are having to deal with students who would normally have been in a special class, learning better social skills, shall we say, having some kind of support for learning difficulties they might have. They're now back in the classroom because we don't have the funding for special ed, and the classroom teacher has to program for them, often without very much support.

Ms Martel: What's the impact on parents?

Ms Gordon: I remember talking to a parent not too long ago who wanted to know when they would graduate from school, because they were having to do so much work with their children at home. They were doing homework for quite a lengthy period of time and the child was only in grade 3. That was so the curriculum could be followed, and of course with grade 3 testing there's also that push there, to make sure the children have all the necessary equipment and information they need to be successful on the test. Probably the parents are very nervous in some ways as to how their child will perform on the test as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The government side; Mr Gill.

Mr Gill: Thank you for your presentation. In my region, the region of Peel, we've had some school closings and some school openings. I see, maybe not in your numbers, but I've got some numbers from the clerk's office—the enrolment in the Rainbow District School Board in the last four or five years has decreased by 2,100 pupils. Do you think that has anything to do with the closing of the schools?

Ms Gordon: Any decrease you have, yes, is going to impact on whether the school remains open or not. If the funding isn't there to keep our smaller schools open—some of them are in outlying communities, and some children are going to have to travel long distances to come to school. If their enrolment declines, yes, I would think they'd be put on review. It takes a very creative board to be able to say, "No, we're going to keep this one

open and we're going to have to find the money elsewhere."

Mr Gill: Naturally, if the enrolment is lower, the schools will close?

Ms Gordon: We happen to find ourselves in this particular situation, but I believe it's because of the funding available, not totally because of declining enrolment. What I am trying to say to you is that we're dealing with a spread-out area rather than a concentrated area of students. It's not as easy as just saying, "We can take the students from school A and move them down the street to school B, and they're not going to lose out on their community experiences there."

Mr Gill: In your last 30 years as a teacher, I suppose you've had a great career in teaching. You talked a little bit about class size. In your opinion, what is the ideal class size? I know people say 1:1 is ideal or that 25:1 is ideal. In your opinion, what is the ideal class size?

Ms Gordon: If I was teaching in a primary classroom I think I could be quite excited if I had a class of 15, because I know I could get to these young children and give them the attention they deserve so that later on in life they're not going to have perhaps the problems that might be there with learning, especially if I didn't have the opportunity for more contact—not one-on-one necessarily, but more teacher-student contact.

I was teaching in a grade 7 and 8 class, and one year I had a class of 37 in grade 7—very challenging, I have to tell you. It was in an inner-city school, children with very high needs—wonderful children. I enjoyed teaching there and I'm looking forward at some point, hopefully, to going back to that school. But with 37 children, with the needs they had, it was an impossible task. At the same time, we were implementing new report cards, we were implementing new curriculum. It was very, very difficult.

Had I stayed at the school this year—and it was just the way things were organized. It's a dual-track school, with French immersion and a regular program in it. I had moved from regular program to the French immersion, where the enrolment was a little less. I would have had a class of 20 or 21. I would have been very excited and happy to have had 20 or 21 kids in a split grade 7 and 8.

The Chair: The official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Maybe I can help the member opposite. The total amount for your pupils in elementary is about \$819 less each, notwithstanding enrolment drops. There's no question that the government has a peculiar standard that would hold remote schools as part of the same space that would impact students in, say, downtown Sudbury, that it would be part of the same consideration. That's why schools are closing.

It's interesting that the member opposite did acknowledge that if people leave to go to private schools, it will close schools. We appreciate the member opposite at least acknowledging that's part of what the policy is for.

I wonder if you, in your work, have come across the 2001 tracking report yet, which was published by People for Education.

Ms Gordon: I haven't seen the whole report, no. I have heard some bits and pieces, but no.

Mr Kennedy: Maybe you can give me a quick reaction. These are surveys filled out by some 800 schools across the province. They indicate that while the average number of special ed students is up from 33 to 36, the number of special ed teachers is down from 2.4 to 2; that there are more schools than ever before without full-time principals and more have part-time principals; that educational assistants are down; that the amount of money in fundraising has gone up consistently; that custodians are down another 12%; that secretarial support services are down 7% in the last year or two. This is the experience: a degradation of the support available in elementary schools. I wonder if you could comment on that for us.

Ms Gordon: I think your question had to do with the report and how it has affected the public schools.

Mr Kennedy: The evidence that's been collected around the province, yes, and how you find it in your board.

Ms Gordon: As I said before, we have schools that don't have full-time principals. We have secretarial staff whose times have been cut. That certainly impacts on parents being able to get hold of somebody at the school on the front line. Sometimes you get an answering machine because people are busy in the classroom or the principal is busy in the office—or maybe in the classroom; you can't be sure. Special education resource time: our board this year is putting extra money into special ed, and I would assume that's where a couple of very needy schools did manage to get some extra resource time to help deal with these children.

Mr Kennedy: Just a quick question. I didn't want to stop you from listing that, but just very quickly, reflecting on what the parents and children in Sudbury need, do you think they would rather have this private school credit or, say, a class size cap of 20?

Ms Gordon: I certainly think they would like to have small class sizes.

Mr Kennedy: It's about the same cost province-wide, \$300 million or \$350 million to cap class sizes in primary grades at 20, which is what we have proposed, or to give public money to private schools.

Ms Gordon: Smaller class sizes would be far more helpful to our parents, I believe, than giving them a tax credit for private school tuition.

The Chair: We've run out of time.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): Mr Chairman, on a point of order: I was wondering if we could make a request through our research here, ask the researcher to find out from the Ministry of Education how many hours a day they feel it's appropriate for a grade 1 student to be travelling on the Trans-Canada Highway in northern Ontario to attend school. Maybe we could find that out and see if there's a standard there.

The Chair: OK. We'll try to get that information for you, Mr Ramsay.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation. This committee is recessed until 1 o'clock this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1201 to 1302.

SILVERCREST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to bring the meeting back to order. It is 1 o'clock. Our first presentation this afternoon is from the Silvercrest Christian School. I would ask the presenter to come forward please and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Rob Duiker: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. My name is Rob Duiker. I'm the principal of Silvercrest Christian School in Wasaga Beach. Our school serves the needs of children from junior kindergarten through grade 8. The assortment of gifts, virtues, learning needs and behavioural needs with which our teachers must deal is similar to the variety experienced in most public schools. In fact, some of our students have come to us because they have needs that their previous schools had difficulty meeting. The occupations and income levels of the parents are also quite varied. Most of the families who comprise our school community struggle to pay the annual tuition, which is \$6,800 per family. To keep the tuition affordable, we do a great deal of fundraising and watch our expenses very carefully. We have been blessed with qualified, creative, resourceful and committed teachers, who take home considerably less income than do their public school counterparts.

I attended independent schools myself as a child until the financial misfortune of my father's business in the late 1960s made continued attendance impossible. My parents were forced to register me and my siblings in a school system which taught inconsistently with our culture. We could not participate as fully in our culture as did others we went to church with, shopped with and worked with. My focus, as we discuss the tax credit proposal before us, will be to contend that the existence of funded independent schools is a tangible sign of a healthy multiculturalism.

I have lived in the United States while teaching native American children on a Zuni reservation in New Mexico. Through this experience I have become acutely aware of the cultural distinctions between Canadians and Americans in terms of the ways in which we treat minority cultural groups.

The system of schools in the United States was designed to contribute to the creation of a citizenry of loyal Americans. The founding fathers of the United States set in motion a plan whereby one American culture would be shaped. The schools would provide the heat for the American melting pot of cultures. Schools would successfully transform a wide cultural diversity into an English-speaking citizenry, with a decidedly American view of history and an assertive nationalistic zeal.

Similarly, Canada has attempted to create a system of schools which reflects its cultural goals. At the time of Confederation, our new nation consisted of a predominantly French-speaking Catholic population in Lower Canada, while mostly English-speaking Protestants lived in Upper Canada. Our founding fathers determined that English and French language rights ought to be protected in the Constitution with the establishment of Catholic and Protestant schools. This reflection of the bicultural character of Canada continues to this day with the presence of government-funded Catholic and Protestant schools in Ontario and Quebec.

However, the direction of Canadian culture underwent a considerable transformation during the Trudeau years. The impact of these changes is still being felt today as we become an increasingly multicultural country. It is now expected that people who live in Canada are able to retain their language and their religion, as their culture is protected and honoured. It is important that we have a system of schooling that acknowledges and upholds this present Canadian cultural reality. Education in Ontario must keep stride with the advancement of Canadian multiculturalism.

We are happily moving beyond the thin edge of the multicultural wedge as we hone a Canadian culture that is not characterized by our similarity to one another or by our like-mindedness. Instead, we seek a country where we honour and respect each other's cultural distinctiveness. We must continue to recognize, as our forefathers did, that our system of schools is an important conduit for the cultural vision we have for our nation. We must continue to move beyond our two-schools system, two-culture model, to a more innovative and truly Canadian approach. The province's announcement of a tax credit for independent school tuition can be seen as a brave step toward a truly multicultural Canada.

While I fully support the tax credit idea, I would like to respectfully suggest two changes for your consideration so the needs of my school community are addressed.

First, to dispel the notion that this is a tax credit for the rich, I propose that the tax credit be available only when the total tuition is equal to or less than the actual per student cost of education in the local school district for the current year. The schools generally referred to as elitist typically charge tuition which is far in excess of this amount.

This type of safeguard against funding for elitist schools finds its precedent in British Columbia, where similar limits are in place. This committee has heard testimony that funded independent schools in British Columbia are all elitist. Nothing could be further from the truth. I personally enjoyed working as a teacher and a principal in British Columbia for a number of years and am familiar with the funding formula in place there. Independent schools, to receive 50% funding, must be able to show that their per pupil costs are no less than the actual amount of funding received and no more than the per pupil cost in the local school district.

This type of limit lacks the awkwardness of a means test. A means test would require the imposition of a definition of the word “rich” in terms of income. With all the local cost-of-living variations and the varieties of ways of earning income, a fair means test would be virtually impossible to formulate. It is far simpler to measure a school’s tuition than a parent’s ability to pay tuition.

Second, in order not to promote higher tuition rates, I propose that the credit not be expressed as a percentage of the total tuition but rather be a flat, per student amount. As I understand the current proposal, the maximum tax credit will only be achieved when the tuition is \$7,000 per student or higher.

To be fair, the size of the tax credit should not be dependent on the tuition amount. Each student is equally valuable, and we would very much like to see a policy in place that demonstrates that.

My parents-in-law raised eight children. Each child spent eight years in independent schools. My father-in-law worked as an auto mechanic as he faithfully paid his tuition and fed the many mouths around his table. My mother-in-law worked as a homemaker. In 2001 dollars, with education costing about \$7,000 per year, this tradesman saved the public education system of this province the equivalent of about \$448,000. One can only imagine how many pairs of skates and new bicycles those kids did not get as a result of those tuition payments. In spite of that, my wife still actively participates with me as we seek Christian education for our children.

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One and a half months from now, my family will be moving to another part of the province to work in another independent school. Since my own children will be attending both an independent high school and the independent elementary school where I will be working, the total amount I will pay in tuition will be approximately a quarter of my before-tax salary. At the same time, I will be paying public school tuition in the form of taxes. My situation is not all that unusual. Many parents in this province live in humble homes, drive old cars and work many overtime hours in order to have the opportunity to pay both public and independent school tuition.

But there are also others. Many people visit our school and long to see their children in our classrooms. But sadly, try as they might, the cost of independent schools is out of their reach. Today we are working toward a solution to their plight. Now, some of our friends who believe passionately in one public education system will ask, “What plight? Is the public system not good enough for you?” Indeed, Ontario has an excellent system of public schools filled with committed teachers who love their students. To help you understand the commitment of parents to independent schools, I offer this illustration.

A young woman who was new in town went shopping for a pickup truck at the only car dealer in town. She said, “I’d like to see some pickup trucks.” The salesman said, “All we have are model Zs. It’s a car designed for everybody. It’s all you will ever need.” The woman

responded, “No, thank you. I need a pickup truck for my small business.” The salesman became irritated: “What? Is the model Z not good enough for you? I’ll have you know my whole family drives model Zs. In fact, everybody in this town drives one.” Departing, the woman said, “Sir, I believe the model Z is a fine and versatile vehicle, but what I want and need is a truck.”

You see, most independent schools are not like a Jaguar or a Maserati or a Rolls-Royce. While you would be hard-pressed to find an independent school of low quality, most of them do not intend to be academically superior or elitist in any way. They are simply different. They are designed to meet the educational goals of a specific cultural group. They are designed by parents who hold the best interests of their children at heart. And they are designed by parents who hold the best interests of Canada at heart.

Most independent schools have proved over the years that they prepare young people for a productive and positive role as citizens of this great country. But more than that, typically our students show great love today for their neighbours and their neighbourhoods as they play road hockey, tidy up streets, participate in minor sports, visit the elderly, hold down part-time jobs and have friendly conversations across the back fence. They are able to do so, in great part, because they have a clear understanding of who they are culturally and the role they are called to fill in this world. Most independent schools have encouraged young people to be stalwart and gentle citizens for a prosperous and multicultural Canada.

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to an interesting item from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation’s submission to this committee, as found on their Web site. It says, “Today, OSSTF takes pride, as should the citizens of Ontario, in the fact that 95% of Ontario’s students attend public schools—the highest percentage anywhere in the free world.” If we agree with the OSSTF, given the current situation, where public education is the only choice for people of limited means, the things of which we actually boast are the financial chains which bind people to public education.

Let’s change that. Let’s trust parents to make wise choices for their children. If we then have a public education system that 95% of the population has freely chosen for their children, that indeed will be something to brag about. However, I would far rather reserve my boasting for that great day when 100% of the children of Ontario are financially able to attend a high-quality, culturally appropriate school of their parents’ choice.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak on this very important and timely subject, and thank you all for the brave steps taken to introduce fairness to education funding in Ontario.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus. I’ll start with the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation, a very well-prepared and well-presented presentation that deals with the issue as it relates to your

particular situation, your involvement in the education system.

One thing that has come out a number of times during the hearings is presenters putting forward a proposition that this will see a great change in the student population from the public system to the independent system. The concern, of course, is that this will happen and that the system you're involved with is not accountable and the students will then not have an accountable education, as they have a right to expect in the province of Ontario. Could you tell me a little bit about what you think makes your school accountable to the parents and the students in your system?

Mr Duiker: Yes, I'd be pleased to do that. Our parents, by the very fact that they have chosen this school and are supporters of school choice, tend to be, shall I say, a tough bunch on teachers. They have very high expectations, partly because they pay tuition, I suppose, but they are very involved in the school and we are accountable directly to the parents. That's probably the highest form of accountability that exists in the school system. If we fail as teachers in our school, we don't just hear about it from school principals who are watching us, but we hear about it directly from parents, and the parents have a direct function in the governance of the school. So we have a very close-knit relationship, parents to teachers. We work as a team. That works very well.

The Chair: The official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for coming. I appreciate your being here. I know you were at the Toronto hearings and the government didn't put you in then. They finally got you here. It's a long trip from Stayner. I appreciate the sincerity of your views today.

Can you just inform the committee, what portion of the tuition paid at your school is education and what portion of it is the religious portion for the purposes of income tax?

Mr Duiker: I don't know exactly what the figures are.

Mr Kennedy: Can you give us a rough breakdown?

Mr Duiker: I can tell you that it's going to vary with the number of children you have in the school.

Mr Kennedy: Say, just for the sake of comparison, you had one child. How much of that would be a religious credit and how much would be an education credit?

Mr Duiker: I believe if you had one child, it's approximately half. I don't know exactly. I can tell you that I have three children. I received no tuition receipt when I had three children in the school. Now that I have a daughter in high school, I did receive a small donation receipt.

Mr Kennedy: Why do you think the government has designed a means of supporting, potentially, your school and the school you may end up sending your children to in the near future, but to a lesser extent your school than private sector schools? For private sector schools there's no guessing involved; they get the full \$3,500 benefit. I hear you saying in your presentation that you should put some income ceilings on, but we heard the Treasurer last week say no, that would be wrong. I'm just wondering,

do you think it's right that you're in the same boat with the well-off schools, the elite schools and so on? Why do you think the government has done that? Obviously, it's a deliberate thing. The government has put all kinds of private schools in the same boat. You mentioned culturally appropriate, you mentioned religious choice and so on. The largest number of families benefiting will be neither, and I'm just wondering, why do you think the government has done that?

Mr Duiker: First of all, I'd like to say that you guys all do quite a good job of disagreeing with one another already without my assistance. My best interests are served by a collaborative means of decision-making among you. I don't really want to judge the intent of the government. I do want to point out that I see a better way to do this, I guess. That's all I wanted to address. I don't want to say something like they have friends in high places or something like that, because I don't know.

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Mr Kennedy: I'm not asking that. I'm just curious—

The Chair: Mr Kennedy, we've run out of time. I have to go to Ms Martel. Two minutes goes very quickly when you're having a good time.

Mr Duiker: I'm sorry. I'll speak faster next time.

Ms Martel: Thank you for coming this long way. You must have driven about three hours to be here and we appreciate that.

I must confess that I don't know anything about your school, so let me ask you this question: do you accept children of all faiths at your school?

Mr Duiker: Yes, we do.

Ms Martel: So, if we're Catholic, it would not be a problem for us to participate?

Mr Duiker: That's right. As a matter of fact we've been receiving many inquiries from Catholic people lately, because there are some health concerns within the new Catholic school in Wasaga Beach, so there's a very good chance we'll have a number of Catholic children in our school in September.

Ms Martel: I didn't understand when you talked about your own situation, when you said your parents "were forced to register me and my siblings in a school system which taught inconsistently with our culture." Could you describe what that means?

Mr Duiker: While we do accept children of other faiths, our teaching is distinctly Christian. We believe that if education has anything to do with truth that different cultures have differing views of truth.

We believe the truth of what is contained in the Bible. It is, if you will, the glasses, the spectacles through which we look at the world, and we teach using those spectacles. Of course, Catholics are also Christians. We have unity with Catholics on the fact that we believe in God. I don't want to turn this into a theological thing, but—

Ms Martel: Let me ask you another question. What if you had a family who were Hindus or Muslims, Jews, would you accept all of the above?

Mr Duiker: What would happen in those cases is the children would be accepted into the school, but the parents would not be members of the school association if they don't agree with the statement of principles in the constitution. The parents would not have voting rights and the parents would know that their children are being taught from a Christian perspective.

Ms Martel: OK. Are the children excluded from various tenets of your teaching, then?

Mr Duiker: No.

Ms Martel: Why wouldn't the parents be allowed to be part of the association, then?

Mr Duiker: What has happened, in fact, is that parents who have come in have been ministered to by the ethic of the school—the love that they're surrounded with, by the fact that they can participate. They can see that there's much to admire and learn from the way that Christians run their community, the way that they have community. In some cases it has been a means by which people have joined churches and become Christians.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION
RAINBOW DISTRICT 3

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, district 3. I would ask the presenter to come forward please and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome, and you have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Alexander Bass: I'd like to introduce myself: my name is Alec Bass and I'm president of district 3 OSSTF, which includes Sudbury, Manitoulin and Espanola.

I would like to begin at the outset by thanking the committee for the opportunity to be able to speak. I understand that this is getting to be quite a privilege, and although I feel fortunate that I am here and able to speak, I believe that this discussion deserves a much broader audience, and certainly the implications here with this tax credit go far beyond the simple committee's discussing it in terms of a financial obligation.

As a teacher who has taught in the public education system for 27 years, it is difficult to comprehend that any government would act in such a callous way to achieve its ends by using the lives and education opportunities of our children. I know that this particular government believes that the private sector does things better than the public, but again we're going to the ridiculous.

Public education is the right choice for all Ontarians. I believe it is the only choice for all individuals and families in Ontario who contribute their hard-earned tax dollars to fund a sound public education system which is expected to deliver quality education to their children. Public education is for the common good of society. Public education is the great equalizer within our democratic state. Public education allows universal access to

quality education despite a student's economic circumstances.

The members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Rainbow District 3, believe that Bill 45 is a regressive bill targeted to dismantle public education. The Ontario government was not given a mandate to dismantle public education in the last election.

Our members believe that the initial \$300-million cost to this bill could have been better, more equitably spent on public education. Further, we believe that the \$7,000 loss for every student leaving the public education system to attend a private school because of Bill 45's tax incentives—which results in a net savings of \$3,300 per student to the provincial government—will dramatically reduce board of education funding for public education.

Imagine what a public system could do with \$300 million extra: textbooks; field trips; smaller classes for students; professional development funds so teachers could keep up with the demands and technology of rapidly changing new curriculum; cleaner schools; safe schools; more guidance centres to help our young teenagers with personal problems. The list goes on, as you've heard time and time again in the hearings already.

The problems plaguing the public system in recent years are due to the underfunding and the most chaotic change in curriculum etc in the public schools in Ontario with Bill 74 and Bill 160. A recent poll has indicated that 15% of those parents polled would consider moving their children to private schools with tax subsidies against seeking smaller class sizes, etc—the kinds of things that have been taken out of the public system as a result of funding.

Consider the impact on schools in areas of northern Ontario. I heard a comment made earlier here in terms of if one school closes because of declining enrolment that the students would just simply move to another school. That's impossible, if anybody knows anything about the topography or geography of northern Ontario. Schools aren't just blocks away from each other. They are a three-and-a-half- and four-hour drive from one another.

Last year four of our local high schools were considered for closure due to declining enrolment with this government's direct impact on funding and the impact of the new funding model based on school credits generated. Two schools did close; two communities have lost their public school system. Two have a reprieve for a year and they have to move their enrolment standards to over 500. This legislation will only exacerbate this problem. Whether there are 400 students or 600 students in a building does not change the cost of running that building: the cost of hydro, the cost of maintenance, the cost of repairs, cleaning and so on. This competition for students in northern rural areas will help no one in the education field.

It needs to be pointed out also that the funding has now been frozen and controlled totally by Queen's Park by this government's previous legislation. The public system cannot raise funds to account for changes in enrolment patterns or the various different effects that

may, in a given year, affect various parts of our group. The private system is not under these types of controls. They can raise funds accordingly and have tax incentives and so on available to them to raise these funds in terms of being able to look after their students.

Canada is renowned for its unique cultural identity. We are a cultural mosaic. Bill 45 threatens the very foundation and fabric of our society by promoting segregation. Do we as a society wish to encourage segregation of various cultures by promoting private schools? Will all students from any religion or ethnic gender be allowed to attend some of these private schools funded by everyone's tax dollars? I believe you know the answer, and I believe that the answer is no.

This proposed bill will subsidize education for the wealthy in Ontario—the same people who have already benefited the most from the recent tax cuts the government has offered up. Even Mr Harris and the education minister herself have very recently written letters indicating that to fund private schools will have a disastrous impact on the public education system.

Much of the decision revolves around extending funding to only private religious schools with the argument that the separate school system is already being funded by the public purse and therefore it is discriminatory to other religious groups. I believe that this is another argument altogether. The separate system gets its funding by government decree, and if that is to change, then proper public debate on that issue alone should follow, as was done in Quebec and in Newfoundland recently.

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As we extend funding to private for-profit schools, whether they be religious-based or not, the next step demanded will be from all private schools. How will this be monitored or controlled?

I can readily see a whole host of other applications: ICS, the school of taxidermy, YNN etc. As well, I am concerned with the impact of the NAFTA agreements on the competition in the private sector and the concern that will soon follow as all corporations try to get a part of what they see as a lucrative education market. We may, by international law, not be able to discriminate among these companies or be fined. What impact will that have? There are no controls or accountability in the private schools as there is in the public sector. What we'll have is a two-tiered education system supported by tax dollars with two-tiered accountability—one strict accountability for public schools and no accountability to the private school sector.

Public education is the glue that holds our society together. Bill 45 seeks to dissolve this glue. If the bill is passed, private schools and segregation will increase. If Bill 45 is passed, these schools will increase to such a degree that being placed in the public education system will be for the disadvantaged and the economically deprived. This is not right. This is not what Canada was founded upon. Equality is the cornerstone of our society's structure. Where is the liberty when only some will be allowed to go to the prestigious schools and the less

fortunate cannot? Is this Canada, the land of opportunity? I think not. Bill 45 is poised to take away freedoms from many Canadians and from the people of Ontario.

Ontario's public education system is the foundation of our democracy. Ontario's public schools provide a safe learning community where all cultures and ethnic groups come together to learn and to develop into tolerant, caring citizens. The purpose and the responsibility of our public institutions is to promote tolerance and acceptance of all citizens.

If democracy is to be served in Ontario, public funds—tax credits—must be used for promoting the public good, not for fragmenting or segregating one group from another. The unity and the diversity of public education must not be eroded by public funding for special interest groups. We should not have to give up a good public school system equal to all to support a private education to the few.

The following recommendations are being made:

(1) Those sections of Bill 45 dealing with the tax credits for parents of private school students should be withdrawn.

(2) The \$300 million in the Ontario budget for the tax credits should be reallocated to the budget for public elementary and secondary education.

(3) The government should hold a referendum as in Newfoundland, which asked the following question: "Do you support a single school system where all children, regardless of their religious affiliation, attend the same schools where opportunities for religious education and observances are provided?"

(4) Those sections of Bill 45 dealing with tax credits for parents of private school students be dealt with as policy of the Ontario PC Party and, if supported by the party, brought before the people of Ontario in the next election.

(5) If, after proper consultation and an election mandate, legislation subsidizing private schools is enacted, the government of Ontario should specify what, if any, protections will be put in place to prevent public schools from being fragmented and weakened.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Bartolucci.

Mr Bartolucci: Sandy, thank you very much for your presentation. Let me just ask you a very, very brief question and allow you a minute and a half to answer. Is education in Ontario better off after six years of Mike Harris government, and how will a \$300-million to \$700-million withdrawal from education affect our already eroding system?

Mr Bass: It certainly isn't. In the 27 years that I have been teaching, I have yet to realize the stress, the concern, the lack of funding, the lack of textbooks, the lack of proper curriculum. All the things that were part and parcel of a normal, healthy education system that had been for years, since Bill 160 has been introduced, are gone. We have fragmentation in our schools. We have concerns about extracurricular. We have an overworked, stressed-out workforce. The government is the only one

that can't seem to understand some of the major issues that I hear from every sector in the province in terms of dealing with how to improve the delivery of public education.

Again, sad to say, it seems that with this new legislation we are going down another step into the darkness in terms of fundamentally changing dramatically the education system. It certainly has not improved.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Sandy, for making a presentation to us today. You have talked about this as an incentive. Why would parents in the Rainbow District School Board, either at the elementary or secondary panel, make a decision finally to switch their kids to a private school? What is happening in the classroom today that would push them to finally doing this?

Mr Bass: I think personally this is something that this government has been busy doing since it was elected. It has been steadily putting down public education teachers, it has been questioning their qualifications, it has been wondering about the abilities of certain students, testing them, and casting almost a shadow, a pall, of ineptitude, I said, in terms of public education. That has been going on, and at the same time that's been going on, I think \$2.3 billion has been removed from education. We're talking billions of dollars in the last seven or eight years.

I think that a lot of people are looking—they realize the importance of education—to different areas and saying, with so much turmoil in the public system, if they had an opportunity to get smaller classes, proper textbooks, proper equipment, properly educated teachers and so on, they believe that is in the private sector.

Although I know for a fact the private sector is not subject to the same credentials that we need to have—they are not subject to the College of Teachers, to the testing that we already have, to the rules and the testing that is ongoing in the high school system; again, I'm talking from the secondary level, and certainly the elementary—I believe that they believe that will be there.

Again, it's the problem. The public sector is controlled by its funding envelopes and by legislation that has been put in. I don't know how the private sector will deal with that. I understand the Christian schools have recently raised \$500,000—that's a half a million dollars—to promote their wanting the tax credits to go through. The public system doesn't have access to that kind of money.

Mr Wood: You're no doubt familiar with the recent grade 10 tests in which in the two public systems about 68% of the students scored at the expected level. The students in the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools took the same test and 82% of them scored at the expected level. Would you agree with me that shows, at least in the alliance member schools, that they're doing a pretty good job of educating the students?

Mr Bass: I would think that the Christian alliance schools may be doing quite a good job in terms of doing the reading. I guess the implication that I'm getting here is that you're suggesting that in the public system it would be much lower.

Mr Wood: No. Lest you misunderstand, I took from that that they were probably doing a good job of educating the students in the Christian system. There's no implication that somebody else wasn't doing a good job. We have to have a benchmark to compare and they seem to be ahead of the largest benchmark, which is the two public systems.

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Mr Bass: I can answer that by saying the school that I work at in Sudbury here scored 78% on that test. There are other schools in Sudbury that have a very high rate of special education, learning disabled and so on and so forth. Sudbury Secondary scored much lower on that test. I don't believe that particular test, administered the way it was administered, does particularly signify whether one person is doing better or not better. I think it implies that things can improve. I agree things can improve. I'm not trying to pretend that all of the changes that are coming down that this government has tried to do in education are bad. I think some of them are very positive. But there are some very bad ones.

To answer your question, I don't know that that particular test is a test that says one group is doing it any better than the other.

My concern is the funding issue. If this bill goes through, then private schools can raise funds wherever they need to in terms of correcting whatever service. They can have a class size that they determine is the appropriate class size. The public system is not privy to that. It has rules and regulations that it must follow.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION,
SUDBURY SECONDARY UNIT

The Chair: Our next presentation is from OECTA, Sudbury Secondary Unit. I would ask the presenters to please come forward and state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Nina Stapleton: I'd like to thank the committee for allowing us to appear before you today. My name is Nina Stapleton. I'm president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, the secondary unit. The lady next to me is Cheryl Chamberland, a teacher and an executive member of our union. We represent the Catholic secondary teachers who are employed by the Sudbury Catholic District School Board.

We view the tax credit as a further erosion of public institutions, such as education and health care, that Ontarians hold dear. Public school funding is based upon student enrolment, which is approximately \$7,000 per student. If the government gives parents a \$3,500 tax credit, the government will gain a profit of \$3,500 per student. It is a set-up for the destruction of the public school system in Ontario.

The Ontario government has cut \$2.3 billion from school boards over the last six years. While some schools did receive more money than they had been receiving annually four years ago, it was at the expense of other schools in large urban areas such as Toronto and Ottawa. This government is playing a shell game with its bookkeeping in an attempt to hide its real agenda from the people of Ontario.

When the Conservative government assumed power, the provincial debt stood at \$90.7 billion and today the debt has risen to \$110.7 billion. Ontarians might well ask where the money has gone, especially considering the severe funding cuts to both health care and education.

The government's plan to implement tax credits for private schools really represents a voucher system. The average Ontario family is working so hard to maintain a decent standard of living that they might not have had the time to research what the voucher system is. Using the government's number of a \$3,500 tax credit for each student going to a private school, a parent would have to top this figure up from other family funds. Given that tuitions for private schools range from roughly \$5,000 to \$40,000 per annum, and given that the average family in Ontario has two children, we purport that this would create a severe burden on average families, and many of these are trying to save money to send their children to post-secondary educational institutions.

When asked during the leaders' debate if Premier Harris favoured vouchers for private schools, Premier Harris replied he was clearly opposed to them. On April 10, 2001, Mr Harris insisted that vouchers "have never been espoused by me or the Minister of Education."

In a January 2000 letter to Mr McGuinty, the Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, said that financial aid to private schools would undermine the public system and "would remove from our public education system at least \$300 million per year," with some estimates as high as \$700 million.

A Toronto Star article on May 23, 2001, estimates the cost of the tax credit could rise to \$2 billion in five years—so up goes the provincial debt again.

To quote an article in *The Globe and Mail*, "When public school parents already feel compelled to raise \$30 million a year to buy essential supplies for the province's elementary classrooms, what noble doctrine underlines the Ontario government's decision to spend up to \$300 million annually to cushion what parents spend on private school tuitions?"

I am a parent also. I have one student in university and one currently in grade 11 in high school. I have experienced my older child in grade 10 not being able to do science homework, and when we questioned him why, he told us, "Mum, there's only one set of textbooks for science and there are five classrooms taking science at the grade 10 level, so we can't have a book to bring home." We had to go out and purchase our own textbook. Luckily and thankfully, we had enough money to do so.

I have here in my hand a letter from one of the public high schools in Sudbury, which one of our children

attends because they offer a program that our system can't afford to offer at this point in time. It's a letter of request from the fundraising committee for the Lockerby basketball association. Kids in northern Ontario are at a disadvantage. If they want to be competitive, they have to travel. They have to go to other northern Ontario cities and they can't afford to do this. They can't even afford to go to their local NOSSA meetings any longer when they have these with regard to the various events in sports, and parents have to come forward.

This letter is asking our family, as a household, either to hand over to this committee \$500 or initially to give a deposit of \$50, which will be refunded if our child does not make the basketball team. He has for the last four years, so I presume he will. It's asking us to either come up with \$500 or to raise \$500, and that is just in one area. People in the north are being short-shrifted all around. Yes, luckily we have the resources as a family to provide this for our child, but I know that countless other families will not do that. Surely all of us must recognize that if children are involved in extracurricular sports and activities, this will keep them off drugs, stop them from smoking, they will be less likely to turn to drinking and they will develop into very good citizens for the future of this province.

In my opinion it appears, though, that Mr Harris is pandering to the likes of Stockwell Day and his supporters, whose party platform espouses tax credits for private schools. Ontario has two publicly funded systems of education to which parents can send their children. It should be the priority to fund and manage these systems so that every child's scholastic needs are met. The taxpayer should not be expected to fund a variety of special interest schools when it's obvious that to do so would harm the existing systems, particularly when only the wealthy will be able to afford the private schools, even with a tax rebate.

Since the choice of a private school education is often a response to what are seen as shortcomings in the present education system, that is, the public, we would like to point out, as teachers, that the government, through the Ministry of Education, sets the curriculum and methodology by which each subject must be taught. Therefore, in many instances, the perceived failures in our education system can be laid squarely at the feet of the government.

In its usual haste, the Ministry of Education has implemented too many changes in curriculum in too short a time, with not enough planning and little in-service training for teachers. This has led to disasters such as a 30% to 35% failure rate in the new grades 7 to 9 mathematics programs, and the complete loss of suitable programs for previously basic-level students, that is, the students who will not be going to college, who will not be going to university. They are going to fall through the cracks.

I want to stop at this point from what I have printed and refer to one of the questions that was asked of the previous speaker with regard to why perhaps some of the Christian schools are doing better in test scoring. First of all, these children can be hand-picked. Any private

school can turn a child away. Secondly, in the public school systems, we had children who were taking courses under special ed at the basic level when these tests were done and those people were counted as part of the test result. Therefore, the test results were skewed.

There are some 734 private schools. Yes, I grant they came in in the top 20 in the testing. However, Lockerby Composite, which is the school in Sudbury that my son goes to, came in 49th. I went to see what some of the criteria were and how they managed to do so well. Well, in the school, they only have 30 students who are taking courses at the general level. The rest of the students in that school are at the academic and high end of academic. That's why the test results were skewed. To have this thrown back in the face of the educators, thrown back at the school boards, thrown back at the public education system I think is really misleading to the people in Ontario.

1350

We believe most people who live outside the greater Toronto area will not be able to send their children to private schools even with the tax credit. Northern communities such as Kirkland Lake, Timmins, Red Lake, Parry Sound and even schools in the Bruce Peninsula really will not be able to be in a situation to provide a viable education. All that's required, though, to open a private school is \$250 and an application form.

As was said earlier, the teachers who teach in these situations and the administration are not required to follow the Ontario curriculum. They don't have to use standardized report cards. They can choose whether or not to participate in the tests. And their teachers do not have to belong to the Ontario College of Teachers. In fact, only 130 of the 734 private institutions that provide education in Ontario have their teachers belong to the College of Teachers. They won't be required to take the government's teacher recertification testing or upgrading courses. Finally, they're not subject to any public scrutiny or public accountability. In fact, one of my teachers said to me the other day, "We wonder whether or not they'll even be subject to the police checks that other teachers are required to undergo." We believe that accountability should be required of everyone who receives public money.

In Sudbury, there are a few private schools. It appears that none of these schools, which offer full-time day programs for students, offers courses or education for children with special needs and a lower-than-average learning ability.

The specifics of some of these schools are interesting. The Learning Centre, for instance, on Bancroft Drive, has seven students and one full-time teacher. It doesn't provide for special-needs children. The Learning Centre charges tuition of \$8,000 per year. If parents want to fundraise at bingo games every 11 days or so, they can somewhat reduce their commitment to the \$8,000.

The Baron Academy, which is another private school in Sudbury, charges a tuition fee of \$7,500. This has to be paid upfront. So if something happens when your

child is in the school and they no longer like your child, or for some reason your child is having difficulty and does not want to attend the school any more, you're still on the hook for the \$7,500. I also want to add that there's a \$500 testing/assessment fee before your child would even be accepted into the school. Needless to say, they do not take children at the lower academic level.

I'd like to point out that at these schools all of the classes are split-level, that is, two grades taught by one teacher in one classroom. As experienced teachers, we know this really does not work for the benefit of the student.

At the Baron Academy they have 51 students. If you can't afford the tuition, you need not apply. As with that school, the other one and a third one that I'm going to speak about, the parents have to supply their own transportation costs. The Sudbury Catholic District School Board, the Rainbow District School Board and the two francophone boards in northern Ontario pooled transportation to get the cost down to approximately \$500 per student.

The total number of students in these schools is 138. That includes the Glad Tidings Academy, from which the fellow presented here earlier. Their tuition is \$3,500 per student, but their congregation subsidizes that so the parents really are not on the hook for any more money.

If we take a look at this number of 138 just for these three schools, it represents a loss of about \$1 million to the two publicly funded school systems in Sudbury. If Mr Harris's tax credit goes through, it will actually mean a net gain to the government of a half a million dollars. Again, we wonder where the money is going to be spent.

Under the tax credit program, if 10% of the school-children in Sudbury were to go to a private school, the two existing public boards—that's the public board and the Catholic district separate board, which have a population student base of 24,700—would lose \$17.290 million and the Conservative government would pocket \$8.645 million. Just to put it down into smaller terms, a loss of 10 students from one of our local schools represents a \$70,000 loss. However, the school still has to pay heating costs, transportation, maintenance and so on. This will bring about more school closures because the boards' hands are tied financially, especially in relation to Bill 160, which removed the rights of local boards to tax. This whole thing is going to bring about a further erosion of the fibre in the local communities in northern Ontario.

One of the presenters earlier alluded to the fact that she chose to live on the lake and hence paid higher taxes. Well, we know how many people around this province are buying bottled water but they still have to fund the public water system. So unless we're going to provide tax rebates in every case of personal choice, over and above what's provided by the public system, something that as Ontarians we know we really cannot possibly afford to do, then we should not be making exceptions for things that are not going to benefit all Ontarians. If

it's something that's going to benefit everyone, no problem.

It is very disconcerting also to see that economically poor states in the United States such as Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee and Mississippi spent more money per student than Ontario in the 1999-2000 school year. In fact, Ontario ranked 57th out of 63 US states and Canadian provinces and territories in educational spending.

The people of Ontario well understand that we need to be socially responsible for the well-being of all the children of this province. They are our future and we must allow all of them every effort to succeed. That's the mandate of any intelligent and caring society with a vision.

We believe that Ontarians want to be socially responsible and that is why the Sudbury secondary teachers of OECTA recommend the following: the tax credit plan be withdrawn from Bill 45; the government allocate more time for debate on what can be considered the biggest shift in education in Ontario in over 200 years; and that all schools that receive public monies be fully accountable to all Ontario taxpayers. Thank you.

The Chair: We have about a minute and a half per caucus.

Ms Martel: Nina, you've been in the school system for a long time. I should tell people you were one of my teachers and that will really date both of us.

Ms Stapleton: Thanks, Shelley.

Ms Martel: Tell me, though, in the last number of years, what are the changes you've seen in the education system in this community? I want you to talk about the province. If we extend the tax credit, which will surely mean \$300 million to fund that which would have gone to the public system, what would be the impact of that loss?

Ms Stapleton: I can just speak about a couple of the secondary schools on our level. We didn't have textbooks, we didn't have a clear-cut curriculum. The teachers were trying to scrounge to put together material, but then were put on paper rations. So we couldn't even hand out runoff copies to students because there wasn't enough money in the budget to provide for paper. Consequently, the children did not get the material they needed. Furthermore, the curriculum also was not really geared to the needs of the children. It was something hastily put together, rammed down our throats, no preparation for it, and a lot of it was superfluous. The whole education concept of reform is great, but we should have backed it up to about the grade 3 or 4 level and introduced it very slowly. Then we wouldn't have the failure rate of 30% to 35% in the mathematics and science areas of testing that took place, Shelley.

The Chair: The government side.

Mr Spina: Thanks for coming before the committee, Ms Stapleton. The United Nations claimed that funding the Catholic system was discriminatory. Earlier, Doreen Dewar of the Rainbow board—I'm sure you know who she is—indicated that she felt there should be one single publicly funded system. My question is, what's the alternative? Should everyone be funded equally regardless of

faith or should the Catholic system be amalgamated into the public system? What's your opinion?

Ms Stapleton: I think earlier the fellow from Glad Tidings talked about the realities of how the Catholic system came into being, and that was through the French Canadian Catholics, who were the majority at that time, the Irish Catholics and so on, and the Protestants. So that was written in and we got the funding.

Mr Spina: But that's constitutionality. I'm asking you for your opinion.

Ms Stapleton: That's the constitutionality. I will quote to you—I don't know if you fellows have had the chance to meet Peter Lauwers, who helped to orchestrate Bill 160 for your government for a phenomenal amount of money. I had the pleasure of negotiating across the table with him in 1998, and in a sidebar conversation he said to me, "Well, you know, Nina, before we ever brought in a one-school public school system or a referendum or a voucher system, we would go to the people of Ontario and have a double referendum. We would ask if the majority of Ontarians believed in one public school system, and the majority of Catholics supported one public school system whereby Catholics could take religious classes and Muslims could take their classes and Jewish people could take their classes." He told me it was in the government's plans that that's what they would do.

I think he's pretty close to the government, because when Mr Snobelen was on television that very evening in the fall when we were all on the edge of strikes, and he made this announcement that the government would allow boards some movement within the envelope, Mr Lauwers left the room, came back five minutes later and had just been on the phone to Mr Snobelen. So I know that's how close he was to the government. So back as far as three years ago, I knew what the plans were.

1400

The Chair: I have to go to the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: There are a number of points that are very helpful in your presentation. One that I think maybe is worth drawing emphasis to is, you indicate that if just 10% of the people in this area were able to find alternatives with the encouragement, the push being given by this government in this measure, there would be a loss of some \$17 or \$18 million. Just to put that in perspective, so far the government has taken away about \$19 million. So this measure, by itself, would virtually double the degradation of the resources and the quality of education in terms of the direction.

I think it's very important for people in the community to know that, because I think some people think this might just nibble around the edges. This could make a very substantive attack. I'm just wondering, in areas like special education and some of the other things you've mentioned, give us an idea of what could happen if you lost as much again as what already has been taken away.

Ms Stapleton: I can just give you one example about special education and special-needs children. For instance, in one of our schools, St Charles College, these

kids are in wheelchairs and they're really not on a level playing field, even within their own classrooms. Some of them are in wheelchairs, some of them are on crutches, some of them are in bed. We used to have pool time funded for these kids, to put them on a level playing field. I just spoke to the special ed teacher and they've had to raise \$1,400 because the board could no longer afford to pay for it. So the children themselves raised \$1,400 to access pool time.

But the cost you talk about, the \$19 million removed from the school communities in Sudbury, coupled with what I read now is something like another \$40-million cost to the restructuring of our hospitals in Sudbury, which the Sudbury taxpayers are going to have to take up, I don't really know what's going on. I'm beginning to wonder if this whole restructuring concept hasn't been a gift to the construction industry on the part of the government, at the expense of students and citizens in this province who are no longer able to keep up with the standard of living they've had over the last 10 years.

I read the other day that if the regular Ontarian and Canadian were to get the same increase as CEOs across this country have had over the last 20 years, the minimum wage would be \$24. That's how far behind the average person is in this province.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

LO-ELLEN PARK SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNCIL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Lo-Ellen Park Secondary School Council. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes.

Ms Mary Hewitt: My mouth is dry. I don't know why. I get really nervous when I do these. After all these years, I still get nervous.

My name is Mary Hewitt. I am the past chair of the Lo-Ellen Park school council. We really appreciate the opportunity today to present to this committee.

Lo-Ellen Park Secondary School is a community school with an enrolment of just over 700 students. We consider a well-rounded education important, with an emphasis on languages, science, technology, drama, music, art and athletics. Our school also has French immersion and, starting in September, the international baccalaureate program. Over 80% of our students go on to college or university. Lo-Ellen is located in the south end of Sudbury and services an area south along Highway 69 to Killarney and the French River. Some of our students spend over two to three hours a day on a school bus.

The Lo-Ellen school council believes that public education should deal with every student equally and justly. We feel that the proposed tax credit for parents of private school students will harm Ontario public educa-

tion. Therefore, we ask the committee to recommend to the Legislature not to pass this tax credit.

We would like to comment on four issues. One is funding. The province of Ontario cannot afford to grant a tax credit to parents of private school students when the public schools are so seriously underfunded. Their budgets have been slashed in the last few years. In 1996, the former Sudbury board of education, with a similar enrolment to the Rainbow District School Board, received funding of \$139,232,779. In the year 2000, the Rainbow District School Board continued to cut programs because they only received funding of some \$120,745,539. That is a loss of almost \$20 million in four years, with a doubling of the geographical area.

Northern communities have a resource-based economy. As companies reduce their workforce to remain globally competitive, northern school boards are consequently facing declining enrolment. It becomes very challenging, between provincial funding cuts and a declining enrolment, to offer quality education when schools are spread out over a large geographical area of 13,390 square kilometres. We believe that our board is doing the best it can with the resources at its disposal.

It has been suggested that the tax credit will cost \$300 million or more. This is money that should be invested in public schools. Last week our principal spent \$44,000 on textbooks for the new grade 11 curriculum. Lo-Ellen's share of the provincial textbook grant is \$14,000, a difference of \$30,000. Why has the Ministry of Education cut back the textbook grant for the new grade 11 curriculum? Is this money being spent to fund the tax credit for parents of private school students?

Money needs to be added to public schools, not taken away. It is frustrating for our school council to watch programs, staff, school supplies and equipment being reduced or cut altogether in order to meet the financial criteria laid out by the Ministry of Education. There is a concern that giving parents of private school students a tax credit will be the first step toward further funding.

We cannot trust the government in this. Only a short time ago, Mr Harris's government warned the Supreme Court of Canada and the United Nations that giving any money to private schools would have a detrimental impact and erode public education in Ontario. We appreciate that the Ontario government must live within its means and reduce the deficit. However, granting any funding to private schools seems to contradict the philosophy of the current Ontario government. This government has consolidated hospitals, school boards and municipalities to save the taxpayers money. We believe that a tax credit to parents of private school students will fragment education rather than consolidate it.

Our second issue is the perception of public schools. What shapes the public's attitudes towards educational issues? The OISE/U of T 1998 survey states, "A wide variety of factors shape people's attitudes towards educational institutions: their own interests and direct experiences; perspectives advanced by those they talk to

and respect; pervasive messages from the media and public figures.”

We believe that the current educational reforms have sent a negative message through the media to the public, who perceive that the public education system is not meeting the needs of its students, therefore causing some to lose confidence in the public education system. The OISE/U of T survey states “In 1998, respondents are almost twice as likely to believe that high school education is getting worse than to think that it is getting better ... Satisfaction with the school system declines with age. Those under 25 are almost twice as likely to be satisfied with schools as those over 55. We find similar patterns regarding satisfaction with the value for tax money and with student discipline.”

The survey continues. It shows that 70% of the public perceive that getting a post-secondary education is necessary. “A community college education is regarded as the minimum credential needed and more than a quarter think that a university degree is needed. Conversely, hardly anyone in Ontario believes that you can get along in contemporary society without a high school diploma. There is clearly a widespread belief that we are now living in a credential-based society in which an advanced formal education is increasingly highly valued.”

This perception places a great deal of stress on students and parents, especially when a student is struggling in school. The double cohort and the Grade 10 literacy test adds to this stress. If a child does not pass the literacy test, he or she will not get a secondary school diploma, without which they cannot go to college or university. Instead, the student will get a certificate if they pass all their courses. There are no exemptions from taking this test, preventing many learning-disabled students from going to college or university after high school. Universities and colleges admit exceptional students who have difficulty with written communication and provide support for them. They acknowledge that many exceptional students develop skills to compensate for their learning disabilities. So why should students who have no hope of passing the literacy test stay in school when they will not get a diploma?

1410

I am quite concerned about this, because I have two children who have severe learning disabilities in written communication and they could not pass this literacy test. One was accepted at Queen’s University for civil engineering and the other is at Brock University for biological sciences. I really don’t think they would be there if they were under the new curriculum.

Parents want their children to be successful in school and gain meaningful employment. If parents perceive that their children will not be successful in public schools, they send them to private schools. There is an increase in students attending private schools or in home schooling, which seems to coincide with the funding cuts to education in recent years.

Public schools are not perfect. Encouraging parents to send their children to private schools will not solve any

problems in public schools, either real or imagined. We believe that a strong, properly funded public school system can meet the needs of all students in Ontario

Accountability: all schools receiving public money must strictly follow the guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education. According to the Education Act, “‘private school’ means an institution at which instruction is provided at any time between the hours of 9 am and 4 pm on any school day for five or more pupils who are of or over compulsory school age in any of the subjects of the elementary or secondary school courses of study and that is not a school as defined in this section.” Private schools do not have to follow the Ontario curriculum or have certified teachers as instructors. In the last few years, parents, the public and the government have called for accountability for publicly funded schools. This accountability should extend to any private school that receives public money or to parents who receive a tax credit. They must strictly follow education guidelines.

All schools that receive public money must: (1) follow the provincial curriculum; (2) all students must write all provincial tests, including the EQAO and grade 10 literacy test, except where exempted for special needs; (3) all teachers must be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers and follow the “standards for mandatory professional development with re-certification every five years, performance appraisals, evaluation, and de-certification will be phased in.”

Equal educational opportunities for all students in Ontario: Ontario needs a public school system that will provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Any school receiving money, tax credits or vouchers from the government must accept any student who applies. When funding was extended to separate schools in 1985, they had to accept non-Catholic students.

Currently there are four publicly funded school systems. Granting any kind of money—a tax credit or voucher system—to private schools will further fragment education. Quebec—in 1993—and Newfoundland—in 1997—no longer have denominational schools.

The multicultural society in which we live needs an inclusive education system providing equal educational opportunities and social space for all. Ontario needs to give students, parents, teachers, schools and school boards a consistent education policy that is not driven by or for business, private interests or partisan priorities. Public education must deal with everyone equally and justly; it must not discriminate against any one person or group.

In conclusion, Ontario cannot afford a tax credit to parents of private school students; all publicly funded schools must be equally accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario; public schools must be perceived as good places to educate your children; Ontario must have a public education system that provides inclusive educational opportunities that are just and equal for all students in this province.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus, and I’ll start with the government side.

Mr Gill: On the third page, one of the things you mention is, “We believe that a strong, properly funded public school system can meet the needs of all students in Ontario.” Are you saying we should have just one system and not Catholic or francophone? Is that what you’re suggesting there?

Ms Hewitt: This was not an issue that was discussed at our council meeting.

Mr Gill: I just want you to elaborate on that point.

Ms Hewitt: In this document, “public school system” refers to the four public school systems we currently have.

Mr Gill: The UN said, about a year ago, that if we keep funding the way we are funding the current system, it’s discriminatory to some of the other—I come from a Sikh background. What’s your opinion or comment on that?

Ms Hewitt: Well, the Ontario government felt that, in response to the UN—

Mr Gill: I meant your comment.

Ms Hewitt: Yes, I know. Let me finish, please. The Ontario government made the comment that funding various denominational schools, be they Christian, Sikh or others, would be detrimental to the public school system.

My personal point of view is that we should have one publicly funded school system, perhaps divided along language lines similar to what Quebec has.

The Chair: The official opposition. Mr Bartolucci.

Mr Bartolucci: Thank you very much for your excellent presentation and for your continuing dedication to the public education system. Your presentations are always well researched and well thought out.

You will know that the Rainbow district board had about a \$2-million reduction in funding from the province this year and had to use some reserves—\$1.2 million, I believe. It’s important for the government members to understand: first of all, can the Rainbow district board sustain that and, second, what is the impact when there’s a severe reduction on a school like Lo-Ellen, where there are dedicated teachers, dedicated parents, dedicated students? It really is a model.

Ms Hewitt: For one thing, I know our board cannot continue to take money out of its reserve fund. Our board has been using its reserve for the past few years to maintain what we consider to be the absolute minimum that we can offer. I’ve had a child at Lo-Ellen since 1990. I have always been a very active member of that school community, and I see we need a lot more money. There are not enough textbooks. Our band is getting no money from the school for instruments. It is the parents who are maintaining it. Our drama department is the same. Our teachers are to be congratulated for doing the best and making everything work for our students.

By the way, our school had almost 95% of its extra-curricular or co-curricular activities up and running all year, but with the help of members of the community—many of our students with an adult support, including my daughter. She wanted to have the evening of one-acts, which have been at Lo-Ellen for 13 years, and she

organized it with a parent’s support. Also, she and her friends went on to represent northeastern Ontario at the Canadian Improv Games in Ottawa. They have never had an adult coach; they have always coached themselves. An adult has always been present to make sure they behave appropriately.

The Chair: Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Mary, for taking the time to make a presentation today. I appreciated particularly the financial information with respect to the Rainbow District School Board, which shows a loss of almost \$20 million in four years. I didn’t realize it was that high.

Ms Hewitt: I’d be glad to give you copies of our annual general report. I have a stack of them at home about this high.

Ms Martel: I didn’t realize it was that high, which gives you some idea of the problems we’ve got in the community.

I just want to focus on accountability, because the government’s budget stressed the word numerous times throughout the document and yet we find ourselves in the position that unless the government is prepared to bring forward amendments, and we haven’t seen them yet, the government is not going to make private schools accountable in the same way that public schools are. You’ve taken some time to list those, and so have other presenters. Why do you think the government is quite prepared to give public money to private schools but not demand that those same private schools be accountable as every other teacher, school and board is in the public system?

1420

Ms Hewitt: I don’t understand that, because accountability has been a pillar of their education reforms. I mean, teacher testing—all of this is new. The EQAO, I believe, is—no, the EQAO been around longer than that; my son was in it. Originally, the EQAO was just a sampling across the province, but now I believe it’s in every grade 3, 6 and 9 class in the province, and they brought in the grade 10 testing. The government has shown how important accountability is, and that’s why I don’t understand.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Hewitt: I have one more thing, actually, just very briefly. I have with me a letter from the school council coordinating committee of the Rainbow District School Board. I’m not going to speak to it, but I just ask that you read the concerns they have.

The Chair: OK. I’ll make sure the clerk distributes a copy of the letter to every member.

STUDENT GENERAL ASSOCIATION,
LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Student General Association, Laurentian University. I would ask the presenter to come forward, please. On behalf of the

committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Suzanne Legault: My name is Suzanne Legault. I'm vice-president, student issues, of the Student General Association at Laurentian University, also local 30 of the Canadian Federation of Students.

On behalf of the SGA, the CFS and in solidarity with all those organizations and individuals who oppose the introduction of a tax credit to parents wishing to send their children to private schools, I will be speaking against Bill 45.

If Bill 45 is passed, those sending their children to private schools would receive substantial tax credits. Like the recently passed Bill 132 permitting the establishment of private, for-profit universities in Ontario, such an initiative will undermine public education. Using public dollars to fund private schools is the wrong direction. The Ontario government itself has pegged the cost of this move at \$300 million a year. This constitutes nothing short of a direct attack on a publicly funded, quality and accessible education system.

Public schools have been severely underfunded, with over \$1,000 per student cut since 1995. An expected 330,000 students will be lured away from the public system by the introduction of this tax credit, and each lost student will represent a \$7,000 drop in provincial funding to a school. In other words, the creation of incentives for those students from wealthier backgrounds to move to private schools forces public schools to struggle with reduced enrolment and fewer public dollars.

We reject the rhetoric of choice and equity employed as justification for a voucher system. Yes, parents should have the freedom to choose where to send their children to school, but not at the public's expense and especially not with the influence of vouchers as an incentive to choose outside the public system, given the fact that public education is already underfunded.

Ontario's public school system functions to provide all students of all abilities with an equal opportunity to maximize their educational potential, regardless of factors such as race, gender, religion or economic background. Funding private schools does not create equity but rather a segregation of groups within the public community of education because, according to Premier Harris himself, funding private schools would "fragment and weaken our public education system in Ontario, thus undermining the goal of universal access to education and demonstrating an utter lack of accountability to the overall public good to which this government should be committed."

Like the majority of Ontarians, students support increased public funding for public education before tax cuts. For instance, according to a recent Ipsos-Reid poll released on May 7 this year, two thirds or 64% of Ontarians, including a 53% majority of decided PC voters, want increased provincial funding for universities and colleges even if it may mean cancelling tax cuts or reduced spending in other areas.

Students, like most citizens, recognize that a strong system of public education is the foundation of a demo-

cratic society and a vibrant economy. We are opposed to the diversion of more than \$300 million from a public system of education already in crisis. Ontario's public system of education needs new textbooks, improved libraries, smaller class sizes, music classes, cultural studies, physical education and extracurricular activities. Students with disabilities need proper attention. Adult education must be improved and expanded. Teachers and support staff deserve fair wages and workloads. Diversity and tolerance must be promoted within a single system of public education and not fragmented and lost in a segregated, two-tiered system.

The 1999 Blueprint campaign document expressed support for the maintenance of a system of public education, and Janet Ecker and other ministers have made similar statements since. A change of such magnitude should not be disguised as a tax measure and rushed through as a budget item. Fundamental changes should only take place after a thorough and comprehensive discussion involving parents, students, educators and support workers, as well as the government and general population, and should only be implemented after a consensus has been reached.

The public hearings that have been instituted provide only the fiction, but not the substance, of democratic process. They have been organized at short notice and are of very limited duration. Many individual high school students who are deeply concerned about the effects Bill 45 will have on their education, along with many other groups and individuals, have not been given the voice to speak at these hearings. In light of these factors, it is strongly urged that the proposal to establish tax credits for private schools be withdrawn. Thank you.

The Chair: We have approximately five minutes per caucus. I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you very much for your presentation. I appreciate your looking at the broad impact in terms of what this will do for students. I'm wondering, being a lot closer to high school than the rest of us, if you could tell us a little bit more about what this says to the students who aren't done yet, who are maybe hoping to go on to college or university. What does it say about the government's commitment to them?

Ms Legault: I think it basically says there is no real, legitimate commitment on the part of the government to ensure they will have a quality, accessible post-secondary education in the future, especially with Bill 132 being passed and the possibility of for-profit universities setting up in Ontario, the diversion of more public funds into private pockets in that case. It's not clear that we have any guarantees for our future education in any meaningful way.

Mr Kennedy: The rafters of the Legislature just ring with the echo of, "This is for students. This is student-centred and student-focused," and so on. I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit more on what it has been like, over the last six years, for students caught up in the loss of extracurriculars, caught up in the deduction of resources. I think we've got figures today showing that,

compared to, say, brothers or sisters who are five years older, students in this area will be funded \$819 less in the upcoming year. What have some of the experiences been like, and what do you think has been the impact on what students have been able to achieve in the last while?

Ms Legault: Basically, especially as far as smaller schools are concerned, it's a lot more difficult, at least in the context of universities, where I'm speaking from in this case, relating to Bill 132. It is a lot harder to attract students. There have been huge decreases in funding, programs have suffered and a lot of faculty positions have not been renewed. Generally, the overall quality has been diminished, because of trying to make ends meet, and then the programs suffer in the process. Because of that, tuition increases over the past while have been phenomenal, and there's been no commitment on the part of the government to reinstitute a system of grants, instead of loan programs, which just end up increasing the debt for students overall.

Mr Kennedy: Some people say, "Well, people should pay," and so on. Have you seen students not succeed as a result of the increased difficulty?

Ms Legault: Yes, for sure. I know a lot of people who just couldn't continue their education because they simply couldn't afford it.

Mr Kennedy: We used to have a province—if I want to get OAC students upset, I tell them what I paid for tuition: \$750 in 1977 at Trent University. I think there are people in this room who enjoyed the same privilege. The ironic thing is that there are people in this province, the ones who are setting these high tuitions and deregulating tuitions—I know the University of Western Ontario wants to charge \$14,000 per year for medical school next year. The average income of the families is already \$140,000, excluding people. It's more of a comment, but it really seems ironic to me that those who went before and had it a heck of a lot easier—I had a summer job that paid \$12 an hour at that time, and some students haven't had that yet. I'm saying it more for the benefit of the committee, when it comes to their turn to comment, to reconcile taking away resources in high school, making it more difficult to get through, squeezing down the curriculum, putting all the onus on to the students and then making it even tougher to get into post-secondary. It doesn't look like we should have any expectation of generosity on the part of your generation if we continue this.

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Ms Legault: No. I would agree with that completely.

Mr Bartolucci: Just one quick question. You might want to inform the committee: Laurentian University has never run a deficit before; are they running a deficit now?

Ms Legault: I don't have the exact figures right now, but I could provide that for you if you need that.

Mr Bartolucci: OK, great. Your tuition has gone up?

Ms Legault: Yes, 1.96% for the next year.

The Chair: Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: Merci d'être venue ici cet après-midi pour faire une présentation. You are one of the lucky folks in

the province who actually got a spot. I asked the clerk this morning what our numbers were running at, and she advised me that about 880 people requested standing to deal with this bill. I suspect the overwhelming majority want to focus on the tax cut and not other parts of Bill 45. Clearly, with the limited hearing time we have, a fraction of those people will actually have a chance to get their say.

At the end of your remarks, you talked about the need to expand the hearing process. I wonder if you can explain to the committee why you would ask that. You got your spot; you've had a chance to come and have your say. Why do we need to hear from more people?

Ms Legault: Basically to ensure that all representative groups and individuals get their opinions heard. I think it's just not possible to get an adequate representation in the limited time that has been given for people to express their concerns about it, and a lot of widespread concerns just won't get to be heard and contemplated by the committee because they haven't been given the time.

Ms Martel: You mentioned that in the government election platform in 1999, no mention was made of using public money to fund private schools. Clearly there has been quite a change in what they articulated to the public then and what they are bringing to the public now. Because the government has no mandate to go forward on this issue, is this another reason that you think people should be able to have their say, because it represents such a fundamental shift not only in their policy but frankly in the way we have traditionally funded education in this province?

Ms Legault: Yes, exactly. For such a fundamental policy shift there needs to be a lot more discussion and evaluation of all the implications on all the groups that compose the province and that will be affected by it.

The Chair: Mr Spina.

Mr Spina: Thank you, Ms Legault, for coming; good presentation. Bear with me if I haven't got any background information; I don't have a written context. We're just going by what you said, so I hope you appreciate that. By the way, I just want to indicate that when the NDP government brought in the social contract, there were no public hearings. Many people thought that was a fundamental shift from policy, and did they have that mandate? That's perhaps a rhetorical question at this point.

The United Nations claimed that funding the separate school system—you may have heard this question somewhat earlier—was discriminatory in the province of Ontario and alternatives should be explored. You quite accurately, I think, quoted the response at the time from the Premier and the minister, who said that funding other schools at this point would fragment it. We'd have to take money out of the public system. That would mean funding it fully, as the public and separate school systems are funded now. Tax credits were something else. But you can argue the point if you wish after.

You mentioned, I think, a single publicly funded system. My question to you is, do you think everyone

should be funded equally in their diverse schools, or should the Catholic system, for example, be amalgamated into a single publicly funded system without any funding for the others?

Ms Legault: I think the issue of the Catholic system would have to be dealt with in a separate manner, but as far as this bill is concerned, it's not clear to me that it's an appropriate solution—going in that direction, toward funding private institutions—nor an appropriate Band-Aid to the issue of being discriminatory. It makes the current system worse, and I think we should be going in the opposite direction.

Mr Spina: So you think we should be funding the other schools fully?

Ms Legault: No, I don't.

Mr Spina: We should not fund anybody else, but then we run afoul of the UN in being discriminatory by only funding Catholics. How do we resolve that as a province?

Ms Legault: I would support one system of public education.

Mr Spina: So the other should be melded in. You've mentioned 330,000 students being lured away. I wonder where you got that figure from, if you could help us understand that.

Ms Legault: That was from a June 5 press release of the NDP.

Mr Spina: OK, so it's the NDP press release. All right. No, that's fine.

Ms Martel: Thank you for quoting that.

Mr Spina: We respect that. We don't agree with it but we understand now where you got your point from.

I'm willing to defer to my colleague.

The Chair: There's a minute left if you wish to use it.

Mr Gill: I think you did say something about a private university, as if there are going to be some public funds going in. I think, for the record, it's been made very clear by the minister that if there's a private university, there will not be any public money going to that university. I think you had mentioned that there were going to be some funds going through.

Ms Legault: If private universities do become implemented in the province, it will be a siphoning of public dollars away from the public system because, based on the general agreement on trade and services, if the service of education is allowed to be provided by private companies, then equal weight has to be given to them in the same way that public education is taken into consideration. So there is the possibility that the government could be sued if they don't treat them in the same way.

Mr Gill: I certainly encourage you. Thank you very much for coming, because it takes quite a bit of guts to come to a committee like this. In that respect, let me reassure you there's no public money if there is a private university. I know that's the position the minister has because I happen to be the PA to the minister.

Ms Legault: I would disagree.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

WALTER HALCHUK

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Walter Halchuk, if you could come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Bartolucci: Luck of the draw, are you, Walter? Walter was the lucky guy who won the draw.

The Chair: There were four names in the draw this morning and that name came up.

Mr Walter Halchuk: Good afternoon. My name is Walter Halchuk. As has been mentioned to you, I am the lucky one who got drawn.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee members for the opportunity to address you on this issue, Bill 45. I am speaking to you as an individual and not as a representative of any group or association, even though I belong to six and serve on the board of four.

I'm a businessman with a history of volunteer community service that goes back to the early 1970s, when I had the pleasure and honour to be part of the youth advisory committee to the forward-thinking Sudbury city council.

My interest in this method of broader support for education stems from the values passed down to me by my parents and this multicultural community. My parents came from Ukraine, where state-run education was not the choice; it was the only game in town. Initiative and curiosity were drummed out of the population. The hammer and sickle produced generations of citizens who relied on and waited for government to solve their problems.

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Having escaped and survived this socialist experiment, my parents made it clear to me that education, not just schooling, was important. In addition to my public school preparation, I attended Ukrainian school evenings and Saturdays, where I learned more about my culture, and a more inclusive version of Canadian history, than I was taught in public school. As we've heard, there are ways that they can improve it. It was great to hear about the MacLeod school, because they are doing extremely well, but I would wager that they are an exception rather than the rule.

How can we truly educate our youth today if we do not provide the means to that education in a just manner? I'm speaking of justice here. Financial support for Catholic schools is a pre-existing constitutional matter, a legal, nonconforming situation—to borrow from municipal zoning terminology—and unacceptable to some. The UN decision for full funding, approximately \$7,500 per student, for non-public schools, as supported by Ottawa, I believe to be fiscally irresponsible. Of course, there is one public school authority, rather than four school boards, as an option.

The James M. Flaherty solution is more just, in my view. It does not fund non-public or private schools, thereby not supporting the individual aims of these schools. Yet it reimburses in part parents who choose non-public or independent schooling for their children.

This is the direction, I honestly believe, whether it's Ontario or anywhere else, where things are going to develop.

But with this sort of funding we have to look at something else. Fiscal responsibility is the flip side to this coin. Accountability has to be there. I ask you to consider this conditional stipulation for eligibility for such a tax. In other words, how do we make this work? I refer you to a press release that was put out by the province. I believe it stated that consultations will identify an appropriate framework for establishing eligibility for this credit. I have several suggestions.

Tax credits would be issued to those parents who choose non-public or private primary and secondary schools—this takes out JK and stuff like that—that employ certified teachers and administer standardized student tests—EQAO and that sort of thing.

To address student excellence and performance at the secondary school level, the return of college board entrance exams for all students would be useful. This will give an idea of how they match up for those who wish to continue on to university.

Next, I think slightly outside the box, to better apply to northern Ontario and address the geographic disparity of this region, the eligibility could be extended in a fashion to all parents who send their children to schools that employ certified teachers and standardized student testing. It basically begs to redefine slightly the “private” definition here. Private schools have an exclusivity or a choice in what we're dealing with.

I'm saying northern Ontario, because of its disparity, should be considered in a fashion within a form of private school. So whether the parent sends a student to private or public school, there should be some sort of thing that will allow for extracurricular activities and fundraising that will be available there.

I believe before there was also a tax break for drivers and various others in northern Ontario. We have, as the members here know, a few miles between towns, and if you want to compete with anybody or if you even want to discuss it, the technique is usually physically going there. At this stage we do not have the fibre optics throughout northern Ontario to be able to do this or just to travel several blocks into another neighbourhood.

Next, tax credits would also be provided to parents for payment of tuition fees regardless if the parent, the student, the school or a third party, such as a labour union, pays for the tuition. This includes scholarships. We're talking about different—in other words, if there is a situation where a private school chooses to accept members on a scholarship, whether it be a full scholarship or not, these parents have other expenses for such a student. This will level the playing field, especially for those who may feel their choice of schools is limited.

Simply defining what we're going to do, we're asking you to establish eligibility for this credit. These are some things I'd like you to consider.

Finally, I trust that our existing human rights legislation will be a guide in stipulating eligibility of non-public

schools. I would not want my tax dollars going to a Lee Harvey Oswald or Yigal Amir or Timothy McVeigh academy no matter how certified their teachers are.

Thank you for your patience. Respectfully submitted by Walter Halchuk here in Sudbury.

The Acting Chair (Mr Bob Wood): Thank you very much, Mr Halchuk. We would appear to have four minutes per caucus available. I believe we start with Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: I wanted to go back to the deputation that was put forward by Mary Hewitt and focus on the section on accountability, because you've told the committee that you're in support of the government scheme. At the same time as the government proposes to use public dollars to support private schools—because parents get that rebate and then they pay tuition, so of course they're getting public money in private schools—why is it, then, that they don't have to be accountable in the same way as public schools have to be accountable? Mary and others before her pointed out that private schools don't have to follow the provincially established curriculum, their students don't have to participate in the provincial tests, their teachers don't have to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, there's probably a legitimate question about whether or not their teachers are going to have to go through police checks as well, and I don't think the government has said one way or the other. Why is it, then, if the government is going to give public money to private schools, that private schools shouldn't be accountable to the public in the same way that the public school system is? And do you support that, or not?

Mr Halchuk: I have no problem in supporting it, because the direction was open-ended in the fashion I just mentioned to you in a press release, that the framework for establishing eligibility for such a credit would be done through a forum such as this. In part of my presentation I stated that the accountability would be that a tax credit would be given to those parents who choose schools that have certified teachers and administer standardized student tests.

Ms Martel: But there are any number of private schools that don't. So are you saying that the government tax credit should only go to those schools that are following provincial standards, have certified teachers etc?

Mr Halchuk: Certainly. I don't see a problem. Also, for example, in one case I'm thinking of, all students would be required to take college board entrance exams. If a school chooses a method that is not what the rest of us may consider the “in” way to teach students but still can produce a literate person who knows how to handle tests in particular and also a situation that will put them in the public—so, for example, with college board entrance exams, if that person can pass that battery of tests, I see no problem in having funding for that sort of school. But if they do not meet the standards, I don't see supporting that. It's that simple. I think those sorts of standards have to be there. Whether the certified teachers are up to 100% or 50%, that can be discussed, but there have to be certified teachers.

Ms Martel: What if they do that but they bar special-needs students or bar students with a lower level of academic achievement?

Mr Halchuk: I think I mentioned also that I trust that one of the guiding eligibilities for this sort of tax credit would be the existing human rights legislation. Should someone choose to bar someone on religious grounds and things, they definitely would not be qualified for that sort of thing.

Ms Martel: The problem, though, is that the code exempts private schools right now. The code prohibits this kind of discrimination, and that was made clear to us in the Legislature a couple of weeks ago. As the code is currently written, it does not prevent private schools from barring students perhaps with disabilities or students who have lower academic needs. So the code is not going to protect those students. I hear you referring to the code, but it's not going to protect these students.

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Mr Halchuk: As far as protecting these students, that's fine, but I understood that this committee is looking at the tax credit eligibility. Therefore, these parents who choose to go to, for example, a school, if they are barred, that school does not become eligible for tax credits for students.

Ms Martel: OK. So regardless of what the code says, because you referred to that as the provision and said that should be the standard—

Mr Halchuk: For this tax credit. We're talking about this tax credit, correct? So that means that in the choice that is made of how you apply this tax credit, you have to abide by the Human Rights Code. You have to also have certain standards for that school to be able to receive those sorts of, I guess, marks or whatever you want to call that. Sorry.

Ms Martel: I just go back: you said, again, that the school has to meet the standards of the Human Rights Code. The current dilemma we have is that the code does not consider it discrimination if a private school bars students. So I return to the problem again that your wanting to use the code will not in effect prohibit schools from barring students; they can, under the current Human Rights Code.

Mr Halchuk: Yes, they can, but then that school does not become eligible for the tax credit.

Ms Martel: In your opinion.

Mr Halchuk: Yes. Exactly.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much, Walter, for your presentation. I very much appreciated particularly the issue we've been dealing with considerably of the Catholic school system and the fact that it's part of our publicly funded public system, and the United Nations decision. I appreciate the comments you made that the approach the budget makes to a partial tax credit for parents who make that choice, for whatever reason, is a good approach to try to achieve some fairness and some equity for those parents, and not go into the areas where the UN says we should go and which would not be in the best interests of the population of Ontario.

I was very much interested: we've heard a lot of discussion about the definition of "eligible tuition" for the tax credit. You point out a list of items that you feel should be put in place to define the eligible tuition. The opposition and some folks who have been speaking on the issue are implying that there will be no criteria, that the eligible tuition will be that anyone who turns in tuition will be get their tax credit. The minister was quite clear that we need to develop a framework for what eligible tuition will be. Your recommendations here are quite extensive, and we appreciate your coming forward with them.

On the last one here that I have marked down you said we should make the credit available to people even though they haven't paid the tuition, that if somehow it was a scholarship or something else, they should get a tax credit on that anyway. In your opinion, are there many schools that would fit in the category that before they get to grade 13, there are a lot of scholarships that would apply to?

Mr Halchuk: I don't know how many it would apply to at this stage. I would have to do the research. But I do know there are schools that will provide a scholarship for the tuition portion, and in some cases a full tuition and costs involved in that school. I met a chap who came from rather modest means who did get a complete scholarship to Upper Canada College. This is the situation.

Now, the parents obviously have additional costs beyond those for that child, and that would be one area I would like to have the committee consider. As I state, whether the scholarship is even from a labour union or whether it's from a school or anybody, if that is done, I think parents should have that tax credit.

Mr Hardeman: I thank you very much for your suggestions on the criteria, and we'll turn it over to my colleague Bob Wood.

Mr Wood: I want to understand your idea of, I gather, a northern tax credit which, if it's a good idea, I think should be applied throughout the province and not perhaps just to the north. But that's another story. What I thought I heard you say was, if you send your child to one of the two public systems, you think some form of tax credit should be available to those parents so they could give money to that board to assist in some further offering of activities. Is that what I heard? If I didn't get it, explain to me what you said.

Mr Halchuk: In effect, through the two systems, because there are four boards, actually, that this tax credit could be expanded in terms of its definition, not necessarily of private schools, but in such a fashion—because this will handle some of the additional costs there are in northern Ontario. Granted, the private schools are a major consideration in southern Ontario, but in northern Ontario it is a minor consideration, to a large degree. What it would address is the additional costs that are incurred in northern Ontario beyond simply the standard classroom costs that are there. I feel that this would be a way of looking at it, and it goes beyond simply saying

private school testing. But it is schools that normally do not have an entry requirement, and therefore this entry requirement happens to be people in northern Ontario, which now includes Parry Sound and so forth.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for your presentation. I just want to ask a couple of things, Mr Halchuk. You talk about the UN decision. You know when the government deputed to the UN, they said things like funding “would result in disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario.” This is the only study, by the way. These, some 50 pages of legal research, are the only study this government has ever produced on the possibility of extending funding. It was in partial as well as in full form. In that, they made arguments—they paid good money for arguments—that said negative fiscal impacts would take place. “There would be a marked increase in the duplication of services and capital costs to fund” private schools “and a concurrent diminishment of the range of programs and services that the public system would be able to afford.” That’s what the government said; that’s what they told the public, the last election. That’s where things stood until this.

From your standpoint, you’re saying you would agree that they shouldn’t implement the UN decision, but you say because of fiscal responsibility. Yet, I think you might agree, what’s in front of us is a format now that would allow any number at all of private schools to come forward and receive this credit. There’s nothing that I’m aware of, or perhaps you could point it out in your study of this: is there anything that would stop this from being \$1 billion or \$1.5 billion if sufficient numbers of people chose to leave the public system and go into private arrangements?

Mr Halchuk: Eligibility.

Mr Kennedy: I’m sorry: which eligibility?

Mr Halchuk: I’m talking about eligibility for this tax credit.

Mr Kennedy: But eligibility, you’re saying, for the schools. Suppose that eligibility was met with certified teachers and standardized tests. That still is an incentive. I think you’re aware too that this is the only jurisdiction anywhere in North America that has actually brought this to the point of a law, this close to passage. Thirty-three referendums were held in the United States last fall on tax credits and vouchers. Every one of them was defeated. The margins were about 70 to 30. This is the first time a government is actually going to enact it, put into law this variable of being able to have a wide-open system. So I’m just wondering, if you say “fiscally responsible,” wouldn’t it be fiscally irresponsible to give away \$1 billion or more or whatever else? Why didn’t government contain this somehow, give it a budget?

Mr Halchuk: From what I can see, the containment is in the fact that you’re going to a maximum of about \$3,500 rather than \$7,500 per student.

Mr Kennedy: But for an infinite number of students.

Mr Halchuk: In a virtual reality. I’m speaking about the actual reality. I don’t see this happening across the board. First of all, there has not been a stampede in the

Sudbury area to private schools. There have been some more phone calls, granted, but I don’t see this sort of thing stampeding people into the private school system.

Mr Kennedy: I appreciate that you’re saying bring in some controls. Alberta has them, BC has them; everybody who does direct funding to schools has them. But direct funding, where the finance minister in Ontario said there’s 32% in Manitoba, for example, that would be, in addition to the money we’re talking about today, another \$240 million. That would be \$540 million. If we had what happened in BC, that was about an 80% increase from the time they initiated to the time that they’re done. That would be additionally some \$280 million.

1500

I’m just wondering, at what point does this become fiscally irresponsible? How much money can the government be throwing at this initiative? I think you have been here all day. You have heard from the local schools. They are missing things. They are missing textbooks. They are missing special education. There are kids who are not getting their needs met, and those are the ones who are left behind. You might appreciate that some kids are \$1,200 kids—they come ready to learn, they’ve got all the background, they’ve got all the ability—and there are some other kids, maybe just for a year or two, but they cost more. I hate to refer to them that way, but the good thing about public education is that they will all pool the risks and the challenges. We can’t do that if we’re going to pay people money, give them an incentive to leave that public system, to take the lazy way out and not try and make it work.

It strikes me that the whole proposition, if fiscal irresponsibility is going to be raised, is so open-ended. How do you see that not being fiscally irresponsible to spend whether it’s \$300 million or \$500 million or \$800 million? This could go anywhere that a disgruntled public could take it.

Mr Halchuk: First of all, I don’t believe it to be an attack on the public school system. In terms of the fiscal responsibility, I see this as being a prudent way of expanding support for education. It’s a more inclusive method. You’re bringing up some large figures and I don’t know how they would apply, but exponentially, in giving—

The Chair: With that, I have to bring the discussion to an end, because we’ve gone by our time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF SUDBURY

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Islamic Society of Sudbury. I’d ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Dr Shah Nawaz: My name is Shah Nawaz, and I am vice-president of administration of the Islamic Society of Sudbury. With me is Dr Belaid Aouni, a professor at

Laurentian University, who is the vice-president of education at the Islamic Society of Sudbury. We have been given very short notice about this committee and I haven't been that well prepared. It's my first time appearing before a committee like this, so excuse me and overlook my inappropriateness at times.

I would like to start by saying a few words about the Islamic Society of Sudbury. It has been a registered charitable association for the past 20 years. It's a small but active community. We have been active enough to establish the only mosque and Islamic centre of north-eastern Ontario in Sudbury.

We serve the needs of a community of 400 Muslims who live in the Sudbury area and many students from various Muslim countries who come to the university there. It's more like a transient population. The Sudbury Muslim community has the uniqueness of being a small United Nations. The origins of these people are 20 different countries.

Basically we organize various community events of a religious and cultural nature. We are also a very active part of the larger Sudbury community, and we have spokespersons in the police advisory committee, inter-faith groups, race relations committees etc. We are also at the central library to provide information about Islam to those who are interested in knowing about it in this part of the world. We have regular prayer meetings and special events for Eid and Ramadan, our sacred month. We have a board of directors and an executive committee operating in a democratic fashion.

Today our discussion revolves around the future of Canada and the future of children, which crosses all party lines. Like all Canadians, we are very concerned about the future of Canada and the morality and ethics of future Canadians. As a religious group, this is of special importance to religious minorities, in addition to the multi-cultural mosaic of the future Canada. We are always hoping and looking forward to a spiritual renaissance for a brighter future for our country. What can we do about such a brighter future? The only hope is our children.

I'll briefly present the actual story of parents who are part of our community. About 30 years ago, a person immigrated to Canada and made Canada his home. He educated and trained himself and became a professional and a taxpaying and law-abiding citizen. He married a girl from the old country and they had two children. The kids grew up in a small town in Ontario.

Initially the education system was felt by the parents to be a very appropriate area for their children. They sent them to elementary school in French immersion because it would add to the diversity of language skills for their children. They were looking forward to being part of a bilingual Canada.

As they progressed through elementary school, the problems of the Canadian education system became gradually more obvious to them. Around that time many task forces on North American education systems supported his views. North American high school graduates performed much worse than in many Asian countries. In

addition, discipline and moral values were not stressed in the school. Students were free to study or not to study. Moral sciences were not part of the curriculum. So he decided to send the children back home overseas for grades 6, 7 and 8. They stayed with grandparents, getting to know their families and learned about their religion and culture. It made them very strong and very sure about their identity.

This major decision took its toll physically, emotionally and financially but it was the best decision for the future of their children. The children have returned. One has finished first year university in Toronto and the second one is completing her grade 12 this week. The choice has been very expensive for the parents, both of whom are taxpaying citizens, and I believe they should have a choice.

I am here to voice my support for the government's decision for a tax credit for parents who would like to send their children to schools that they select as best for their children. We are all different people, no two people are the same, so let's allow people who are different to live out their differences in a meaningful manner. Let's be grateful to God for what we have in Canada and grateful for the education initiatives of the government. Let's pray that the government does not overlook the spiritual needs of its citizens and sets policies that look forward not only to a more prosperous but also a more humane, more kind, more noble, more tolerant Canada.

That's all I have prepared, so we have lots of time for questions.

The Chair: We have approximately four minutes per caucus and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Gill: Thanks to both of you for appearing before the committee. I'm assuming, maybe wrongly—were you born in Canada? Was your basic education here?

Dr Nawaz: My post-graduate training was here, yes.

Mr Gill: I meant more like high school.

Dr Nawaz: No.

Mr Gill: So this gives you a comparison between getting your basic education in terms of high school or primary school somewhere else.

Dr Nawaz: Correct.

Mr Gill: Now that your kids are studying here, how would you compare the two systems, where you studied versus here, how bad is it here or how good is it here?

Dr Nawaz: Well, things have changed. I am over 50 years old, so we need more recent comparisons. In fact, I was hoping I could bring my daughter. This is my own story, obviously. I was hoping to bring my daughter in, but she has exams. She would be the best one to compare the two. I have talked with my children about the differences, and they have told me the differences are still similar to what my feelings are about the differences. There is a difference, definitely, in the amount of material that you learn. The curriculum includes moral sciences over there. They don't have a subject like moral sciences in any of the schools that I have seen here in Sudbury.

Mr Gill: One of the things you mentioned, and I think it's a good point, is that the community—the 400 Muslim families and some of the students—is quite well integrated into the society at large in terms of being on the board of police, being on several other committees. One of the points brought forward before, by the committee, or by some of the presenters, has been, “Well, if we give a tax credit, then maybe we're going to be ghettoizing people, and maybe they're going to be so segregated that the community at large will suffer.” What is your opinion on that?

Dr Nawaz: I disagree totally with that. What we are going to make is better people who are more sure about themselves, more productive, more hard-working and more competitive. These are the words that come to me. We need their competitive spirit. We don't have that in the public system. If you stick with the public system alone, there's no competition. What does the public system have to show over the last 20 years? Many task forces, as I mentioned here, have clearly stated that North American students are not doing well compared to the rest of the world. Why is that?

1510

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr Wood.

Mr Wood: Could you share very briefly with the committee what Islam teaches about respect for others and tolerance for others?

Dr Nawaz: It's not very different from any other religions. You treat your neighbour as you would treat yourself, the way you would want him to treat you.

Mr Wood: If you had enough numbers, do you think there would be an interest in an Islamic school here in Sudbury?

Dr Nawaz: Definitely.

Mr Wood: Why do you think there would be interest here?

Dr Nawaz: Because the public system is not inclusive in terms of the aims and objectives for our children.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The official opposition. Mr Bartolucci.

Mr Bartolucci: Just a very, very quick question, and then Mr Kennedy will take over. Doctor, thank you very much for your very good presentation. I do respect your point of view, as you know.

You see, I see this as a way of weakening the public school system, because I believe the Muslim children have so much to offer the public school system, as do so many other groups that I believe may choose to leave it. And that is a weakening of the public school system. Do you believe that that will happen?

Dr Nawaz: I do not believe so, because my children have gone to both the public system—they actually did their high school in the public system. I had every opportunity to send them to private school. But the parents have the choice. That's the most important thing. We should have a choice. We have chosen private schools for a certain period of their time, or their formative years, when we felt that the system is not appropriate for that particular age group, where they come under peer pres-

sure, where the material that they should be absorbing must be much more than what's offered in the school, their ability to choose moral sciences. There are many things that children need at a certain time of their educational period in the school, and parents should have the choice to do that. Having one system is like having Air Canada.

Mr Kennedy: Picking up from that, Doctor, I just wonder if I could ask: it seemed to me—and I don't want to paraphrase; I really would like to understand—that you mentioned grades 6, 7 and 8, that that was a time—you've mentioned, in a context of formation and you mentioned moral sciences as part of the things that were being offered in the schools that you'd had to send your children back to.

I wonder if I can pose the question to you this way: what would it take? Can you imagine being able to achieve some or all of that objective within a modified public system? Could you see ways in which it could adapt to deliver some of that specialness that you were seeking for your students? Because obviously you did entrust your children to it. It sounds like—I don't want to be mistaken again—most of their education was within the public system, and you identified a special period. Is there any way that public schools could adapt to have that level of diversity?

Dr Nawaz: There are always ways, but the question is about the practicalities. What has happened to the public school system over the last 20 years? What has happened to it? Are the children much better now 20 years later? Children are always children, you know. There will always be the same eight-year-old and 10-year-old. Twenty years ago, there were children coming out of the public school system. Now children are coming out of the public school system and there's comparison of international standards. Why are we failing in the public school system in spite of having had this time frame of 20 years of government supervising, providing leadership for better-educated Canadian students from high schools? We are not getting that. This, I felt, was a failure of leadership of the governments of North America in putting education behind other forms of development of human skills; not the basic education for children, but they put other things ahead of it, such as maybe rocket science, but not the children and the future.

Mr Kennedy: Can I understand that? Because I think it is important. We have a very brief opportunity afforded by these hearings to try and reconcile some of the views people have about education. Some people would argue that education has lost its centrality, that we used to put a lot more emphasis on it and it has slipped down, and some people have talked about that in terms of the funding. Sudbury children have a lot less money being devoted to them. But it's about commitment as well.

Part of what you've clearly identified as missing is a religious component, a moral component. As well, you're suggesting that there's been some slippage, some loss in the last 20 years. I guess part of what we look at is, how can we get the people who are motivated to see things

better to stay with the public system so it can improve? It can only be as good as the people who will participate in it. What I'm trying to get at: what would you like to see changed specifically? What could be adapted to meet the kind of standards that you're looking for in either sphere? You mentioned two—perhaps you didn't put them as deficiencies, but two things that strike you—the 20-year loss and also the part that you felt was on the moral grounds.

Dr Nawaz: Nothing is impossible. But we have to look at the practicality of it. If you offer them something 20 years from now, they would rather take something that's available this year.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Dr Nawaz and Dr Aouni, for participating here today. I wanted to ask about the other members in the community. How many of the other members in the community are sending their children home for some period of their formal education? We know what your circumstance is.

Dr Nawaz: I was extremely lucky to be able to do that, because so many things fell into place and the situation was available to me to get the job done. After several years of actually thinking, we ended up doing it. I have talked to many of the parents who wish they could do it, but they cannot for practical reasons.

Ms Martel: I'm not asking it as a criticism. For example, Dr Koka—I'm just going to ask about some of the members in your community. Did his son go home for any part of his education? Do you know?

Dr Nawaz: It's really not my business as to how to look after their children; it's their job.

Ms Martel: I'm not trying to be critical of them. I am curious about the position you are adopting today for this reason: Dr Koka's son is at medical school right now in Ottawa. I would argue that his getting there reflects positively on the public school system.

I believe you have another colleague who worked for OCWA—whose name I forget and I apologize for that—whose daughter now is a physician and, I would argue, was well served by the public system to get her there. Two of your colleagues, because you talked about community—I had the pleasure last year and this year of giving volunteer service awards to the sons of both Dr Vijay and Dr Kumar, who are very attached to the community.

So why I'm surprised by the position you're taking is I would make the argument that your community, in particular, because I go to your events and I know the folks in the community, has been well served in the public system. They are very productive. Your community is providing in essence the medical basis and a basis at the university. I'm surprised at the position you are taking, because I would argue that many of your sons and daughters are making an enormous contribution back into this community, and I'm wondering if many or most of them went through the public education system here. It would be a positive reflection about the public school system that they are doing so well.

Dr Nawaz: I have to answer, first of all, you are not referring to my community. Number two, I have lots of Canadian friends also who keep their kids in the public school and send their kids to medical school. So it does not reflect my community. I'm representing the Islamic community.

Ms Martel: I understand that, but there are many people in your community who form the professional basis in this community. That's a given. I'm not saying that's a bad or good thing—that's a given.

Dr Nawaz: I'm representing the Muslim community here and I don't think you refer to any—all the people that you mentioned are not in that community.

Ms Martel: Dr Kumar, Dr Vijay?

Mr Gill: They might look the same, but they are not.

Ms Martel: I'm sorry, Raminder, I go to a number of their events and that's where I see these people. I'm sorry.

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Dr Belaid Aouni: I would like to add another thing. It doesn't mean if our kids are in public school they aren't very happy. I will give you many examples, starting with me, and it may be outside of Sudbury, in Quebec. The people arrange to send their kids during the summer: instead of the kids taking holidays, we send our kids to other countries, and I am talking about Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. There are some schools, from primary schools, especially for the foreign from outside. So when we send our kids there, it's to complete their background. They take courses in morality, they take courses, for example, in the Arabic language, Islamic education, and also scientific aspects in mathematics and so on.

I am in teaching, and I can tell you sometimes I'm not very happy with the way they teach them some mathematical aspects, maybe because I am a professor in operations research, and when they see my kid, they start to, for example, make duplication and they show them how—I tell the professor it is the wrong way; he will not be very strong.

I will not discuss this, but to answer the question that was already raised, many people that I know send their kids during summer by supporting tickets, plane tickets and their fees there to get what they don't find here in public school. I cannot do it during fall and winter, because he cannot be in two systems at the same time. But that means I have not found all I am looking for for the education of my kids. And I am doing it for the benefit of my country, which is Canada. All these efforts have a direct benefit for my kids in their future in constructing and developing my country, which is Canada.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

SUDBURY AND DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Sudbury and District Labour Council. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record.

On behalf of the committee, welcome. You will have 20 minutes.

Mr John Filo: Hold it, Mr Wood, before you go.

Mr Wood: I'll be back.

Mr Filo: No, no, I've got some tickets. I'm fundraising for my son's football team at Lasalle high school and I'd like you to buy a ticket. They're \$2 each.

Mr Wood: I think I'd better do that right now.

Mr Filo: Some of the funding cuts that you guys have implemented, we have to compensate for.

The Chair: Remember that the clock is ticking.

Mr Filo: I remember that the clock is ticking, but I also remember that you guys are well-scripted. I am a politician wannabe. I ran for Parliament. I watch the parliamentary channel. You guys are well-scripted; you know what you're saying. As individuals, you are very decent, honest, direct people. But when you get into the House there, you toe the party line. It doesn't matter about my presentation. I can tell you that right now, Marcel—Mr Chairman.

The Chair: Marcel is quite right. That's OK.

Mr Filo: Because it won't make any difference. You people have come into this province and you've changed everything. You've made it topsy-turvy. You think you are doing the right thing, no question about it. But I'll show you that in fact what you're doing is leading to a real degradation in a lot of the institutions that we have in this province.

I know the clock is ticking, but I've got a written submission which will be read into Hansard. I just want to answer some of the people. I guess our friend the Ukrainian person has left, but I wanted to say this. He mentioned the socialist experiment in the Ukraine. There is no dictionary that will define what happened in the USSR or any of its eastern republics as socialism, but we're all brainwashed into thinking that that is socialism. That's not socialism. Tyranny in any form, whether it's Tory tyranny or Russian tyranny, Communist tyranny, is still tyranny; it's not socialism.

Mr Hardeman, you made the comment that there was a definite commitment that there'd be no public funds given to private universities. Can you categorically state that the government or any of its spokesmen will make a statement and that statement will hold forever, like, for example, the business about funding private schools? They flip-flop all the time, Mr Hardeman. Their guarantees aren't worth the paper they're written on.

Mr Hardeman: I don't want to correct the presenter, Mr Chair, but he's referring to Mr Hardeman when the comments he's referring to were made by Mr Gill.

Mr Filo: I'm sorry. I apologize. I suppose the comments were true, though, as I stated, or did I make a false statement, other than identifying the person who made the comment?

Mr Hardeman: You misidentified the person making the comment.

Mr Filo: OK, that's the only thing, but the statement still holds. You're politicians, you're never held to what you say. You know, that was then, this is now.

I want to go back to the presentation, though. You can question me at length on anything that I say.

In 1898, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada drew up a platform of principles which included as its number one item free compulsory public education. That was almost 100 years ago. The labour movement has a deep commitment to free public education.

Historically, there's always been a fundamental difference between business and industry—and you guys are representatives of business and industry—and the labour movement with regard to education. Business and industry tend to view education as training, whereas labour sees the role of education as developing an informed, independent-thinking, responsible, self-actualized citizenry that contributes to a fully functioning democracy.

The Premier has been heard to say that giving a tax credit to parents of children in private schools is practicable because there is money available. We believe that any available monies should be put in the public system so that subjects such as art, music and physical education, in addition to the three Rs, are restored to previous levels.

Our public school system has served very well as the vehicle for intergenerational mobility. I'm an example of that. My parents were poor immigrants who came from central Europe. They had a grade 3 education. I am a retired professor, formerly chairman of mathematics in the institution that I worked in. Also, I worked for 14 years in international mineral exploration, so I've got the greatest regard for the great religions. I spent a year in Saudi Arabia, I have been on every continent except Australia and Antarctica and I've worked with Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, you name it. They are great religions.

Mainstream economists and political scientists are generally in agreement that capitalism is a system designed to create new wealth. When it does, it concentrates it in fewer and fewer hands, resulting in a stratified society of the haves and have-nots. Most of us know that out of the top 100 economies in the world, 52 are multinational corporations, 48 are countries. We should be frightened at this awesome concentration of power and resources in entities that are not democratically elected and thus accountable to the people over whom they have such influence. We need legislation created by our governments to put in place checks and balances on such companies so that privileged classes and special interest groups are not favoured at the expense of the population at large. Of course unions are a mechanism that evolved to redistribute wealth to foster a classless society.

I don't want to debate how much has been cut from education. Ask any parent if the funding has kept pace over the years. I have two teenagers in high school, and to participate in varsity football, my 17-year old son has to raise \$250, plus supply approximately \$170 worth of equipment. The school field hasn't been rolled for years and the irregularities in it have resulted in injuries.

Royson James, a Toronto Star columnist, has written that the Tory politicians "have spared no expense, used their political muscle and spun a web of deception aimed

at confusing the taxpayer and hiding the damage they inflicted on municipalities.... The Mike Harris government has taken out newspaper ads to spread its propaganda on this issue. They've paraded a steady flow of wily cabinet ministers, each filled with duplicitous words and numbers intended to obfuscate and confuse." The same holds true for education.

1530

For a group that "is not the government, but is there to fix the government," the interpretation that suggests itself is that "fix" is employed in the same sense as in "fix the fight"—I used to box as a youngster—meaning bringing to a prearranged conclusion favourable to the fixer.

Outside of tax breaks and cuts that have resulted in hardship and pain and loss of services, what has your government accomplished? Where has the government shown any creativity to solve the problems of a modern society? Even in education you're following the model of Len Derkach in the Filmon government in Manitoba. Fortunately, he was replaced by Rosemary Vodrey who decided that sanity should prevail. Most of his initiatives were discarded. Your research officer probably knows what happened in Manitoba.

Why is it that when governments with a left-wing orientation attempt to change public policy, the right-wing think tanks and the neo-liberals—usually referred to as neo-cons—haul out that immutable law of unintended consequences and ascribe to whatever initiatives are being contemplated every theoretical negative outcome possible or probable, but when the Harris government promotes tax credits for private schools, they are eager to accept the inane logic of a semantic argument that tax credits and vouchers are not equivalent? I suppose the writer of an editorial for the National Post of May 11 will be disciplined for breaking ranks.

There are two issues that should be emphasized, two issues with which the Harris Tories are overjoyed because of the confusion associated with them:

(1) Those opposed to tax credits for private schools are not opposed to motherhood, apple pie and religion. I respect the religions; every one of us does. Indeed, although we feel that religion has no place in the Houses of legislation of the nation, practitioners must be allowed to follow any religion they wish, but not at public expense. Do you want to subsidize the conscience of your neighbour and does he or she want to subsidize your conscience, especially if your name is David Koresh of the Waco Branch Davidian cult or if your organization is Heaven's Gate and you have to hurry to catch the rocket ship travelling in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet? But I do not in any way demean the legitimate great religions. Conscience is personal and private.

(2) Trumpeting the availability of choice; that parents know what's best for their children. Even this is not a correct statement. Parents know what they want for their children and what they believe to be best for them. The Harris Tories maintain that denying tax credits to private schools is unfairly restricting choice; that the supreme factor in our lives when the deity is not being invoked

should be the free market that has natural and magical solutions to all our ills. Unfortunately, the rules of the free market were written by the haves, who were always in control of the governing classes and who are so even now.

Gary Orfield, a Harvard professor, has indicated, "Choice is a term that is difficult to disagree with in principle, but which has no clear meaning until many blanks are filled in. In other words, it is an almost perfect political concept." As with freedom of speech and freedom of personal expression, freedom of choice must have judicious limits placed on it because of the consequences to those not doing the choosing. Personal freedoms must always be subjected to the test of the greater public interest.

I appreciate that it is difficult for this government to implement policies that serve the greater public interest. Its track record of abuse to Toronto, unions, the poor and homeless, teachers, seniors and a leader who thumbs his nose at family values by taking his girlfriend on an international junket and embarrassingly uses unacceptable language when his limited intelligence prevents him from being accountable for his policies in our House all militate against sensible progress.

It is time for some sober reflection. What is the benefit of an approach that has jeopardized so many of the institutions that have made our province into a caring, compassionate society and has pitted group against group? Why has the Harris government decided that a minority of all eligible voters is a mandate to do whatever they want just because they have the majority in the House? It's a little complicated there, but you're serving as a minority government really. You were elected by a minority of people eligible to elect you, but you are running things as though you've got 100%.

Interjection.

Mr Filo: What's that, Joe?

Mr Spina: Every government.

Mr Filo: Well, all right, every government is. But there's a point where—just because it happens that everybody does it—you have to say to yourself, "I'm an honourable and decent person, and I don't have to behave like everybody else does. I'm going to do the right thing."

What would you say about another party in government ramming through an agenda to serve special interest groups such as you're doing? You'd be out there screaming. I've seen you on television, Joe. You're a great performer.

Withdraw the tax credit. Show that the greater public good is paramount.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus. I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Bartolucci: Thanks, John, for your very interesting and passionate presentation. Are you concerned that Bill 45 will segregate and stratify our public education system?

Mr Filo: Mr Bartolucci, it's as plain as the nose on our faces. Yes, it will stratify it. There're two ways of

looking at something. One is anecdotal and one is statistical. We've had a lot of anecdotes said here this afternoon that suggest that it won't, but statistically there's only a fixed amount of money available for education. If it goes toward private interests, it won't go for public interests.

Mr Kennedy: In terms of the basic outlook, I think you've touched on it but it bears repeating. People put a lot of faith in the forward progress of this province, built on people reaching their own potential and built on people defined by where they're going, not by where they're coming from. To me, this brings it to a dead stop. A government that makes money on kids going into private schools never again will have a commitment or a rationale to make public schools the very best they can be. It doesn't make any sense at all.

I wonder if you sense that sense of moment or if you just think this is another hiccup along the road. For me, people don't get what's in this. The government is able to slide into the summer. People don't understand that this is a fork in the road. While it should be an ideological dead end, it might be just the kind of thing that takes public education rapidly down the hill.

Mr Filo: This is the thin edge of the wedge. What follows from here on in—and some of the religious groups have already gone on record as saying, “This is fine for starters, but we're going to continue to fight until we get full funding.” Whichever way you look at it, full funding for private schools, whether it's Upper Canada College or the Christian academies, will mean less money for the public system.

Ms Martel: Thank you, John. The minister has said, and the government during the course of the hearings, I gather, has said it as well, that the \$300 million we're talking about, that I am fearful is the low figure, is not money that would be taken from the public education system. We also heard earlier this afternoon that there won't be public money put into private universities. Are you concerned that in fact it is going to be money that comes out of the public education system? We've already heard about some of the cuts, specifically with respect to this community. What would be the greater impact with even more money coming out in terms of this community and what it's facing?

Mr Filo: They're trying to bring the public education system to its knees. Jonathan Kozol has said that the way things are going in the education system, it's only going to be the children of the fittest who are going to survive. It's an obvious factor that the money that goes to private schools cannot be used to implement progressive change in the public schools.

Not only that, there's another point that's very important. The public debt since the Conservative government has come into power in Ontario has increased by leaps and bounds, mostly because of the way in which it gives away tax credits to special interest groups. I can't remember what the figures are, but the provincial debt has increased substantially. Where is the right-wing

portion of the Conservative party saying, “Hey, hold it. We've got to stop this drain on the public purse”?

Mr Gill: Just to be on the record, during the NDP years, John, you may know that the debt actually increased from \$45 billion to \$90 billion. You may remember that or maybe not. Was that too long ago?

1540

Mr Filo: You say, “Was that too long ago?” Do you think I'm some kind of an idiot, Mr Gill? Of course I remember that. But don't forget that the economic conditions were significantly different. You have been in power in the best economic boom for years, and the NDP was in power in the worst economic time since the Depression. Doesn't that make any difference to you?

Mr Gill: The UN has said that to comply with the human rights—whatever—code, you have to either give funding to everybody or not deal differently with the Catholic board. What's your opinion?

Mr Filo: I don't think the United Nations said it in just those terms. You're very much simplifying it. You're making it into a black-and-white issue. The fact is that you don't solve one problem by introducing another problem. The provincial government and the federal government have a duty to straighten out the business about funding the Catholic schools. I'm not going to get into that. I don't have an opinion on that. I have an opinion that all religions are worth respecting but that conscience is private and that people like you should generate the solutions to these dilemmas that we find ourselves in. You're elected to do that. You're going for a raise right now, aren't you?

Mr Gill: In your mind—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Gill, but we've run out of time.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Filo: Thanks for coming to Sudbury to hear us out. I'll be watching you on television, and I repeat that I think you're all decent and honourable people.

HELEN GIBSON

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Helen Gibson, if you could please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes.

Mrs Helen Gibson: First of all, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Helen Gibson. I am here as a parent and would like to take this opportunity to speak on behalf of my husband and myself. I would like to present from my own personal experience and to possibly represent some of the other families that have already chosen private education for their children. I'm a parent of a 10-year-old daughter who is presently enrolled in grade 4 at Glad Tidings Academy, which is our local private Christian school.

When we first considered registering our daughter in junior kindergarten, I had the belief that I would like my daughter to attend from kindergarten to grade 8, but on

the other hand, my husband was not quite as sure he felt a religious school would be appropriate for her. We proceeded to have her registered for junior kindergarten. Within the first year of attending the school, my husband was convinced that a private Christian education was the very right choice for our child. He believed in it so strongly that he has since then served on the board of our school four out of six years.

In the past six years, we have been very pleased with the academic and religious training our daughter has received. Our daughter is not a natural for As; she is a student who struggles and works very hard. At this school, they have taught her that hard work pays off and they have helped her develop a personal work ethic which is very high. I'm proud, as a parent, to say that she has attained an honours standing within the last two months. It has been wonderful to see our daughter excel in this environment. This school has been a safe, loving and nurturing environment. The children have a sense of family, not just community. The school supports our personal moral and religious convictions, the standard of education is very high, the teaching is excellent and the class ratio, on average, is 16 to 1.

We are so thankful that we have the choice to send our daughter to this interdenominational Christian school where our values and morals are reinforced. I'm very pleased to see Bill 45. It may well assist our family to continue the education of our daughter in this fashion.

During the past six years, our family has undergone great sacrifices—and, may I add, we were very willing to do so—to have our daughter attend this private school. This tax credit by no means will eliminate our personal cost or sacrifices that we make to put her in private education. Our family is not an affluent family enrolling our daughter in a private, elite school. Instead, my husband is a blue-collar worker and I work part-time providing child care in my home to assist in paying for my daughter's education, our home expenses and to enable me to be a stay-at-home mother. We are a family that values high standards of education and wish to have our values, morals and religious beliefs reinforced in our school system, and our choice is available in our local Christian school at Glad Tidings Academy.

I believe that this bill will also make it possible for other families to have more equal opportunity to better afford, and the freedom to make the choice of, private education if it best suits their child and their family needs. I also believe that the choice of private education should not be available to only the affluent but, if I can restate it, I believe that all Canadians should have equal opportunity to have private education if it best suits their family needs, whether it's cultural, religious or specific academic needs.

I would like to thank the Chairperson and board members for the opportunity to speak on behalf of my family and possibly represent many other families that have already chosen to do so.

The Chair: We have five minutes per caucus. I'll start with Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: Thank you, Mrs Gibson, for coming today to express your point of view. You know, if you've been sitting here at all this afternoon, that we have a different point of view. I would relate to you what I said earlier this morning, because I know you wouldn't have had a chance to be here when the representative, Ms O'Brien, from the Montessori school was here.

I respect your ability to send your child to a private school. That is not a right that we want taken away. My concern continues to be that I fundamentally believe that, as a government, providing funding for parents now to do that through the tax credit will have an impact on the funding of public education. When the government says this \$300 million is not \$300 million that would have gone into public education, I don't believe that. I think it is, because the Minister of Education, six months ago, said that was exactly the case. Now she has changed her tune, but in fact that was the position of the government. So I continue to believe that that is money which should go into the public system.

Secondly, I'm also concerned that the government will not stop just at the tax credit, but that this is a first step toward the establishment of charter schools in the province, which I and my party are also opposed to.

So for those two reasons, from the beginning of the government's introduction of this bill, we have taken a position that we do not believe public money should be used to support private schools. You were good enough to come and to give us your view on that, and because you weren't here when I described my view earlier this morning, I wanted to make sure I could explain that to you so you would know what our position is and why.

I don't have any questions, I just wanted to make sure you understood.

The Chair: Do you want to reply?

Mrs Gibson: No. I was here. I snuck in a little bit this morning and heard the Montessori presentation. Again, I am not a political person. I am here just representing people who have already made much sacrifice.

I have been a taxpaying citizen through residential for over 23 years. I have paid taxes on my residence and at other times other properties that we have had. We have always paid our taxes. We have been allotted the public school system, not by choice, but that's where we are. In the past we have tried to change it over to the Catholic system, because we felt that would be where we would want our money allotted. Through the city level we were refused because we are not practising Catholics. I don't believe the money we have paid out has really been applied to our daughter's education, but again I believe this is what we would do. Whether this bill goes through, I will continue. The education for my daughter from JK to grade 8 will be approximately \$31,000, which is the cost that I paid for my original first home 23 years ago, and I believe it is a tremendous sacrifice.

As I say, I can't speak politically, because I'm not a political person; I don't understand all these things. But this is tax money that I have paid, and not necessarily just that, but a credit, if it's \$3,500, will not give me \$3,500

back. I won't get that tax credit. It won't balance out what we pay out. Private school is a small number compared to the public and Catholic.

1550

The Chair: The government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much, Helen, for the presentation. I just quickly want to go to your comment to Ms Martel that you had tried to put your child in the Catholic system.

Mrs Gibson: No, I said I had applied to have my personal residential taxes changed from the public system to the Catholic system, because if there was no private Christian school, I would either home-school or, as a school choice, I would choose the Catholic system. I applied at the city level to have my taxes redirected to the Catholic board because I wanted to support a board that I believed in more strongly, and I was refused because I am not a practising Catholic.

Mr Hardeman: To get it correct, you were refused the right to move your taxes, so in essence you were also refused the right of your child to be put in the Catholic system.

Mrs Gibson: If I wanted to put her into the Catholic system, I could, but because my daughter was not in the school system and because I was not a practising Catholic, I could not redirect my tax dollars.

Mr Hardeman: The other thing is, I just quickly wanted to reiterate your comments about the tax credit. Of course, we all know on the committee, and I'm sure everyone in the audience knows, that the implementation of the tax credit will be \$700 maximum the first year, which is for the school year 2002, to be paid out in the year 2003. It's quite obvious from that that your choice as a parent was not predicated on a future tax credit. You really believe as a parent that this is the right education for your child.

Mrs Gibson: You are correct.

Mr Hardeman: I guess I just want to throw it in here now. Our previous presenter—and I know John is still with us, so I'm not trying to say this behind his back—made the comment that parents don't know what's best for their children, they only know what they think is best for their children. How would you relate to that? Do you think that parents aren't the appropriate people, that we, the people at Queen's Park, are better equipped to make a decision on what's best for your child, a better decision than what you could make?

Mrs Gibson: I don't know if I can really comment that clearly on it, but I believe as a parent you know the personality, you know the belief system, you know the values that you want and you know your child's educational needs. I'm not saying that the public system wouldn't have done it, I'm not saying the Catholic system wouldn't have done it, but as far as academically, where my daughter struggled, the school was there for her, the tutoring was there for her, whatever her needs were. The work ethic that has been brought up through this school has met her needs. I believe in my heart that

my husband and I both know what is best for our children.

Mr Hardeman: It's been presented at the committee a number of times that as a parent, whatever you feel is not available in the present two systems could be added to those systems, as opposed to you making the parental choice to go to an independent school. Do you think that would be possible? Could you identify what would be required, and could that be implemented in the public system?

Mrs Gibson: There are very many reasons why I sent her there, one of which is our religious beliefs. At present, I don't see that they are reinforced. Many cultures are shared in the school, many faiths, with different representations. I don't believe fully that the Christian belief is strongly represented. I was raised in a Protestant public school and prayer was part of my life growing up. Those things are no longer there. So, religiously, I would like to see something and I don't know how that could be done because of the way society is. You don't want to offend another to adopt to another. I think also the ratios—I don't know how the public and Catholic systems could have 16 to 1.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Kennedy: Excuse me.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr Kennedy. I thought I had a little bit more time.

Mr Kennedy: It's only the third or fourth time, but we don't read anything personal into that. It's been a long day for everyone.

I appreciate very much your presentation. I think there isn't anybody in the room who doesn't recognize sincerity in what you've given us to consider today. We've been given very constrained circumstances in which to consider this. I suspect you have nothing either to hide or to not divulge in terms of your school experience. Most of this has been rushed through. Two days from now, we're going to be asked to vote on this. We won't even get a chance to read the transcription of your remarks before we're asked to vote. That's how limited this proceeding is.

I wonder if you would consider for us some of the larger issues here. You talked about 16-to-1 class size. The public system had a growth in class size until a few years ago and then the government arrested it and said, "We're going to bring it down a little bit." But it's still much higher than it used to be. We've said, for example, \$350 million could bring a cap of 20, on the road toward 16. The kind of thing you find so beneficial could be brought, with the right kind of commitment, into the public system. I just wondered, do you think that would be generally beneficial and useful and maybe even necessary?

Mrs Gibson: I have to think. I still say that I believe the choice of my education is what I would want to support. I don't know that what the public school system is teaching would suit the needs of my daughter. Yes, you can bring it down to 20 to 1, but there are a lot more

issues. I have had experience with the public school board. I lived in the west end for 18 years. During that time I was a foster parent and I had many of the children in my care attend public school. Unfortunately, the experience I had with them—they were problem children and some of the techniques the teachers were using I did not feel were suitable in any school, religious or whatever. I just feel that I don't know that the public school system could come to what I would want.

Mr Kennedy: I appreciate what you just said, which would be more fair-minded even, to consider it for your own children. I was asking just as a fair-minded individual, would it not be a good thing for all those other children to also enjoy something approximating what you're finding at Glad Tidings, to have those smaller class sizes? Would that not be indeed an important goal for any government to take on and try and deliver?

Mrs Gibson: I think smaller class sizes would definitely benefit the children and the teachers.

Mr Kennedy: I don't know how wide your experience is of some of the alternative schools, but do you think that maybe some would be attracted back? You have already expressed, on your family's part—and I appreciate your struggling with that; I know those are personal decisions—that some might find it more beneficial, that more of their individual needs might be met under that kind of circumstance.

Mrs Gibson: In a smaller ratio at school?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

Mrs Gibson: Possibly.

Mr Kennedy: That's the commitment our party has made. That's something we would do in terms of making this happen.

The province hasn't been asked to look at your situation exclusively. It's been asked to consider a wide-open exemption for all kinds of private schools. They could be religious, they could be anti-religious, they could be whatever nature people would like to make them and they would be eligible for this tax credit. Do you have any comment or any insight as to why the government came up with such a wide exemption? The only study there has been is the Shapiro report of 1985, and it said that the worst funding for public education, to consider private schools, would be the tax credit or the voucher system. It said it wouldn't be good for religious schools either but it would be great for private sector schools.

You may have heard earlier today that if you get any kind of tax credit at Glad Tidings—and I assume there might be some—you're benefiting less than the private schools. They are the main beneficiaries of this new initiative. I heard you talk about words like "choice" and so on, but do you think it's reasonably fair that if we've got scarce resources and large class sizes in the public system—and you've got a case which we've said, in our party at least, deserves to be heard, but we don't believe this is at all the way to meet it. We think there has to be some kind of response within the public system. We think public money belongs in public schools. But at least we have acknowledged there's something to be

heard here. Why has the government made this so wide? Why are all manner of schools in it? Why does all kinds of consideration have to be there and why is it that families such as yours are the only ones that we see coming forward to defend something that is much bigger than their own particular circumstance?

Mrs Gibson: Speaking from my personal experience, I'd have to say I don't know. I don't know why the government has chosen it. The only thing I can say is that I can see this bill would benefit the families that have made this choice. My reason for speaking is that I believe each family should have the freedom of choice, and if they can have some assistance, then that would be great.

Mr Kennedy: Can I ask you just a little bit on that point? You are obviously participating with a community, of a kind. At your school there is a community coming together. Part of what we do in public education is ask people to consider community, not just to consider the well-being of their child and that's it; to make some sacrifice. We make everyone go to school, for example. That's compulsory. We don't do that very often, but we think that's something all society would benefit from.

Your conscientious objection aside, isn't it a good idea to have the strength of public education being our main focus and our main commitment, so that we're able to deliver something like a community that cares about the schools and delivers at least some of the things that you might expect? I understand the religious and conscientious objection you have, but on the other levels, isn't that fairly important?

1600

I would put to you that the voucher system, which is what this is called in the States and almost any place else, allows people to walk away. I see it as a very lazy approach. It means you don't work hard, you don't buckle down, you don't try and resolve your differences. You end up with people going any which way they can, but only those who either can make an extraordinary sacrifice or who can afford to. It just seems to me this isn't a very good fit with the kind of systems we've had. It doesn't acknowledge community at all. It's anti-community. I just wonder if you have any comment.

Mrs Gibson: I think within each ethnic or religious—when you present a private school, there is a community. I know in our school, our school is not just separated to evangelicals. We have kids who are of church backgrounds, we have children who are of non-church backgrounds. As I say, I'm not that well-spoken that I feel I can speak on great issues other than my personal experience. I see that this could benefit. I don't know if there's another answer to assist families that have made these choices, but I think we should all have the freedom of choice.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you again.

GLAD TIDINGS ACADEMY

The Chair: Our last presentation this afternoon is from Glad Tidings Academy. I would ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Michael Versluis: My name is Michael Versluis and I'm the chair of the board of Glad Tidings Academy. I would like to thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to speak to you today. I recognize it's late in the day and you have heard many people speak already, so I'll attempt to make my remarks as brief as possible.

I represent today the interests of Glad Tidings Academy, an elementary school that is operated by the charitable organization known as Sudbury Christian Schools Inc. Our organization has operated a Christian faith-based school in this city for over 19 years. We currently have 72 students enrolled in our school and a staff of six. Our base tuition rate is approximately \$3,500.

Our school strives for and has achieved a high academic standard for our students. We are not an elitist school and our enrolment reflects the broad spectrum of academic abilities and social status. We encourage each of our students to work hard and to achieve their own personal best.

We integrate into every aspect of our curriculum the foundation of our Christian faith. This is the characteristic that makes us unique from other private schools; it's our emphasis upon our Christian principles. As you are aware, over the last several years the public system has been stripped of any of the historical traditions of Christianity within their schools. While we are not here to discuss this issue today, let it suffice to say that the exclusion of Protestant Christian faith from public education has created a climate where families with strong faith have been forced to create their own alternatives.

Our school, like many others, was started by parents who have strong Christian beliefs that they want to pass on to their children. For 19 years, it has been individual families who have shown, through their sacrifice, that they are committed to the cause of Christian schooling. The tax credit provision in Bill 45 is the first time parents have received any support for such a choice.

While we do not presume to speak regarding the motivation of the government in bringing this initiative forward, we applaud the fact that they have chosen to directly assist families who make a choice for a school like ours.

It ought to be noted that our school and most other faith-based schools have not asked the government for direct funding. Even though there is an inequality that exists within our province, where our government fully funds one faith-based system and does nothing to assist others, it is not our desire to seek such funding for our school. We do not wish to become encumbered by a great

amount of government interference. We do, however, support parents who, without malice, continue to support schools they do not use. We feel such families should be helped through the tax system.

Our school and our families want to be free to have input into their child's education, thus we support the fact that this initiative directly benefits the families who are choosing faith-based education. We feel this is but a small gesture acknowledging the sacrifice these families are making.

This tax credit is not going to assist only wealthy families who are attempting to raise up an elite class of children. Glad Tidings Academy represents working families who are struggling to meet the obligations of family life. For the most part, our school families are led by parents who work to pay for their children's education. It's a personal sacrifice they make so that their children will go on to make a difference in the schools they will later attend and ultimately become productive citizens of this community.

We, as a school, do everything we can to assist our families. We have kept our tuition rates to a minimum. We share facilities with a local church and our staff make personal sacrifices for the sake of what we believe in. This tax credit will not directly benefit our school; it will simply ease some of the strain on families who choose faith-based education.

Finally, let me address the issue of the threat this initiative makes to public education. There have been many who have spoken up to say that this proposed legislation will be the undoing of public education. I do not attempt today to address the many issues that public educators have had to face with the government over the last several years, but I would like to say it is our belief that schools like ours do not pose a threat to local public schools.

It's my understanding that in other jurisdictions where similar credits have been given to families, there has not been a mass exodus from the public schools. After all, families choosing schools like ours are not simply choosing us for our high academic standards or our small student-teacher ratio; they are choosing our school as a way to strengthen the faith of their family. Our community will continue to need and want a strong public education system that will adequately meet the needs of a pluralistic society. The public schools have clearly defined themselves as non-faith-affirming institutions. Therefore, schools like ours have risen to the challenge of filling this void.

The problem that has existed over the last few years is that families who have chosen faith-based education have also been forced to continually fund a system of education that their faith has been shut out of. It is my opinion that Bill 45 does not threaten our public education system but simply supports minority families who want to train their children in a cultural or faith-based school.

I thank you once again for the opportunity to submit this brief today and I respectfully submit it.

The Chair: We have four minutes per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr Spina: Thank you, sir, for coming forward. Mr Kennedy earlier said that the world is wide open, that we are issuing these tax credits to anybody who wants to open a private school. I suggest, first of all, that part of the reason for these hearings is to gain input as to what criteria should be applied to the tax credit, to determine who should or should not qualify for these tax credits. Do you have any opinion on what kinds of criteria we should be looking at?

Mr Versluis: I'm not sure that I really can comment on that. I'm not up on what all other schools are doing. I'm certainly not involved in other schools. I have children who attend public school and I have children in our private school, Glad Tidings Academy. But I certainly wouldn't criticize the government for setting some standards related to the criteria that would be required for the tax credit. Whether or not we would fit the criteria really wouldn't make a difference. Individually, as a school, we made our decision to have a school before there was any tax credit or there was anything given, so we would continue to do that. Our future does not rest upon the decisions made by the government related to this tax credit—for sure. It's possible that we might qualify under a certain level of criteria or it might be that we would be excluded, but at the same time I think it's important that there be some acknowledgement for the choices made.

Mr Spina: In part of your presentation you made a statement on page 2 that says, "We do not wish to become encumbered by a great amount of government interference." That question will come forward from the others, so I'll bring it forward now. I guess that ties in with my comment or my question, and that is, if we were to look at criteria as to which schools would qualify, what constitutes government interference? Would having to meet standardized testing be considered that? Would having teachers qualified or certified under the Ontario College of Teachers, for example? Should those be considerations? Would those be considered interference or not?

Mr Versluis: Those specific things wouldn't be considered interference. I think if any funds were attached to any requirements related to what we would teach regarding our religious beliefs and where our religious beliefs crossed into curriculum, for instance, that would be an issue we would be opposed to having any involvement in. As far as the accreditation or qualifications of our teachers, I don't think there would be a problem with that as well.

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I think it's the Ontario college that has excluded many teachers from private schools. It hasn't been the teachers who have not wanted to be part of the college, but rather they have been excluded because they chose an education, again probably a faith-based education, and they were forced to go to a school outside of one that the Ontario college approves of. I think if there was some

kind of movement there, if there was an openness by the Ontario college to receive many of our teachers, then it would be a possibility that we wouldn't have anything opposed. We do have some teachers who are certified by the Ontario college but not all of our teachers are, because, again, they have been trained in another institution.

As far as our students meeting the grade, we have no problem there at all. We certainly believe that our students, if they were tested equitably—we're not an elitist school, as I mentioned, so all our students are not on the top of the heap. However, when our students are scored on international tests, they score well above the average, even though we have a broad spectrum of academic abilities. We would have no problem with that if the testing was provided in a fair and equitable way toward our students, and our students were not prejudiced against because they were not using a specific curriculum.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for your presentation. There was an earlier comment about international testing scores and that Ontario public schools weren't doing well. In fact, we've done very well and a lot of our international scores are extremely good.

Mr Versluis: I'm not speaking about the public schools at all.

Mr Kennedy: That was just for the general record here. In fact, one of the most high-achieving boards was in Durham region, and now it's been racked with all kinds of problems, some of which local people attribute to the lack of response from the government. It's ironic that that has been the case, that one of the most acknowledged boards in the province has since been hit by at least some level of policy—

Mr Versluis: But equally, in the same way, a lot of private schools are put down as if they have an inferior quality of teaching or an inferior quality of curriculum because they don't use exactly what the ministry approves. The prejudice goes both ways.

Mr Kennedy: And indeed some schools feel the same way because it's one size fits all. You are outside that big footprint from Queen's Park, but it's almost a Soviet-style thing, where it reaches into every classroom. Some teachers say they want to close the door and keep the politics out, but every time they turn around, knock, knock, there's Mr Harris or Ms Ecker giving them something new to contend with. I think, objectively, there's been so much interference and so much centralization, I can understand some of the appeal of staying outside of that.

I want to ask you a fairly serious question. We have a short time to consider this on its merits. There is a consideration that, for your school, there's a much broader consideration the government has asked us to look at. The government party says, "There will be some kind of guidelines. We'll see if we have any amendments tomorrow." This legislation has no guidelines whatsoever and none of the selected officials get any input into the

regulations. They're done behind closed doors. They're done without any public scrutiny whatsoever.

A year ago, this is what the government had to say about this kind of proposal: "It would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding." That's what the government said. This was their official deputation to the United Nations. They said, "It would result in disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario." Those are the exact words. In fact, the Premier of this province and the Minister of Education, leading policy and leading funding decisions in this province, said that's what it would do. Now here we are, a year later, no other studies have been tabled, we're in this very rushed discussion, and we're supposed to believe that somehow the government has had a change of heart. They've done this total, complete, double-ended flip-flop and we are supposed to look at this as something having merit.

You said yourself your school would continue without this. You perhaps were asking for something but you weren't banging on the door, and if it doesn't happen your community is going to continue. Where did this proposal come from? Why do you think the government is suddenly putting this on the table after denying and denying that they had any interest in this? Where is it coming from, and if you have any insight to that, why are we being so rushed about it? What's the big hurry?

Mr Versluis: As a supporter of private school education, I would hope it's because the government has seen the merits of private education.

Mr Kennedy: Talk about a conversion of experiences. I don't mean to belittle that, but it's a point.

Mr Versluis: I have no idea why the government does what they do. We're just here today because we see the fact that they have made a decision and we are probably as surprised as you are.

Mr Kennedy: You can understand the view of others.

The Chair: We've run out of time. Ms Martel.

Ms Martel: I think it shall be termed the conversion on the road to Damascus.

Mr Versluis: They saw the light.

Ms Martel: You know we have a difference of opinion, but there was a point you raised that I did want to respond to because it's a question we raised in the Legislature. The one other jurisdiction that has put in place a tax credit proposal the same as this government is putting in place is Milwaukee, because in other jurisdictions there have been different methods of funding private schools. So the one we have a direct comparison to is the system that is already in place.

What worries me greatly is that that experience showed that 15% of families pulled their children from public schools to move into private schools. If we use what is the most direct comparison and we overlay that into Ontario, that would mean about a \$2.3-billion loss to the public system, with parents taking their children out and moving them into private schools, which would have an enormous impact on funding for the public school system, over and above all of the concerns we already

heard here about the consequences we've already seen with the cuts. When we look at what other jurisdiction is using this and what has been the effect, this really worries me, because I don't see why parents wouldn't do the same thing here in Ontario that has already been done in a jurisdiction that has adopted exactly a similar proposal.

Mr Versluis: I think it's important to address the issue of what would happen to the funding for the public school system because I believe in a strong public school system. I have children in public school so I don't want to see it depleted either. But at the same time, I would want to carefully look at the demographics of Milwaukee and see which kinds of schools those students went to. I know we in Canada are not the same as the US. Faith-based schools, for instance, are much stronger in the US than they are in Canada. There's a much larger proportion of faith-based schools in the US. If, for instance, 10% or that 15% went to faith-based schools, I would say it's probably not going to happen in Canada, but I don't know. I think it would be more interesting to look at a Canadian population, which is more pluralistic, and you'd have to have a big jump in the number of private schools. As it is, there are 730 private schools in Ontario, and 102,000 students out of 2.1 million are attending private schools. A 15% increase in that wouldn't be that much.

Ms Martel: I'm curious because you said you wouldn't see that proportion if it was a question of them moving to a faith-based school. Why? This is not meant as disrespect, but clearly in the arguments you've raised and those that were raised before you, there are any number of people who are feeling like the public system is not responding to their religious needs.

Mr Versluis: And that's true. That's a problem we're not really addressing in this issue, because Protestant Christianity for years was part of the public system—the Catholic system and the public system. The public system at least gave some kind of reverence to the Protestant way of thinking and to the traditions of the Protestant church. That's just not there any more. It's not even allowed. It's discouraged and it's banned in many school districts from anything being there. That's really what we have responded to and what our group of people has responded to, and others. I don't think people would leave the public school system en masse for that reason in Ontario because I don't see that being an issue for a huge majority of people in Ontario.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

There's one notice I would like to pass on to the members. I would like to remind all the members that amendments are due tomorrow at 4:30 at Queen's Park.

With no further business, this committee is adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning at the Marriott Hotel in Ottawa.

The committee adjourned at 1619.

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