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Wednesday 18 February 2004

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Mercredi 18 février 2004

**Standing committee on
public accounts**

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Provincial Auditor:
Ministry of Education

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Wednesday 18 February 2004

Mercredi 18 février 2004

The committee met at 1040 in committee room 1, following a closed session.

2003 ANNUAL REPORT, PROVINCIAL AUDITOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Consideration of section 3.05, curriculum development and implementation.

The Chair (Mr Norman W. Sterling): Good morning, Deputy Herbert. Thank you very much for coming to the committee. It's our tradition to allow you to make some opening remarks, and then the committee will go to questioning thereafter.

Microphones come on automatically. The Hansard reporter turns them on. You can push the button to turn it off, though. If you'd put the microphone fairly close to your mouth, one of the members of the committee—I shall not divulge which one—

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The old ones, whoever they are.

The Chair: One of the older ones would appreciate hearing it through the speaker system.

Ms Suzanne Herbert: Thank you, Chair. I'm Sue Herbert. I'm the Deputy Minister of Education, and with me today are Judith Wright, who is the assistant deputy minister of strategic policy and program, and Kit Rankin, who is the director of curriculum. There will be no teasing from Mr Patten.

I have prepared remarks. I don't think I'll use the full 20 minutes, and hopefully I won't bore you too badly, but I do have a few things that I would like to put on the record as part of the introduction to public accounts here this morning.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to update you on the ministry's responses to section 3.05 on curriculum development and implementation of the annual report of the Office of the Provincial Auditor. This was the first provincial curriculum audit to take place since 1993, and it resulted in five insightful recommendations. We've put considerable effort into addressing these recommendations and will continue to do so, but before I address the ministry's specific responses, I would like to provide a bit of context on the current educational environment in Ontario.

I've been the Deputy Minister of Education for the past four years, and I must say that Ontario's curriculum

has undergone significant changes even over that brief time frame, though curriculum reform began three years before I arrived.

In 1996, following recommendations tabled in the Royal Commission on Learning, the ministry assumed full responsibility for curriculum policy and undertook the development of a province-wide curriculum, which resulted in the publication of: 18 elementary curriculum policy documents for grades 1 to 8, nine in English and nine in French; the kindergarten program document; 28 grades 9 and 10 secondary curriculum policy documents, 14 English and 14 French; and 35 grades 11 and 12 secondary curriculum policy documents, 17 English and 18 French.

All of these curriculum policy documents contain detailed learning expectations describing the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire at each grade. Each curriculum policy document also includes an achievement chart, which provides the framework used for assessment and evaluation of student achievement. These descriptions of levels of achievement were introduced to help ensure consistent assessment and evaluation processes across the province, along with a provincial report card based on these standards.

Elementary curriculum policy documents for both French- and English-language schools were introduced for all grades in September 1997 and 1998.

Secondary curriculum reform, which included the introduction of the Ontario secondary schools grades 9 to 12 policy and the four-year secondary curriculum policy documents for all disciplines, was introduced one grade at a time, starting with the grade 9 curriculum in September 1999 and ending with the grade 12 curriculum in September 2002.

I am pleased the auditor's report recognizes that the process for developing the new curriculum was appropriate and that most educators interviewed considered the curriculum to be a high-quality product.

Implementation of provincial curriculum policy and programs is a shared responsibility among school boards, principals and teachers. To support the implementation of these system-wide changes, the ministry provided significant resources. Approximately \$472 million was allocated for textbooks and resources, support materials and funds for training teachers. Orientation sessions for each of the new curriculum policy documents and subject-specific train-the-trainer workshops were offered prior to

the implementation of the curriculum for grades 9 to 12 over a four-year period.

Support materials funded by the ministry and targeting the curriculum policy documents and its new achievement charts include exemplars for grades 1 to 12, course profiles for grades 9 to 12, elementary curriculum units for grades 1 to 8, and the electronic curriculum unit planner for grades 1 to 12.

Exemplars are samples of student work demonstrating the four levels of achievement and are used by teachers for assessing students. A survey conducted by the Council of Directors of Education in June 2002 indicated province-wide teachers' approval of these documents, and the ministry's exemplar project is ongoing in other subject areas.

Course profiles at the secondary level are a series of second-generation documents with detailed examples of learning activities and assessment strategies. These were developed for all courses for grades 9 to 12 and sent to schools in paper and electronic versions, as well as posted on curriculum Web sites.

The ministry also funded development of the curriculum unit planner, an electronic tool that helps teachers create individual lesson plans and units of study. Teachers across the province can develop their own units, or download ones developed by the ministry or by their school boards and modify them to specifically meet their students' needs.

It's important to remember that curriculum implementation is an ongoing process and not a single event. We expect that teachers, who are highly skilled professionals, will continue to hone their skills and continue to assume personal responsibility for acquiring the professional learning they need to help them remain effective and competent educators.

Given the scale and pace of changes introduced into the system, a number of the auditor's recommendations related to training and implementation were a direct result of the pace of implementation. There is no doubt that the ministry and the sector were challenged by the pace of change, particularly in the elementary reform in the beginning years as implementation began without all of the support resources in place. Now, in relation to textbooks and resources, as the auditor indicated, textbook availability is being resolved over time as publishers introduce new textbooks and other learning resources.

In terms of training and support, although large-scale implementation initiatives are over, we are still providing significant levels of support to teachers to meet targeted priorities and needs. We have also put in place a systemic process for curriculum review and revision to ensure that curriculum changes take place in an evolutionary manner.

Furthermore, a number of the auditor's recommendations focus on accountability. As the report itself points out, "... school boards are responsible for ensuring that their staffs comply with provincial policy on education and for helping teachers to improve their teaching practices and to deliver the curriculum effectively. Principals

are responsible for supervising and evaluating the performance of teachers in providing the appropriate instruction for their students and in evaluating student work and progress."

Over the coming months, our key priorities as a ministry include achieving the government's education "excellence for all" agenda, improving student achievement and building confidence in our public education system. With these goals in mind, today I want to talk about the auditor's recommendations and provide you with an update.

The auditor's first recommendation related to the implementation of the curriculum, the speed of its implementation, and the need for more specific implementation training. A continued range of supports for curriculum changes will be introduced systematically. This support will be timely, measured, focused and ongoing.

To this end, an ongoing five-year cycle of review of the Ontario curriculum, known as "sustaining quality curriculum," or SQC, was initiated in February 2003. The first full year of this ongoing five-year cycle of review began last September. This review process will ensure that the curriculum remains current and relevant. It will also systematically build in monitoring of how the curriculum is working, what revisions need to be made and how to implement any changes in a timely fashion.

Revisions to the grades 1 to 8 social studies-history-geography curriculum, the first subject reviewed, will be completed by this spring. We are currently seeking input from our stakeholders on a draft of these revisions.

The next phase of review has also begun for the English-language and French-language curriculum in mathematics for all grades, career and guidance education for grades 9 to 12, and business studies for grades 9 to 12. Canadian and world studies grades 9 to 12 implementation is planned for September 2005.

As the report indicated, the ministry has spent over \$300 million on textbooks and learning resources to support the new curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12 in both English and French.

As a result of ongoing textbook development, the ministry was able to make an increasing number of grades 11 and 12 textbooks available for French-language core and non-core courses for the 2003-04 school year. More recently, the decision was made to provide funding of \$2.6 million to French-language school boards for the purchase of textbooks and other learning resources in French for all grades by March 2004.

The ministry continues to meet with the curriculum implementation partnership and ad hoc committee, which is chaired by myself and Michael Fullan from OISE, comprised of key education stakeholders, to help determine appropriate areas to support effective curriculum implementation.

1050

I'd like to point out that boards have developed action plans for students at risk, which include a commitment to provide specific professional opportunities related to

literacy for the 2003-04 school year, in response to the targeted funding to boards for the at-risk initiatives. These action plans include commitments for teacher professional development for literacy and numeracy to take place in the 2004-05 school year.

In addition, our early reading and early math strategies now emphasize the importance of focusing on teaching reading, writing and math skills to improve the learning and achievement of students. To support the early reading and early math strategies, we are implementing a training program for teachers of children in kindergarten to grade 3, as well as principals, which runs until the end of this school year. This training focuses on effective instructional strategies, using assessment information and other school data to set improvement targets and guide instruction, and on instructional leadership.

In addition, ministry staff is working with teams in 43 schools to improve reading achievement of JK to grade 3 students, as well as to improve these schools' improvement planning techniques. Best practices from this initiative will be shared across the system by December 2004.

Boards have developed plans to ensure secondary school principals and all teachers of the grade 12 Ontario secondary school literacy course, or OSSLC, will receive individual training in the new course. Training is taking place throughout this school year. To support teachers in the implementation of the OSSLC, the ministry has developed a Web site that will go live very soon.

A wide range of targeted implementation supports—what we call TIPS—are now available as well. These include grades 7 to 9 applied mathematics, released in December 2003 and posted on the Ontario Curriculum Clearinghouse Web site; \$2.45 million in funding to support follow-up training in boards for grades 7 to 9 mathematics; implementation supports for French-language schools, consisting of approximately \$3.5 million in funding to develop resources and offer training to boards, including teaching modules in math for grades 1 to 8—19 of 40 have been sent to school boards—to be completed by 2005, and learning materials for grade 9 applied math, sent to school boards in 2003.

Approximately \$7.7 million in funding will be transferred to both French-language and English-language boards to allow them to continue training teachers in the use of the electronic curriculum planner, student assessment and other ongoing priorities.

As promised in the report, we are working with publishers and other interested stakeholders to ensure they have the necessary lead time to develop appropriate resources to support curricular revision. Members from publisher organizations attend the Liste Trillium advisory committee in its twice-annual meetings, as well as stakeholder information sessions on specific curriculum initiatives.

The auditor's second recommendation addressed the need to ensure the provincial curriculum meets the needs of all students, in particular struggling students. These are students at risk of not obtaining the necessary know-

ledge and skills to succeed in subsequent grades and not meeting the requirements of the secondary school diploma. It also addressed the need to develop processes that would enable boards to effectively track these students. As we responded in the report, "Addressing the learning requirements of students at risk of not succeeding is a ministry priority."

We know that over 36,000 students did not pass the OSSLT at its second administration. Although 85% of students enrolled in academic courses passed both the reading and writing sections of the test, only 38% of those enrolled in applied courses and only 14% of those enrolled in locally developed courses successfully passed both.

The previous government introduced the OSSLC, which began to be offered this past September as an alternative support and opportunity for students who failed the test. We are currently monitoring the implementation of this course.

This group of students, those who failed the test, is a very large issue for all education jurisdictions. The Royal Commission on Learning, in 1994, indicated that approximately 30% of children left the system without a diploma. Based on 1993 data, 58% of grade 9 students taking the old general level courses left school without a diploma, and 65% of students taking the basic level courses did not obtain their diploma.

The debate about creating a system that expects high standards for all and the need for system mobilization to support students who, for a number of reasons, do not succeed and/or leave early, has been going on for decades. It feels sharper today because of the economic narrowing of opportunities for these students if they leave school without a diploma, and because they can now be clearly identified and monitored in the education system in this province.

Last December, the government announced \$112 million in support to school boards for students with extra challenges. This funding consists of \$95 million to help students from low-income and single-parent families, as well as recent immigrants, and \$17 million for services to students whose second language is English or French.

The government is allocating \$50 million annually to school boards to implement the recommendations in the reports of the expert panel for students at risk in Ontario and the program pathways for students at risk work group. Specialists have been hired in every board and are working closely with the ministry. These at-risk leaders received expert training in the spring and fall of 2003, and an additional session is being held this month. In addition, Ontario's principals' associations received approximately \$1.4 million through the ministry's professional learning fund to develop professional learning courses, which include courses on effective practices to support at-risk students.

Requirements to ensure that boards identify measures that will be used to assess how effective their local initiatives for students at risk are in improving student performance will be established and reported annually. In

addition, processes to identify, track and monitor at-risk students in remedial programs are underway. Boards are tracking students who have been unsuccessful on the Ontario secondary school literacy test and who must complete it in order to graduate.

Working together, a number of branches in the ministry have established appropriate accountability measures relating to the funding for board action plans related to students at risk. These measures were initiated in 2003-04 and will be further refined in 2004-05.

The auditor's third recommendation focused on consistency and quality in implementation of curriculum and assessment policy. Again, as the report itself points out:

"School boards are responsible for ensuring that their staff comply with provincial policy on education and for helping teachers to improve their teaching practices....

"Principals are responsible for supervising and evaluating the performance of teachers in providing the appropriate instruction for their students and in evaluating student work and progress."

Having said that, the ministry has a role to play in ensuring greater consistency in student assessment and evaluation, and enhancing board accountability. For instance, as part of the sustaining quality curriculum process, achievement charts that set provincial performance standards are currently under revision. These will be finalized later this year to create greater consistency across subjects and grades.

The ministry contracted the Council of Ontario Directors of Education to help us develop documents that provide implementation support for the provincial secondary assessment policy in English and French. Boards have received funding to offer training on this initiative. We have begun to develop a similar elementary resource document that will be released and ready for training in 2004-05.

School boards and schools have already received samples of student work, or exemplars, and the publication of these documents is ongoing in both French and English.

We recognize the importance of research and training, as well as sufficient and reliable information, to support effective decision-making and improvement planning processes. The new Ontario school information system, ONSIS, which is targeted for implementation over the next two years, will help support the development of accountability measures for schools, school boards and the ministry. This will be a complex, multi-year project, but it will pay off in our ability to act on real information about our schools and students.

Closely tied to this project is implementation of the Ontario education number, or OEN. A student identification number assigned by the ministry to students across the province will become the key identifier on student records throughout a student's school career. Over two million OENs have already been assigned to students in 102 school boards and school authorities.

The auditor's fourth recommendation refers to standards for student information systems, the effectiveness of

improvement planning and research on key issues. As I have just indicated, ONSIS, the ministry's new data collection system, will become the foundation for generating more accurate, reliable and complete statistics, providing a better basis for assessing needs and for developing policies to meet those needs. In addition, the ministry has trained board teams on how to use assessment data to inform improvement planning, and we have sponsored three regional symposia on data-driven decision-making for school improvement.

An RFP for research to investigate effective strategies to improve boys' reading and writing skills is being developed and will be posted in June. The research on this will commence in the 2004-05 school year and continue for three years.

The fifth and final recommendation highlights the need to assess the effectiveness of the annual education plan and the teacher adviser program. Students in grades 7 to 12 are now expected to prepare an annual education plan. Students in grades 7 to 10 prepare their plan with the assistance of their parents, guidance counsellor and teacher adviser. The plans are optional for grades 11 and 12.

We agree that the annual education plan and teacher adviser program are important tools to help students achieve their educational goals. Ministry policy already requires school principals to conduct a survey every three years with students, parents, teachers and community members to determine the effectiveness of their school's guidance and career education program. To assist in the implementation of this new requirement, the ministry has helped schools and school boards by sponsoring teacher and administrator training, and developing and distributing support resources, including model program effectiveness surveys in CD-ROM format.

In addition, the ministry will undertake a review of the implementation of the annual education plan and teacher adviser program in Ontario schools. Options on the review methodology have been developed, and the review and recommendations will be completed by the end of the 2004-05 school year.

In conclusion, I would just like to reiterate that we appreciate the constructive recommendations by the Provincial Auditor and the working relationship that my ministry and his office have had throughout this audit. Thank you.

1100

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy. I think you took 19 minutes.

Ms Herbert: I said it would be under 20.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I want to ask about what is a heated issue in my own community among students, and that is the massive number of students who are being frustrated by the current curriculum. I don't know whether the reports that have come forward and are across the media are accurate, with estimates of as many as 45,000 kids unlikely to graduate because they failed too many courses in grades 9 and 10, but whatever the number is, there are too many kids in

that circumstance. What they ask me—and I'm going to pose the question to you—is, how did we get here? How did we get to a circumstance where there are so many kids across this province who want to graduate and are telling me, “I simply can't. I can't do the courses that are being asked of me”?

Ms Herbert: I might just start with the development of the secondary school reform and how it was constructed, and then we might talk a little bit about what we know about credit accumulation for kids in grades 9 and 10, which was addressed primarily through some of the work the Queen's study did. Kit, can I ask you to address that?

Ms Kit Rankin: I'm Kit Rankin, director of the curriculum and assessment policy branch. The development of the new curriculum in Ontario began with a great deal of input from parents and community members, as well as educators. The ministry was urged to ensure there was a high standard in the curriculum in Ontario that would challenge students and prepare them well for their futures. There was also benchmarking against curriculum in other jurisdictions. As a result of this work and the accompanying research, teams of curriculum writers, practitioners from the field, worked hard to develop a curriculum that would be appropriate for Ontario students.

Since the introduction of the curriculum, from time to time people have certainly indicated a concern that some students are struggling, and the Queen's report does indicate that in certain areas—certainly in the applied program—students are having some difficulty at this time accumulating credits. As we move to the sustaining quality curriculum initiative, we are examining this issue.

Ms Broten: I have to say, with the greatest respect, that really doesn't answer the question about how we got to this difficult circumstance. We studied it; we talked to people. It's really not news to those of you who are much more expert than I am that it's been a number of years that we've had teachers, parents and students critical of the consequences of these changes on a particular group of students: at-risk students. These issues were raised a long time ago. I know a report came out in March 2003 saying we need to have recommendations for supporting students at risk. My question is, why was this not included as a component early on? There had to have been an understanding that if you're going to increase the level of curriculum, you're going to leave some students behind. How can we not have dealt with that at the time?

Ms Herbert: The actual implementation of the grade 9 applied curriculum, which is the curriculum you are referring to, began three years ago. One of the reasons we put the Queen's University study in place was to actually monitor and see whether we had the curriculum at the right level and whether it was going to work or not work. We now have three years worth of data, and clearly we have some issues with the curriculum, which is why we're moving up the review of the mathematics curriculum in particular and fast-tracking that and why we put in place the supports through the OSSLC and the remedial

supports I talked about for grades 7 to 12 as a response to what is essentially the third year of curriculum reform.

In the Queen's study, the projection of kids who are at risk of leaving school without a diploma is about 25%, which is about 24,000 students. Obviously, as a ministry and as an education sector we're really concerned about supporting those kids as much as we can to get their diploma, which is why we've put in place the number of initiatives that I outlined in my speech.

The question of whether the standards in the curriculum are right, which is implied in your question, “Do we have the curriculum standards right?” is the question we're now undertaking, in particular with the math review, which is where we've had the most credit loss, according to the Queen's study.

Ms Broten: Does the ministry have its own figures as to the number of at-risk students?

Ms Herbert: Sorry?

Ms Broten: Do you have your own figures as to the number of students you believe would be defined as at-risk students?

Ms Herbert: In secondary school, we accept the Queen's study that we have as many as 25%, or 24,000. That's the figure we've been using as an at-risk figure.

Ms Judith Wright: I'm Judith Wright, assistant deputy minister for the elementary and secondary programs division. In terms of students at risk, we have the Queen's report that the deputy mentioned, which has a number of estimates. We also have put in place, as the deputy mentioned in her speech, a capacity at school boards by putting at-risk leaders in place. The school boards, through that position, have been better positioned to identify the students who are at risk in terms of not appropriately meeting the grade level.

The second way of identifying at-risk students is through the monitoring of the Education Quality and Accountability Office standardized testing in grades 3 and 6. Through those results, teachers in schools can identify students who are performing at level 1 or level 2 and can put in place the necessary supports for those students as early as possible.

Ms Broten: There were funds allocated in March 2003, \$50 million, with respect to at-risk students. Did that money get spent or has that money waited for the recommendations that came out in October for the expenditure of those funds? It was announced in March 2003.

Ms Wright: The \$50 million has been allocated to the school boards and they have the money. Ten million of that was to enable them to enhance their leadership capacity at the board level by hiring the at-risk leaders, and \$40 million was allocated to the boards in order for them to develop work plans for addressing their board's specific needs for students at risk.

In return for the allocation, they have done board work plans on how they intend to, first and foremost, focus on the literacy requirements, and then second, look at pathways for students who are at risk.

Ms Broten: When did that money flow?

Ms Rankin: It flowed as part of the school board operating grants for this fiscal year.

Ms Broten: So it's part of the \$112 million?

Ms Herbert: It's in addition to that.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Thank you for coming here today. I want to follow up on a couple of issues that have been raised. In the materials that we received—I'm sorry, I just can't find it quickly—there was some reference made to the whole issue around social promotion. I know that social promotion had, for many years, been a very significant feature of decision-making at the elementary level. I wondered if you could bring us up to date on that issue.

1110

Ms Wright: This is a very significant issue, as you are aware. It's also one that's actually quite difficult to quantify in a meaningful way. As you're probably aware, under the Education Act the issue of promotion of a student is a principal's decision. I think one of the aspects that we are certainly going to do in terms of following up on the Provincial Auditor's report is to do some more quantitative research as to the extent of this problem and the extent of the question of social promotion and what's happening across the elementary and secondary school system with that. So we've committed to actually getting a better handle on what I would say is pretty much a systemic concern and one that is probably most important for the individual student and at the school level. We need to be able to have a better understanding of the implications for the students and the school of this particular concern. We will do further research and we will certainly be talking more extensively to principals. I think we'll be reporting back to the auditor as part of our report back on what we find there.

Mrs Munro: I appreciate that. I guess my question then, following from the information you've provided is to ask, when you've done the research on the extent of the problem, what are you going to do then?

Ms Herbert: I think I would add that what we know now is that there's conflicting research. We've had research in the 1970s and 1980s that pointed out that holding children back, if you like, which is what the system would call it, is detrimental to their self-esteem and their growth. There has been research that says that's not true; there are other ways to intervene with students which will support them to move forward in a way that still meets the criteria. What we have to do before we can tell you what our recommendation to the government might be, will be to tease through all of that information and all of that research and come to some set of conclusions that we might bring forward for the government to advise, but I can't, in advance, tell you what that might be.

Mrs Munro: I appreciate that. My next question relates to the question of the students at risk. How do you define a student at risk? When do you decide that a student is at risk?

Ms Herbert: The way we've been using "student-at-risk" for the purposes of the government's initiatives has

been to see the students who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma. That definition has really focused on the secondary school system, though we have initiatives for grades 7 and 8 as well because as we come to the grade 10 test we need to do as much preparation as we can. So we've defined it as students who are at risk, through credit accumulation information and through their writing on the test, the OSSLT, of not obtaining their diploma. There are other definitions, clearly, that could be used, but for this specific initiative that has been our definition.

Ms Wright: The working group on at-risk students actually developed a definition which was based on the definition that the deputy has given you and also did include as well students who had become disengaged from secondary school for a variety of reasons which would be reflected in their credit accumulation, but also could be reflected in other issues. The actual at-work group has developed that definition. That definition was then used by the expert panel on literacy and the working group on pathways in order to develop the recommendations that they made on what kinds of strategies they felt would work for schools and school boards in addressing the broad range of these students who were at risk of not graduating.

Mrs Munro: I wonder then, when you're looking at the issue around social promotion and the kind of problems that it creates, would that study allow you to look at whether or not potentially students who have been promoted socially ultimately become candidates for a student-at-risk program?

Ms Herbert: It's hard to say. That's a very good point. You're quite right; it should allow us to do that.

Mrs Munro: I think that's a really important opportunity when you're doing research.

The other question I have is related to the question raised earlier by your remarks with regard to teacher training. I think that, in a way that is totally justifiable, obviously a great deal of attention has been focused on looking at teacher training. I'm just wondering, because popularly there is the notion that there are so many factors involved in student results and obviously the work done by the group examining students at risk would be in a better position to comment on the wide number of problems that ultimately lead to a student being at risk. Do you have any data that would demonstrate a correlation between the level of teacher training and student results? Are we getting a bang for the buck?

Ms Herbert: Sorry, we're conferring on a response here. We as a jurisdiction don't have data. We have some research from other jurisdictions that would speak to the investment in instructional strategies that work with particular kinds of students and with particular kinds of curricula. I might ask Kit just to comment further on that.

Ms Rankin: Yes, we're working very closely with the students-at-risk leaders across the province. One of the things they're being asked to do as they implement recommendations provided by the expert panel on literacy and the pathways working group is to collect data for

a wide variety of purposes. In addition to collecting the data to help them identify and monitor and track struggling students, we're also talking with them about how they can try to use the data they collect to assess the effectiveness of the interventions they make, including the teacher training, which is certainly a major intervention.

We're in the early stages of dialogue with them. The recommendations of the expert panel on literacy did focus on the importance of using information well to assess the effectiveness of our interventions and to work with our students. We're looking forward to doing some more work with them on it. It's certainly a part of the intended direction for the at-risk initiative.

Ms Wright: If I could just add, under the early reading-early math initiative, which is focused on JK to grade 6, we are doing an evaluation of that initiative, and part of what we will be evaluating is to see if the investment in the training for teachers has actually ended up in any kind of change in instruction. We can't directly necessarily say that that has in turn led to better performance on EQAO results. The direct causal part is more difficult to make. But we will be able to know whether in fact that training has affected instruction.

Mrs Munro: I just think it would be very important to look at.

Ms Wright: Very important, absolutely.

Mrs Munro: I want to go back for a moment to the whole issue of the student at risk. When you defined it, you talked about the potential that an individual might have for success and the lack of that being the key to defining this individual as at risk. Does it include, or to what degree does it include, those students who are also identified and funded through special education?

Ms Wright: "Students at risk" is a definition that would include a kid who was struggling for a number of reasons. There may be children involved in that category who have a learning disability. I think the notion we have is to actually do a fairly tough definition on what a student at risk is and an intervention that is targeted at what the local needs of the school and the school board are. So the actual definition of a student at risk may include some students who are struggling for reasons of having an exceptionality. The actual funding itself is targeted for a series of programs that would be put in place for students who may need additional remediation or a different pathway through school.

Mrs Munro: I guess my point is that, although not to take away, and by no means to interpret this as in any way taking away from the value of the identification for special ed and the consequential funding, it just seems to me that in very many cases the student at risk who doesn't fall into that category has been overlooked, and it would seem to me that it's most important that when you are looking at program development, it has to be in a manner that meets the needs of those who fall outside that definition.

Ms Wright: And in a way that links all of those different supports. I agree.

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Mrs Munro: Yes. Just finally—I'm actually coming to my final question—in the King report—I don't know whether you have it right there, but my copy has page ii. It talks about the new curricula. One of the things it raises as an issue is the question of what are referred to as grade 10 essential skills. It says that since they "do not qualify as required course credits, the transition to grades 11 and 12 workplace preparation courses for students who take the grade 10 essential skills courses is adversely affected." Could you explain to us why that decision was made?

Mr Grant Clarke: I'm Grant Clarke and I'm the director of the secondary school policy and programs branch. What the report is referring to is locally developed optional courses in grade 10. The point the report is making is that students don't take them because they want compulsory credits in grades 9 and 10 and so too few, he concludes, have taken advantage of the grade 10 courses that are available to them in English, math, science or actually any other subject as well.

The reason for the courses in the beginning, when the reorganized program was put into place, was to allow students to have catch-up courses, recognizing that some students would be coming into grade 9 and, in key areas like English, math and science, might not be at grade level to meet the expectations in the grade 9 applied or academic curriculum. So the purpose was to give them a leg up, if you will, into the grade 9 program, to allow them to consolidate the learning they needed in the foundational knowledge and skills related to English, math and science and then move on from there, either into the applied stream in grade 9 or 10 and move on to grade 11 courses, or to go into grade 10 and what we might colloquially call stepping stone courses—locally developed optional credit courses in, for example, English, math and science—to further consolidate their knowledge and skill base in order to get ready to take advantage of destination-related courses in grades 11 and 12.

The fact that they're there is not in dispute. The report is saying that unless they come with compulsory credit, too few students will take advantage of them. So this is an issue that is currently being discussed within the ministry. It was certainly one of the recommendations of this report and of previous reports—for example, Barry O'Connor's working group on at-risk students—to increase the designation of these courses to increase the number that would count for compulsory credit.

Mrs Munro: In looking at those courses and the lack of take-up on them, would there have been any data done to look at whether those students—are these the socially promoted students that find themselves now in a situation where they don't have the skills that they perhaps should have had in order to be able to go into grade 9?

Mr Clarke: It's possible. The report does conclude that students taking locally developed compulsory credit courses in grade 9 are the most seriously at risk of not being able to complete the other course and credit or diploma requirements. So that does suggest that they

were under-prepared coming into grade 9; that is to say, they weren't at grade level. In reality, the grade 9 locally developed courses are based on elementary level expectations. They are indeed catch-up courses, so that does imply that students who need those courses are not yet ready for the curriculum in high school, and this is an attempt to catch them up.

Mrs Munro: Would schools have difficulty being able to timetable these courses in relation to the numbers of students who would be eligible to take them? Are there some practical problems in providing them at the school level?

Mr Clarke: Yes, and to what extent they're offered in all the schools is another issue. If you have a small number of students in a school who put up their hands and say, "Those are the courses I want," then there are sometimes difficulties in putting together a viable class in a school. Then you run into the issue of students not wanting to leave their school to perhaps go to another school, if that's indeed possible, to collect into a viable class size to offer those sorts of courses.

Also, in the first year of the grade 9 cohort, in 1999-2000, only about 1% of students were in these courses. That grew in the second year to about 5% to 6% in English, math and science. But students are not put into these courses; they have to select these courses with their parents in grade 8. So they have to have enough information about them and understand their value and purpose. One of the conclusions in the double-cohort study has been that students are often in courses that seem out of touch with where they are academically. That's a larger-context piece. Even with the best supports that could perhaps provide the level of support that students might need, whether or not students are actually finding their way into these courses is—

Mrs Munro: Would you anticipate that, with the students-at-risk program and the funding, there would be a greater understanding of the opportunities these courses present?

Mr Clarke: Absolutely. I think that with the work that's happening at the board level and with the advisory committees that are in place around the students-at-risk issue, there's much more attention being paid to, for example, the organization of the path of the program for students beginning in grade 9; the reach back, the communication between elementary and secondary schools, around what students may need, the information parents and students need in grades 7 and 8 to know what the menu of opportunities is for them in grade 9 and better advice and better information about how, if you do these things in grade 9, there's something waiting for you in grade 10; and more focus on success and trying to overcome the documented experience of failure that many of these students have had in grades 9 and 10.

Mrs Munro: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms Munro, I didn't realize your last question had five parts to it.

Mr Marchese: My questions don't have parts; they just flow in a helter-skelter sort of way.

The Chair: I'm not holding you to that. Ms Munro said this was her last question, and I just didn't realize there were five parts to it, that's all.

Mr Marchese: I'm just going to ask some questions on the basis of how they appeared in the auditor's report. One of the first questions that comes to mind is regarding the latitude the boards used to have to be able to develop some curriculum that addressed the needs of certain students. They don't have as much latitude any more, but some still do in some cases? Does one of you, all three of you, agree with the idea the board should have some latitude to respond to their own particular needs, or do you think we should be centralizing all curriculum?

Ms Rankin: I'll reply to that, if I may, Mr Marchese. The locally developed courses are an option that is open to school boards. There is actually a guideline for school boards in the development, and there's a process for approval of those courses to make sure that even though they're locally developed they are consistent with the overall vision of the Ontario curriculum and will meet the needs of students well. As you've already been discussing with the committee, there can be locally developed courses that are substituted for the compulsory courses in grades 9 or 10 English, mathematics and science. In addition to that, boards have the opportunity to propose locally developed courses for other areas that they think would benefit their students. A number of boards have developed such courses for a wide range of needs; some of them for struggling students and others for other purposes, for preparing students for future career directions.

The point about the three locally developed courses that are compulsories is that those are the ones they can do instead of the Ontario curriculum, whereas the others would be in addition.

Mr Marchese: So we do know how many boards are doing their own locally developed programs, because they have to get your approval, right?

Ms Rankin: There's a process working through our district offices to gather that information annually.

Mr Marchese: There's a process, but we don't really have an established process at the moment, is that it?

Ms Rankin: We do have an established process, and each year there is a careful review of all of the locally developed courses that school boards are proposing. Those are either approved or there's a dialogue with the school board about—

Mr Marchese: Are they approved in advance of those courses being offered?

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Ms Rankin: Yes, that's the requirement.

Mr Marchese: Then you would review them on the basis of their effectiveness, presumably, on a three-year cycle or whatever?

Ms Rankin: There is a three-year cycle of review for the optional courses. The board is required to make sure that the courses are meeting the needs of their students and then periodically to resubmit on that basis.

Mr Marchese: There's a cost, obviously, when boards do that. Do the boards cover that on their own?

Ms Rankin: The development of the locally developed course would be the responsibility of the school board. Whether that's an extra cost to them or not would depend on how it's done. In terms of the ministry, the ministry staff would come together and do a review process, and that does occasion some small extra cost.

Mr Marchese: But there is an extra cost for the board. Do they just find it somehow? How do they find the money if they think there's an important course development that they have to do for grades 9, 10, possibly 11? Do they just find it?

Ms Rankin: With the original development of the locally developed courses in English, math and science for grades 9 and 10 back in 1999 and 2000, where it was expressed to the ministry that this was a provincial need, the ministry actually supported a consortium of school boards to co-operatively develop and then provide them to all school boards in Ontario. Otherwise, if there are individual courses that boards want, they would determine what resources were needed to do so. It might be time as opposed to additional dollars, but still it would be one or the other.

Mr Marchese: Time is always money. Someone has to do it. The other question that had arisen was around the issue of curriculum and its implementation—you spoke to it briefly, I think—where people talked about the curriculum being introduced in haste, perhaps not having adequate text books at the time, and teachers expressing a concern around students at risk. You only came four years ago, so obviously this was done before your time. The other two of you, were you around? You weren't. So you really can't comment on that, can you? That's a problem, isn't it? I was going to ask—presumably you folks in charge would know that teachers would be complaining that perhaps this is done in haste, not adequately prepared. Training might have come at some point, but in the meantime they might have been inadequately prepared; in fact, curriculum might have been introduced and the textbooks not been available, which is odd but probably true. Did some of you hear about that while that was going on? You must have been around somewhere? Do you have an opinion on that?

Ms Herbert: I was around somewhere, yes. I have been a civil servant for a long time, Mr Marchese. I had three children in the public education system, too.

Mr Marchese: That helps.

Ms Herbert: What I can speak to on this is, of course, feedback that we've had from the curriculum implementation partnership group, which is a group representing all of the stakeholders, including the Ontario Teachers' Federation, faculties of education, school board representatives, that have worked together on implementing the curriculum. As you can expect, that partnership is the group that actually brings its issues to the table. I can speak to some of the issues you talked about from the perspective they've given me, which is that the elementary implementation, if you were in a classroom, felt hasty. There was a lag time between some of the support documents that teachers required and the implementation

of the curriculum that left teachers in the classroom, as the teachers' federations would express it, feeling not well-supported as they implemented the curriculum. I think the ministry tried as much as possible to look at methodologies which would provide at least interim supports and resources to teachers. You will recall the Xeroxing of textbooks was one of the things I think parents and teachers commented on.

Mr Marchese: Did we admit to that at the ministry, that that was happening?

Ms Herbert: In the ministry—and we say this now—if we were thinking about elementary reform, would we have wanted to have more time or wanted to start with the support documents first? We probably would have. The problem is that when you are doing a reform of this size and this magnitude, while you are actually not able to stop the system and hold it still while you do the reform, it's a very complex and massive undertaking. In spite of all of those glitches, I think, as the auditor has said in his report, the actual development of the curriculum and its use now in the schools is recognized and welcomed by teachers.

Mr Marchese: For sure. I was worried about the curriculum casualties that Mr Kennedy spoke about. It was terminology he used during the hearings where we questioned you and the minister before. My concern is around those curriculum casualties, and presumably we would have known that not only the haste but the rigour of the new curriculum would hurt a lot of the students, particularly those who would be studying at the basic level at the time.

Would the three of you have put in place something that would have protected those kids? My sense is that you would know this would cause problems and that you would have probably put something in place to help them, wouldn't you?

Ms Herbert: It's a speculative question. I'm sure the auditor would not encourage me to reply to speculative questions on an audit report. But I think, as we talked earlier about the students-at-risk initiative and the supports the ministry is putting in place now, that's a response to students who were concerned about their ability to gain their diploma.

Mr Marchese: I hear you. Thank God it's coming.

Ms Herbert: What we've done lately in looking at curriculum revision and making sure that the curriculum is up to date is to look at a cyclical review, so that we are always reforming the curriculum in an orderly fashion. I can ask Kit to talk to that in more detail.

Mr Marchese: No, that's OK. I'm just anticipating your answer possibly. I don't know. It's OK. It just worries me that when we introduce new curriculum, there wouldn't be some planning or some thought about how we would be hurting a whole lot of students in the system, and I'm worried that we don't have those things in place. In the meantime, a whole lot of students get hurt.

My particular interest is students at risk. Unless we serve those students, I'm not quite sure what we're doing,

except that you want to teach everyone, naturally, and everybody should have the environment to be able to achieve at whatever levels students can. Students at risk have the most to lose in terms of life choices and their own life development.

I remember reading studies many years ago and one particular study where teachers were able to determine, they said, who would go to university, who would go to college and who would go to work by grade 1. I think if you talked to a lot of teachers in grade 1, they probably might agree with that assessment. That was part of the study they did. We know literally by grade 1—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Oh, no, you're quite right. That would be bad for kids, wouldn't it?

Teachers were able to predetermine literally, at least based on the skills they bring, who would go where. Knowing that, based on how we put students into reading groups, because we still do that in grades 1, 2 and 3, we have a sense of who's in trouble and who's experiencing difficulty. What does the ministry do—I'm assuming you have the same knowledge as I or others do—or suggest by way of how we deal with those students that we get into our system in JK and SK, where they offer that, and obviously in grade 1, things we can do or should be doing that we're not doing to deal with students we know will be at risk in grade 9, grade 10 and so on?

Ms Herbert: We know, as a society, that children coming into school ready to learn is a key factor in future development, and now we know, through the grade 3 assessment of reading and writing and math, where students are in terms of their performance against a province-wide assessment. That is an intervention point that becomes really important in the education system, looking at the results of that assessment and looking at remediation strategies and interventions which support those children who may be at level 1 in the results.

However, we don't want to wait until grade 3, and so we need to move backwards to JK and SK. I'll ask Judith to talk a little bit about our early math and early reading initiative.

Mr Marchese: I did see their recommendation. They did refer to it. We're happy that such things exist. I was going to ask a separate question on that. But if you want to touch on that, and then I'll ask it again, sure.

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Ms Wright: I do think the early reading and early math strategy is an attempt on the part of everyone involved in education to begin to address the very important question that you've raised. The early reading and early math report started out with two expert panels, one in reading and one in math. We had front-line teachers, principals, SOs and academics basically coming together and making a report on what they thought were their best recommendations for the most appropriate approach to teaching reading and then math in the early years and, as part of that, what the important step was in identifying kids who were, even at that age, struggling to learn for a variety of reasons.

Those two reports were then distributed widely to school boards, SOs, principals and teachers. We had a series of sessions with board teams that were brought together, often with the members of these expert panels, to talk about what the meaning of these reports was. That was an attempt to begin that discussion on what sort of requirements there were for teachers in JK to grade 3 in terms of what they needed to teach reading, math and writing.

We have subsequently followed that up with quite extensive training. By the end of this year, we will have a lead math teacher and a lead literacy teacher in every elementary school who can work within their school with other teachers to talk about what's in the early reading and early math reports and to talk about what the needs of their schools are for teaching.

We have supplemented that with what we're about to release, which will be an electronic Web-based site for teachers to go on to pose their problems and ask for the assistance they need, as well as a guide for parents on reading and math.

So that's the first phase of what we assume will be quite an ongoing phase to address this issue.

Mr Marchese: So let me ask you this: This early reading strategy is only happening strategically in, what, 40 schools?

Ms Wright: No, it's in every elementary school.

Mr Marchese: The early reading strategy is happening everywhere?

Ms Wright: At the end of this year, every elementary school will have been trained on the expert panels' recommendations for what's needed to teach reading and math and writing, and every elementary school will have a lead teacher identified in each one of those to work with the elementary teachers in a community-of-learning approach.

Mr Marchese: So the lead teacher recommends strategies and so on to the other teachers and we hope for the best? There's a Web site, people can—

Ms Wright: The actual report of the two expert panels lays out in quite a bit of detail the sector's own professional judgment on what they think is an appropriate approach to teaching reading and math. The role of the teacher is to develop a community of learning within their school to talk about what kinds of problems they have, what kids need, how to make a strategy specific to their kids.

Mr Marchese: Can I ask you, has this been done in other jurisdictions?

Ms Wright: A version of this has been done, yes.

Mr Marchese: And do we know how well they have done? Do we know what the weaknesses were? Do we know how to take corrective action on that basis?

Ms Wright: We know from other jurisdictions the importance of focusing on the community of learning and teaching around literacy and numeracy, and the evaluation that I referred to earlier when answering Ms Munro's question will be an evaluation that we've started doing of this particular initiative to ascertain how we can

change it, how we can improve it, whether it's had any significant impact.

Mr Marchese: In spite of that strategy, I suspect we're going to have what the deputy said we had 10 years or 20 years ago. These are ongoing discussions. You will always have a lot of students who simply won't do well and many of them won't graduate. They didn't graduate 20 years ago, or 30 or 50 years ago, and they might continue to do so in spite of this learning strategy. I'm not sure you have other thoughts about what to do.

There are concerns in the early years that once students get into special ed—just to talk about special ed—there is a worry that people will be stuck in that level in which they find themselves. A number of studies talk about the fear some people have about not being able to jump out of a particular reading group or special education class and so on. There's a concern that maybe we don't have adequate special education resources and, even if we did, there's the fear that once in there, even though they need help, they might not ever get out. What do the three of you say about stuff like that, in terms of how we deal with that?

Ms Herbert: I agree that when parents talk about their children, they have a fear of their child being what they would call "labelled" and I think their fear is the pre-judgment that you talked about. I actually believe that teachers believe they can intervene and support children in a way that doesn't leave them labelled or typecast in a particular stream—you used the example of a reading group—that doesn't allow them to obtain their full potential.

Really what we're trying to do in the ministry now is to support the school boards to ensure that the basics, that literacy which we know is absolutely foundational, is taught early and assessed early. If the system can do that—and I believe it can—then we'll have moved a long way to addressing parents' concerns.

Mr Marchese: Let's just assume the teachers are doing their best, obviously, once they're in special ed and that, we hope, with all their learning and strategies, some are going to succeed better. Do we have enough special education resources, in your view, to deal with all the problems that we have across Ontario?

Ms Herbert: At the present time, the ministry has provided resources according to the annual ISA assessment, so as the ISA assessments are done, the ministry has been providing the resources that match the results of those validation exercises.

Mr Marchese: I remember going to Windsor, and the trustees and the director talking about the fact that their problems are so severe there, they don't even have specialized people to deal with the problems that those students are experiencing. My sense is that there's a shortage of expertise around the province and it's more prevalent in some areas than others. Do you think that? Do you feel that? Do you know that? What are we doing about it?

Ms Herbert: Two responses. One is that, as I said on the funding side, where students are identified and where

the validation process has taken place, we've been providing the funding. On the question of expertise and supporting children with exceptionalities with instructional interventions that support their individual needs, this is an area, not just for Ontario but across Canada—this is an issue that the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education have been addressing: How do we develop the right expertise to know what kind of interventions work with what children with what exceptionalities?

We've done some preliminary work in the ministry. We hosted last year a very large conference with international experts on autism and educational interventions on autism. We have been doing a lot of research into educational interventions which support particular children with particular exceptionalities. But moving from a system which supports students with special needs in their classrooms in a way that makes them feel safe and supported—an EA—to thinking about what are educational interventions to support that child's learning is the piece that I think—across North America there is a sense that we need to do a lot more research and a lot more standards setting.

Mr Marchese: I'm telling you, there's a lot of research out there. I read it 20 years ago. It's there in terms of effective schools. And I do believe, although I have a different view about instructional kinds of education simply being the solution to children's problems—and I want to ask you a separate question on that.

But the effective research that I've done years ago talks about how if you've got a great educational principal—who, by the way, I believe should be a teacher—an instructional teacher who is a head principal who's got good curriculum knowledge, and you've got teachers who are happy to go to work and you've got a strategy to get parents involved, just those three simple things could turn a school around where they are at risk. So there are things that we can, as educators, do that can change that around. We don't need to re-study the studies. They're there.

So I wanted to ask you that question, for a response to the statement I just made. And then another question about how instruction alone cannot deal with many of the problems the children bring to the school system. Surely you, having been around in different ministries, would have an opinion on what else you think children would need, in addition to the instructional and the school environment, to be able to bring a better result for students who are at risk.

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Ms Herbert: Maybe we could start with the first part of the question, which is, what is the combination of factors that make a school effective and efficient? Maybe Judith, I'd ask you to talk about it.

Ms Wright: Maybe what I can do is talk specifically about the program we have on turnaround schools, which I think you're alluding to—I could be wrong—which is a program we have to work with, at this point, 43 elementary schools chosen partially because they had quite poor results on the EQAO test but also because they reflected

a certain socio-economic location in the community—rural, geographic. We are undertaking an evaluation of that program as well. It's in its third year and we're evaluating the first cohort of schools from this turnaround program.

I think your three points would be identified in that evaluation as being fundamental: parent participation, the absolute importance of the culture of the school and the leadership of the school, not just the principal but also the teachers—

Mr Marchese: That usually comes from a good head principal.

Ms Wright: Absolutely. All the literature says how important it is for the role of the principal to provide leadership for the teachers and the morale of the school. The actual evaluation does show, however, that in many cases the teachers themselves feel the need for more information on instruction and more information on the specific needs of certain kids, often kids with exceptionalities, like just how to handle certain classroom situations.

So part of what is interesting about the turnaround school is just the fact that, as part of it, we had a group of experts who would work with the schools and the teachers. I think the part that both the principals and the teachers found valuable was having somebody to say, "Have you tried this particular strategy?" That was very useful. So it does reinforce the importance of instruction but within the context of a whole-school approach.

The Chair: Mr Marchese, I'm going to go to another member. We'll come back to you.

Mr Marchese: We'll come back. There was a second part. Maybe you can handle it another time when I come around.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm going to defer, if I may, if I can be on after lunch.

The Chair: Yes, sure. That's fine. Mr Fonseca.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Where do the measures that you use right now to be able to do this planning and looking at—let's take into context the at-risk over the last two, four, six years. Where do you get those measures?

Ms Herbert: If I might, the measures we've been using have been essentially the results from the EQAO province-wide assessments, so grade 3 reading, writing and math; grade 6 reading, writing and math; grade 9 math; and now of course the results of the OSSLT, so the number of children who are able to pass the literacy test.

Mr Fonseca: How long have those measures been going on?

Ms Herbert: We started the first grade 3 in 1997.

Mr Fonseca: In 1997.

Ms Herbert: Yes. It's incremental. They didn't all start in 1997. The OSSLT has really only had its second—but grade 3 started in 1997. So at the elementary level, we have essentially what I would call four years' worth of data.

Mr Fonseca: That was coming in yearly.

Ms Herbert: Yes, it comes in annually.

Mr Fonseca: Was anything done four years ago, or in 1997? Was that when you started?

Ms Herbert: I think the EQAO would say that they need about three years of data before you can see any trend or any patterns in the data.

Mr Fonseca: So because there was no trend, nothing was done for these at-risk students.

Ms Herbert: The at-risk students differ. Just with the recent report, we've had the three years of the Queens study, which has pointed to these children. Of course, they are in the system now so they actually have to—in following these students, there's always a problem with our data. Our ability to have current data is always problematic. We have to see how students do before we can actually measure.

Mr Fonseca: I'm just wondering if it's too late. Are we intervening too late? Are we getting to them too late? I know that actually Ms Broten brought up that there was \$50 million that went in. Ten million was to hire at-risk leaders, is that correct? And then the other \$40 million went to the school boards. What was that for?

Ms Wright: The \$40 million was actually to enable school boards to develop programs and help for students who are at risk, focusing first of all on literacy skills, because the first concern was to prepare kids adequately on the literacy side and, secondly, to look at a number of initiatives that would perhaps engage kids who would be more likely to leave the system, be that through school-to-work programs or co-op programs or apprenticeship programs.

Mr Fonseca: Have they built in the reporting mechanism through that fund?

Ms Wright: Yes. When we allocated the money, the school boards were required to do a fairly detailed work plan indicating what they would like to do with that money. We have reviewed that and provided comments back to them based on shared experiences between school boards. At the end of this school year, they'll do a final report indicating how they went about implementing those work plans and what they achieved, and we will be requiring that accountability on an annual basis.

Mr Fonseca: My fear is that the reporting is always coming too late and we're losing these at-risk students and they're not getting the help they need. Communities like my own, in Mississauga East, change so often that we're finding they're not getting the help because the reporting is coming so late. We're reading the trend, but they're gone and we're really missing the boat with that.

I also want to ask: In terms of the system, we know that in the educational context for better learning we could talk about class size and nourishment and teaching style and learning tools and motivations—everything that comes in and around—but at-risk students are at risk because of other socio-economic criteria. What's being done there?

Ms Herbert: I think we've outlined what we've done around the OSLC, which is a second opportunity for students in a non-tested environment to demonstrate that they have literacy skills. That was the most significant

decision that was taken last year and implemented last September. We have those classes up and running across the system, and they will address those children at immediate risk of being in grade 11 or grade 12 and having failed the test; they will have another opportunity. As Judith has already indicated, there are a lot of supports around remediation, extra help and interventions in the school.

You've raised a really interesting point that we struggle with all the time, around how to support schools and services for students who have needs that are beyond instructional learning; that is, children's mental health issues and issues of engaging children who may not be engaged by the normal academic route that lots of children take. What we've tried to do there is create a number of alternate options for students, to engage them in thinking about the work world. We have co-op programs; we have school-to-work transition programs that we hope offer students a way to engage them to stay in school till they get their diploma but allow them the opportunity to think about work as a legitimate option for them. We have the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, which allows students to stay in school and be students but at the same time earn some time against an apprenticeship. We've really tried to work on that side of the secondary school system as well, as an alternative for students who don't follow the normal engagement on the academic side.

Mr Fonseca: I think that's terrific, as far as the students who follow whatever you may deem the norm, the core compulsory courses. Here's what I find really sad right now: We were talking yesterday about innovation, but by having students only stick to those core compulsory courses and drop the drama, drop the music, drop the phys ed and not be able to get involved in those courses, I think we're actually stunting our province in terms of innovation and creativity. When you look at the real workforce, when you get out here, it's about innovation and creativity and planning and leadership and all the things that are learned through these non-core compulsory courses. I think we're setting up a cookie-cutter type of world, and that, in my mind, really doesn't work.

Ms Herbert: I might ask Grant to come up and talk a little about the courses I mentioned.

Mr Fonseca: Can you let me know if there's been a huge drop in those courses?

Mr Clarke: With respect to your first question, schools and school boards have always had responsibility for dealing with students at risk. This is not a new phenomenon. What's new, as the deputy said earlier, is that our way of tracking students has changed somewhat and the curriculum structure has changed somewhat, as have the diploma requirements in the reorganized program.

Right back to the Royal Commission looking at the high failure rates in basic and applied courses, those were students seriously at risk of not getting a diploma. Fundamentally, the reason associated with dropouts reported in that report was that students saw these as dead-end courses not going anywhere, so they basically voted with

their feet. They didn't see any reason to stay in these courses, because they, along with teachers and parents, understood these weren't going to get them where they needed to go.

Boards have had responsibility, as far back as the implementation of the new policy and diploma requirements, for providing remediation within the school day—before or after school—for identifying use of classroom assessments, what is required if a student is falling behind in assignments within a subject in a classroom setting. It is the professional responsibility of teachers to recognize that, and typically they do something about it. So it's really not new.

In terms of the structure that was put in place, this really gets back to a discussion about locally developed compulsory credit courses. I think there was a recognition that there are going to be some students in a higher standards curriculum in high school who are still not going to be ready. These three courses—English, math and science—are there to provide that platform to catch up some of the things student didn't come with when they were getting into grade 9. As was said earlier, you can have the right courses and supports, but a lot of this is determined by the choices that students and parents make and the information they have about, "How will this help me succeed?"

So the progression from 1% of students in the first year taking advantage of these courses compared to the 25% estimate of students who are at risk—if they're at risk in math and only 1%, or even 5% in the second year, are taking these catch-up courses in grade 9, there's a real gap. Why isn't that figure larger? With the board leaders, we're attempting to say, "Is this an organizational problem of schools not being able to really timetable effectively in this way? Is it a communication issue, so that parents of students in grades 7 and 8 actually understand what's ahead of their son or daughter in high school?"

The program pathways group and the board leaders are serious about finding a way to better communicate, not only between elementary and secondary schools but obviously with parents and students to say, "Here's what we recommend that you think about when you're coming into high school. You need to think about it in grade 8, and not just fill out option sheets blindly and take courses or ignore the kind of supports that may help you succeed as opposed to experiencing failure." But a lot of this, as I say, is driven by an understanding on the part of parents particularly, who obviously have the single biggest influence on the selections students make when they're looking at the courses they're going to take. So we have a lot more work to do with the board leaders to make that real.

The Chair: We'll reconvene at 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1204 to 1306.

The Chair: The deputy has been kind enough to bring some of the documents that we were talking about this morning. Maybe you would like to see what those documents are, if members want to wander over and have a look at them. I don't know if there's a desire for us to

retain them or not. If any members want one of those documents, I'm sure they can have one. I appreciate that very much, Deputy.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): It's a fundraiser for the minister.

The Chair: Oh, we have to pay for them, is that it? To the parliamentary assistant?

Mrs Sandals, how long are you going to be, in your questioning? Do you have any idea?

Mrs Sandals: I could go for an hour and a half.

The Chair: Then I'll call on Mr Flaherty next.

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Chair, will we first make a decision around tomorrow's meeting? I thought we were going to do that right after lunch.

The Chair: I was talking to Ms Broten. I was waiting for her to return.

Mr Mauro: Do we know when she is returning?

Mrs Sandals: She may have had a conference call.

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): She does have a conference call and she's going to be tied up for some time.

The Chair: I don't care when we deal with it. Was there any objection—

Mr Mauro: It matters to me, because I might have to change my flight.

The Chair: As far as I'm concerned, if it's a great inconvenience for Mr Andersen to be here, I have no objection to doing this on March 22 or thereafter at a regular meeting. It will probably be a two-hour meeting. I don't see why we wouldn't accommodate him at this point in time. He's new to his post. That's my position: We would cancel tomorrow.

Mr Mauro: Do we have the authority as a committee to make that decision to change the dates?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr Mauro: You don't need approval from anybody?

The Chair: No.

Mr Mauro: I'd prefer to do it tomorrow. I don't know how we're going to make this decision. Does it come to a vote of the committee members, or how do we decide to do this? Do we leave it to the whips?

The Chair: I don't understand—

Mr Zimmer: Can we do this? I'll take a couple of minutes and go upstairs—

The Chair: OK. Let's go ahead with Mr Flaherty—

Mr Zimmer: And I'll come back with the answer.

The Chair: You have six members on the committee. You're going to decide, so just tell us which way it is. As far as I'm concerned, we can postpone it. There's lots of work for our researchers to do between now and March 22, so we're not really postponing any report-writing anyway if we do postpone the meeting with Colin Andersen, the deputy of finance.

Mr Flaherty.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): Thank you for being here today, Deputy and ADMs. There's a lot of material here. I'll try to be as concise as I can be with the amount of work that the auditor has reviewed.

One of the concerns I have listening this morning is that I've heard a lot about the ministry, school boards, research and studies; I haven't heard much about parents. I think I've heard parents mentioned twice, and I was paying attention this morning. I think they have a little bit to do with their children's education. Perhaps they ought to have the most to do with their children's education.

The other thing I'm not hearing is a sense of urgency. When I look at these test results comparing our students with students around the world, there should be a sense of urgency to this, and a timetable, it seems to me. I will look at some of the test results and we can talk about that. I put this in context—I know the uniform curriculum is new. I was part of the development of that; I remember it well. And I know that the testing, as you said earlier, Deputy, has only about four years or three years of history. So there are some recent developments there that have to be taken into consideration.

The only thing that I'd say in a preliminary way is that I know there's talk about resources, which usually means money, but when I look at the accounts of the province, the Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, I'm heartened to see that the Ministry of Finance, on page 31, wrote: "This has led to a shift in the way that governments operate: increasingly, the focus is on the results of spending. This shift recognizes that it is not just how much that is spent that matters. It is equally important to measure what the spending has achieved for a society as a whole, in terms of key outcomes such as literacy and numeracy rates."

I'm sure you agree with that, that more dollars don't necessarily result in better outcomes. It's not just about the money. When I look at education spending itself, as set out on page 36 of the document, education spending is anticipated—we have 9.6% this year, from \$9.236 billion to \$10.127 billion. It's \$891 million in additional education spending in one year. I hope we are not emphasizing money here, because if it was just money, it seems to me that the results would be much better. We have the results as reviewed by the auditor.

I want to talk about a few of those things, starting off with the promotion practices, and I am looking at the auditor's report. Sorry, I'm actually looking at the memo that was done by legislative counsel. This is what Mrs Munro mentioned earlier about social promotion. The message we have here is that "In its 2001-02 business plan, the ministry stated its intention to require that only those students who achieved an acceptable level be promoted. No such action has been taken." Has there been any action taken on that proposed policy by the ministry of education on social promotion?

Ms Herbert: No, Mr Flaherty, there hasn't been.

Mr Flaherty: Is there going to be?

Ms Herbert: It is our hope that, as part of working on the students-at-risk initiative, we'll be examining—as we said when we talked with Mrs Munro—what the research and inter-jurisdictional practice has been around social promotion and what current practice is now.

Mr Flaherty: All right, so that's up in the air. That may or may not happen.

Ms Herbert: It's our intent to undertake that. What the government will do with the results of that work I can't at this point in time speculate.

Mr Flaherty: In the auditor's report, at page 131, the auditor comments on various issues, test results and the students not doing that well, particularly in the applied courses. This is referencing the EQAO grade 9 math test results: "Educators variously attributed the lack of success of these student to a curriculum that is too hard, poor work habits and low motivation, and ineffectual instructional techniques. The primary concern regarding poor work habits was the failure to complete assignments."

Then, "A study performed at one board, in connection with a doctoral thesis, also with respect to mathematics, found that secondary school teachers felt that social promotion in elementary school resulted in the affected students not having 'the [necessary] background in math' or the motivation to do the work required to succeed." Is there some research or science to the contrary?

Ms Rankin: I think we can talk about the work that has been done in response to some of this concern and information that came forth about students' achievement in mathematics. We consulted with school boards to ask where they thought issues were that needed to be resolved, and one thing that we have undertaken is a really targeted approach to giving teachers new ideas, new strategies, right down to sample lesson plans, for teaching grades 7 and 8 mathematics and grade 9 mathematics—a lot more detailed kind of help than we have provided in the past.

The course profiles which were given and the elementary units of study didn't take it down to quite such a fine research level. The work was research-based and it led to the production of a document called math TIPS and a very targeted kind of training program to help teachers in school boards to address these issues. We held a meeting in Toronto in December where we brought teams together from every school board in the province, and we've provided funding to school boards, along with this math TIPS resource, feeling that if we give them some very targeted strategies and well-researched ways of working, this should be a real support to teachers and should help to improve student achievement.

Mr Flaherty: I'm worried about support to parents. Isn't it misleading to socially promote students, like a young person who's failed grade 5 math, and promote them to grade 6 and to grade 7 and to grade 8, and then have them perform very badly on the EQAO grade 9 math test results, naturally enough, since they didn't even get grade 5 or grade 6 math? Isn't that misleading to parents?

Ms Rankin: What we have done in recent years to try and help parents and to help teachers and principals around promotion issues is to articulate more clearly than ever was articulated in the past what success looked like. So the curriculum policies described what expected student achievement was looked for in each grade and in

each subject, and then exemplars were developed to show parents and teachers what student achievement looked like at the various levels of success—levels 1 through 4, which correspond from a D through an A. So for the first time, parents can actually see samples of student work at these various levels of achievement and ask teachers and principals very good questions about their own children's work. So there is a better understanding of the standard than in the past.

Mr Flaherty: I appreciate that and I do like the new report cards, and lots of parents like them. I hear about them and the new curriculum, which everyone seems to like, or generally like. What concerns me, though, is the reliance, if there is, on parents to figure out whether Johnny has passed grade 5 math or not. Is it the ministry's point of view that it's up to the local principal whether or not to promote Johnny?

Ms Rankin: The Education Act places the responsibility for promotion at the door of the principal, in consultation with parents and with teachers, and that practice is very much in place in my own knowledge in terms of the consultation about promotion where there is something in doubt about it, and again, more information than in the past about what is expected for promotion to occur—that is, the standard that's expected to be met for promotion.

But then, as you say, Mr Flaherty, the principal makes the decision. That's why one of the proposed responses, one of the things we've undertaken, is to do the research to look at this whole issue of promotion, not only from an Ontario perspective but from a national and international perspective. When we have done the research and collected the best information available, we certainly hope to be working very closely with principals to provide them with the information they need to exercise their responsibility in the best possible manner.

Mr Flaherty: I'm not an educator, obviously, but what concerns me is we have this province-wide testing—for example, the grade 9 math testing—and then we're comparing our students internationally as well with some of the other test results here. But then on a school-by-school basis principals are making, in the earlier grades when, arguably, remediation could be most effective, decisions that are, I imagine, inconsistent across the province of Ontario. So it depends on which school your child happens to attend whether there is social promotion or not.

Ms Rankin: It has certainly been a goal of the work that we've been doing in our branch and working with school boards in co-operative ventures to give them resources like the ones we've mentioned in our response to help them achieve consistency across their schools and lead to consistency across the province. Consistency doesn't happen overnight, and we're working in that direction.

Mr Flaherty: I'll leave this subject other than to ask you, what is the timeline on the research that you're undertaking on the social promotion issue?

Ms Rankin: We expect to have completed the research within this calendar year, and we will then know

what the best practices look like, what the proven results are of other jurisdictions.

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Mr Flaherty: Changing from that to the remediation issue, has the ministry looked at the possibility, raised in the auditor's report, of using the Chicago example of mandatory summer school for students who are not succeeding in a particular subject?

Ms Rankin: As we do the research on social promotion that we've just referred to, looking at examples like Chicago and other jurisdictions that have mandated remediation would certainly be one of the things we'd cover.

Mr Flaherty: Do you agree with me that that actually goes with the social promotion issue? Students could be offered an opportunity by a principal to improve their mark in a course by mandatory summer school, or the alternative would be repeating the course.

Ms Rankin: It's certainly not unconnected. I think there are a number of ways we can hope to improve student achievement, and additional remediation outside the regular school day or school year could be one of them.

Mr Flaherty: There is a lot of talk, of course, about the training that's necessary—I ask this in the context of the announcement made recently by the Minister of Education about the professional learning program and the training that goes on there. I understand that 15% to 20% of our teachers in Ontario do not upgrade. Is that right?

Ms Wright: I'm not familiar with that figure. I'd have to know where you got it.

Mr Flaherty: The Ontario College of Teachers.

Ms Wright: And I'd have to understand better where they got it. It depends on whether that was the percentage of teachers who had actually registered their professional learning credits. Sorry, I'm just—

Mr Flaherty: Actually, only about 26,000 reported that they took the courses. They ignored that, because there was a union thing going on there: not reporting and all that.

Leaving that aside, the actual estimate—I don't think it's unique to Ontario that unless one has an obligation to upgrade, using that term broadly, some folks don't do it. The majority of folks do, 80% or so, which is great, but my question is: If we're concerned about teachers being adequately trained to remediate and help at-risk children in particular, how does that square with not obliging all teachers to keep their training skills updated?

Ms Wright: I'll give an example of what we've been doing in working with teachers so they are feeling very comfortable in teaching around remediation on literacy. We've put out a booklet called Think Literacy, which Kit can actually talk about in more detail, to work with secondary school teachers on how to integrate the teaching of literacy across all curricular subjects. Our experience with the release of that resource has been that teachers have received it very positively. They're very eager to use it and be trained on it, and I think their

perception is that this is a skill set they need to do their jobs. That's a concrete example of where we've provided training. I can go on, in addition, around the early reading one, where the take-up has been very high.

Mr Flaherty: On the training issue, are teachers teaching phonics to some students so they can learn to read?

Ms Wright: The early reading expert panel identified a number—a range, if I can put it that way—of teaching strategies, of which phonics was one, that they felt were appropriate for a teacher to consider under certain circumstances. So the simple answer to your question is yes, and it's been included in a range of strategies that teachers in the early grades could look at.

Mr Flaherty: Looking at it from a parent's point of view, can parents be assured that in all schools in Ontario, their child can learn to read phonetically if they're unable to learn to read in the whole-language process?

Ms Wright: I'll ask Kit to address that.

Ms Rankin: The elementary curriculum specifically does refer to the importance of including phonics within the learning of language skills in the early years for children. So I would anticipate that our teachers are implementing those expectations as part of their teaching of the language curriculum.

Mr Flaherty: The ministry doesn't know that, though, because you don't check up on those things.

Ms Herbert: It's true; we do not inspect schools.

Mr Flaherty: About the literacy test in grade 9, the OSSLT—it's great to have another acronym. The test results—the next one is the math test—and I'm reading from the auditor's report on page 130:

"The results on the 2002 Ontario secondary school literacy test ... and the grade 9 math test confirm that many students have not acquired sufficient literacy and math skills. The OSSLT is designed to test only basic literacy skills, not students' comprehension of the secondary school curriculum. Yet 28% of first-time and 52% of previously eligible writers were unable to pass this basic skills test after nine and 10 years of schooling respectively."

Do you agree with the auditor's report that this is not a comprehension of the secondary school's curriculum test?

Ms Herbert: Our understanding from the EQAO—you know this is their test, not the ministry's test—is that it is a literacy test based on expectations that would be reasonable out of the curriculum, but that it is a basic literacy test. Kit, I don't know if you want to clarify my layman's language on this.

Ms Rankin: The EQAO has indicated that the way they determined what sorts of things to put on the grade 10 literacy test was by looking at the expectations in the curriculum up to the end of grade 9, especially where they involved communication skills. That's where they developed their sense of what the baseline should be.

Mr Flaherty: What is the target for improvement, and over what period of time, on these scores, which have to be a matter of great concern to many parents?

Ms Herbert: The ministry hasn't set a target. Our expectation is that all kids will pass this, and that's the work we're doing with the system. When we talk about students at risk, all those students should have a fair opportunity, with all the supports in place, to pass this test. So when you say "goal," our goal—and I know it may sound like motherhood—is that all kids get their diploma out of grade 12.

Mr Flaherty: That all students in Ontario will pass the OSSLT? That's a laudable goal. When?

Ms Herbert: That's why we're working with the system now to see what the right interventions are. It's why we're doing the early literacy and early math initiatives at JK, SK and the primary grades and why we're working with this particular cohort of students in grades 11 and 12.

Mr Flaherty: Do you have any timeline on this? Are we looking at two years or three years or 10 years for improvement?

Ms Wright: I think this is a continuous improvement strategy. We have put in place a number of supports and a number of remediation strategies to help students enhance their literacy skills in preparation for the OSSLT. As well, we've distributed to school boards examples of excellent programs that already exist in schools to help students prepare for the literacy test and to enhance their literacy skills.

Mr Flaherty: Again, I go back to social promotion. It seems to me—and I say this by way of editorial comment—that parents would reasonably expect that if their child is in high school in Ontario, that child would have basic literacy and numeracy skills by grade 9 or 10.

This is an aside that's not directly in the report, but when I was on another committee in London recently, we heard from folks there about e-learning as being helpful as a remediation tool, particularly for some students who, for whatever reasons, are more comfortable learning in that way. Is that e-learning process being fostered by the Ministry of Education?

Ms Herbert: You're quite right that there is research that says that, particularly for disaffected, unengaged kids, male adolescents in particular, e-learning is a way to promote and engage them differently than in the standard classroom. The ministry has a project called the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning, which is a small project that, at this point, is funding a series of demonstration schools—we call them pathfinder schools—which are both implementing and experimenting, and then we're doing evaluation and research on the results from those schools. There are a number of them across the province to represent different characteristics. We've got one wireless school up in Rainy River and the rest are in urban and rural neighbourhoods.

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So we are doing some experimentation. We've been funding some research. We've also been working with the faculties of education in terms of new teacher training, to make sure the teachers who are coming out of the faculties have a good grounding in ICT.

Mr Flaherty: My memory may not serve me well but I thought there were three or four school boards that had advanced quite far down that road.

Ms Herbert: Yes, there are several consortia of boards that have put together what I would call virtual high schools in which students can register and take some or all of their courses. Usually students just take some of their courses through that venue. In the francophone education system the use of e-learning is vital. For some jurisdictions, particularly small northern high schools in the francophone system, they do not have the number of students or the teachers able to teach some of the more specialized subject areas. So they are often taught through a virtual classroom or with e-learning tools. There's a 12-board consortium that actually provides those courses to its member boards.

Mr Flaherty: In terms of dollars—going back to where I was earlier about resources, which I think is the euphemism for money—do you know what percentage of the operating budget of the Ministry of Education goes to human resources: salaries, wages, pensions, benefits? I know you flow it through the school boards, but do you have that percentage?

Ms Herbert: About 75% of our school board operating grant is associated with human resources: salary and wages.

Mr Flaherty: That seems to be fairly consistent in the broader public sector.

I want to ask you about the research, if there is any, on class sizes. I saw the chart in here somewhere. It may have been in the ministry material about the number of school boards that have reached the appropriate class size averages, which seem to be fairly high, actually. I saw it in here somewhere. With respect to the proposed hard cap of 20 students, has the ministry costed that?

Ms Herbert: No. We're just in the process now of beginning to look at the planning options the government has. There are a number of options about how to implement the government's commitment on capping class size, and depending on the options the government looks at, there'll be different costing ranges. We're just in the process of developing some design options for the government now.

Mr Flaherty: Earlier on there was some reference to the school program, the name of which I forget, targeting lower socio-economic areas.

Ms Wright: The turnaround school program.

Mr Flaherty: The turnaround school program. I was concerned about the targeting of that in this sense: I think the McCain-Mustard evidence is pretty strong, in their Early Years Study, that socio-economic status is only one variable among a number of variables that ought to be taken into consideration. Therefore, they recommended that in the early child development world the programs be universal, not targeted. Has the Ministry of Education considered that work by McCain and Mustard in terms of targeting or not targeting?

Ms Wright: We did look at that work. To be more fulsome than in my previous answer, socio-economic

status was only one. In fact, we did choose some schools which had poor performing results on EQAO and were not in low socio-economic areas, in order to be able to do a comparison. We also did it according to having a representation of northern schools, rural schools, aboriginal—the usual desire to have a good mix so we could actually do a good evaluation on what we thought were effective strategies or not.

Mr Flaherty: Still looking at research and what knowledge we have, with respect to the proposal that learning will be made mandatory to age 18, does the ministry have any research support for the efficacy of that proposed policy?

Ms Herbert: What we've been doing since the government came to power is looking at other jurisdictions, what other jurisdictions' experiences have been, who has mandatory learning to 18, what the design of those programs looks like. So we've done what I would call an inter-jurisdictional scan. The 16- and 17-year-old initiative I think will allow us to offer to the government some design options that have increased experiences for children. When we think about our workplace options, our co-op placements, what the learning opportunities are for children who don't engage in the same way others do, I think this initiative offers us some real redesign options in the secondary school system.

We know, for example, that we have about 24,000 children who leave the system at age 16 or 17. Of that 24,000, do we know where they've gone? No, because we can't track them afterwards. We do know that about a third of them come back before age 21 to get a diploma of some kind, through some venue. We know there are about 6,000 16- and 17-year-olds in the welfare system. That's about as much as I can tell you from an empirical point of view about what the education system knows. Clearly we're going to have to work with our partners at the children's ministry and other ministries as we put the design of this program together.

Mr Flaherty: I encourage you on the co-op side. We've had co-op students in my constituency office for years now, including some with—I was going to say special needs—exceptionalities. Those are great programs.

The other proposed policy was—oh, that's that age-18 thing again, co-op placement and apprenticeships. Those are all of the things that you're going to look at. Did you find something comparable in your inter-jurisdictional scan?

Ms Wright: We did find some very interesting examples of trying to enhance the school-to-work opportunities. I think what we found most interesting in the inter-jurisdictional was just the extent to which a number of jurisdictions were grappling with exactly this problem. It's not unique at all to Ontario, as you're fully aware. In the UK they've been doing some very interesting work around strengthening those kinds of programs, as well as in New Zealand and Australia. It is always important to understand that that's within the Ontario context and the current system.

Mr Flaherty: Last question, dealing with the auditor's report again: On page 131 the educators were talking about poor work habits and so on. "The primary concern regarding poor work habits was the failure to complete assignments, a finding that was also noted in the ministry's June 2001 mathematics survey." Is the ministry in a position to have any strategies to deal with that issue of students not completing assignments—"poor work habits," as the educators describe them—or is that something that is left up to the local boards?

Ms Rankin: First and foremost, I don't think we can ever underestimate the capacity of a great classroom teacher to engage students. There was discussion this morning about the importance of a school led by a principal who is committed to building a culture of engagement for everyone. I think those are really huge factors.

In terms of other things that we can do, we try to provide the supports to teachers so they can get ideas of lesson plans, if they might be teaching a grade for the first time or new to the profession, activities that their colleagues who are more experienced teachers have said are tried and true and highly effective in engaging students.

As we look at the ongoing cycle of curriculum review, we are very interested in the observations of practitioners about all of the programs, all of the curriculum, to see whether there is anything in the curriculum itself that could be more relevant and therefore more engaging for the students. So that's very much a part of that cycle, to ask the educators whether there are things that could be more current or more age-appropriate to their students.

The Chair: With regard to e-learning, it's my understanding that some North American jurisdictions have a full secondary school program that you can obtain over the Internet.

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Ms Herbert: That's true. There are a couple in the United States. There are certainly some being developed in the East Asian communities. We have one fully on-line university in Canada, which is Athabasca.

The Chair: Which states have it in the United States? Do you recall? Perhaps you could provide that to us.

Ms Herbert: We can find that information out for you, for sure.

The Chair: Ms Sandals?

Mrs Sandals: Yes, thank you—

Mr Marchese: Question.

The Chair: I'm trying to balance a little bit of time here.

Mrs Sandals: With respect, I think we've had about 10 minutes, and 10 minutes this morning.

The Chair: You'll be next.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate that. I can wait.

Mrs Sandals: I'd like to follow up on a few of the points that Mr Flaherty raised. First of all with respect to phonics, I can assure him that, at least with the board that I'm most aware of, phonemic awareness is a required part of the primary literacy program in every classroom.

So to our school boards using phonics, the simple answer is yes. That is, I think, an out-of-date issue.

The issue around failure to complete assignments, which was just raised, is an interesting comment, because although the auditor brings it up here, what I'm hearing from teachers in schools is in fact confirming what the auditor has noted around failure to complete assignments. The concern I'm hearing from teachers is that in fact the rate of students failing to complete assignments has gone up significantly and that that is related to the assessment practices which were imposed by the previous government, because the assessment model that was made mandatory by the previous government in fact precludes teachers from including a late penalty in the assignment mark. Because teachers are no longer allowed to have a penalty for handing in assignments late, therefore students are handing in assignments late because there's no penalty for handing them in late. I'm wondering whether you have any data around that, because it is a real issue in the schools, and whether there has been any thought to re-examining the policy that seems to be driving the lateness.

Ms Rankin: The assessment policy that was developed for secondary schools particularly, but it does go back to the elementary report card as well, was based on the idea that we should not be telling students and parents a mark that is murky because it rolls in so many variables other than student achievement. I think the goal of the policy was to make sure that when the teacher told the parent or the student they had a C or a B+ or a 78 or whatever the mark was on the report card, that wasn't being confused with learning behaviours of the child, behavioural things.

In the past, very frequently, teachers might have included marks for punctuality, bonus marks for helping other students, bonus marks for turning work in early, a number of things that didn't exactly reflect whether the student understood the mathematics curriculum. So the intent of the policy was to separate out those learning behaviours, which are important, and report on them separately from the actual achievement. The intent was to make it clearer for parents and clearer for students.

Mrs Sandals: As with many policies, it would appear anecdotally from the ground that the unintended consequence is that students aren't handing in work on time because there is no longer a stick. So I guess just the observation that that is perhaps something that—the auditor has raised the issue. It's clearly coming back from the ground that this is interfering with students' getting the reinforcement in practising that they need through doing assignments, and it is something that perhaps we should revisit as an item, as policy.

The issue around social promotion and mandatory summer remediation has come up. I believe the auditor noted that there was a relatively low rate of elementary students, at any rate, attending summer remediation. My recollection is that the rules that allow elementary students to attend remediation programs are quite strict. Do we have any data around the availability of summer

remediation, the elementary summer school programs? Do we have any data around generally the availability of those programs and whether it's an issue of students choosing not to attend or whether students would choose to attend if the summer remediation programs were more widely available? Do we have anything that would allow us to sort out which is the real issue here?

Ms Rankin: The ministry does provide funding for these summer remediation or after-school remediation programs, and a fund of 25 million additional dollars was put in place just for this purpose around literacy and mathematics in the late 1990s. The school board then makes the decision about when to offer the remediation and how to offer it. Changes were made to the funding to make it more flexible for school boards and to actually extend it all the way to grade 12, although it had originally been envisioned for elementary and then 7 to 10, and so on.

We do not, in the work that I'm doing, have details about which boards are getting which students, but your suggestion that, even where it's offered, not every student who's eligible might take it up is certainly a valid one. There is an element of parent and student choice. School boards are offering the programs in a variety of ways, so I think we certainly could learn more from them about what's working well.

As part of our at-risk strategy, we've been trying to gather information about effective practices, including practices like school boards that are not running remediation classes in the summer but summer learning camps, and are finding that they're getting great results that way.

Mrs Sandals: No, I just wondered if you had any data around students who would like to attend. I know I certainly used to get calls from parents who in fact would like their students to attend, but in essence they hadn't performed badly enough to get into the pot, because by the time you spread \$25 million over 72 boards, it's not a huge amount of money. What tends to happen is that you often have parents knocking at your door, asking, "Can I get in?" and in fact the student can't get in because the program is already fully subscribed.

Ms Herbert: I think it would be fair to say that we have poorer data at the elementary level. We have fairly good secondary school level data, and that's part of our trying to move the Ontario educational number into the elementary schools so we can begin to track in a much better way.

Mrs Sandals: Anyway, it just occurred to me that some of the issue here is around, if we are going to link social promotion and remediation, then we have to make sure that experience is actually available for summer remediation. You can't make it a requirement if it isn't available.

I would like to—I'm sure you're not surprised—go back to the issue around the design of the secondary curriculum. Certainly the deputy alluded in her remarks to this being a discussion that has been ongoing for a long time. I can certainly verify that even before the

curriculum documents were published, there were alarm bells going off about the group of students we've been talking about being at risk and whether the secondary curriculum was appropriately designed to take care of the needs of all the students. The auditor seems to be talking about the appropriateness of the curriculum for applied students and that being part of the curriculum review.

I'm delighted to get part III of Dr King's report because, as you know, I've had a bit of an interest in that in the past. So it's very nice to have the third part of his work here. I'd like to look at a few of the recommendations.

Because we've got the executive summary—it seems to be (ii)—I guess what he's first of all doing is capturing his findings. The second one is that “low levels of achievement in grades 9 and 10 applied courses, especially mathematics, act as a deterrent to student motivation and to subsequent graduation.” What he's really saying in plain language is that kids aren't picking up those grades 9 and 10 applied math credits, and if you haven't got the grades 9 and 10 applied math credits, then you're never going to graduate. That's essentially what he's saying there—assuming that you're in applied because you can't do academic, OK?

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He then goes on to observe on the next page that “the grades 9 and 10 applied courses (especially grades 9 and 10 mathematics, English and science”—and he cites some others and makes quite a strong statement—“must be modified to be consistent with the needs and abilities of the 25% of students who take them.” Math has been the hottest topic of all. I know that you have stepped up the cycle on which you're going to be reviewing math, and I thank you for that, because it's obviously the one that's critical to review. I was very pleased when you moved that forward in the review cycle.

I guess the question is, given some of the concerns the auditor has picked up around this and certainly given the concern that Dr King has picked up—because he's looked at this in great detail over three years—when we do that grades 9 and 10 math review, are we open to not just tweaking the edges but actually having a serious review of whether that course is pitched too high, to put it simply?

Ms Wright: Yes. The terms of the review are to look at the level and number of expectations, and in particular the sequence from grades 7, 8, 9 and 10, and to take that as a sequence. We know from even the first year of this that we've done that there is a fair amount of clarification of the expectations as well that we can do just in general. So, yes.

Mrs Sandals: I thank you for that, because for anybody who has followed this saga, there was a lot of stress around the university-bound kids and the double cohort. But clearly what has happened is that the academic stream, university-bound kids—there's been a lot of kaffuffle and uprooting and stuff, but they have settled in and that stream is working reasonably well.

What clearly isn't working reasonably well is the applied stream, particularly at that beginning level. It

seems to be pitched at a much higher level than the old general courses and it clearly needs some review. The data—and this isn't educators whining, because I know it's often pitched as educators whining; this is one of Queen's University's pre-eminent researchers on educational issues saying, “Look, here's what's going on.” So that yes is wonderful.

The second piece of this is the essential credits, the locally determined credits. I would probably describe this a little bit differently than Mr Clarke in terms of its history to some degree. I can remember when this first came in that there was a great concern about that small number of students who used to be in the basic level courses and whether there was anything there for them. While I would certainly agree with Mr Clarke that one of the things you can do with a locally developed credit is if you had a speciality school, you could design some wonderful locally determined credit and have a few of them.

But the way this thing unfolded, from my point of view, is that at the very last minute there were these locally determined credits floated in. There's a maximum of three of them. If you look at the structure of the curriculum, they don't even show up on the mainstream structure of the curriculum. What school boards have generally done is come up with what have come to be called essential credits. Typically, what happens is the three subjects that are the hardest in grade 9, which are English, math, science, the kids will take these three essential credits. However, the ministry policy says that you can have a maximum of three locally determined credits, which means, having done that, where do you go? The problem is you've then got to go back into the applied stream, and as we just discussed, the applied stream has some hiccups in it, even for those who start in it.

What happens is we're ending up with a large number of students who probably would do quite well in the grade 11 and grade 12 workplace courses, but there's literally no way they can get from grade 9 to grade 11 because they can't handle the grade 10 applied and they can't get to grade 11.

As Dr King observes—again, this isn't just a whiney educator. Dr King's observation, which Mrs Munro picked up on, is, “Since grade 10 essential skills courses do not qualify as required course credits, the transition to grades 11 and 12 workplace preparation courses for students who take the grade 10 essential skills course is adversely affected.”

I think what Dr King is saying in a more learned manner is more or less what I just said, which is you can't get from grade 9 to grade 11 if you happen to be one of these students.

Dr King goes on, over the page, to suggest a solution, which is that “assigning required course credit value to grade 10 essential skills courses in English, mathematics and science would facilitate the transition of students” to get to grade 11. The issue being that those courses exist, but seeing as they don't count as credits, there is actually not a whole lot of point in taking them. If they counted as

credits, that is, if one increased the number of permissible credits in this package from three to six, which is what Dr King is saying—allow these to have credit value—these students could then get to the workplace courses and might actually manage to graduate. What I think the auditor is getting at is, does the new curriculum allow people to actually graduate?

Unfortunately, this doesn't come under curriculum review, because they're not ministry courses. So you're never going to review them. The question is, are you planning, as part of the whole curriculum review, to review as well what actually counts as a required credit or what can be counted as a credit in order to get from here to there?

Mr Clarke: This has come up not only in the report from Dr King, but of course it was brought up as well in Barry O'Connor's work on the working group on at-risk students. It was brought up again in the subsequent work of the Program Pathways working group that David Armstrong chaired, from the Bluewater District School Board.

Yes, of course we are talking. It will be a topic and is a constant topic with the board leaders and other folks within this—

Mrs Sandals: As you well know, it has been a constant topic with me, because I feel like I've been banging my head against the wall on this one for a very long time. And you don't have to answer this one. The political resistance to "Will you change the policy?" was, "No." I understand that this is not your fault. You can only change the policy if you've got permission to think about changing the policy.

Mr Clarke: I think, for what it's worth, since I was asked to answer the question, the challenge will be to build a pathway that actually gets students to grade 11 workplace or college preparation courses.

One of the other findings in the King report is that there is a fairly clear group of students who are taking all the courses for university admission purposes. Then, in what he calls the other group, which is not intended to be disparaging, students are taking such a jumble of courses with different types of expectations about where they're going. For example, there will be students, who may be candidates for locally developed compulsory credit courses and then in grade 9, potentially grade 10, a combination of applied courses as well, who have college as a preferred destination.

The trick will be to ladder courses in some fashion that you can construct credible pathways, or we'll continue to have the phenomenon of students deselecting themselves from these courses, which then gets to the point—and Dr King makes this point in his report as well—where lots of schools don't offer all the courses that are the building blocks for the students to get to the programs and get the preparation they need. That's an issue we have to work through with the system as well.

1400

Mrs Sandals: I agree with you totally there. It's actually a wonderful segue into one of his other comments, which is around some direction from the ministry.

The Chair: Ms Sandals, this will be your last segue, will it?

Mrs Sandals: Yes. I have part (a) and part (b), but it's all on one topic.

The Chair: You've had 20 minutes.

Mrs Sandals: The issue is around there being a huge amount of curriculum in the new curriculum and it presents itself in two ways. At secondary, it presents itself as a huge number of credits, which particularly small schools cannot hope to offer, and it would be very helpful if the ministry could provide some sort of direction on narrowing that down to the "must offers" in order to have credible pathways.

It presents itself in a different way with the elementary curriculum, which is, when looking at a particular grade and subject, you've got a huge amount of curriculum within that grade and subject. Can the ministry provide some direction around "must do," "should do" and "could do"? That's something that might naturally fall out of your curriculum review. Is that something you are inclined to address? Because that also has to do with successfully getting kids through the curriculum: focusing on what they really need to do.

Ms Wright: In the curriculum review, as I said previously, we will be looking at the issue of whether we have the right type of expectations. After this round that we're just finishing, we'll have to take a look at what the policy implications—which is what I would call that—are for the rest of the curriculum.

The first year we did this we were experimenting a little bit with whether we got it right or not. Part of our own learning from that process will be, do we want to make a recommendation to government to go that route or not? I think it's a very important question.

On the secondary, with just the number of courses, I think we will be looking at providing some sense of what we got right and wrong on that.

I also think we need to get a better handle, beyond the King report, on what courses are being offered right across the province. As you know, King is a sample of schools, so we're a little hesitant to go too far in this without a better understanding of the extent that the courses are or are not being offered, and in particular, in rural and northern areas.

Mrs Sandals: It's a huge issue. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We have about an hour left. On my list, Mr Marchese is next. Then I have Mr Patten, Ms Broten, Mr Zimmer and Mr Mauro. You're entitled to a full whack of time.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate the whack of time. I hope I don't get whacked.

The Chair: You will, probably.

Mr Marchese: I'm going to have to be brief, obviously, or I'm going to run out of time. I wanted to talk about the issue of age 18 and suggest it's the wrong way to go, but you'll do what you have to do. I appreciate that. I think it's a serious mistake. I wondered whether you knew if lawyers have to do upgrading courses on a regular basis or not.

Ms Herbert: In terms of their professional standing?

Mr Marchese: Do they? Do you know?

Ms Wright: I'm not a lawyer.

Mr Marchese: I want to talk about social promotion. If I've got time I will get back to that. I hope Mrs Sandals has the effect she hopes she will have, being in government versus being on the outside. I wish her luck.

I want to focus most of my attention on the whole issue of elementary—not versus secondary, but what we need to do at the elementary level in order to deal with all the questions that we're trying to deal with, with the failures at the secondary level.

I started talking about that earlier on, saying that unless we put resources, which for me means money, at the front end, which is the elementary—and in most cases, I argue, JK and SK—then we will be always spinning our wheels and we'll be back here 10 years from today saying the same things in the same way that we're talking about senior abuse. We've done study after study every four years, every six years; 20 years later we're still facing the same problem about abuse of seniors. It goes on and on because we never really tackle the problems the way we should.

I believe front-ending resources is critical to solving secondary problems. What I gather from you is that you're going to have early reading strategies as a strategy to help; you're going to have lead teachers in math and English, is what I think you said. I'm not quite sure what else you were suggesting by way of your knowledge of what you can do which is within your control as a ministry in terms of educational techniques and methodologies, what else you recommend at the front end, grades 1 to 8, to deal with the problems that we face in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12.

Ms Herbert: Mr Marchese, to go to your resources question, just to be clear on the early reading strategy, we funded \$24 million to the elementary system for that initiative, and \$15.8 million in 2002-03 to introduce the early math strategy. There is \$30 million in 2003-04 to expand them from grade 3 to grade 6. So just to be clear, there were some resources that went to the system in terms of supporting those initiatives.

Mr Marchese: And you're going to be tracking the effect of that. Did you say that earlier? I can't remember. So you'll be tracking it on a three-year cycle again, or every year, in terms of its effectiveness? Do we know?

Ms Herbert: The primary effectiveness measure for that initiative is the grade 3 and grade 6 EQAO assessments that happen annually.

Mr Marchese: That's how we will measure the effect of these programs. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Wright: In addition, we are doing an evaluation, which will happen over this year and next year, to ascertain the effectiveness of the level of the training intervention.

Mr Marchese: The results would be public, I'm assuming, at some point. We wouldn't have to ask you; you'll just release the results. Is that the way it would work?

Ms Herbert: Our evaluations of educational interventions are normally public.

Mr Marchese: In-house or public. OK. So you are spending some money on those early reading strategies, math and reading and so on. Is there anything else that you think you should be doing to deal with problems that you face, that teachers face, at the elementary level?

Ms Herbert: We're also of course working, as part of students at risk, back to grade 7. So if you think about the initiatives to grade 6, we are looking at students at risk. We've provided on the literacy agenda trying to segue grade 7 students through to the grade 10 literacy test, so there's an initiative there. We obviously will be doing some future work for the government, because they have a commitment to lower class size.

Mr Marchese: You're looking at that to see how you might make that work.

Ms Herbert: That, too, is a resourcing issue at the elementary level.

Mr Marchese: Absolutely. You were asked about costs, but I'm not quite sure you were—because that's part of the study in terms of whatever you might recommend to be done. But you do agree that reducing class size would be a great initiative?

Ms Herbert: There is, on reducing class size, a real issue for parents about wanting to see, for their children, when you walk into a classroom that the class size looks like a reasonable class size.

Mr Marchese: Educationally you think it's a good idea, don't you?

Ms Herbert: I think the Ministry of Education would say that the initiative of the government is a positive initiative.

Mr Marchese: If we had full-time JK and full-time SK, would you think that would be a great initiative educationally, socially perhaps? Ecologically, too?

Ms Herbert: I think the research on the appropriate early learning models is a very interesting question. There are, in different jurisdictions, different models. To indicate that for JK and SK full-day is the only model—

Mr Marchese: No, not the only model. We're not talking about the only model, but do you think it's a good idea?

Ms Herbert: I think it's worth exploring other models of providing early learning.

Mr Marchese: I think it would reduce inequality. It really would. It makes sense that it would. You probably agree with me that kids come to the educational system unequal.

Ms Herbert: In terms of their readiness to learn? Yes.

Mr Marchese: There is a socio-economic difference between us which brings about academic differences because usually socio-economics are not just money, but also professional; sometimes the two go together. Kids come into the system unequal. Kids who come from professional homes—and money is a big part of that—are going to do well. They come ready to learn, right? Some other students who face difficulties—social difficulties, economic difficulties—are going to have a hard

time. We agree with that, more or less, yes? So if we recognize there is a social equality difference, we have to resource differently and we do need money to deal with that issue. Some of it is educational, but some of it is beyond education in terms of what we can do.

1410

That's why I think it isn't just a strategy of techniques. Phonics won't solve the issue of poverty; it just won't. That's why we in education say you've got to use whole reading and phonics at the same time—we assume that's what they're doing. But to replace whole reading and just substitute phonics isn't going to solve the problem; it's just not going to do it. Do we probably agree on that too? So it's important to front end in order to deal with socio-economic differences that will show up in grades 9 and 10.

My point to you as a deputy, and to the others, is that unless we find ways of solving the inequality we face in our education system very early, we are perennially going to have all these problems. All the research you do about e-learning or whatever other things might work for students—maybe soccer will attract some students, and maybe teachers should talk about that—is going to be for naught unless we have a broad strategy that deals with the educational social problems.

Ms Herbert: When I talked about different models—to give you some examples, there's the garderie model in France, which looks at three-and-a-half-year-olds. It's not a JK-SK model.

Mr Marchese: I know.

Ms Herbert: There are the first-duty schools here in Toronto, which are an interesting model of a combination of child care, JK-SK and parental support workers. There are a number of design models around early learning. I don't want you to think I'm disagreeing that this is a really important area. The present government has a commitment to a best-year strategy, which the children's ministry has the lead on. It's an important area.

Mr Marchese: I guess what I'm looking for from the ministry—and I'm not sure it's independent of the minister, because the minister and the government will have different initiatives. Sometimes I wish the minister would say, “We want to have a public debate, not just on good practices; we want to look at inequality, we want to look at how the system perpetuates itself and how we break that cycle.” It would be so lovely to think that one of these years the ministry would come up with a discussion paper that said we were going to deal with it. That's what I'd love to hear every now and then, but I understand the difficulties.

The other recommendation I have is that you look at how we train principals on a regular basis. Unless we have good curriculum principals who are able to work with teachers and know how to work with teachers and parents, we're in trouble. It doesn't matter what kind of training you do to help the teachers and then get that to the teachers, it's the principal who is the head of that school. Without that individual being in the loop with all the possible curriculum strategies, including the social

understanding of how things work, we'll be spinning our wheels.

I want to get to the issue of the \$112 million that went to literacy. In Toronto, did the \$46 million go for literacy? Is it going for literacy?

Ms Herbert: The \$46 million was on the LOG grant and the ESL grant to Toronto.

Mr Marchese: The board evidently solved its deficit problem by taking out \$50 million, which they borrowed and which will be amortized over a 10-year period and be paid off, to deal with the deficit they had, which was \$90 million or \$100 million. I understand that the way the Toronto board dealt with the elimination of the deficit—and I think Minister Kennedy announced just today that they could now get back into power as a result—was to use the \$46 million that's supposed to go for ESL and literacy to students in Toronto who desperately need it.

Ms Herbert: As you know, Mr Marchese, the education funding formula is an allocation formula. What we do is allot money on the basis of particular criteria, in this case the LOG grant and the ESL grant. The board then takes their allocation and makes decisions about how it will use that money.

Mr Marchese: That's so clever. I appreciate that you have to present it as such, but that money went to the deficit. It's not being used for ESL, and it's not being used for literacy. I just want to announce publicly that I think it's a shame. The board needs that money for ESL and literacy, because it's got a lot of poor kids in the system who desperately need those resources to help them get out of the cycle. I feel sad that the way they dealt with the deficit was to use that money. I just want you to know publicly that I know and that I feel very angry about that.

In terms of the grade 9 problems we're having—the King report and how we're failing so many of our students—could you again, because I might have missed some things, recap for me what we have learned over the last four years and what initiatives you have taken to deal with the fact that every year students are just not able to cope with the applied program, just a little recap so I know what you're doing, and then tell me how you're going to track the success of whatever initiatives you're taking.

Ms Wright: The primary initiative falls under the students-at-risk initiative, in which we've done a number of things. We've provided resources for school boards so they can have a leadership capacity at the board level.

Mr Marchese: Right. That was the 20 million bucks.

Ms Wright: That was \$10 million of \$50 million.

Mr Marchese: Leadership—

Ms Wright: They can hire an at-risk board leader to help work on developing school-based and board-based plans for addressing the needs of students who are at risk of leaving the system. In addition to that, we provided \$40 million that the boards could use to actually do their own programming and initiatives to support those kids, on the premise that this was not a one-size-fits-all approach and that there would be local flexibility to

develop those programs, and we put in place some accountability for enabling that to happen.

In addition, as part of that initiative, we brought together two expert working groups. One did a report on teaching literacy to adolescents, which has been released and that I think is on the table over there, and a second report that they'll be releasing this spring on teaching kids mathematics. We brought together the second expert panel to look at how we could strengthen school-to-work programs as well as identify pathways for kids who were struggling to get through. That's what we did under that initiative.

In addition, we brought in the Ontario secondary school literacy course, which was for kids who were unsuccessful in the OSSLT and needed a different assessment method.

Mr Marchese: What year is that literacy course?

Ms Wright: It was brought in this year.

Mr Marchese: For what year?

Ms Wright: It's at the grade 12 level.

Mr Marchese: Do you think that's the right time to have such an intensive literacy course?

Ms Wright: In our consultation with the sector, they thought that was the appropriate time to have it.

Mr Marchese: It's not grade 9, not grade 10, not grade 11 but grade 12 before they're condemned?

Ms Wright: The sector's perspective on this was that they preferred that the kids have the opportunity to take the test and try it rather than to take a full course. It was actually at the recommendation of the sector that we did that.

In addition, we put in place a number of supports to teachers around teaching math, to address the applied math question. Kit has referenced a resource we've done called math TIPs, which is a pretty detailed plan for teachers to teach math to adolescents. We've also released a resource called Think Literacy, which is an attempt to do the same thing on the literacy side. I'm running out of steam here; I apologize.

Mr Marchese: I want to ask one last question before Julia cuts me off: Are all these suggestions listed anywhere in a sort of one-pager so I can see them?

Ms Wright: I could get it to you; it would be no problem.

Mr Marchese: Could you do that, please?

One last question, and then hopefully I'll come back and have another turn. On page 8, section 6.4, the auditor talked about "Strengthening the Implementation Process." At the end, he concludes: "It was noted"—I don't know by whom—"that having comparable student performance results would provide valuable information for identifying problems and best practices and might lead the ministry to reconsider the need for large-scale testing." Do you have a response to that?

Ms Herbert: If I could find it, I might. Sorry, Mr Marchese.

1420

Mr Marchese: "It was noted that having comparable student performance results would provide valuable

information for identifying problems and best practices and might lead the ministry to reconsider the need for large-scale testing." Have you thought about that? Have you ever thought about that? Are you thinking about it? Does this lead you to think about it?

Ms Wright: In our discussions with the auditor on this recommendation, I think an interesting point for us was the need to put in place the student number. Without the student number, which we're just putting in place, it would be difficult for us to have meaningful comparable data. It would be useful to have more comparable data on how students are doing than just EQAO standardized testing—I think that's true—but we do have an implementation process.

Mr Marchese: So you're saying that once you have the student number, this question might become more relevant?

Ms Wright: Worth exploring, yes.

Mr Marchese: Without it, it's hard to comment.

Ms Wright: Without a student number, it's hard to get comparable data.

Mr Marchese: Right, and I appreciate that. But in your own mind, intellectually, I think you would be able to say, "Yes, I think we could," or, "we couldn't," or are you just saying, "Once we get the numbers, we'll have a better idea"? Do you intellectually have a sense that maybe this is the right way to go?

Ms Wright: Yes, I think any information that helps us better understand how students are achieving would be useful.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs Julia Munro): Thank you very much, Mr Marchese. We'll move on now. We do have to be cognizant of the time. Mr Patten.

Mr Patten: This is an interesting discussion, to say the least. Just a comment, if I may. You see the pendulum swing this way and swing that way. The auditor used an important word: to "coordinate" some of the curriculum development on a province-wide basis as opposed to centralization of the whole process—every kid has to pass the whole thing—which is a bit of where it is now. I think it partly addresses what you're trying to get at.

In the first place, teachers thought there was a lot of hard work in all of this, which there was; there was a lot of good research; there was a tremendous amount of planning. Then in the first couple of cuts at it, we see where the casualties are, and those are what we call kids at risk. This is not a value-free system. When we use the term "not successful," that for me is not a good thing to say. They're not accomplishing what others may hope they would accomplish in the system, but there's not much acknowledgement that this isn't necessarily for them, if we believe in the research that says every child learns differently, every child learns at a different rate, every child has different potential and every child in one way or another perhaps comes from a different kind of background with a different set of perceptions about the past, present and future.

With all those variables, that's why I say the pendulum swings. The more research we do, I prophesy, the

more we will add flexible dimensions back into this province-wide arrangement, unless they stay as basic overall indicators and not hard and fast rules. I think it would be a mistake if we got sucked into: “Unless a kid passes this, they are dead forever.” That’s just not the case. There are a lot of kids who don’t complete high school and who do better than kids who did extremely well at the end of high school. Some of them are on welfare and they’re very bright; some are even college students. So there’s a hell of a mix in all this. I just wanted to make that comment.

Obviously we have to look at how we make this the most effective system, and we’re looking at that. The other is, if it turns out, and I suspect it will, that this will not be one size fits all—I think this was mentioned this morning—this is not necessarily a test for everybody to indicate their learning or what have you. It’s like the tests we have at the grade 3 or grade 4 level: They may not achieve a high level on the test, but it doesn’t tell you what incredible learning they may have had in the first two or three years because they couldn’t speak a word of English or French when they arrived in Ontario. That’s the unfortunate part about this, but it has a lasting impression on kids and their feelings of adequacy—“I’m a failure” or “I’m stupid”—or all those kinds of dynamics that still go on.

Anyway, I have two very quick questions, because I really don’t know about this. I’m the PA to education but I haven’t been to all the briefings. I really don’t know that and I have too much respect for the committee to just BS people—which means baloney sauce, by the way—by pretending I know something and asking you a set-up question.

The auditor did identify that there were more and more opportunities for the ministry to provide resources for teachers through computerization, e-mails or software, and yet—I forget what the percentage was but it was a pretty high percentage—apparently close to 48% of the teachers don’t even have a PC and most of them are probably not particularly computer literate to begin with.

It seems to me that if the teacher is so important in all of this and we’re trying to provide personal growth development experience and training experience, but she or he doesn’t have some of the fundamental tools to be able to sit there, look at things and translate them into other areas—and the kids themselves are learning more through this—we’ve got a bit of a literacy gap for teachers. It seems to me we’ve got to do two things: (1) encourage them and (2) provide some of the resources for the hardware and software, and change somewhat the culture of “You don’t need a lot of this stuff.” Maybe this is only the medium-aged and older teachers in that board. Would you comment on that?

Ms Herbert: Certainly. Maybe I can just take that segue to go back and answer—oh, Mr Sterling isn’t here. But maybe for the record I can give you the states where they have a diploma on line. It’s Illinois, Louisiana, Utah, Kentucky and Maryland.

Having said that, to come back to your point, there are a couple of things we know. We know that almost all of our schools except in some remote locations have bandwidth. There are some parts of the province—north-western Ontario—where we have some bandwidth problems, which is why we’re experimenting a little bit with wireless, to see if that’s an alternative. And there are a couple of places where we’re actually building on some of the aboriginal communities’ bandwidth that they’ve had funded from the federal government. So bandwidth, slowly but surely, is not going to be a problem for our schools.

On the issue of tackling teacher ICT training, we’ve started in the obvious place, which is the faculties at the universities, with the new teachers. Two of our faculties are now what we call laptop faculties, that is, a laptop is a requirement for the faculty. That’s Nipissing and the new university in Durham.

Mr Flaherty: UOIT.

Mr Patten: You would expect that, hopefully.

Mr Flaherty: It’s state of the art.

Ms Herbert: Windsor is about to make a decision, I’m hopeful fairly soon, to look at being a laptop faculty. In the other faculties of education we’ve been doing work with, we have a person to help them work through how to build ICT into all of the training they’re doing with their teachers, not as an add-on but it actually becomes part of the way the professors teach. All of the faculties are now looking at ICT competencies for their new professors. As professors come in, one of the new competencies they have to have is ICT learning. So we are tackling the teachers coming in in a fairly organized fashion.

On the question of infrastructure in the schools—PCs, computers—you’re right. What we know from our survey data is that probably only about 15% of teachers have dedicated computers, that is, a computer on their desk or a laptop. We also know that the ratio of students to computers is about one to six, which sounds fine except we suspect that a lot of it is to old computer systems. Through the funding formula, we provide about \$100 per student per year on ICT. But the question of—

Cell phone ringing.

Ms Herbert: It’s very romantic, Mrs Sandals.

Mrs Sandals: There are only two songs on this phone. The other one is Hockey Night in Canada.

Cell phone ringing.

Mr Patten: Turn it off.

Mrs Sandals: I will.

The Vice-Chair: I’ll have to exercise my authority here. Take it away.

Mr Marchese: You were really tough, Julia.

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Ms Herbert: The ministry has been doing work on two fronts, as I said earlier. We’ve been looking at pathfinder schools and at the ministry’s role in terms of our legislation and our regulatory framework, whether it supports e-learning and what some of the things are that the ministry has to do to bring the ministry itself up to date in this area. I would agree that we could and should

look at how we can build more professional learning in on ICT for teachers.

I met with a group of teachers just a couple of weeks ago at a program that we're providing a small amount of funding for. These were teachers in mid-career, later career, and their enthusiasm for having been part of an initiative that in a sense forced them positively to use ICT, their enthusiasm for learning new teaching strategies through ICT was really quite—I was quite taken by how they portrayed what it had taught them and how it had helped them in their classroom.

Mr Patten: I just have one quick question.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Patten, you're cutting into Ms Broten's time.

Mr Patten: OK, my last question. The auditor identifies that with the quickness of implementing the curriculum, some school boards were caught short with resources and some didn't have textbooks. That was probably magnified somewhat for the French boards, just by virtue of the size of the population and the need to have more specific textbooks for its curriculum and all that kind of thing. Where is that at, at the moment? I continue to get some feedback that some of the French boards are still feeling they're resource-short in order to really address the curriculum.

Mr Denis Vaillancourt: Denis Vaillancourt, assistant deputy minister in the Ministry of Education. On the French-language textbooks, we have the following breakout for the core and non-core courses: We have 46 approved textbooks right now, supporting 59 courses out of 180 potential courses that are offered at secondary grades 11 and 12. Obviously, some of those 180 courses aren't developed or offered and are not taken. We work with the sector in identifying those courses that are taken and we have been working with publishers to do the rest of the books. For grades 9 and 10, we have 28 approved textbooks, supporting 19 courses out of the 64 possible, and we are continuing development there. In grades 1 to 8, we have 79 approved textbooks, supporting 19 programs out of 53 subjects taught in grades 1 to 8.

By September of this year, we will have a complete selection of textbooks for the basic diploma requirements, so we're progressing very well. As a matter of fact, just this week we've been working with Quebec publishers, enticing them to put their names in the hat to produce textbooks for this province, and they are going to come in on that. So that's looking very hopeful.

Mr Mauro: I just wanted to pursue the issue a little more about social promotion and the policy that exists that allows the principal of the school to make decisions around that. It's not a new idea; it's been around for some time. How long has that—

Ms Rankin: I'm not aware of the time when elementary schools had the decision made for promotion by anyone but the principal. For secondary schools, in the late 1960s there were examinations for secondary—

Mr Mauro: OK, so it's been around for a long time. Those responsible for the creation and implementation of

the new curriculum obviously were aware that this policy existed. Would it be fair to assume that?

Ms Rankin: Certainly the responsibility of the principal and the teacher to decide, yes.

Mr Mauro: Those same people who were responsible for the creation and implementation of a new curriculum would have been aware of the potential negative consequences that curriculum would have, being that this policy of social promotion was existing at the same time. Perhaps it would have made more sense for us to deal with that policy first before the curriculum was implemented—would that be a fair comment?—rather than to blame the policy of social promotion for the results we saw after the curriculum was implemented.

Ms Rankin: I think what was done with the changes in education policy was, report card policies and assessment policies were put in place to describe what the expectation was for promotion of the student and to provide supports to help with that decision.

Mr Mauro: Yes, except that the new curriculum comes down at a time when we have a bunch of people who have already been socially promoted and who aren't ready and able to deal with the new curriculum. So I guess my question is, to put a finer point on it, should we have dealt with that before the curriculum was implemented? We knew there were people who were not going to be able to handle the breadth of the curriculum, the depth of it, and the fact that it was going to be administered in a shorter time frame. So I'm asking you what you would have thought would have been a good idea to suggest to the government of the day around the timing of the implementation of the new curriculum.

Ms Rankin: I know that school boards, teachers and principals worked very hard to manage the implementation in an effective way to support students throughout it. I know that when the assessment policy was first introduced for secondary schools, there was an indication that teachers were given a little bit of time until additional supports and training were put in place before full implementation of the policy. So I certainly could point to that as one piece of evidence that there was consideration given to the fact that it would take a little bit of time to make the change and to implement the new policy.

Mr Mauro: The curriculum is implemented at a time when the policy of social promotion exists, correct? So I'm simply asking if you as a ministry thought that perhaps it might have been a good idea to delay the implementation of the new curriculum, which by most accounts was accepted as being a good idea; it was the implementation of it that people had concerns about. We already know that there are kids in the system who have been promoted beyond their academic abilities. We know that before we implement the curriculum, yet we go forward and we do it anyway. So I'm trying to get you to tell me if you think we should have delayed the implementation of the curriculum to allow those kids who had been socially promoted an opportunity to catch up to a

curriculum that was already more demanding than the one they were probably unable to keep up with.

Ms Herbert: I don't know what options were put before the government of the day when they looked at the implementation time frame. One of the difficulties, as I think I said earlier, for making any changes in education is of course that we're keeping the system running while we're making the changes. And the question about how long is an adequate period of time within which to make those changes and in what nature those changes should happen—clearly the government of the day made a decision that it preferred that length of change to be shorter. Even so, it's been eight years that we've been doing curriculum reform—nine. I'm just trying to think back—to 1997.

Mrs Sandals: It was 1996 when it started.

Ms Herbert: So we're at eight years. I'm showing my math skills. I should be taking those math TIPS.

The length of time the government chose to have the system do that reform—clearly it was their best judgment that that was the time frame they were prepared to—

Mr Marchese: The question is a political question. Please leave her alone.

Mr Mauro: The implementation, as it was about to go forward, received caution signals from a lot of different groups in the province, whether it was the teachers' unions or principals' groups or parent councils or former educators. Many people understood, going forward, that if it was implemented the way it was proposed, there would be the so-called curriculum casualties, and we've seen that borne out to be true. I think we all agree with that. I guess I'm just wondering what your ministry's position was at the time that the implementation was occurring, what your advice was to the government of the day. Were you in step with the process, or did you have a problem with the way it was rolling out?

Ms Herbert: I can't answer that question. I wasn't there at the time those decisions were made.

Mr Mauro: How about one of your teammates here? Is there anybody sitting in the back who perhaps was—

Ms Herbert: Is there anyone who was in a position to have been party to those discussions? No, there is not.

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Mr Mauro: There's nobody in the back who would have been party those discussions? Mr Clarke wouldn't—there's no history at all? OK.

In terms of the testing, I'm just wondering if there is an ability within your tracking mechanisms to view the impact on First Nations and aboriginal communities and how they do if the tests are culturally sensitive for them, any of that kind of thing.

Ms Herbert: It's a very good question. First of all, to step back, we do not provide education to First Nations. That's a federal government responsibility. First Nations, if they—

Interjection: On reserve.

Ms Herbert: On reserve.

Mr Mauro: Understood.

Ms Herbert: Just to finish that thought, though, if boards wish to, reserves can choose to offer our curriculum and offer the Ontario diploma. That's the choice they have, and many boards avail themselves of that choice. I know there are some concerns that have been raised about First Nations, and First Nation languages in particular, around how we treat ESL and whether First Nation languages are part of ESL. There have been concerns raised about that. Dr Rozanski referenced that in his report.

In terms of the cultural sensitivity, and if you'd just repeat the cultural sensitivity question and its relationship to—I'm sorry, I missed that.

Mr Mauro: I think if the First Nations people are coming off reserve and going into urban schools and taking those same tests, they are likely not to be as able to do well on those tests, I would think.

Ms Herbert: I can't comment on the content of the test. That's an EQAO test, not a ministry test. As well, you probably are aware that we have a court case alleging that the test is not culturally sensitive. I'm not about to speak to that issue.

Mr Mauro: That's fair enough.

I had some questions about the dropout rate since the implementation of the new curriculum. Have you got some numbers on that, predating and postdating the implementation?

Mr Clarke: We have a couple of sources for that, and I'll tell you why there is more than one answer to your question. To go back to the Royal Commission on Learning, the estimate in that document based on research of the day was that in Ontario the dropout rate ranged from 18% to 30%, depending on how you calculated it, and they concluded it was closer to 30%. It would net out closer to 20% if you take into account maybe the third of learners who come back over a number of years, up to 21, 24, let's say, and get something like a second chance, the equivalent to a high school diploma.

Of course, the King study talks about a 25% potential dropout rate. This is not based on actual mining of the data that we have. You have to appreciate that this was based on a comparison of students who started the first new grade 9 in 1999-2000. So we don't have all the information yet about what has actually happened to those students to be able to confirm Dr King's assertion that 25% of these students are at risk. It's an estimate based on the idea that credit loss is associated with a greater likelihood of dropout because people get discouraged and they don't see the likelihood of their being able to graduate, so why stay in school anyway. That's underlying the assumptions about dropout rate.

There are other sources of dropout rate. If we look at the OECD statistics or the statistics coming out of the Council of Ministers of Education and the comparisons across the country or the labour market statistics from the federal government, from StatsCan, you get another number. You get a number that says that in Ontario the dropout rate is somewhere between 10% to 12%. They've calculated it somewhat differently.

We're just now going through the process of saying, "OK, the ministry hasn't had an active way of collecting dropout rates," which you can do in a number of ways. There's a great debate about what is the right way for the right purpose, and we're going through that process now. What I can say is it's likely that there are two ways to look at it which would show up in the kind of analysis that the federal government does on dropouts and that's a snapshot of a group of people in a given year, or an "event rate," it's called. It's how many students at this point in time who aren't in school and don't have a diploma. That will give you a lower number.

The bigger number, the one that Dr King mentions, around 25%, is if you track a group of students from a particular point in time over four years, five years, six years, and you add up all the kids who might drop out along the way and not return, you'll get a cohort number for dropout. You'd have to do that every year. That would bring you closer to the 25% over a period of four years or five years, when you would expect students who started in grade 9 in Ontario to have graduated in the new program.

Mr Mauro: This is the last question. I just wanted to go back to Ms Sandals's discussion that she had with you about the local boards' ability to create their own courses to fit the local needs, just so I'm clear. As it exists now, a local board can create three courses only that are credit courses, but there doesn't seem to be the bridge to get them to the grade 11—I'm forgetting the language.

Ms Wright: Workplace courses.

Mr Mauro: Workplace courses. That's accurate?

Ms Rankin: The boards have the ability to create three compulsory courses, so students need a math and an English and a science in grade 9, and then they need to take it again in grade 10, for the most part. The board can offer either the grade 9 or the grade 10 as the compulsory, develop their own locally developed compulsory, but it's the other year that's the problem. Most school boards do this in grade 9. They'll give the compulsory essential course, as they call it, the locally developed course, in English, math and science.

Mr Mauro: They're generally more at what we used to call a basic level, are they?

Ms Rankin: That might not be a bad comparison to make. It was developed with the intent that it would serve the needs of students who were several grades behind.

Mr Mauro: So the kids who are going to choose to take those courses are taking them because they would feel challenged by the other courses that exist in the curriculum.

Ms Rankin: Kids whose parents choose to place them in those courses are taking them because they feel that's their best chance for success starting off at high school.

Mr Mauro: Early on, but then the gap still exists, because eventually they have to take those applied.

Ms Rankin: That's correct. In grade 10, boards can offer locally developed courses in English, math and science as optional credits, but there are still some

requirements about how many compulsory credits have to be taken.

Mr Mauro: When was the decision made to allow boards to create these courses that we're talking about?

Ms Rankin: That's part of our Ontario secondary school policy, which was published in 1998.

Mr Mauro: So it came in at the same time as the new curriculum?

Ms Rankin: It predated the actual release of the secondary curriculum by a little while, by six months or so.

Mr Mauro: But was it created because the new curriculum was coming? Was there a recognition that there were going to be some challenges under the curriculum, and so we thought this was going to be a mechanism that would maybe help make the transition a little smoother for the kids?

Ms Rankin: That's my best understanding, that it was intended to help with the transition for students who were struggling in their elementary program.

Mr Mauro: So there was a recognition of the difficulty of the new curriculum. We tried to address it, except we still leave that gap. We need to be able to bridge them from those courses to the workplace courses and/or the applied, should they advance through them.

Ms Rankin: Yes.

Mr Mauro: OK. That is something that I think you indicated earlier is being reviewed, in terms of increasing those courses from three credits to six credits. Is that correct?

Ms Rankin: The O'Connor report—this was the report on students at risk, released last winter—indicated that there should be five compulsory credits instead of three credits, and King makes reference to six.

Mr Mauro: The report indicated that. What is your ministry doing with that report? Do you have any direction based on that report to go forward with those recommendations or to review those recommendations?

Ms Wright: We've been reviewing all of the recommendations of that report. Actually, the vast majority of them have been implemented. On this specific topic, we're in discussion with the minister about it.

Mr Mauro: OK. Thank you, Mr Chair.

The Chair: I have Ms Broten and Mr Zimmer.

Ms Broten: I want to talk for a few minutes about outcomes and research. I guess that's been a common theme that we've analyzed over the last two weeks here at public accounts—measuring our outcomes, where do we want to be, and making sure that we base our decisions as a government on information that is valid.

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I guess I was startled that, of all the sectors, in a sector that is based on report cards and measuring results for the students themselves, we have not historically done a very good job in determining and setting outcome-oriented measures for the work of the ministry and basing ministry decisions on research. In the auditor's report, he's certainly critical of the lack of outcome-oriented measures for the effectiveness of elementary and secondary

education and the lack of research to support decision-making. A lot of decisions have been made over the last number of years about how we would alter and remedy, perhaps, the former government, to move in a direction in the education system.

My questions are: On what was that based? Since there is a criticism of not having research available to make decisions, what was the decision based on? How did you have sufficient information to make those? How could you know where you wanted to go if there were no outcome-oriented measures in place? And how can we measure our success and ensure that we're not back at this table again talking about these very same issues four, six, eight or 10 years from now?

Ms Wright: An excellent question. It is a bit amazing, the lack of outcome measures that exist in education. I think we all share some commitment to wanting to improve that and to identify what we think, over next couple of years or over the short term, with the education sector, the most important outcome measure should be. Is it the dropout rate, which is what Grant Clarke was referring to in his time here, or do we want to look at graduation rates? What are the other outcomes that we actually want to measure?

At this point, the primary outcome measurement is the standardized testing in 3, 6, 9 and 10. Our ability to work with schools and school boards to mine that data so it can tell us as much as it can about what kids are learning has actually been the priority of what we've been trying to work on.

In terms of the basis on which decisions were made, given the lack of substantive outcome data, I would say that in general terms, especially around the development of the curriculum, those decisions were made because the curriculum was based on and developed by Ontario teachers and for Ontario teachers. So it was very much reflective of their professional judgment about what the curriculum should and shouldn't contain. In that sense, the expertise we call upon is the expertise in the sector, with a longer-term commitment to meet the requirement that you're talking about to have better measures. As the deputy indicated, we did contract the King report, which was our attempt to start to move more drastically in that direction.

Ms Broten: I know that the King report has been through many iterations and we've had this information for a period of time, so what measures have been put in place in response, even if it's on an interim basis? Because the problem with the education system is that all along, while we're waiting to find the ultimate result and know exactly which place to go, we're leaving kids behind in the school system.

Ms Wright: I think it's fair to say that the King report has informed the recommendations of the working group on students at risk and has informed the recommendations of the expert panels that we have put together and that the sector has used to advise on what it thinks the recommended actions should be to address the students who are at risk.

Ms Broten: Two questions arose from your last answer. Does the EQAO analyze results to figure out how to improve who is at risk etc? Is that analysis undertaken? Because if the EQAO is our way of testing, two questions arise: How do we determine success in grades that don't have a test and how do we analyze those results to make sure they provide us with useful information to solve the problems in the system that need to be solved?

Ms Wright: As part of the standardized testing in EQAO, they do ask schools and school boards to do improvement plans on an annual basis. In those school-based and board-based improvement plans, having looked at that data and analyzed it themselves, boards and schools identify what strategies they think they need to put in place. All of the school and board improvement plans are posted, I think, on EQAO's Web site or on our Web site, so they are also accessible. That's the main mechanism for taking that data and integrating it into the way schools teach and are organized.

Ms Broten: This is my last question. In my own community I have a real diversity in terms of over-performing schools, underperforming schools, and I wonder what the ministry's plans are in regard to assisting those underperforming schools in our communities.

Ms Wright: We have an existing program, which is smallish, called turnaround schools. That existing program is to provide assistance to, as I mentioned earlier, schools that are low-performing. I think it would be important to look at whether there is an opportunity to extend that program to more schools.

Ms Herbert: There is a program that we're looking at right now that looks at twinning high-performing schools with low-performing schools. I know it's something that our minister is really interested in. When you have a diversity in performance and where you can statistically look at those schools as being comparable, is there a way those schools can learn from each other? It's been that kind of twinning of schools and learning from each other that builds on the model that Kit talked about, about having teachers be communities of learners. Can we have schools be communities of learners? It's been done in several places in the States, with quite some success, and in Britain as well. I think some of the research that's been done by Michael Fullan and by OISE would say that there's some real opportunity in Ontario for us to look at how we might twin schools and have them learn from each other as well. We haven't put them in place, but there are some other initiatives, I think, that we can support schools and school boards to be doing that should assist in that.

Ms Broten: I've heard it described as a lighthouse school. Is that what you're talking about?

Ms Herbert: Right. That's another model.

Ms Broten: Are we moving to a model in that direction?

Ms Herbert: The minister has asked us to look at that program and what it would take to—

Mr Marchese: What about cost differences, Laurel? How does it solve that?

Ms Broten: I think those questions were answered earlier. So, given that I'm concerned about the time—

Mr Marchese: No, they weren't.

Ms Broten: Mr Marchese's point is valid. If I look in my own community, the school that's doing well has parents who are able to work in those schools and participate, and the other one doesn't.

Ms Herbert: The community mobilization around schools is absolutely key.

Mr Zimmer: Very briefly, on page 140 of the auditor's report, under "Research to Support Decision-making," let me read the first sentence. "In addition to its impact on improvement planning processes, the lack of sufficient, comparable student performance data and suitable computer support systems to capture and analyze contextual data also limits the ability of the ministry and school boards to conduct the research necessary to address critical issues in curriculum delivery and to provide the basis for informed decision-making."

We've heard a lot over the last two and a half weeks about the horrendous difficulties some of the ministries are having managing their IT. It seems to me you have a whole lot of information floating out there. It needs to be analyzed if you are going to get the decision right. How are your computer information systems? Are they as bad as some of the ones that we've heard about in the last few days? What sort of budget do you have for it? In your view, is your information technology budget adequate? What are the shortfalls, what are the problems? Then I have two other follow-up questions.

Ms Herbert: I'm looking at the Provincial Auditor, because he knows that deputies always welcome a question like this, a chance to go on the record about their infrastructure needs.

Mr Zimmer: For the record, that was not a given question.

Mr Marchese: It's not about money, Jim. Tell them.

Interjections.

Mr Zimmer: Hold on. I want to hear the answer here.

1500

Ms Herbert: The ministry is working off an old legacy system right now. I think we would all agree, and so would the school boards, that it's inadequate. The previous government was funding us to put a new data warehouse in place that would actually revamp our entire internal system and, as well, the school board systems, the way they have to report their data to us, and to link us to the EQAO database, which is another issue that we've had: our inability to take the information from EQAO and match it to individual students through the use of a student education number.

We are moving fairly quickly. That project is about three years old; we hope in the next two years for it to be up and running. That may be optimistic on my part and will to some degree be dependent on the future resources

we have to implement the system, whether it takes us two years or three or four years.

The significant backbone of the system is in place and that was the rolling out of the Ontario educational number this fall. That was a very significant achievement, not just on the ministry's part but on the school boards' part, because they had to input all of that data into the new system. So we are moving. The speed with which we move will be somewhat dependent upon the resources that are available to us.

Interjection.

Ms Herbert: Yes, that's very true.

Mr Zimmer: How's the budget for that sort of information technology? Is a part of it with local boards and a part with you? What's the split and what are the difficulties?

Ms Herbert: I couldn't off the top of my head give you a sense of what the overall budget on IT is in the boards. In my own budget, I have project funding that amounts to about \$6 million to \$8 million to implement this.

Mr Zimmer: My concern is, and what I'm worried about here is, we've heard about the critical importance of getting this information together so you can solve these delivery programs so we don't lose a generation of students. You can lose a generation of students in three or four years; they've gone from age 14 or 15 to 18 and we've lost them. What kind of time frames can we reasonably expect to get your systems up and running so you can get the information, and what kind of priority are you giving to shortening the time frame so we don't lose a generation of students?

Ms Herbert: The biggest priority we have right now is to match the Ontario educational number with the EQAO results data, which tells us how children are performing, and our credit accumulation data, which is what allows us to say—and Dr King used the existing data we had, with some manipulation—how many credits kids are accumulating in what grade, which is the biggest indicator of how they are doing in the high school system. So that's our big priority right now, to get our achievement data—just to go back to the question of metrics and measuring—together with our Ontario educational number. Then we'll be able to track by board, by school, how children are doing—not by name. This is all, of course, privileged information.

That's our biggest priority and we hope to have that done next year. There's a much bigger part of the information system which will allow us to go deeper into information for policy purposes, but right now our priority is on tying the student achievement data together.

Mr Zimmer: Do you have the budget to help you meet that priority?

Ms Herbert: If you're asking would I like more money, yes, of course. But the money that has been available to me thus far and which we'll be asking for as part of our budget process for next year would allow us to move substantial amounts of this forward in the next two years.

Mr Zimmer: It would be a shame to lose a generation of students because you can't get the data in a manageable form.

The Chair: Mrs Munro, do you have a short, one-part question?

Mrs Munro: Yes, a one-part question. It goes back to the question that was raised by Mrs Sandals some time back in the rotation with regard to the late assignment issue. I wanted to just clarify the response that was given to us. In the effort on the new report card, there was the idea of separating the actual demonstrations of skills, of content, whatever, of the student as opposed to: Was the assignment on time? Does the person operate in an effective way? Am I correct that your answer was to demonstrate that there were two issues here that you were trying to capture in the report card?

Ms Rankin: What I was trying to explain, and I think that's what I'm hearing from you, is that the learning skills, the kinds of behaviours that students exhibit, were separated from the actual achievement of the curriculum.

Mrs Munro: If that is the case, then it seems to me, because I ran into the same kind of questions being asked

by teachers and parents, that was translated to individual schools in a somewhat fuzzy manner. I had people telling me that in one school they were not allowed to deduct late marks on assignments, but in the same board, there could be. I guess what I'm asking you is, should we as a group here, as a committee, be making a recommendation that this gets communicated in a more clear manner for people?

Ms Rankin: I think you're making the point that our assessment policy around the deduction of marks for lateness needs clarification. I can certainly see that there are things we could do to facilitate that.

The Chair: I'd like to thank you, Deputy, and all of your people for coming today. I'm sure we could have all asked another four hours of questions or whatever, because there's always a great deal of interest in this subject. I ask you to follow up in writing with any of the requests that we've made to you, or if there's any clarification you'd like to make in writing, please do so.

For other members of the committee, we'll be meeting for a few minutes after.

The committee continued in closed session at 1512.

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