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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 16 June 2004

Mercredi 16 juin 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 16 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 16 juin 2004

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM
CANCELLATION ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 ANNULANT LE PROGRAMME
DE PERFECTIONNEMENT
PROFESSIONNEL

Mr Kennedy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 to cancel the Professional Learning Program / Projet de loi 82, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario en vue d'annuler le programme de perfectionnement professionnel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Education for the leadoff speech.

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): At the outset, I'd like to acknowledge that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Mississauga West, Bob Delaney, and the members for Scarborough Southwest, Sault Ste Marie and Guelph-Wellington.

The bill we bring forward today is a punctuation in the development of a real teacher development program in this province. The punctuation we have is a stop to a program that hasn't worked. It was brought forward in the wrong spirit and in the wrong expression by the previous government in the name of teacher development, but it was really not only not accomplishing any of the objectives it set out, but having quite the opposite effect. We have a bill that purported to be about teaching standards that actually had the effect of lowering the morale and, ultimately, the standards of teaching in this province.

The job that we have in this Legislature is obviously to provide good government, to provide responsible leadership in our roles as elected officials. Certainly part of that is a responsibility toward the people who are engaged by the government on behalf of the people. Of the various groups of people we have working for us, not many are as large or as significant as the teaching workforce of this province, some 115,000 strong, in publicly funded schools in this province.

The bill we have in front of us today, Bill 82, up for second reading, simply puts forward a better prospect to

those 115,000 public service employees, those public service professionals. It essentially holds out to them and to the parents and the other interested members of the public of which there are many in this province, and to the future of education, that we will actually find a means by which we tap into the potential of our students, primarily by tapping into the potential that we have in the people who instruct at the front of the class.

It is a difficult job. I suppose it would be nice on some level if all one had to do was stand in this House, pass a law and say that made teachers, teaching and learning automatic, that somehow there were, as this bill started off being called, a test or an indication that would give us that assurance. The reality is different. The reality of our province since the passage of the professional learning program is that we've lost time. We've lost time to do the roll-up-the-sleeves work that is really required in our schools to motivate people.

The reason we take the unusual step of wiping out an entire initiative is because, notwithstanding the very large gap between the approach of the last government and the approach this government brings to bear and the dichotomy, really, between the things we're trying to do, you'll find that there are very few things we have gotten rid of holus-bolus, simply because we have a regard for the need for stability in the system, the need for predictability, not only on the part of students but also all the people who are working to support students. That has to be provided. But this is gone in its entirety should the Legislature express its will in support of this bill.

1850

The reason for that is its premise. Its premise was not only what I would call a lazy approach, one that didn't fulfill the obligation of government to find a real answer, to motivate people, but it had at its root the idea that there had to be a compulsion or a force in order to have professionalism on the part of teachers. That is a false premise, and it's a premise that came on top of an overall officially sanctioned taxpayer-paid-for outlook on the part of the government that extended even to television advertising against the professionalism and, ultimately, the integrity of the people in our classrooms who, I would argue here tonight, as our party and our Premier have consistently done, have fundamental integrity and express it on an ongoing basis.

I would say even to the members opposite who may have supported this bill in its initial expression that if they would be in any way honest and reasonable—and I'm saying they are honest and reasonable people, but on

this particular subject, I think they found themselves in a funny place. To say otherwise, to say that we need to legislate a certain amount of professionalism to a group of people who are asking every day to manifest themselves as professionals—they make choices over other people's children, and we in this Legislature make that possible. More than that, we make it necessary. It's the law to send your kids to school. It's your law to be in the charge of these particular people, and we have increasingly learned what a public duty and responsibility that is to have discharged.

We have, over time—all governments of all stripes—supported an increased professionalism on the part of teachers. As we ran into struggles in recent years, these are struggles not necessarily of the making—if you look at the curve of professionalism of teachers, it has actually been fairly steep. It's been the steeper curve that we've had around expectations for our kids and hoping that someone else is going to help us get it there. But we have to be honest about what those challenges really are. Those challenges are not about forcing professionals to do something or to be something. In fact, if there's one clarifying difference between the motivation of this bill and what it seeks to replace, it's that we also want teacher excellence in this province, and we assume that teachers want it as well. So we don't need a bill to force artificial qualifications.

Let me just lay out for the people out there what this bill is going to do. It's going to get rid of artificial qualifications in favour of an environment that will actually get us teacher excellence. One of the ways it will do that is to simply not require an artificial standard: 14 courses completed within five years or, according to a law passed by this Legislature, you're no longer a teacher. Now, no number of courses is going to guarantee that we have good teachers, just like no number of courses would assure us in this House that we have good legislators. There are other standards which have to be met. We wouldn't want to wait five years, frankly, to find out if we had teachers with problems or issues or difficulties. We instead believe fundamentally that we have a very highly qualified workforce.

I would just point out to people in this House who aren't aware that we turn away the vast majority of teacher candidates in this province from our education faculties. We have had, in recent years, ratios of 7 to 1 and 8 to 1, in parallel with faculties like law and medicine, of qualified people trying to get into teaching. We need to nurture the preparation time that we have. We need to find ways to find its expression in the everyday lives of teaching and not, as people who remember the antecedents of what we're here to remedy today, have something scratched on the back of an envelope. That was a 1999 campaign promise by the then-governing Conservatives that said, "We're going to test teachers." They spent public money on backdrops that said "testing teachers." Then a leaked cabinet document shortly after the election said that, in fact, there is no teacher test that can be applied gainfully. Instead, it

became this mandatory professional development that wasn't based on sound principles. It is a good thing for professionals to develop; of that, there can be no denial. But what is not sound is to have that happen in a prescriptive way, to have that decided by a central body, to have that organized by the government of the day.

The irony of this is that there was a college of teachers formed on a consensus basis arriving from a royal commission in 1994. Every party said that a college of teachers would be a good idea, but when it came time to extend what should have been respect to teachers consistent with having a college, consistent with being a profession that deserved the privilege of regulating itself, the previous government overruled that college of teachers: "No, we will impose on that college our will, not necessarily how it is seen by people whom we've selected to uphold the public interest in teaching, but our will," and ultimately, I would submit to this House, a political will and flawed for that reason.

What we did not have were steps forward. What the children, students and young adults of this province have had as a result is something of a step backward. Professional development, investment in human capital, is the way to go forward in education. These are the things that work. We used to know that in this province when we were a ranking jurisdiction in terms of educational achievement, but now we've slipped backward, in no small part related to the fact that we have not been taking the steps to motivate and support our teachers. We've been putting them in too crowded classrooms with too few resources, with outdated textbooks and without the kinds of conditions that actually allow them to access one of the best ways to achieve things on behalf of an increasingly complex classroom.

Part of the challenge that we, this government, have to step up to bat on has to do with that challenge, has to do with not trying to wash our hands of it with the passage of an inappropriate law, but rather taking responsibility for it in tandem with teachers in this province and saying to teachers, "We understand what that classroom is like." I think the teachers of this province, for a variety of reasons, have had good, sound reasons to believe that they work on the moon, that they're in some different place than the rest of us when it comes to what the current educational challenges are.

We're going to close that gap by recognizing that our number one asset in this province, in terms of what we went to achieve in education, is a highly skilled and motivated workforce. I would recommend to people watching this debate on Bill 82 to have a lookout for early next week, when we'll have a teacher development paper available for discussion. Rather than imposing something unilaterally, we're going to be working with not just the teachers of this province but with the administrators of school boards, with parents, with students—who, after all, are ultimately the net beneficiaries, or not, of any decisions that we make here—to come up with a real regime for teacher excellence.

What I would say that people will find in that paper is, at its core, a consistent outlook that this government has taken in its audition for government and will maintain throughout its administration, which is a policy of teacher respect. We believe that nothing else can work. If we can't treat teachers like professionals on a consistent basis, we have no right to expect back from them the kind of extraordinary effort that we require on behalf of our children.

We say that the highly qualified teachers whom we have need to have specific supports in order to continue to succeed. We are meeting this weekend with a group that we call the education partnership. In this new government, we have the idea that we need to be working together, so we've created our own means to do that: a table that, yes, has teachers at the table. Before we bring policies forward to this House, teachers, principals, students, parents, board trustees and other elements are sitting down to try and improve the policies we have before we impose them on two million kids, which ultimately is what happens if that isn't done.

We spend far too much of our day in the Ministry of Education fixing things that didn't need to be broken. This is one of those. We could have, even under the most adverse conditions, such as the professions who teach in this province had in the last eight years—we still could have found a way to get professional development to happen. I would submit to people out there that the evidence for that is that, time and time again, despite what the past government did toward teachers or toward education, people within those various bodies—elementary and secondary, French and Roman Catholic—all tried to co-operate, all tried to find solutions, but there simply wasn't an ability to do that.

1900

There is now. There is now an ability and a capacity to pull the best out of this province. I can tell you, as someone who, on behalf of this House, has the privilege of going around to our schools, we have in this province the people and the ideas to have the best education system in the world. Part of what we need to do and wasn't done in the legislation that we're pulling away from in Bill 82 was a simple recognition not just of that, but of what the task at hand is. To be able to allow people to access some of those tremendous ideas and programs and experiences is really fundamental to what we have to accomplish in this province.

We have in Ottawa, for example, where I was yesterday, a tremendous program that the principal tells me is already increasing literacy scores for students. They were just waiting for a chance to do that, and with the funding we provided last December, they bought the materials, they provided the training for the teachers that they'd been clamouring for, and they got a 20% spike in the literacy and numeracy attainment of those young kids. I would say that there is a direct correlation here.

This bill has a complicated title about the college of teachers and the professional learning program, but it's really about teaching and about students learning. It is

about the beginning, the first instalment, of our policy of teacher respect. We will see in this jurisdiction something different from elsewhere. In New York state, they had an initiative three years ago about teacher quality, and that was to find out which teachers had qualifications. We have a tradition in this province of highly qualified people that we can build on.

The kind of things that we can start to do is get after some of our own admitted weaknesses. We lose one in three new teachers. We pay \$7,000 or more a year to the faculty of education to train teachers, and then we have had an environment here where we're losing one in three. It's not a selection process. We're not losing the ones who can't teach. We're losing them simply because we have not created that reinforcement. After the teaching year that people have, and preparing and pre-service, we haven't been able to take them from universities into environments and make sure that they learn those other things that they have to have, because our school system has simply been too strained for that.

Yet elsewhere, mentoring programs are working. Taking experienced teachers, making them available to new teachers, having real time and resources there so that they can drill down on what they're capable of doing, only makes sense, and it's being done now only on a haphazard basis, because those are the resources that have been offered. So we're going to be able to create, through a mentoring program, a very strong sense that we value the teachers who are coming in. We'll also be able to work with our faculties of education to make sure that the kinds of things that teachers get prepared for are the things that we need to have happen in this province, that we'll be able to look at the formal and the informal opportunities that people need to have, both in school and on their own. There's a tremendous amount of work that needs to be recognized that takes place on the part of teachers to develop curriculum, to develop their own abilities, and right now there is no formal recognition—not in the tax structure; not in the way that we look at how we pay teachers. All we're saying is that we're going to take responsibility for any changes that there are in the system.

We have ambitions on behalf of students. We want every 12-year-old in this province to be able to read, write and comprehend at a high level—literacy and numeracy that has, for a variety of reasons, been denied too many of our young children in this province. We encounter them today in grade 10, and then struggling again in grade 11 and 12, 48,000 of whom may not get their diplomas this year. That's not acceptable. Our ambition is that we would solve the essence of that problem, the dilemma for those students, by the time of age 12.

You know what? I can say that as many times as I want in this House, and unless that's picked up by not the co-operation, not the willingness of teachers in this province, but by the commitment of teachers in this province, that won't happen. The only way that members of this House can ask for that commitment is to provide some of the support and some of the resources that people need,

because it is a tough job. We don't have in our schools the same kind of challenges that we once did. We have children who have language barriers. We are proudly, I believe, in this society, offering educational opportunities to children who used to be kept at home or parked in institutions.

All that means is, we need to be able to provide the resources to meet some of those challenges, because our ambitions are for every student. We share what I think instinctively teachers share: the idea that every student can learn. Our education system has to offer them the basic ingredients of citizenship, but there has to be the preparation and support for people to be able to do that.

We're looking at the role professional activity days can play in the course of the school year. We're also looking at a way, whether it's through tax credits or other elements, whether it's in curriculum involvement, we can acknowledge what teachers are doing on their own and on their own time.

We'll look also—and we have a separate discussion paper out there about what the college of teachers needs to be doing in respect of professional standards. But, as a corollary of what we're talking about here today, we'll say this: You can't have a college of teachers unless it's run by teachers; that in fact there has to be the basic extension of identity. If it's going to be self-regulation, it needs to be by the people who are being regulated.

We say also that there are opportunities for us, with respect to the evaluation that currently goes on, to tie that more into professional development. Ultimately, we all succeed when our teachers feel they have the support they require. The only way that can be provided is if it's done on a consistent basis.

We spend, lamentably, in this province, or we did until this year, something in the order of less than one eighth of one hundredth of 1% on developing our staff. In industry, that would put you out of business. We have depended instead on teachers pulling money out of their own pockets to do additional qualification courses, sometimes at \$1,000 a pop. Instead, in this province we need to take responsibility, not for the sake of teachers but for the sake of students, for making sure that teachers can keep up with changing programs and certainly with the changes that we have.

We bring this ambition that our education system will be among the best anywhere in the world in preparing students. The only way to make that happen is to have discrete policies for new teachers and experienced teachers so they can interact with other industries and other experiences and that we do the preparation, yes, but not the preparation or the development of teachers that is based on a flawed idea.

All I'm asking this House to do with this bill is to remove that flawed idea, to open up other possibilities and create, for the first time in too long a time in this province, a partnership between teachers and other people who are joined together in their ambition for the children of this province and for what publicly funded

education can finally do on behalf of the future of this province.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It is with the enthusiastic support of many close friends, not only in Mississauga West but in the education community in Peel, that I speak in favour of the legislation to repeal the professional learning program for teachers in this province. I acknowledge especially the friendship and help of Steve and Shelley Katz, Clinton and Micheline Smith and Rob and Sue Harshman. This expensive program has been ineffective in achieving any of its goals. The PLP was mean-spirited and it has failed to win the support of the average Ontario teacher.

Some people ask, "What's PLP?" I think it's a fair question. I ask them to imagine that in order to continue in their job or profession, they are required to remain on perpetual probation. That's what PLP was.

PLP was, first and foremost, a bureaucratic, inefficient and cumbersome system that involved unnecessary paperwork and took valuable time away from students in the classroom. The record-keeping required was onerous. PLP generated little but ill will among the teachers who were supposed to be its beneficiaries.

PLP was poorly conceived. For all the mountains of paper it generated, PLP did little to benefit teachers. Many teachers tell me it actually damaged the average classroom in this province. The high levels of uncertainty generated within the teaching community, as well as the time the program robbed from class preparation, only hurt the quality of the teaching time our students received.

The PLP excluded teacher input. It forced a one-size-fits-all system on all teachers in Ontario. The previous government felt that it knew what was best for teachers and our education system. It introduced the PLP without consultation and without regard for the real needs of teachers. Would it not seem logical to involve teachers in the process of development of their own professional development program?

Who is better qualified to understand what teachers need in order to grow and develop than teachers themselves? Rather than take a dictatorial approach that imposes an unreasonable and unworkable program on the teaching profession, it would seem logical to work cooperatively with our teachers to come up with a program that not only meets their needs but is effective.

What this government is determined to do is involve our teachers in designing the most effective way to learn to do their jobs better.

1910

All Ontarians would agree that the education of our children is a top priority. It is the teachers in our system who are the key to our education system: teachers who are well-trained and highly motivated. Good teachers are essential to the success of our education system. With the rapid changes taking place in our society and in our economy, it is more critical than ever for teachers to stay up-to-date on new trends and new ideas.

As a manager in the private sector, I was responsible for the professional development of my staff. Not surprisingly, it was more effective to help a staff member progress in his or her career with a helpful suggestion on professional development, rather than threaten the same staff member with penalties for not doing professional development.

The implication with PLP, of course, was that teachers wouldn't do anything without the government having to beat them with a stick. It just isn't so. Most teachers already take courses to develop professionally. Summers often mean new courses, upgrading qualifications and putting in long hours writing papers for university courses. This is one of the reasons why Ontario teachers rank among the best-qualified teachers in the world. This is one of the reasons why the best teaching in Ontario happens in public schools.

Teachers in this province have proven over and over again that they want to grow and develop as teachers. We need to help this growth happen, rather than continuously confronting them and making their jobs more difficult.

If we decide, as a government, to work with our teachers, then we'll see much more professional training take place. Our Ontario classrooms will be the better for it.

It's not only what you ask people to do, but how you ask them to do it that is important. This government is committed to changing the tone of its discussions with teachers in this area of ongoing training. The results will speak for themselves.

Another problem with the PLP is its exorbitant cost—close to \$10 million. The cost has been expensed to the Ontario College of Teachers, which is in turn supported by teachers through their annual dues. So here we have a situation where the teachers themselves are forced to pay for a costly, ineffective program that they know does not work and into which they've had no input whatsoever. Is there any doubt that teachers would have no faith in a system like this?

This government is finding it is more successful and productive to work with teachers rather than confront them. We are interested in listening to our teachers rather than turning a deaf ear to them. It's in this vein that we've decided to explore with our teachers the most effective ways to develop excellence in education.

One effective way to facilitate the professional growth of teachers is the development of a mentor system, where more experienced teachers partner with those who are just entering the system. Mentoring not only works better, it addresses the individual needs that new teachers have. In those schools where mentoring has been introduced, it has proven effective in building teams of dedicated teachers who are able to work together, share ideas and see student achievement improve dramatically.

At T.L. Kennedy Secondary School in Mississauga, for example, mentoring has resulted in a significant improvement in staff performance as well as staff morale and the desire among staff to work together toward common goals. This program alone has achieved far

more than the \$10 million spent by the PLP in its sad, sorry three-year existence.

Across Ontario, schools have introduced many innovative methods that are far more effective in bringing about results. Many schools have developed their own models, which combine dramatic improvement in student achievement, community involvement and professional development for teachers.

Striving toward excellence in education must include dialogue with all of those involved in the educational process. It's fundamentally unsound to expect that we will achieve excellence in education through the imposition of one monolithic program such as the PLP.

Ontario teachers have shown their willingness to experiment for excellence in the past. They will continue to do so under the right policies and the right leadership. Schools and individual educators will be encouraged to take some risks to see improvement in student achievement by trying new techniques and working collaboratively with others. Our goal is to encourage innovation among teachers rather than to stifle their imagination.

We are proposing, as a government, that we begin to put money into professional development for teachers. Under the PLP system, teachers were responsible for paying for most of their courses themselves, including travel and accommodation expenses, wherever that may have been necessary.

It would seem reasonable for the government to make an investment in the training of the people who are responsible for the education of our younger generation. By doing this, we'll be sending a message to both teachers and the community that we really are concerned about what goes on in the classroom. One of the ways by which this government intends to invest in teacher professional development is through the expansion of summer courses, as well as other vehicles that will improve the quality of education in the classroom. Practical courses that are geared to the classroom will directly benefit students. In addition, teachers will gain from the interaction with other educators who have done research or have experience in the fields where they both work.

The government that Ontarians rejected last fall had plenty of simple answers, such as PLP, for a world with a desperate shortage of simple problems. It would be misleading to say that teacher training is a simple problem. Ontario's education community consists of assets who draw a salary and who go home to their families after school is out. For this reason, the Ministry of Education is launching a series of consultations with educators, school boards, principals and faculties of education. We want the best return that we can get from Ontario's investment in its human assets in our education system.

The end of PLP signals a new era of co-operation with the educators in this province, and it opens the door for innovation as well as improved student performance. PLP was badly conceived from its very inception. As bad policy, no patching, no fixing and no modification can ever make it work. It needs to be scrapped, and this bill

will scrap it. For these reasons, I gladly support the elimination of the PLP program.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I just wanted to make a few remarks regarding Bill 82, which is only a few pages long. Leafing through it, it's about three page long, very brief, and it simply states, "An Act to amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 to cancel the Professional Learning Program." It looks very benign and perhaps very harmless, but it is actually a very strong message. It's a message to the teaching profession and to teachers in Ontario that the war against them is finally over.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): We're declaring peace.

Mr Berardinetti: As my colleague to my left has stated, in a way it's a declaration of peace. But I think it goes beyond that. It sends a signal to the teaching profession that we wish to work with them and to treat them with the respect they deserve.

I wanted to start off by congratulating the minister for bringing forward this bill. I had a lot of pressure from a lot of my friends whom I went to school with who became teachers and who found out, when I was seeking office last fall, that the Liberal Party platform would include a significant education component. They spoke to me, they lobbied me, and they said, "We, as teachers, are not being treated the way we should be treated."

When you look at other professionals, whether they be doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants, engineers or other professionals, they don't have to go through the same types of rigorous learning programs that were put forward by the former government. I was leafing through some parts of the previous program that was in existence, and basically what was in place was a requirement that teachers had to complete 14 courses every five years to maintain their Ontario teaching certificate. I find it somewhat onerous and somewhat unusual for one profession to have to do that, to take 14 courses every five years to maintain your certificate. I think if you're going to do something like this, which I don't support, then the same would apply to other professionals, as I mentioned, whether they be doctors, lawyers or other professionals.

1920

If you started doing this, the costs involved in this testing and certification program would be huge. So I really think that in some ways this is saving money for the taxpayers of Ontario, because I think teachers, like lawyers, like doctors and other professionals, are going to do what is necessary to maintain and keep their professional standards as high as possible. In any profession, you're going to get good and bad, whether they be lawyers or doctors. You're not going to get perfect in every profession. That could apply to politicians as well. It could apply to all sorts of professions and fields; you're going to get good, and you're going to get bad. But I really don't think in my heart that what the previous government was trying to do would in any way improve the quality of teaching in Ontario.

Let me speak for a few minutes about the teachers who are here in Ontario and who have worked so hard here in Ontario. I'm a product of the public school system. I attended public school in Scarborough from kindergarten right through to grade 8, and then I attended high school in Scarborough from grade 9 to grade 13. I have to say that, except for maybe one or two teachers, 99% of them were exceptional professionals. They worked hard at their job. They were willing to spend time after school with individual students, including myself if I needed extra assistance, and they got involved in the community or in the school community, whether it be running the football team or the chess club or the photography club or whatever other group that ran after hours.

Many teachers took the time to get involved, and I really have to take my hat off and give my congratulations and express my real admiration to many of these teachers who worked so hard. I've had the opportunity in the past few years to reconnect with some of them as I've gone back to my old high school and my old public school and had the chance to speak with some of these teachers.

Some of them recently retired. I had a chance to meet with one—his name is Mr Crowe—and he was my grade 12 and my grade 13 history teacher. He has recently retired. I have to say that he had a tremendous influence on my decision to go to university and what kinds of courses to take, what kinds of things to do and what direction to go in life. In many ways, he's an unsung hero, because he influenced many other people as well, not just myself, to be better people, to be contributing members of our society and to try to strive to be the best they could be.

I can think of many dozens of other teachers who did the same thing. They would put their whole heart into their job and into their profession to try to do the best they could. I take these few moments to thank them and to congratulate them for what they're doing. I feel that in a way today we are somewhat recognizing their professionalism and that we are saying to them, "You deserve better than to have to be tested, you deserve better than to be beaten up"—as the former government did—"and you deserve better than what happened in the past eight and a half years." I honestly feel that this short, three-page bill, Bill 82, is the start of a program to bring teachers back into the mainstream of our education system and back into the mainstream, ultimately, of Ontario society.

We recently tabled a budget on May 18, and the finance minister spoke about a four-year plan. That four-year plan looked at many aspects of Ontario. The education system was one of them; the health care system, of course, was a huge part of the budget; the environment, stronger cities, and other areas as well. But I have to say that I think one of the cornerstones of our four-year plan which was encapsulated in our budget was the education system and improving that system.

I think our Minister of Education, along with our Premier, and all members of the Liberal caucus are com-

mitted to seeing a better Ontario with better teachers, a better health care system, stronger cities, a cleaner and better and safer environment, and so on. It's all part of our four-year plan. It's all contained in our budget. I think today's debate, our start of our discussion on this particular piece of legislation, is significant, because it allows us to bring education into that four-year plan and to truly start to discuss it as something significant within Ontario.

In the final few moments I have, I wanted to just relate a small story. Last Friday, I had the opportunity to visit a school in my riding. I've visited many schools since I've been elected. This school is called St Agatha school and it's located in the riding of Scarborough Southwest. As I was given a tour through the school by the principal and a few of the teachers, I was shocked at the condition of the school. I was shocked at the infrastructure of the school. I was shocked at the morale of the teachers. There are 400 students in that school; 200 of them are in portables and 200 are in the school. The teachers were doing the best they could to try to teach their kids and get them the best possible education. I could see from going through that tour with the teachers that they were doing the very best they could, with the very limited resources they had, to make these kids the best students they could possibly be.

I left them saying that we had a plan in place and that we would be doing things to make schools like St Agatha a little bit better, whether it be improving the infrastructure or improving some of the morale of the teachers, which is at an all-time low right now. I think this bill, this particular piece of legislation, begins the morale part of that whole improvement, which is so important.

I'm happy to support it. I put my support fully behind the minister and I congratulate him and the Premier.

I pass on the remainder of my time to the other speakers from our caucus.

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): I'm pleased to rise this evening to add my comments with respect to Bill 82, the cancellation of the PLP program. I'd like to commend the minister for introducing this very progressive legislation that addresses an outstanding issue and really speaks to the treatment of teachers in this province over the past eight years by the past Conservative government. I think it really demonstrated to teachers how they were viewed in this province, and it was in a very negative light. We had a government that tried to convince parents in this province that your child's teacher was your enemy and that they were your friend.

This program was extremely divisive. It resulted in an entire morale and relationship with the provincial government, over 8 years, that was very negative and unproductive. It added much instability to the education system in this province. So I'm pleased to lend my support this evening to the repealing of the professional learning program with Bill 82.

What would have happened to education in this province had the Conservative government been re-elected? I hate to think, given the trends that were taking

place in education. Here's a little bit about the facts of our education system under the past Conservative government: \$500 million out of the public education system handed over to private schools; grade 3 standardized tests in reading have shown no improvement since 1999; math scores have dropped since 2000 to 57%; half a million students are in classes of 26 or more. We know the research indicates that class sizes of 20 are one of the most productive ways to maximize the learning potential of students in this province.

Under the Harris-Eves government, Ontarians' investment in education dropped us from 29th position to 46th position in North America. We lost 26% of teacher librarians, 22% of physical education teachers and 12% of English-as-a-second-language teachers. This is not the Liberal concept of managing and supporting our education system, when we need children in this province to be the best they can be to compete in an ever-changing economy.

They cut more than \$1 billion from education in their first two years: \$145 million from junior kindergarten, \$150 million from adult education, \$39 million from busing, \$163 million from classroom spending, and \$167 million from school construction and maintenance.

I can tell you that the Minister of Education visited the riding of Sault Ste Marie several weeks ago. We visited five schools in our community to meet with some of the local teachers, parents and students and to take a look at the learning environments which students in this province are faced with. The minister will certainly attest to this: We had classrooms with leaky roofs and tiles falling off the ceiling.

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Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Windows broken.

Mr Oraziotti: Windows broken.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): Rats running around.

Mr Oraziotti: Definitely rats, mice, you name it. This is not the kind of environment we want our children in this province growing up in and expecting them to reach their potential. It's a testament to the incredible mismanagement of the education system. It reminds me of the balanced budget that the Conservatives had supposedly brought in. It's amazing. I know it's a fact. I worked in education for 10 years and I can tell you that it's the truth in education.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Well, then, you don't know what you're doing. I guess that's why you're here.

Mr Oraziotti: That's OK. I think we've hit a nerve. I know the truth is painful for some people, but it still will be told here tonight.

Cuts to education investment forced 25 school boards to cancel junior kindergarten—I guess that's imagination—23 boards reduced special education programs, 44 boards reduced transportation services and 42 boards cut custodial and maintenance budgets. I guess they cut custodial and maintenance budgets and, as a result—

Mr Dunlop: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I thought the bill was about the elimination of the teacher

testing program. This has nothing to do with the teacher testing program. He's grandstanding over here. He keeps staring over in my direction, and the bottom line is, he should be—

The Acting Speaker: You may take your seat.

Mr Dunlop: Is that not a point of order?

The Acting Speaker: I've heard your point of order. The member for Sault Ste Marie.

Mr Oraziotti: I guess we've incited some tension here, but the reality is that this speaks to the relationship that the past government had with teachers in education, their treatment of teachers and their treatment of the entire education system. It's unfortunate that the member fails to see the correlation here, but there definitely is one.

While private school funding increased by \$3,500 per student, public school education funding decreased by \$1,250 per student—not my idea of supporting public education.

Student achievement flat-lined for grade 3 testing. Passing rates in reading rose only to 50%, where they have stayed since 1999. Math has fallen from 61% to 57% today. There are similar results in grade 6, with no more than a 1% improvement. This is a disgraceful record and a lack of student achievement. In an era where we had such tremendous economic stimulation in this province and where there was tremendous revenue raised, it certainly wasn't put back into education and into the students who needed the assistance and the help.

There are 15,000 fewer teachers than 10 years ago—\$385 million cost to taxpayers to fire teachers and other education workers. The number of private tutors for public school students has increased by 300% since 1995. Considering all of this reinvestment, I don't know why this had to take place, but it did, and it speaks to the lack of support in our schools and the absolutely disgraceful standards that our students are faced with and the lack of supports they have. The results are reflected in their student achievement progress.

Our students lost 24 million learning days under the Harris-Eves government. That's three times more than under the two previous governments combined. We've got 48 instances where teachers withdrew their services or were locked out. This is the kind of relationship that has haunted the education system for the past eight years. This is why the professional learning program is being repealed, because it speaks to the relationship that we want to have with our province's teachers.

What are we going to do? We're going to collaborate with our teachers, as well as principals, school boards and faculties of education. We'll gather input from parents, students and others to ensure that they have a role in support. We are going to rebuild the relationship with our education partners that has been destroyed under the past government. If we want our teachers to perform to their potential, to give back to our students, to make our students the best workers and productive citizens in this province, then we need to support them and stop attacking them.

Let me tell you, as someone who has worked in education, I certainly didn't need the provincial government leaning over me and saying, "You should support professional development." I took at least a course every year for the 10 years that I was teaching, and many of my colleagues did the same, without anyone looking over their shoulder and telling them what they should or shouldn't take. If someone travels overseas and takes slides and brings those back and shows their class, there is no recognition for any of this professional development, development that actually is very meaningful to many students in this province. There's no recognition for past educational involvement under the PLP. It was fraught with many difficulties and challenges, and it was an extremely resented piece of legislation.

We're going to create inventive and innovative mentoring programs for teachers by using more experienced teachers and their expertise. We're going to increase the number of professional development days that were cut by our past governments. We're going to enhance teacher performance appraisals so we can ensure that our teachers have the support they need to move forward.

In closing, I think this is an extremely appropriate piece of legislation. I want to commend the past speakers who have spoken in support of this. I want to commend the Minister of Education for taking the time to get out there into the ridings and meet first-hand many of the stakeholders in education, to introduce this piece of legislation that will earn trust and respect and rebuild our relationship with the education workers of this province.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to speak tonight on Bill 82, the act to repeal the professional learning program, or as it is often called, the teacher testing program. I want to note first of all that, yes, we are repealing this program, but the purpose of this is so we can replace it with something better, something that actually works.

I'd like to speak a bit from my perspective as a person who was a trustee for 15 years, because our friends in the opposition here, the members of the former Tory government, sometimes make the accusation that we're repealing this so we can pander to the teachers' unions. So I'd like to tell you what this particular program looked like, the professional development record of the Tories, from the point of view of management, because that's what I was. I was a trustee; I was management.

So let's set the stage here. When the Tories came in in 1995, we had a salary grid—still do, in fact—for teachers that encourages upgrading. Teachers are rewarded for going and taking university courses. After they take a certain number of relevant courses, their salary can be upgraded. In fact, we found that the vast majority of teachers were, in fact, upgrading their qualifications, either by taking university courses during the summer or at night school or by taking workshops in summer institutes that were supplied by their own boards.

Then the Tories got into the act. The first thing that Mr Johnson, the former Minister of Education and, I take it, the current candidate in Don Valley East, is it, for the

Alliance—excuse me, the Conservatives. Anyway, he came in and he cancelled most of the professional development days and, at the same time, changed every piece of curriculum in the province of Ontario.

Let me give you a parallel. The biggest employer in the manufacturing sector in my town is auto manufacturing. So suppose you had an auto parts plant and you got a contract to produce a new product, a new part. You retooled your assembly line. You've got your assembly line all set up to produce a new part. You call your employees in and you say to the employees, "No training on this one, folks. You figure it out yourselves. Go on the line there and see if you can figure out how to put this part together. And oh, by the way, we're going to start shipping the product today." That's essentially what happened: They cancelled professional development days and said, "Now deliver a whole new curriculum without any training." If I suggested that to a manufacturer, I'd get laughed out of town, but that's what happened.

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Then the Tories made a campaign promise. They said, "We're going to test teachers, and if they fail the test, we're going to kick them out of the profession." This was a dumb promise. However, Tories were always very proud of keeping promises, even dumb ones. So they referred this to the college of teachers, because the college of teachers, as with any other professional college, any self-regulating profession, is supposed to be in charge of the professional development of its members.

So they said to the college of teachers, "Figure out this teacher testing promise we made." To their credit, the college of teachers did a huge amount of research. They went to some of the southern states that had actually tried this scheme, and guess what they found out? It really was a dumb idea. It didn't work. So then they started looking at professions in Ontario and their professional—they looked at professions all over the world that had good professional development products. They consulted with all the different stakeholders in the education system. They put together a series of recommendations and went back to the Tory government and said, "Here's a proposal, what we think will actually work, and we have substantial agreement from all the stakeholders: teachers, principals, directors, trustees, parents, students. We think this will work."

The government said, "Well, maybe, but it doesn't actually look like teacher testing, and we said we're going to do teacher testing. So it has to be teacher testing." So they substantially ignored the recommendations that were put forward by the college. Instead, they came up with this idea that there would be 14 courses, seven of which would be determined by the provincial government, which, of course, knew all. There would have to be a testing component, because after all, this has to be called teacher testing. So there would be a testing component at the end of each course. This is what is officially the professional learning program, the thing that we are repealing, as I say, the teacher testing program.

So let's look at this from the point of view of management. Did this work? Well, suppose you had a teacher who was struggling, who maybe had some weaknesses and needed some help to really get on top of their profession. As management, as a principal in a school, I don't want the provincial government saying, "Go take these seven courses." I want to be able to say to that teacher, "You have a problem here, and you have a problem here. Here is where you can get some help that's going to help you improve the things you need to improve."

Suppose we had new curriculum—and we did everywhere. I want to be able to go into the school, and the principal wants to be able to go into the school and say, "We have a new math curriculum. We want the teachers in this school to focus on the new math curriculum so we can improve the math results. We don't want the provincial government saying, 'Take these seven courses,' on something you don't need courses on. We want you to learn how to teach the new curriculum. What are up-to-date teaching methodologies? How do we deliver this new curriculum?"

Suppose, on the other hand, that you're trying to recruit some teachers into your leadership development stream—and this is a big issue, because young teachers got so frustrated watching what principals were going through under this scheme that there's a real problem out there recruiting. In order to recruit people into the leadership development stream, they have to take a master's of education, and they have to spend two summers doing principals courses to learn to be a principal. They don't have time to take seven courses the provincial government dreamed up. So this was a problem in terms of trying to recruit and train new leadership.

Similarly, with new people to be superintendents—again, same problem. If you're taking these courses that the Tories thought you needed, you don't have time to go and get the proper qualifications to be a new supervisory officer. So this didn't work for the management side of the board any more than it worked for rank-and-file teachers.

So, in fact, as some of my opposition friends here are suggesting, the government said to the boards, "Well, you know, you used to do these professional development workshops. You used to do these summer institutes. Let's count them as some of the courses. But, oh, by the way, there has to be a grading component at the end."

This sounds simple, but the professional development workshops were offered by volunteer teachers, the summer institute courses were offered by volunteer teachers, and while they were perfectly happy to share their skills and expertise with their colleagues, they weren't perfectly happy to volunteer sitting around marking their colleagues. What we began to see was that if you said this was a Tory course, you couldn't get people to come and take it and you certainly couldn't get people to volunteer to teach it any more. So again, this presented a problem, not just for teachers but for management.

Let's look at what happened to teacher morale. Any business management model says that employee morale matters. So what happened? We had ads that said teachers were duds, we had labour turmoil, we had the kerfuffle over extracurricular activities, we had all the new curriculum, but finally we worked our way through all that. Things began to calm down. And then what happened? They threw in the bomb of the PLP, the teacher testing, and blew everything up again, which had everybody totally frustrated all over.

I'm supporting the repeal of this bill.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I ordinarily would have been on my way home now, but I was drawn into the conversation. I know just how important it is to have a self-regulating authority for any profession, and I think all persons here with any professional designation would know that.

What normally happens here are two things. The composition of the governance model is extremely important. In fact, this was recommended by the consultation on the For the Love of Learning document. It also said in that document that they should be self-regulating, that there should be a college that has a certain structure.

The problem is, the NDP did that study, in all fairness. I would say David Cooke was the Minister of Education who initiated this consultation. But where it became a problem is, who is actually qualified to be on the college? As it turns out, in all fairness, the structure of the governance model now is that the union runs it. Let's be honest: It's the unions running it. That's the deal. They didn't want to recognize OISE or anyone who didn't have a teaching certificate; that is, a dues-paying member. That's the issue here. Don't let anyone obfuscate or fool you in any way. That's issue number one.

The validation of ongoing education: my daughter, my sister, my wife are all teachers, and I think they work very hard. I would never discredit the work they do and the contribution they make to informing other people's lives. I would say 99% of them, like politicians, work very hard—except for the Liberals, of course.

My point is that the issue here was the ongoing learning in a highly technical environment. I think the learning that goes on and how it goes on—the unions required teachers not to take the courses that were put on by boards of education or OISE, and it's a shame that you've—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): The fact of the matter is that this program, as it was developed under the Conservatives, was one more attempt, one more effort and one more bit of evidence that what they really wanted to do during the whole time, during the whole eight years they were there, was to bash teachers. This was part and parcel of that effort to denigrate, to downgrade, to undermine those people who spend a lot of time working with our children in the classroom and whose efforts in that regard we want to support.

My approach really comes from more of a personal level because my sister-in-law is what you would define, I think, as a relatively new teacher; she's been in the classroom in the last three years. We've had some discussions about this particular program and she expressed three concerns about it. First of all, that there was a cost to it, and for a number of new teachers coming out of the system, after having a BA, after having two more years, they were already experiencing significant debt with respect to their education. So the application of 14 more courses and the costs teachers had to cover was yet one more thing they were trying to cope with when many of them already had a burden with respect to the debt they were coming out of university with.

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Secondly, we went over the courses at one point in time. She talked to me about them and what the synopsis was for each. I found it really difficult to see how relevant some of these courses were with respect to her situation as a new teacher in the classroom. Frankly, as she read through the courses and read through the synopses for me, I couldn't see that they were relevant at all to what she was coping with as a new teacher in a classroom in a high school of 1,500 kids.

Thirdly, what she really needed as a young teacher was not irrelevant courses but a lot of mentoring from more senior teachers in that school about how to deal with kids who were acting out, how to deal with kids whom she suspected were being abused at home, how to deal with kids who weren't engaged in the classroom, whom she needed to be engaged in order to learn.

That's what we should be doing. The effort under the Tories was really to bash teachers one more time.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm very pleased to join in the debate tonight and give my support to Bill 82, the Professional Learning Program Cancellation Act, and to thank my colleagues who spoke very eloquently before me this evening.

I think the common theme of what they had to say is that the war against teachers is over and this government is going to treat hard-working teachers in this province with the respect and professionalism they deserve.

Over the last many months, I've had a great deal of time and opportunity to spend time with teachers. As a professional myself, as someone coming out of the legal profession, I've talked to them about the fact that you need to mentor young, new professionals. This act and this change that our government is making is part and parcel of a new direction that we are going to take to make sure that our teachers are highly qualified and highly trained, that they know we value them and their government is behind them. Which one of us does not remember a teacher in our life who made a big difference? Which one of us cannot think back to a time when someone excited in us the love of learning? Those are our teachers.

My nephew is here at the Legislature today, and as I speak to him about what he loves about school, he talks

about his teachers. He tells me about the teachers who invigorate him, who teach him, who make him love learning. Those new young teachers who are coming in, as my colleagues before have said, don't need yet another course, yet another day away from school. What they need is someone to teach them the ropes, someone to mentor them, someone to guide them.

Our government is going to start talking to teachers, respect them as partners in this learning process, respect them as professionals, work with them to develop new mentoring programs, professional development days, enhanced summer programs and increase the role of teachers in appraising each other.

I am very much in favour of Bill 82, and I'm pleased to stand in support of it today.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Bill 82 is a sop to the unions, the teachers' unions. It's not surprising that the NDP and Liberals are in bed on this particular issue, because when they were in government, from 1985 to 1995, they did nothing—nothing—to address the problems we had in our education system.

I walked across this floor to talk to the Minister of Education at the time in the Liberal government. I walked across this floor to talk to the Minister of Education of the NDP government at that time. They said to me, "Norm, every time we take a step forward, the union pushes back two steps."

Mike Harris and the Progressive Conservative government had the gall, the guts, the fortitude to go forward with a challenge to the teaching profession. We brought forward the college of teachers, and what happened? The union pushed back and took control of the college of teachers.

This is nothing other than a payback to placate the unions, the teachers' unions, and betray the trust legislators have to the children of Ontario. This is a bad bill. It goes back on accountability for our teaching profession, which was introduced in this Legislature and introduced into this province. It was, unfortunately, needed. I come from a long line of teachers, as you do, Mr Speaker.

It's not surprising to see this government cave on Bill 82 to another union, another time, because they owe it to them. They went out and worked for them in the election. It's payback time—no accountability.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Education has two minutes to reply.

Hon Mr Kennedy: I extend my thanks to all members of the House who made questions and comments. I would simply say that we stand here in the House, as we have done often in the last number of months, repairing things that are broken, repairing things that didn't need to be broken. In this case, a broken trust: a trust on behalf of students that was thwarted by the perspective we just heard; a trust that got broken because a certain government with a certain perspective can't distinguish between the run of teachers in this province, 115,000—fewer than 20% took one course under this. When they should have taken six or seven, 80% didn't even take one course.

Thankfully this former government couldn't tell the difference. They had their personal political agenda. They needed to attack somebody. They needed to be against something. They needed to be about something negative. Instead of the trust that they had, instead of the obligation that they had to students in this province, they felt they could take it out on people.

What did they do? They did this professional learning program knowing full well that it would undermine the abilities of classrooms to function, but that was a price they were prepared to pay, a price they were prepared to make students pay on their behalf.

We stand in a province with people who understand well, the people who sit in corners of the Albany Club and worry about unions taking things away from them. Instead, we say to you, we respect teachers in this province. We respect the professionals and the workers—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Would the Minister of Education take his seat, please? I'll have order in this House, please. Minister of Education.

Hon Gerard Kennedy: We respect the teachers and workers in this province, because we know our job isn't the one of sitting in comfortable chairs in the Albany Club; it's to make this province work again, it's to make public services work again and it's to live up to the trust we have to see the children of this province reach their potential. Teachers are going to be the way we make it happen.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Dunlop: Can I ask for unanimous consent to have our leadoff time put off to another time, please?

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has sought the unanimous consent of the House to defer the leadoff speaker for the Conservative Party. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Dunlop: I appreciate the fact that you have allowed—Mr Flaherty, who is our critic for education, is not able to attend the House tonight.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: I never said one thing when the government members spoke, and here we are, the heckling begins. If you want me to sit down and you don't want to hear the—

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. The member for Simcoe North has the floor. I would ask all members of the House to allow him to make his presentation uninterrupted.

Mr Dunlop: The fact of the matter is, Mr Speaker, I didn't heckle the government members when they had the leadoff period, only the member from Sault Ste Marie for his ridiculous statements.

I am pleased to rise this evening to speak on a 20-minute allocation of time for this particular bill, An Act to amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 to cancel the Professional Learning Program, or as we call it, the loss of accountability in the classroom act, or the unions win act.

It's really simple. I wouldn't expect anything but this type of legislation from this government. Obviously, we knew the way the critic for education had fearmongered before the election, for the last four years that I'd seen him. I know this was a promise Mr Kennedy had made as the critic for education. That's a promise he had made to the teachers' unions across this province: to get rid of the teacher testing program, as we know it. You know what? I commend him for doing it. At least they've kept one promise they made to somebody. At least they've kept something.

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The fact of the matter is, I don't agree with the bill. I know there are many people among my constituents who don't believe in it either. I'm not so sure every teacher believes in this particular piece of legislation. I have to tell you—the teacher testing program, or whatever we want to call it here, the professional learning program—I had many more complaints about things like health care in my first term in Parliament than I ever had about the professional learning program. There were a few people who came forward. I got a few letters. Of course, some of the leaders of the teachers' unions in our area made complaints. But I thought that the teachers I had met, the teachers who came to my office, the teachers who wrote letters, the teachers I met at functions, didn't seem to be particularly alarmed at the professional learning program. But Mr Kennedy led that attack as the critic for the Ministry of Education, and at that point he won. They are the government, and they have every right to put this particular piece of legislation forward, and I expect other legislation will follow as a result of that.

For example, if you listened to some of the speeches in the leadoff by the government, you'd think that every move we'd made in education was wrong—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: You're the government now, and you can change whatever you want.

We reduced the number of school boards in the province of Ontario to 72. I guess that was a mistake, according to the Liberals. So you can replace it with 135 or 137, whatever was there before. I'm looking forward to seeing all those new administrators being hired into the education system, because, you know what? We must have made a mistake when we got rid of 60 or 70 school boards, and I look forward to seeing the Liberal government replace them. You know what? That's what we need in education—more bureaucracy. We need more administrators. We need more supervisors. We don't need that money going into the classroom; we need more administrators. I'm looking forward to seeing Mr Kennedy, the Minister of Education, and Mr McGuinty go back to the old times when it was so wonderful, and we can have 150 school boards. That would be a good step forward.

The student-focused funding formula: That had to be a mistake. I heard nothing but complaints from the Minister of Education and the education Premier over there. He talked all the time about the student-focused

funding formula. Well, why haven't they changed it? Why wouldn't your first piece of legislation be to return to the old days, when we didn't have it? I haven't seen it yet. You'd think that would be the first thing you'd want to do. Instead of the professional learning program, you'd think you'd want to return to the days when we didn't have the student-focused funding formula program. I guess that's what it's all about.

I heard the honourable member from—I believe it's Sault Ste Marie—is that right?

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: I'm sorry. He talked about the loss of revenue in your schools, or the loss of money directed toward the students. I don't know where he got that from.

Let me tell you what happened in my first four years, including part of this year, since I was elected as a member of Parliament. I'm going to talk to you about my two school boards—the two major school boards, the two largest school boards—Simcoe County District School Board in the county of Simcoe and Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. In 1999-2000, the Simcoe County District School Board received total funding of \$311 million. By 2003-04, that increased to \$381 million. Now, I'm not a mathematician, and I don't intend to be, but I think I'm better than McGuinty is at math. I'll tell you one thing: That's a \$70-million increase. Do you know how many more students we had? We had 50,774 students in 1999-2000, and we had an additional 1,500 students in 2003-04. So those 1,500 students received from the Tories—the people that, to you, apparently hate education—\$70 million extra. That's one board.

Now, let's go to the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. In 1999-2000, that board received \$123 million in funding for the year. In 2003-04, that was increased by \$38 million to \$161 million, and they had an additional 1,400 students. Now, I don't know where you got the decrease in funding, because that's a fact. We just took that off the Minister of Education's Web site last week—unless he changed it and made it look good for us, but that's the number I received from the Ministry of Education on the grant allocation sheets.

I'm looking forward to a lot more money, because this guy is the education Premier. He owes every school board. He owes all the trustees, like the member from Guelph-Wellington. He owes them all. All the teaching organizations, all the education stakeholders are owed by Mr Kennedy and Mr McGuinty. I expect to see a lot more money flowed into the education system.

What I'm seeing in the budget—and I hope I'm right on this. I understand that you will, in 2007-08, go to \$17.7 billion from what I guess is \$15.6 billion this year, which is the amount of money we flowed in 2003-04. That is, apparently, a \$2.1-billion increase.

But now we have something new to pull money from: the health care premium. That's where we'll be getting it from. Any additional funding, of course, just like the sewers and water and potholes, will come from the health care premium. We'll flow that money into the education

system. That's fair, because we already know that it's health—a healthy education, a healthy lifestyle, healthy food in the schools—so it has to flow from the health care premium that we understand was originally supposed to go just toward health, but now we're finding it's going everywhere.

I want to speak a little bit about the teaching profession. I'm very interested in the comments made by the government members, because a lot of them referred to the fact that they either were teachers or had a number of teachers in their families, and they referred back. Nobody is against teachers, nobody that I know, and I think it's so unfair to try to label a political party or any particular person in this Legislature as being opposed to the teaching profession.

For example, Mr Speaker, I don't have to look any further than you. I believe the Speaker is married to a teacher, a very lovely person, and I know she does a great job in the boards down in her area.

I have a number of teachers in my family. My mother-in-law is a teacher. She's a great teacher. My mother-in-law taught me in grade 1. Her name is Mary Taylor. She's a great lady. One of her specialties, all through those years that she spent both in the public board and the Catholic board—she actually taught in Victoria Harbour with the Catholic sisters at that time. The nuns were teaching in the school as well, and she taught with them. For years, she won every music festival around with her rhythm band. She'd take these little kids in grade 1 and kindergarten and teach them how to play music. I'm very proud of that. I know I'm not a teacher. I came from a construction background and a political background. I'm not a teacher, but I do really respect my mother-in-law and what she did in that field. She's a great lady, and I think she likes me too.

I look at our friends. I was out with friends of ours last Friday night. The young lady, who is a teacher, and her husband asked us to go away on a vacation with them this winter. I'm pretty proud of that, because I'm a Tory. I would think they would never invite me on a vacation, but I was asked to go on a vacation. We're seriously considering that next winter and looking forward to that, because they are good friends. We often tease each other about politics and education. I'm quite sure my friend worked for the Liberals, but she's a great lady and friends enough that they want us to go away on a vacation with them this coming winter.

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The other thing—and I've got to say this in a very, very positive manner. What I want to say is, one of the nice things I've found about being an MPP in my riding of Simcoe North is that—I lost contact with a lot of people who were the educators when I went to public school and high school, that is, elementary and secondary school; I like to make sure the terminology's right. I've been able to get to know a lot of my former teachers. They're now retired and many of them are living in the city of Orillia particularly.

I met, for example, my former science and chemistry teacher in high school, Reid Asselstine, one of the top people in the Rotary Club in the city of Orillia, just a workaholic in all the different service organizations.

And I got to meet my former English teacher. Her name was Molly Brien. Molly taught me English in grade 9 and in grade 13. Molly was a fantastic teacher. I wasn't into Shakespeare and all that sort of thing too much, but I can tell you that she made it fun in the classroom. I've met her again. She's married today, and I was at her husband's 80th birthday party. It was great to see her again, and we chatted. Whenever I go up to the Washago area or the Ramona area I get to see Miss Brien. She's a great lady.

These were the kind of people I had as teachers. I really did appreciate them, and I appreciate them today. In fact, I've been able to attend so many of their anniversaries, 50th anniversary parties, their birthdays, 80th and 75th birthdays. It's great to be there. They were people I respected so much. They never talked a lot about teacher testing or any of those sorts of things. I have gained a lot of respect for those people, not only when I was in secondary school but later on as I became an MPP and got to reacquaint myself with many of these people. They are leaders in our community. Many of them are close to retirement or are now retired. They're doing a great job and are respected members of the community.

I wanted to add that, because it's important that we're not branded as people who are opposed to teaching. It's easy for you to sit on that side of the room. We believe that the professional learning program was a step in the right direction. As the new government, you have every right to change that particular piece of legislation. Obviously, we're going to vote against it, but we're not surprised by any means that you would do it. You owe the teaching unions. It's as simple as that. You owe them, and that's a fact of life.

But what got me was Earl Manners. Earl Manners did not run for the Liberals. He ran for the NDP, against my friend and colleague Laurie Scott in Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. Some of the people most opposed to the government never ran for the Liberals. I thought Earl would follow the education Premier over there, because he talked about education all the time. Of course, he kind of had a conflict, because his wife's a teacher. But the bottom line is that he—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: We're getting some heckling from over there.

I just wanted to add a little bit of background to this and add a couple of the details that I thought should be added.

I'd like to put on the record that the professional learning program is being cancelled as a direct payback for the support from teachers' unions. For example, I wanted to add some of the dollars that the unions actually gave to the Liberal Party of Ontario in the last election: the elementary teachers' federation, \$13,400; the Toronto Catholic teachers, \$15,000; the Ontario English Catholic

Teachers' Association, \$7,500; and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, \$9,600.

I'm not sure what they gave to the New Democratic Party. Obviously, they must have given close to the same amount, because Earl turned out and ran for the New Democratic Party in the last election.

If there's any compliment I want to give to the Minister of Education, it's that he branded us well in the last election. You won the election, and I think it took a lot of the education stakeholders to help in that victory. I'm not so sure they're all so happy now. You've still got over three years to keep them happy. I'm not sure they'll be on your side when time flows around and we end up at the next provincial election, which I believe is scheduled for October 4, 2007. Now, that's unless the Premier walks down the hall early. He still has the right to do that, which you're not bragging about in your legislation or bill that's been introduced.

The bottom line is that we on this side of the House will not support this legislation. We think it is a step backwards. We think it could be refined. There's no question that any piece of legislation can be refined. If I can give an example, as you all know—well, I don't know how many people are familiar with the transportation segment of the student-focused funding formula. That took from 1997 till today to actually get resolved. There has been an ongoing dispute over how we funded transportation, and some of your school boards are finding that out right now: Some are getting large increases in the amount that's allocated to the board and others are getting decreases because they've likely been overpaid for a number of years.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Under your government.

Mr Dunlop: I hear some heckling going on over here, but one of the things that I want to point out is that in almost all these cases, committees made up of professional stakeholders from the education field made up the regulations and the legislation. It wasn't Mike Harris and it wasn't Ernie Eves and it wasn't Janet Ecker and Dave Johnson. It was the professionals in the Ministry of Education and in the school boards who actually created the regulations and the formulas. Our job was to move it forward, and we were proud of that. We think we did that job very well.

As we look forward to the future, it's important that we all realize that education is a very, very important part of the future of this province. I hope that the move today to eliminate this program works out to be positive in the end. We've all got children and grandchildren, and we'll have those people in the future in our education system. We need to realize that this is very important for the future of the province as we educate our young people, and hopefully we can move Ontario and our country ahead in a very positive manner.

I really appreciate the opportunity today. Again, I'd like to thank all the members of the House for allowing us to defer the leadoff. Mr Flaherty is tied up tonight, but he'll be eager to get back in here and talk about education

in the leadoff time whenever the next reading comes up. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Martel: With all due respect to the member, I would have liked to hear what Mr Flaherty has to say this evening. I'll look forward to hearing exactly what he has to say about the education issues in this bill in particular. I'm sure it'll be really enlightening.

Let me say with respect to the comments of the member from Simcoe North, I'm not surprised at the position your caucus has taken. You were the folks who brought in this program in the first place, so I'm not surprised that you're opposing it this evening.

I guess I am surprised about the comments you made with respect to branding, referring to the Liberals as trying to brand you in some way with respect to education. I've got to tell you, I think you guys did that all on your own by what you did over eight years in terms of education, and teachers in particular. I don't think there are very many people out there who don't think of the Conservatives and think of teachers and think of bashing all in the same sentence, because frankly, that was really the history of what went on for the eight years under your government. I find that really regrettable.

My parents were both teachers—my father was a principal for many years before he came to this place—my brother's a teacher, my sister-in-law's a teacher, and I have another brother who's qualified to teach but chooses not to. So we come from a family where they were either teachers or politicians. I found very regrettable, over the last eight years, the high-handed manner in which the former government treated teachers. There really was an all-out effort to undermine, to underrate, to devalue the work these folks do. I regretted that from the perspective of someone who has relatives who were teachers and as someone who has children in the school system and who really appreciates the work teachers do. I don't think I could do the work teachers do, not now, not given all the constraints and concerns they have to deal with. I just found it really regrettable that that was the attitude taken, and I hope things are now changing.

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Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm pleased to rise to respond to the members for Simcoe North and Lanark-Carleton. One of the saddest parts of the history of Ontario is eight years where the honourable profession of educators had been denigrated and demoralized by the politics of division and the extreme necons who came into this province in 1995—

Laughter.

Ms Di Cocco: And they laugh. It is this history that has done the most damage to our education system. Professionals were treated in such a way—the education system is made up of professionals who teach our kids. Our students are not better for the eight years this government had power in this province.

It is a sad tale when we look at having to try to undo so much moral damage that was done to the teaching profession. Even the way it was structured: They talked

about the profession of teaching, saying, "These teachers need to be tested," relegating them to a childish—testing is not about professional development. Testing implies that they don't know something.

We have a lost generation. We have teachers who can hardly wait to get out of the profession because they feel so denigrated, and they were great teachers. I say that we are going to turn that around, because good education is about respecting our teachers.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Respect for teachers? I can certainly identify with that. My mother was a teacher by profession.

Mr Rinaldi: Is she still your mother?

Mr Yakabuski: She's no longer with us, Lou, but she spent the 18 years after she got married having 14 children, so she didn't have any time for teaching. I also have a brother who's a teacher and many friends who are teachers, some of whom I play hockey with, so I know the vital work they do. I also have children in the school system, and I can tell you, a good teacher can change a student's outlook on life by the way they assist in their development. I have seen with my own daughter how her attitude changed by having a particular teacher in grade 6 who challenged her. Last year, in grade 8, she was the only student in her school who was awarded the Renfrew County Medallion for her academic achievements, and I give the teacher she had in grade 6 a great deal of credit for challenging my daughter to be the very best that she could be.

The teacher testing program was about exactly that: challenging our teachers to be the very best they can be and offering to them the opportunity to improve themselves so they can challenge people like my daughter to be the very best they can be. It is not about attacking teachers. That is how they would like to portray it, because they parlayed that into an alliance, if you want to call it that, in the previous election so they could garner the support of the unions to defeat this government. This bill is about payback for helping to defeat the government. It's not about improving education. The changes we made in education are still going to be in place, because they were positive.

Mr Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to stand and comment on the comments of our friend from Simcoe North. It's interesting to see him in the denial stage, where it didn't happen. I can tell you, I treat teachers as special people. I do have a daughter who's a teacher, but I'm not speaking to defend her profession. I had the opportunity to become a teacher some 25, 30 years ago, but I wasn't cut out to be a teacher.

Mr Sergio: And look what happened to you.

Mr Rinaldi: That's right. Look what happened to me.

In the last eight years, being involved in municipal politics and dealing with some of the things the former government did and how they treated teachers, I was glad I made that decision, even though it was 25 or 30 years ago, because I know I couldn't work under those conditions.

I've had the privilege—I don't have the numbers because I didn't think I was going to be addressing this tonight, but I've probably visited some 30 schools since I've had the pleasure of serving my riding: grade 5, grade 10 and some grade 12 classes. Let me relate to you an incident two weeks ago Friday, where I was at Plainville public school, just north of Cobourg. I walked into the school to speak to a grade 5 class. I was welcomed by the principal and about four or five teachers. It was just like God walking into the room. I was welcomed with open arms. It was certainly refreshing to believe that I was going to their school to talk to the kids, to talk to the teachers. I also had the privilege to talk to the student council, because that day was pizza day. It was nice for those mothers who were there volunteering their time to be able to be in a different environment.

We've made great strides, and recognizing teaching as a profession, a real profession, is certainly making some headway.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to reply.

Mr Dunlop: I want to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Sarnia-Lambton, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke—my colleague—and Northumberland for their comments tonight. There are times when it's actually kind of fun to be here in the evenings to take part in these debates and listen to the concerns.

I guess the bottom line is really this: I'm looking forward to all the changes in education. I was told over and over again that things like the student-focused funding formula and the removal of school boards in this province—we thought we had too many school boards, and of course the Liberals and the NDP thought they were in adequate numbers. I'm looking forward to that legislation coming in. I want to put that on the record. Let's make sure we get rid of the student-focused funding formula. We support it, but we know that you don't like it, so I'm waiting for that piece of legislation to come forward.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: It treats everybody fairly. If anyone knows how the student-focused funding formula works, it does treat people fairly, but you're going to eliminate that. I'm assuming that's going to happen. I'm looking forward to all those administrators being hired, and those supervisors and all those bureaucrats in those Taj Mahals we have. I'm looking forward to another 50 or 60 of those being built across the province to restore it to the good old days. Let's restore it to the good old days, when everything was so wonderful. In 1991, our Simcoe county school board built a \$12 million—we called it the Taj Mahal. We asked them not to build it because the kids were in portables. I still remember those days. I hope we don't go back to those days, but I'm afraid this government is taking us exactly in that direction, back to those good old days.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Martel: Speaker, I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to stand down our lead and for me to do a 20-minute rotation.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt has sought unanimous consent to stand down the lead for her party. Agreed? Agreed.

Ms Martel: We were actually told that it was going to be a different bill debated in here tonight, so Mr Marchese came in with the wrong set of notes and I told him I would cover for him. He will be prepared to do an hour leadoff on another day. So let me say a few things here tonight.

The professional learning program really was and has been an extension of an ongoing battle against teachers that started when the Conservatives were first elected and formed the government. This extension of the crisis in education was really started by Mr Snobelen. A number of us who have been here for some time will remember that one of the first things he did as Minister of Education was to hold a large forum in a government building with many of his ministry staff to tell them that the government was going to have a crisis in education, essentially to get through the reforms it wanted. He was caught on tape doing that; he was quite open about it when confronted with it. That was really where we started in terms of education reform—and I say that very loosely—under this government.

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The minister of the day, the first Minister of Education under the Conservative government, wanted a crisis in education, and he got it. The reality is that over the next eight years it was students, parents, teachers, administrators and staff in the schools who suffered as a result. I just think back to the schools in our area and what the loss has been in those schools over the last eight years. The reality very clearly is—and I don't know how the member for Simcoe North could not admit this—that there was a cut in real funding for education over that period of time and that cut resulted in very negative consequences in so many of our schools. It resulted in, for example, a loss of special-education assistants in many, many boards across the province. It resulted in a tremendous increase in students who have special education needs sitting on a waiting list, probably 30,000 as we speak waiting for special-education services.

Those cuts resulted in the loss of libraries—full-time librarians and then libraries as a result—for instance, in the elementary school in my hometown. It resulted in the loss of art programs and music programs and art consultants and music consultants hired by the boards. It resulted in a loss of custodial staff in many of our schools, so the custodial staff were not in those schools on a full-time basis making sure they were safe, making sure the school grounds were safe, but instead were in on a part-time basis, and the eyes were not there watching who was coming into the schools to make sure students were safe.

Those Conservative cuts resulted in the loss in many schools of full-time vice-principal positions. In my own

community, we saw many VPs sharing schools, travelling 50, 60 kilometres to share schools in rural areas. The Conservative cuts to education resulted in school closures. Rainbow District School Board in my own community two years ago was dealing with proposals to shut down 10 schools, and most of those in fact were shut down.

The cuts resulted in bigger class sizes and in, for example, PTAs or school councils fundraising not just for school equipment, as they might have been doing before, but for textbooks and other essentials that should have been covered under the education funding formula.

That has been the impact of eight years of cuts to education. It has been very real in our communities, it has been very real in our classrooms and, frankly, it has had a very negative impact on so many students, so many parents, so many teachers and so many support staff who make education possible in our communities. That has been the legacy.

It's a little hard to listen to the member for Simcoe North tonight talk about an increase in funding in his own riding. His riding must have been the only one that got some increased funding. I've got to tell you, the boards in our area didn't see increased funding. The boards in our area have been struggling with very significant problems with the funding formula, especially because so many of them have rural schools and were so negatively impacted by the funding formula that provided funding based on square footage. The legacy in our part of the world is that the cuts have been very detrimental, and it will take a long, long time for schools in our area—staff, students and parents—to recover.

The program that we're dealing with tonight, the professional learning program, was teacher testing. You could call it by something else, try and camouflage it by naming it something else, but at the end of the day, that's what it was. It was the response to an election promise made by the Conservatives in 1999 to target this particular group and test, that being teachers.

What I found really interesting at the time, because we opposed the legislation when the Conservatives brought it in, was that the Conservatives would target a specific segment of the population for testing. There is no doubt that teachers provide tremendous service to our children, make a tremendous contribution to the learning environment our kids are involved in for so many hours of each day. The government tried in some way, shape or form during that time, as they defended this, to make the argument that because kids spend so much time with teachers in the classroom, somehow this teacher testing was necessary to determine their credentials, to make sure they stayed up to date with respect to professional development, to make sure they were qualified to be there.

But what requirements did the former government make of other professionals for testing? I look at physicians. Did the government of that day, the Conservatives, pass a bill to make some kind of requirement that physicians in Ontario had to take 14 courses every year

or two years or else they would lose their licence to practise? No, they did not.

Did the government of the day go to the college of nurses and say, "You're going to institute a program of testing for nurses, and nurses are going to have to take 14 courses every year or every second year to retain their nursing licence"? No. Conservatives didn't do that either.

Did they go to paramedics, for example, who provide high-quality services, who we rely on, and say to paramedics across the province, "Well, you folks, to keep your licence to practise, to keep your licence to have a job, you're going to take 14 or 10 or 20 courses and pay for them out of your own pocket for you to continue to qualify to operate as a paramedic"? No. Conservatives didn't do that either.

Look at police officers. Look at firefighters. Did the Conservatives say to those groups of people, "Because you provide public safety, which is critical to our society, we're going to make sure you're qualified and we're going to force you to take 14 or 20 courses a year for you to maintain your job, for you to have a licence to practise"? No, they didn't.

You know what? From my perspective, all of those categories of providers, both health care providers and I guess community safety providers, in the most generous terms, perform functions which are equally important in the life of our community. They may not spend six or seven hours a day in a classroom with our kids, but boy, when a paramedic is on my doorstep and I'm having a heart attack, I sure want to know that he or she is qualified. The services that they're going to provide to me are probably just as important as the teaching services being provided to our kids.

So across the whole spectrum of health care and community safety providers, the government in its "wisdom"—and I put quotation marks around that—decided to target one particular sector of the population: teachers, whom the government had spent the four years between 1995 and 1999 bashing, undermining, undervaluing, attacking. Any word you would like to use that is derogatory is the word you could use with respect to the Conservative government's attitude toward teachers.

Anyone who was here during the period of 1995 to 1999 and remembers some of the comments made by the Premier of the day, Premier Harris, or by Minister Snobelen, could not take it any other way than that the government really had it in for teachers.

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I don't know why Mike Harris had it in for teachers. I don't know what was in his past that made him so undervalue and undermine teachers. But the fact of the matter is, when he started on the union bosses, on teacher holidays, on the small amount of time that teachers were in the classroom, conveniently neglecting all the time that teachers spend after hours marking papers, preparing tests and involved in extracurricular activities, you could only take his comments one way, and that was that he really had it in for and was out to get teachers, in a way that, frankly, marked the Conservatives from then on.

So the teacher testing was part and parcel of what the Conservative government began in 1995, which was teacher-bashing, and carried on through the whole first term. The election promise was out there to try and grab the votes of those people who might have been dissatisfied, for some reason or another, with their child's teacher. The teacher testing promise in the election was just a way to try and grab those votes.

But it was interesting that the government never, ever, during that whole eight-year period, talked about testing any other group of society, be they health care professionals providing important health care services, day in and day out, or whether they be those providers in our community like firefighters, paramedics and police officers looking out for our public safety.

Now, I talked about my sister-in-law, because I tried to look at the impact of this teacher testing on an individual who had some experience with it. This is a new teacher—three years teaching in a very large high school in Niagara Falls with 1,500 kids. She's a secondary school teacher who's very bright. She teaches math and computers. She has a real gift—a gift I never had, I've got to tell you. Math was never my forte, and computers aren't today. So I admire her, because she is a very good teacher, teaching OAC-level students math and computers.

When the government passed this program, we had a long discussion about what it meant for her. What was it going to do for her? You know what she said to me? "I look at the list of courses that the government would like me to take—these 14 courses—and they are ridiculous. They are just ridiculous. They are not, in any way, shape or form, relevant to my experience in the classroom. They are not relevant, in any way, shape or form, to what I need to learn as a new teacher in the classroom. They are not relevant, in any way, shape or form, to what I'm experiencing as a new teacher in the classroom, with respect to the kids I'm trying to teach and their parents whom I'm trying to deal with, or with respect to the new curriculum that I am trying to implement on their behalf."

She was really clear that the courses were not relevant at all. They were completely irrelevant to her experience and her needs as a new teacher. Of course, when the government tried to sell this teacher testing program, they really focused on new teachers and why this was so necessary for new teachers, even though the new teachers were the most recent ones out of the education system, and so would have the best grasp, frankly, of all of the changes in pedagogy, in curriculum etc. They're some of the best-trained and best-qualified teachers. The government tried to focus on them.

She said to me: "You know what? If the government really wanted to try and help me out, instead of these 14 mandatory courses that I have to pay for out of my own pocket, which are totally irrelevant to my experience, if the government really wanted to make a difference in my teaching ability, the government would have a mentoring program, so that I could spend some time with senior

teachers in my big high school and get their advice and input on how to deal with students who are acting out in my classroom—the folks who are looking for any excuse to raise hell in the classroom to try and get some attention; who are totally disruptive; who make it very difficult for me to teach; who don't show respect to either me, as a teacher, or their fellow students. I could use some help talking to senior teachers about how they deal with kids whose aim seems only to be, when they come to school, to be disruptive in my classroom and others.”

Was the government offering that through the teacher testing program? No, it was not.

She said to me: “I could use help dealing with students who I'm very concerned about, concerned because in my gut I think there's a real problem at home. I think there's abuse occurring at home. I'm really worried about this student who comes to school and my gut feeling is, there is a problem with abuse or assault at home. I don't know what I do about that. I don't know what I should look for. I don't know if I should be calling the CAS. I don't know what kind of intervention I should be making. I sure could use the experience of a senior teacher in this institution to give me some insight about that, so I can respond properly, so I can know what to look for, so I can know how to deal with this in the appropriate manner.”

She said: “I could use some help dealing with those students in this classroom who aren't engaged. It's clear they don't want to be here. They're not disruptive, they're not acting out, but, boy, they really don't want to be here. They're not doing their homework. They're not participating in the classroom. They're not asking questions. They're not engaged with other students. They're not engaged with me in a question/answer about the curriculum that we're dealing with today. I could really use some help dealing with those students, so that I can engage them in the classroom, so that I can make this curriculum relevant to them, so that I can make it important for them to come to school every day when they really don't want to be here, so that I can be productive in ensuring that they can pass their OAC, they can graduate and go on to college or university or a trades program.”

Did the government of the day offer any of that through its professional learning program? No, it did not. From my point of view, the former government was not really interested in helping those teachers. The professional learning program was a public relations exercise. It was all about being able to go back to the electorate and say, “We lived up to our promise on teacher testing, and this is how we did it.” It wasn't about supporting new teachers in the classroom, making sure they had a valuable experience, make sure they had the supports necessary to really engage their students and to make sure they could enjoy learning and make sure they could actually pass.

Those are the kinds of things we need to be doing now. It's good that we're getting rid of the professional learning program. It served no useful purpose, except to

target teachers one more time in a really negative way that did not contribute to anything positive in the classroom or the education system.

But what is required now is for the government to really focus on how we support new teachers in particular, because we want to keep them in the profession and not have them leave after one or two years because they're so frustrated by the system and frustrated at not being able to get the support they need.

We really need to be clear about what programs we are going to develop to ensure that we're supporting new teachers. We need to be looking at the professional development that's going on in boards. But you know what? For many years, before the Conservatives got involved in this issue, boards were doing professional development. Every board everywhere across this province was engaged in professional development, because administrators and boards recognize as much as anyone else that if you're going to have a positive teaching experience and a positive classroom experience, you need to have your teachers engaged. You need to have their qualifications upgraded. You need to be sure they are learning the most up-to-date teaching techniques.

Professional development isn't something new, but it should go back to the hands of those boards that were doing that long before the government got involved in trying to just test teachers for political purposes.

Frankly, we need to make a major investment with the boards in professional development that is specific geographically to all of the areas of the province, and that has to happen as well.

My final point is this, because the Conservatives have said this is a payback for support in the election: I got some money from OSSTF. I got some money from OECTA. I didn't get much teacher involvement in my campaign. I disagreed with the professional learning program when it was first introduced, and I continue to disagree with it today. It's time to stop bashing teachers and be positive again.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Pickering-Ajax—

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): Before long, between Whitby-Ajax and Pickering-Ajax; it keeps changing and it will.

I'm pleased to take a couple minutes with respect to Bill 82, the cancellation of the teacher testing program. We've heard comments, and I heard members on our side talk about the denigration and demoralization of the teaching education portfolio. I suggest they were demonized by the former government for a number of years. I think it clearly started with the likes of the minister of the day, Snobelen, when he indicated he would create a crisis in education and set out to do that. He was clearly successful for the balance of not only that mandate, but the mandate that followed.

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During my time in the mayor's office, in the only march we had on city hall—and that's because the kids knew if they came to city hall they were going to get

attention—there were 200 or 300 of them who marched down the road to city hall to get attention. They knew that going to the member's office, who subsequently became the Minister of Education during her tenure, among other ministerial responsibilities—but they marched on city hall to express their discontent with what was happening in the education system. Certainly the teacher testing program did nothing to enhance the opportunities and experience of young people in our schools.

There are needs in education. As a matter of fact, the member from Simcoe North was speaking earlier about all his relationships in teaching, and certainly most of us have those. I come from a teaching background. My wife still teaches. She's a grade 1 teacher, and she heads in to class at 7 o'clock in the morning, gets home at about 5 o'clock or so in the afternoon, does a couple of hours at night. She takes her professional training very seriously, but found the imposition of something called teacher testing did not support the objectives that she has in the classroom. It didn't support the grade 1 students who need to have numeracy and literacy. It didn't support the young people who need the support of a teacher in the classroom.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments. The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr Yakabuski: I'm pleased to respond to the comments from the honourable member for Nickel Belt. It's clear that she is starting the early lobby campaign to get some of that support back from that powerful union so that in the next election they will be more supportive of the NDP than perhaps they were of the Liberals in the past election.

We know that this is all about the payback for the Liberal government. We know that the union was opposed to the professional learning program. That was clearly demonstrated by them over the last few years. But it was never about singling out or attacking teachers; it was about a package of educational reforms, and we're not hearing from the government when it comes to eliminating many of those reforms, because they are well aware that those reforms were good reforms which have improved the educational system in the province.

I want to talk a little bit more about teachers, because I do have the utmost respect for them. My brother's a teacher.

Interjection: Is he still your brother?

Mr Yakabuski: Yes, he is.

When I was operating the hardware store with my wife in Barry's Bay, and Martin had left Whitney—he had taught in Whitney for a few years—I used to have parents come into the store all the time and say to me, "You know, your brother changed my daughter's life"—or "my son's life"—"for the better. He was a tremendous teacher, and he got them focused on the right track." So a teacher can have a tremendous impact on a person's life.

I was talking about my daughter Emmallee earlier—

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): So then what happened to you, John?

Mr Yakabuski: I have no idea, John.

But I also want to talk about our son Lucas, who has that same teacher this year.

Interjection.

Mr Yakabuski: Gee, two minutes just goes so fast.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I want to congratulate my friend from Nickel Belt, because I think her remarks were very insightful, in terms of what the professional learning program was all about. You will recall Liberals and New Democrats attacked this program when the Tories introduced it, as the member from Nickel Belt appropriately said.

The Tories used to call it "teacher testing." For public consumption, it was teacher testing. For teachers it was called the "professional learning program." The problem with it was it wasn't much of a learning program for teachers. It was really political in nature, not pedagogical. It was designed to say to the public, "We're finally going after this profession, because we're finally going to make them learn and teach more effectively so Johnny can read in the classroom." And that was the politics of the bill. You know that, right?

And so the member for Nickel Belt and I are together on this in saying that the Liberals are doing the right thing. I would remind the—

Applause.

Mr Marchese: Not so fast, please. We will have plenty of time to review some of the Liberal promises. I will have a whole hour, when my turn comes again, to speak to some of these deficiencies. I'm looking forward to the Liberals talking about, in terms of their funding, whether they're going to solve the problem of librarian shortages, ESL problems, special education problems, music teacher shortages, educational assistant shortages, caretaker cutbacks and all that.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: All the Liberals are saying in unison, "Yes, yes, yes," and I'm so looking forward to September when, of course, none of these things will happen and each one of you is going to say, "Geez, we said yes, but nothing is happening." I look forward to September, but in the meantime I congratulate the member from Nickel Belt.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): It gives me much pleasure this evening to stand as a retired professional in the teaching profession for 32 and a half years. I can certainly speak from experience: The professional learning program was the licence to bash. It was the licence to continue the war against teachers. This is a teacher thing. It is not a union thing; this is a teacher thing.

I heard words this evening across the way that teachers support this. Well, I can tell you, I've been in many schools since I got elected, and I have not heard one teacher yet say that they support this. In fact they applaud what we're doing. They always believed they could do it on their own, as I did for 20 years. I moved from teachers' college to earning three university degrees to taking two summers at Queen's University with a principal's

course and doing other short courses. That's what I did for the spirit of educating those students that I wanted to hold on a pedestal.

That's really what was at the gut level of teacher training. It wasn't to be forced into taking a professional learning program, which really meant nothing except to once again bash the teachers, bash the profession, continue the war. We saw it with everything during the eight years.

I have to say when I was in the profession, I thought there must have been something in the early life of our former Premier of the province that created a problem with teachers. I still haven't learned it all, but one of these days I will learn it.

I certainly support doing away with the professional learning program.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt has two minutes to reply.

Ms Martel: I want to thank all the members who participated in the responses. Let me say a couple of things. Look, I'll say it again: This program was just an extension of the teacher-bashing that had gone on since 1995. It was one more attack on teachers, one more attack on those people who are providing incredible contributions to kids in the classroom. No one should have been surprised, because one of the first things that came out of the mouth of their first Minister of Education was that he was going to create a crisis in education, and the Conservatives surely did that.

This program was completely irrelevant to the lives of so many new teachers, who we really need to be supporting in the classroom, who needed mentoring programs, for example, to help with those kids who are being disruptive, to help with those kids who are not engaged, to help with kids who they are concerned are being abused at home.

This program provided none of that to new teachers, who really needed that kind of support, especially if we were going to keep them as teachers in the long term in

Ontario. The professional learning program was teacher testing. Call it by any other name, that's exactly what was, and the whole purpose behind it was for the Conservatives to be able to say to the electorate, "See, we kept our promise made during the 1990 campaign; we've got teacher testing"—

Mr Marchese: We beat them up good.

Ms Martel: —“and we're beating them up good; we're getting a handle on what they're doing; we're making sure they're qualified; we're making sure they are going to learn,” when they didn't do that for any other segment of the population, any other group of professionals providing health care or providing emergency services or protecting public safety.

Mr Marchese: What about the Liberals?

Ms Martel: My colleague from Trinity-Spadina raises a very good point, and in the hour he has when he speaks to this, he's going to talk about what happens now. Where is the \$1 billion to \$2 billion that Rozanski said has to go back into the education system? Where is the money that the Liberals need to cap class sizes? Where is the plan so that in September we have art and music and all those other programs that the Conservatives cut? So I look forward to his speech.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate. I recognize the government House leader.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent that the House do now adjourn and that tonight's debate be considered one full sessional day for the purposes of standing order 46.

The Acting Speaker: The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to adjourn the House and have tonight's session be considered a sessional day for the purposes of standing order 46. Is there agreement of the House? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 am.

The House adjourned at 2101.

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