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(Hansard)**

Monday 29 May 2006

Lundi 29 mai 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 May 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 mai 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT
(STUDENT PERFORMANCE), 2006
LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ÉDUCATION
(RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES)

Mr. Peters, on behalf of Ms. Pupatello, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 78, An Act to amend the Education Act, the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 and certain other statutes relating to education / Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation, la Loi de 1996 sur l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario et certaines autres lois se rapportant à l'éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): The Minister of Labour has moved third reading of Bill 78. Speakers? Minister of Education.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'd better clarify with the Clerk here. It was moved by the Minister of Labour, so he has the floor first. He must begin the speech. Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Education and the honourable member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot.

I'm pleased that we are here tonight debating third reading of Bill 78. I would like to ask the Minister of Education to provide the House and the viewing audience with some of the highlights of this most important piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I really appreciate that commendation by the Minister of Labour.

I rise in the House today for third reading of some very important legislation for the direction of education in Ontario. If passed, the student performance bill would be a tremendous boost for improved student performance.

In March, the McGuinty government introduced the concept of setting provincial outcomes to maximize our education initiatives and remove barriers to greater student achievement. The one-size-fits-all approach in education adopted by the previous government is simply ineffective.

This bill is a significant tune-up that will modernize education as a condition for success of students. It contains several limited but substantive amendments to the Education Act and the Ontario College of Teachers Act. These amendments provide the legal support necessary to enable the most important objective in education in this province—improved student performance.

To do this, the bill proposes four main points: initiatives to support teaching excellence; a process of consultation to clarify responsibilities for boards and the ministry; a partnership in education based on respect; and openness to the public.

My colleague Ted McMeekin will speak about some important topics regarding this proposed legislation, such as responsibilities, flexibility, and trustees. I'd like to speak about some of the amendments made to the bill and address the important topic of teaching excellence.

Over the past few weeks, we've heard from many of our partners in education. We've had meaningful discussion and I've listened to their concerns. In response to the issues raised, I am pleased to report some of the amendments that have been passed by the standing committee on social policy.

In response to concerns around privacy regarding the collection of student information by the ministry, and after the ministry worked closely with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, a motion was passed to clarify this section of the bill to ensure that it conforms to federal and provincial privacy legislation.

Information is an essential ingredient to support meaningful dialogue at all levels in the education system about strategies to help every student succeed.

Information about courses, classes, students and teachers is needed to help ensure that effective policy and program directions are set by the ministry to promote student achievement. Information is needed to be able to publicly report on the performance of the education system as a whole.

After working with the ministry, the Information and Privacy Commissioner has no objections to the legislation. Privacy and security considerations are a priority for the ministry in every aspect of data collection and analysis.

On another topic, principals and vice-principals have requested that their own peers be involved in all reviews or hearings involving principals or vice-principals conducted by the Ontario College of Teachers' investigation, discipline and fitness-to-practise committees. We discussed this issue with principals and vice-principals and we agreed with them. A motion was passed to amend the bill to enable this peer review for principals and vice-principals.

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In addition, a motion was passed that would specify a requirement in the act for the government to conduct consultations prior to finalizing any regulations concerning shared responsibility in furthering the quality of education.

This government recognizes that to improve student performance, we must support the very people who deliver education every day: our teachers. This government believes that giving our teachers the respect that they deserve is critical for teaching excellence. Teachers are the single most important influence, apart from family, in shaping the future of our children and our province. Every day, teachers across Ontario inspire students and colleagues with their innovation and passion for teaching. They play a vital role in ensuring our children get the skills and knowledge they need to achieve excellence. We're committed to supporting them. We believe that teaching is more than a profession. It's one of the highest callings and a matter of public service. When you understand the import of their work, I think everyone would agree.

That's why we've put into effect a policy of respect for teachers and have made it our responsibility to ensure that our teachers have what they need to help our students succeed. That means providing the support and recognition for what teachers and educators do on behalf of students every day.

This legislation proposes some critical changes to enhance teacher excellence. It would revoke the pen-and-paper test that didn't evaluate a teacher's actual classroom experience and effectiveness, in favour of a new teacher induction program. We are hearing rave reviews about this so far. It would facilitate the extension of teacher collective agreements beginning September 2004 from a two- to a four-year term. It would also revitalize the Ontario College of Teachers to carry out its mandate by adding six elected positions to council, enough to give classroom teachers a majority through college regulation. Teachers deserve the privilege and the responsibility of self-regulation.

Our platform commitment was a college council composed mostly of working classroom teachers, just like the governing bodies of the college of nurses and the college of social workers, and composed mostly of respected members of those professions.

In the last college election, a mere 4% of teachers even bothered to cast a vote, indicating a profound loss of confidence of the college's stewardship in the profession.

Bill 78 strengthens the college by adding six new seats to the council. On May 18, the college approved regulation amendments that would assign 19 seats, including the six new ones, to practising classroom teachers. With 37 positions making up council, this would give classroom teachers an effective majority voice on council.

This is something entirely new for the college: a college regulated by teachers, a truly self-regulatory body. Every council member would have a duty to serve and protect the public interest, and would be required to take an oath of office.

In addition, a public interest committee appointed by the minister would assist with questions of public interest and governance. We're also putting in place some of the strongest conflict-of-interest provisions for a professional college in Ontario. None of these provisions existed under two of the previous governments.

This government is taking responsibility for education in Ontario and giving our partners in education the respect that they deserve. I hope this bill will find the support of my colleagues, because ultimately it represents what we all desire to accomplish in education: openness, partnership based on respect and, best of all, improved student performance.

I'll be heartened to hear the words of my colleague and parliamentary assistant, Ted McMeekin, who I know will follow with more detail.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): It's been said that once you set your foot in the river, the river is never the same. I think that's true. I rise today in this House to participate in the third reading of the student performance bill.

As you know, this bill proposes some very important legislation concerning the direction of education in Ontario. While Minister Papatello has already spoken about some important topics regarding this proposed legislation, I'd like to speak for a few moments about how this bill will help build relationships based on respect and how it will address the topic of sharing responsibilities: two very important issues in today's educational environment.

This legislation would help build on the new era of respect and partnership already evident in schools and school boards across Ontario. It would respect school board trustees for the important work they do by giving them realistic supports, removing extreme penalties in the act related to trustee compliance, and strengthening and clarifying their role in stewarding education. It would respect student trustees by empowering and recognizing them through new scholarships, non-binding votes, procedural rights and access to increased resources. Trustees deserve to be treated with greater respect if the public is to appropriately understand their role and value that role. Their hard work and contribution toward increased student success has resulted in a productive environment of peace and stability, and improved student performance.

Of course, a trustee's capacity to undertake their role is an important ingredient. If passed, the bill would

permit school boards to set trustee compensation up to provincial limits, which would be set in regulation, in line with school boards elsewhere across Canada. It would also grant authority for regulations to provide a retroactive increase to trustees' honoraria for the current school year and provide a process for community input to what appropriate levels of trustee honoraria ought to be. It would also eliminate paternalistic and arbitrary penalties for trustees that were enacted under the previous government and provide a consultation process to clarify respective roles in the business of stewarding education. That also means remuneration. We know that a one-size-fits-all approach to remuneration won't work because it doesn't allow for the recognition of unique and local circumstances facing boards of various geographic and student body sizes.

There have been questions regarding the role of the citizens' advisory committee and their role in determining remuneration for local trustees. I want to assure all those present in the assembly this evening and those who may be watching at home that there will be consultations with respect to these regulations. Establishing and enhancing partnerships based on respect means more flexibility to boards so that they can make better decisions locally. We intend to create a new era of local flexibility and autonomy by empowering trustees in local allocation and policy decision-making.

If passed, this bill would introduce the authority for government, in consultation with school boards and other stakeholders, to make regulations to promote equality in education. It would also permit regulations to clarify ministry and board responsibilities related to significant goals, including the effective use of resources; student outcomes, including elementary literacy and numeracy; and high school graduation rates. The government understands very well that the delivery of education programs and services must be done through a partnership between the government and the boards of education. We understand the importance of consultation and of having a real sense of buy-in to any standards that may ultimately be established.

1900

Our government has a solid record of advancing its goals through consultation, and we're committed to continuing this approach. As the minister mentioned, a motion was passed that would specify a requirement in the act for the government to conduct public consultations prior to finalizing any regulations concerning the duties of boards to further the quality of education. I think that's really important. That really gives some outward and visible evidence of our commitment to a consultative process.

In addition, our government plans to embark on a special consultation with trustees and other educational partners around the nature of provincial outcomes, and which areas of increased flexibility need to be opened up. Student trustees are an equally critical component of our view for partnerships in education based on respect. As a first step in ongoing student trustee development, the

legislation, if passed, would provide student trustees with a variety of rights, including a scholarship or honorarium at the completion of their term, equal access to all board resources and the same right to attend trustee training opportunities as is in place for current board members.

I'm an idealist, but one without illusions. Achieving excellence in education would demand a genuine partnership, shared respect, mutual responsibility-taking and some agreement about results. To ensure confidence in public education, our government has identified areas of key provincial interest in education, and let me just list four of them: first, class size, and we've seen some real movement there; secondly, fiscal responsibility; third, improvements in literacy and numeracy; and finally, safe schools. If passed, the legislation would clarify ministry and board responsibilities as they relate to those interests and, of course, to the important area of student performance. It would enable the ministry, in consultation with school boards and other stakeholders, to actually set provincial outcomes—something parent groups really want to see across Ontario. Specific outcomes would be set in regulation after significant consultation between the ministry and the school boards.

We also propose to establish a standing committee on education to hold public hearings every year on the effectiveness of provincial funding. Why is this important? It's important because we need our partners to work together. We can only achieve our goals together, and by working together we'll get better results for Ontario students. As a government, we acknowledge that we can't do it alone.

Improved test scores are a good example of a shared responsibility that will lead to better outcomes for Ontario students. Our government has set clear targets for increased student achievement in literacy and numeracy. To support this goal, our government has set a target of 75% of 12-year-old students achieving the provincial standard on province-wide tests in reading, writing and math by the year 2008.

In the primary grades we are committed to reducing the number of students in the classroom to 20 or fewer so they can benefit from more individual attention. As you know, and as research has clearly shown time and time again, both here and abroad, small class sizes are crucial to ensuring that students get the individual attention they need to master the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy, and we are on track to implement a real cap of 20 students in the primary grades by the 2007-08 school year.

If passed, this bill would repeal sections of the Education Act relating to class size limits and replace it with the authority to make regulations governing class size that support phased implementation of the government's primary class size initiative and other related measures.

Over the years, teachers shouldered heavy workloads, received inadequate funding and worked in an environment that didn't always support them in their role on the front lines in our education system. After years of labour

strife under the previous government, the McGuinty government is proud to have played a role in a provincial dialogue that helped teacher federations and school boards reach the first-ever set of four-year collective agreements. Together we have signed 122 agreements, an unprecedented number of collective agreements across the province.

The result? Well, let me tell you: four years of peace and stability, more prep for elementary teachers, and 2,000 new specialist teachers by 2008-09 to deliver enriched arts, music and phys. ed. to more than two million Ontario students. We are grateful for all the people who have become involved with us to help make this happen. Frankly, without their co-operation and commitment to this new partnership on behalf of students, these successes would not have become a reality. Long-term peace and stability is the foundation for progress in education and for the success of our students.

I need to mention two more initiatives that are affected by shared responsibilities and are key to improved student performance: our primary class size initiative, and access to education through virtual technology. We all know that a crowded classroom is no way to get through to a child or to help them be the very best they can be. Small class sizes are crucial to ensuring that students get the individual attention they need to master the fundamentals so important to them. Before we began reducing class sizes in 2003-04, only 58% of grade 3 and grade 6 students were meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math. After the first year of more primary teachers in the classroom, test scores rose to 62% for 2004-05. Clearly we're heading in the right direction, and all across the province educators, parents and students are very, very pleased. As class size drops further and other new government initiatives continue to enhance the learning environment, we expect that scores will continue to rise, and that's got to be good news for people in Ontario.

Studies have shown that primary school students in smaller classes perform significantly better in reading and mathematics, with the most pronounced gains importantly being made by minority and disadvantaged students. That's why we've been so eager to share the news that class sizes in the early grades are shrinking. Last September, Premier McGuinty announced that several hundred thousand Ontario students in the early grades were returning to school to smaller class sizes as they came back to continue their education. This is a direct result of \$126 million in additional funding this year, on top of \$90 million the year before, funding that means school boards could hire another 1,100 teachers to reduce class sizes in 1,300 elementary schools.

We know that kids who experience success in the early grades are more likely to stay in school and go on to achieve success in high school and beyond. That's why smaller classes in early years are such a priority and make so much sense.

1910

Aside from sharing responsibilities, this legislation would offer critical support to students learning through the use of virtual technology. More students would have access to the Ontario education advantage because school boards would be able to reach more students through new e-learning instructional methods. That's exciting. Recently, our government launched e-learning in Ontario schools so students could have more choice to customize their education based on their individual strengths and their individual interests. E-learning will allow students in our 21st-century schools to enrol in on-line English, history, science and other courses written and taught by our fine Ontario teachers. By modernizing education through e-learning, we are creating more learning choices and opportunities and more excitement in education and, frankly, more hope for a better future.

All of the amendments being proposed hinge on our ability to create and sustain lasting partnerships in education based on respect. I think it's clear why Ontario students, teachers and our publicly funded education system need this bill. It represents a brighter future for all the students in our province.

A revolution is coming, a revolution that will be peaceful if we are wise enough, compassionate if we care enough, and successful if we are fortunate enough to be able to stay the course. I believe that, if passed, its focus on sharing responsibilities with our educational partners will lead to a stronger and more robust educational system in Ontario. That's good news for all of us.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Just to comment about this bill, but in general on education, I remind the government that one of your campaign promises, one of the 231 promises, was to try and keep rural schools open. Yet, as we speak, in my riding two high schools are slated to be closed and 18 rural and small-town elementary public schools, and that's just the public school list that they're going through. I want to ask you to go back and talk to the powers that be in cabinet, in particular, and make sure this doesn't happen. In particular, the largest meeting I've been to in 16 years occurred about three weeks ago at Elmvale District High School. The gymnasium was absolutely full, and there were probably 50 or 60 people overflowing into the hallways, stifling hot, and yet it wasn't a particularly hot night. It's just that the school is in bad shape, and I must confess I didn't know it was in such bad shape. They should have invited me in, frankly, a couple of years ago. Why it's being slated to close, I don't know. I can't picture a town, Elmvale, without a high school. The school has been there since 1953. There are about 600 students there. The rumour is that you want to close that, and also Stayner Collegiate, and build one mega high school in Wasaga Beach. Yes, Wasaga Beach does want a high school, but its time will come as growth occurs. I'm supportive of that, but don't close Elmvale and don't close Stayner. Particularly Stayner: Just two summers ago you put in a world-class athletic track, a very expensive one. So I

remind the government of its promise to keep these schools open. You criticized Mike Harris for what you said was closure of rural schools, and now you're doing the same thing and worse.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's certainly my pleasure to make a few comments on the speech by the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, my good friend and former colleague from regional council when it was a two-tier system way back then, the regional municipality of Hamilton–Wentworth.

Nonetheless, I think it's passing strange. In fact, one of our other colleagues from that community—I just happened to be speaking to her last night—happens to be a trustee for the public school board in our area and was incredulous, couldn't believe the claims the government was making, in terms of the way they've fixed the school system in the province of Ontario. In fact, she was quite sure that the shine would wear off very quickly because very soon parents are going to be able to see first-hand that the rhetoric the government is bringing forward doesn't stand up to the reality.

What kind of rhetoric is that? Ask any trustee, certainly from the city of Hamilton's schools boards, about what this government is really doing on issues like special needs and ESL and you'll find that they're not doing anything ESL- and special-needs-wise. That's still a huge problem in the system.

They have not dealt with the most fundamental problem they said they were going to deal with in the election campaign, and that is a funding formula that is inappropriate and doesn't work for school boards, doesn't work for students and doesn't work for teachers. It just doesn't work. Yet that most fundamental issue has been virtually ignored by the government.

They talk about numeracy and literacy numbers, but my good friend from the riding of Trinity–Spadina, who's going to be speaking his leadoff speech in this third reading debate later on tonight, will tell us very clearly that those EQAO scores are a result of tinkering that the government has decided to do, not only with the amount of time students are given to write these tests but also with the formulae, the way the tests are written.

Today is a sad day because we have third reading of a bill that doesn't really help students much at all in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I just want to stand up and speak in support of the bill. I want to echo my great friend and colleague from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot when he was describing education, when he put the success of the students as the number one goal of this government since we got elected in October 2003: from Gerard Kennedy, the former Minister of Education, to the present minister, Sandra Pupatello, one direction to maintain the peace and tranquility in the education system.

Many people out there probably listen to us now, especially the educators. They come and listen to the member from Simcoe–Grey and the member from Hamilton East and they're going to laugh at them

because they know that's not correct. They know now that they have a government listening to them, consulting them, giving them some kind of respect and dignity when it comes to student achievement, and when it comes to training and giving the ability and techniques they need in order to teach and to be a success, and to achieve our goal of good educational results for the students in Ontario.

I believe strongly that this bill will strengthen our goal by maintaining trust in teachers by switching the qualifying test to an induction program which lets teachers and principals, the educators, help fellow new teachers to fit into the class and help give them the tools as to how to conduct themselves in order to be good, successful teachers. The trustees who work hard in the province of Ontario to make sure that students succeed: We'll also place some dignity and trust in those people.

Also, increase PAs from four to six to give students and teachers the ability to have some kind of preparation to know what future education they want to plan and do.

Hopefully I'll get another chance to speak in support of this bill.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I'd just like to speak briefly to that part of Bill 78 which deals with the issue of the composition of the governing body of the Ontario College of Teachers.

When the college of teachers was first brought in by the Harris government, one of the core mandates of the college was to regulate the terms and conditions of teachers, to establish teachers' credentials and of course to regulate the conduct of teachers, and having some powers in order to ensure that their enforcement actions were carried out.

Since this government was elected in 2003, we've seen a slow and steady decline in the powers and the teeth of the college of teachers, so that at this point it's really rendered meaningless if the purpose is, in part, to protect members of the public and children from the actions of certain, although a minor number of, teachers.

1920

I heard the minister say in her remarks how wonderful it was that we would have a college that was self-regulating. That's so, if they're truly independent and truly free of conflict of interest. As a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada, I can tell you that we are very well regulated by our organization, which is composed of members of the bar as well as members of the public.

My comment would be that if this is to be truly meaningful, you need input from the teachers, of course, but you also need input from the members of the public, and to make sure that you stay free of conflict of interest. In this situation, where the teachers' unions are going to have so much input into what's going on in the college of teachers as a governing body when they're also generally regulating and representing defendants at hearings, we wonder how free of conflict of interest they're going to be.

Those are my comments.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot.

Mr. McMeekin: I want to take a moment to thank my colleague from Simcoe–Grey, my good friend from Hamilton East—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Your former friend.

Mr. McMeekin: —still my friend; always my friend—my colleague from London–Fanshawe, my new friend from Whitby–Ajax, and the minister as well, for their helpful comments along the way.

I don't think there are very many people in Ontario who've given education any thought at all who would seriously debate that a good, strong educational system is the building block to Ontario's future, or that it's about opportunity and trying to ensure a more equitable sharing of opportunities. Outcomes will always be different, but opportunities should be pretty equitable.

It occurs to me that in a world where we can purchase raw resources, copy technology and borrow capital, the only real advantage we have as a society and as a country is a creative, well-educated, entrepreneurial workforce that can take us into the next century. Brain building is critical too, but the simple political reality is that we need to compete in today's world. We're prepared to go into that, affirming Best Start programs and hoping that those on the other side of the House will get on board with that, but also recognizing that when all is said and done, we're prepared to go the results-based route. We're betting that all of the strengths of the emerging educational system will in fact help us to solve the problems that we have.

We've been consultative, participatory and student-based in our focus. We intend to proceed in a way that will strengthen our system for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add some comments today on Bill 78, which is the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Student Performance). I'm pleased to add some comments to that bill. The one section that I wanted to focus on in terms of this bill—

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Ask for standing down the lead.

Mr. Miller: And if I could also ask for unanimous consent to stand down our lead time on this bill, please.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to stand down the lead? Agreed.

Mr. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jackson: And Madam Clerk.

Mr. Miller: And Madam Clerk.

The section that I would like to focus on is this section of Bill 78, this omnibus education bill, that passes control of the college of teachers over to the teachers' unions. My basic question on that would be, how does that help the students? I think we would all agree that in bringing about changes to the education system, we want to see results for students. We want to see them learning better. We want to see them being able to compete and have the skills necessary to compete in an increasingly complex

world. So how does handing control of the college of teachers over to the federation of teachers help the students? My answer to that question would be that it doesn't. It hurts them.

I would like to use in my arguments not only my opinion on this but those of members of all three parties. I note that there was a filming of the TVO program Studio 2 on this question. They had three past Ministers of Education on the program: Dave Cooke from the NDP, Bette Stephenson from the PC Party, and Sean Conway, the former Liberal Minister of Education. I think when people are gone from politics, they tend to be a little less partisan. If anybody has watched Studio 2, they all do a great job of giving insight in terms of what's going on. It's interesting to note that when that program focused on education and the issue was discussed, all three former Ministers of Education thought it was a bad idea that control of the college of teachers is being handed over to the teachers' unions. I think that is worth noting.

I'd like to quote from the actual program. I have the transcript of the program, a couple of bits which I think illuminate that. When asked about this situation, the response from Dave Cooke of the NDP was, "Not more power, total power. They have now made a decision at the college of teachers that the head of the council, who is a union rep or a union person, is going to be full time, looking over the shoulders of the registrar. Crazy." Sean Conway adds, "The college of teachers already has a majority of the profession on the council. The difference is that the omnibus bill now says we're going to add five more from the unions, which will now give a majority to the unions on the council, which is a completely different concept." Bette Stephenson adds, "Far too many, far too many under the influence of the federation of teachers."

Dave Cooke gives a practical example of what this will mean. "A practical implication: There are discipline hearings. When a discipline hearing happens, right now a majority of the federation—there is not a majority of the federation on the discipline panel, but there is a majority of teachers. It might be a director and so forth. At the same panel, there will be a lawyer hired by the federation to protect the teacher. So now you're going to have a majority of people from the federation passing judgment on the discipline hearing that their federation is fighting. It doesn't make sense."

Going on in the program, Bette Stephenson is asked by Sean Conway about recurrent training of teachers. He poses a question to her: "Bette, looking back at my time at the ministry, which was not as long or nearly as colourful as yours, I wish I had spent more time thinking about and dealing with teacher education, because when I think about my nearly 30 years in the Legislature, we had a lot of time and energy spent on education, but we spent precious little time on teacher education. Where are we on that in your view?" She goes on to say that she thinks we've stalled at this time.

On that point, I would like to note that the past PC government acted on the Royal Commission on Learn-

ing, which I believe was Gerry Caplan of the NDP, around 1993. That royal commission's report was acted on by the past Harris government, and a lot of their recommendations were the changes that happened in the educational system. They were geared towards trying to increase the outcomes for students. One of the bills that this McGuinty government did away with was a bill that required recurrent training for teachers and teacher testing, but the goal of that bill was to have better outcomes for students.

Just about any profession you name has recurrent training. I fly. I'm a pilot. If you're a commercial pilot—and I am a commercial pilot, although I don't use it on a regular basis. I fly for fun. Basically, with flying and with lots of other things, you've got to use it or lose it. You've got to be proficient at it and be doing it on a regular basis to be good at it. To be current at any profession, you have to be learning about changes going on in the profession. Whether you're a doctor or a pilot—if you're a pilot, I'm familiar with that. If you're an instrument commercial pilot, you have to do recurrent training once a year and also do a test. It's just part of the job. Obviously, if you're flying in an airliner, you'd probably be comforted by knowing that the pilot has done and passed his recurrent training.

Are our students any less important to us? I would say they're very important and we want to see the best results possible. Unfortunately, this government did away with the recurrent training and the teacher testing that was put in place by the past Progressive Conservative government and recommended by the Royal Commission on Learning from the NDP government. Now they're handing control of the college of teachers over to the teachers' union. That is not going to benefit students. We should be doing things that are going to improve education and benefit students, and we are not with this bill. So I wanted to highlight that in the short time I have to speak on this bill.

1930

I would also like to talk about something particular to my riding at this time, and that is the fact that there are a lot of students in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka who at this time are not receiving any education whatsoever, and that is the elementary students looked after by the Near North District School Board. That is because the long-term occasional teachers are on strike in the Near North District School Board, which affects most of the Parry Sound area. I don't think it's fair that the students are suffering as the occasional teachers are bargaining. It might be very legitimate concerns they're bargaining for, but I don't think it's fair that the students are the ones who are suffering. I know I'm receiving a lot of frustration expressed to me through e-mails and letters from people from my riding, so I would like to outline some of that frustration in some letters I'm receiving.

I received a letter from Pam Stoneman. "Frustrated Parent" is the way she signs it. She states:

"I would like to know why my three public school-aged children are being punished because the Near North

District School Board is refusing to ratify an agreement with its occasional teachers. It is my understanding, and you can correct me if I am misinformed, that the other 30 school boards in Ontario have already ratified similar agreements and ours refuses to. There is talk amongst parents, teachers and staff that this will affect my child's year. It is my understanding that this could cause my children to have to go to school this summer in order to be credited with this school year.

"This whole thing is ridiculous, closing schools because there is the possibility that maybe one class in our school may need a supply teacher...."

She goes on to say, "When will this end? I just received word via the school bus driver that they have been told they will not be working at all next week because the schools will remain closed all week...."

"My husband and I work full-time. Child care is a nightmare with an on-again, off-again strike such as this one.

"I want answers and I want something done.

"Pam Stoneman, Frustrated Parent."

It is true, in a riding like Parry Sound–Muskoka, a large northern rural area, that it makes it very difficult in a situation where husband and wife are both working and transportation is a big deal, trying to make arrangements. I just don't think it's fair to the students or the family in a situation like this where the students suffer.

Another e-mail I've received states:

"I ask that you continue to ensure the board puts the needs of students first. Students need to be in school, learning. This disruption of their education deeply concerns me as our schools already struggle to meet the challenges of the provincial curriculum."

Another e-mail I've received:

"This has gone on far too long and shouldn't even be happening. How can a school board close all the elementary schools in its district due to a walkout of 'occasional' teachers? Obviously our definition of 'occasional' is far different from what they interpret. I have contacted the Minister of Education, but have not had a reply. What is going on? Why are the schools closed? Do we only have 'occasional' teachers on staff in this school board area? Now we have been told that the elementary schools in the Near North board may not be reopened, and the children will lose their school year. This is unacceptable...."

"We pay a large portion of our taxes towards education and don't seem to get any of this money back when schools are not open. It is time for someone to take responsibility for this lack of education for our elementary students. We don't care what the whys or the wherefores are; just open our schools."

That's from Gail and Robert McKowen in Parry Sound. You can see a lot of frustration there.

Another e-mail, from Karen and Greg Hobson, saying:

"My name is ... Karen Hobson and I am writing to you because of my concerns regarding the Near North District School Board closing our elementary schools in this district.

“My husband, Gregory, and I have three elementary school-aged children that have had their year interrupted by the strike and lockout of the occasional teachers within the Near North board. It is our understanding the schools will continue to be closed this week, May 22 to May 26, and that this may now affect our children’s entire year.

“We do not understand how a total of 275 occasional teachers in the board, 60 here in the schools in the Parry Sound area, can close an entire board. What are our full-time teachers doing? How can the board say they cannot safely teach our children with these occasional teachers on strike? Obviously their definition of ‘occasional’ and mine are completely different.

“My husband and I feel that something must be done; this situation is not acceptable. We are asking for your help in this matter. We do feel that our schools” do not “have to be closed as negotiations continue. Surely there are enough full-time teachers to handle our kids. Greg and I feel it is time for the Minister of Education to step in and reopen the schools and get the negotiations back on track.

“Once again, these ‘professionals’ are holding our children as hostages by threatening their entire school year. Enough is enough; it’s time for the kids to be back in school.

“Feel free to use my husband’s and my name, as well as this e-mail, when you talk to the Minister of Education. Thank you.

“Karen and Greg Hobson” from Parry Sound.

Just a sample of some of the e-mails I’ve been receiving to do with the occasional teachers’ strike in the Near North District School Board. I agree. I don’t think it’s fair to the students involved, especially so close to the end of the school year, that they are being held hostage, their education is being affected and complete lives are being disrupted as families have to scramble to find child care and make transportation arrangements. It’s just not fair.

I did ask the Minister of Education today in question period about what she was going to do to get involved to try to bring an end to the strike. Her answer, as I read it over, is fairly vague, a very political answer, I’m afraid: happy that some schools are reopening but not really saying anything definite about how she has been involved. She kind of skated around saying what specifically she was doing to bring an end to the strike; not really assuring to those people in Parry Sound.

I might note that the school board chair, back on May 19, did a press release and formally asked the Minister of Education to get involved. I wish she would get directly involved and bring an end to the strike so the kids don’t suffer.

The May 19 media release from the Near North District School Board:

“Schools Remain Closed—Board Chair Calls upon the Minister for Assistance.” A plea for help.

“The Near North District School Board does not see an early resolution of the current job action by its

occasional teachers.” It goes on to tell parents to try to make arrangements for caregivers.

“Today, board chair Alan Bottomley will call upon the Minister of Education to intervene. Our students have already lost a significant number of days due to power outages and inclement weather.” I think that’s something very much worth noting: that in the Parry Sound area this year we’ve had many power outages to do with storms. I won’t blame the McGuinty government’s hydro and energy policy for that one, but we have had many power outages. We’ve also had many missed days because of weather. Because of that, obviously the students just can’t afford to miss any more time from school whatsoever.

Not a lot of comfort from the minister’s answer today. All I can do is ask the minister to become directly involved to help bring this strike to an end. We have to put the interests of the students first and get the kids back to school, particularly when it’s so close to the end of the school year. It’s not fair to all the families and the kids involved in this strike, and I implore the government to bring an end to the strike and get the kids back to school.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: I’m pleased to make a few comments on the speech by the member from Parry—Parry Sound—Muskoka. I can’t say it, but I like to go there from time to time.

Nonetheless, interestingly enough, the member spent a great deal of his speech talking about what’s turning out to be quite a controversial little issue, and that’s the issue of the college of teachers. There was a heck of a lot of concern brought forward by the member about the college of teachers, an inference that there are going to be these great powers. There are fearful tones coming out about the fact that the union is going to be running or in control or in charge of this college because it has the majority of votes. Of course, we don’t have a problem with that in terms of thinking that teachers are responsible people, able to look at their role very responsibly.

However, the government, in response to that kind of criticism that came from the Tories, turned around and did something totally different and put something else into the mix. In fact, what they did was put a new little piece into the mix, which is called a conflict of interest committee or a conflict of interest—

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): Public interest.

Ms. Horwath: A public interest committee, it’s called. What they’ve said is, “Teachers, now you can have a majority, but we’re also putting this other little organization together here to keep an eye on you, to watchdog the work that you’re doing.” So interestingly enough, although they say that they trust the teachers and they want the teachers to have the majority on their college, they then turn around in response to the criticisms that are coming from the Conservatives and say, “We’re going to put all these things in place because, really, we don’t trust you. We think you maybe

don't have everybody's best interest at heart, and we're concerned about that."

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On the school board issue, from the local level, I think the member has brought some important things forward. I recall the members of the government, while running, saying they were not going to close any more schools, and sure enough, schools are closing left, right and centre in Ontario.

Mr. Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to speak for a couple of minutes about this bill that's going through third reading.

First of all, I want to say that I take pride in being able to visit a number of schools in my riding, especially when I cover a riding that has some six different school boards. The conversations that I have, not only with the students, mostly grade 5 and grade 10, but I take the opportunity to meet with the principals and the teachers whenever I'm at a school, and I'll tell you, it's almost like you have a red carpet when you go into a school right now.

I'm not going to make excuses that there aren't some concerns—of course, whenever you have a structure of that magnitude, there always are—but the other piece is that we are listening. We're listening, we're acting and we're doing right things. The fact of stability with school teachers—they were in fear of not knowing where they were going to be tomorrow, whether they were going to be at school or walking a picket line.

Just to switch a little bit, because I know we only have a couple of minutes: the trustees. These folks get elected. They're hard-working. I meet with them on a regular basis as well because we believe in a true partnership with those folks. They're there to deliver the education this government and the people of Ontario expect them to deliver, so to recognize them for the hard work they do and to give them some more assurances of things they can do, this bill addresses those things. I think it's for the right things. We keep on saying education is very important. They were so used to getting beat up all the time before; it's time that we show some respect and move forward.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to have one or two minutes to respond to the member. In his comments, he was really talking quite personally about a situation in his own riding in Parry Sound–Muskoka. Today he asked a question of the minister, but I'm not sure he got a very satisfactory answer.

I listened to the member for Northumberland, and how far away he is from reality. Most boards, he would know—and I've met with the boards in my area. There are some six boards in my area: French and English, public and separate, and then there's a Durham component and a Peterborough component. I think what I'm hearing from most of them is they're in serious, serious financial trouble.

Mr. Marchese: Is that right?

Mr. O'Toole: In almost every single board, as the member from Trinity–Spadina would know, the special education portion of their budget, the transportation

portion of their budget and the salary gap issue are huge, huge issues. They're all waiting for the GLGs to be announced so they can figure out how much of that \$7,000, the gap on the grid as well as the formula, is there. They had promised to fund education. In fact, they've allowed more wage increase into the system.

I don't think anyone wants to dispute that, but they're trying to paint a rosy picture artificially. Do you know what I'm saying? The member from Northumberland said there's a red carpet. He really meant red ink, because every board in this province is in deficit.

Interjections.

Mr. O'Toole: The member from Guelph–Wellington should know—they're squawking now; they don't want to hear the truth. The truth is, peace at any price. It's sort of like Neville Chamberlain's famous speech just before they bombed London. But I would expect we'll see something on this in October 2007, because the relationship with this holy alliance will become your biggest nemesis.

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): It's a pleasure to be here this evening to make a few comments with respect to third reading of Bill 78 and to comment on the remarks of the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka earlier.

There seems to be some concern around the Ontario College of Teachers arising from some of the comments made by the members of the Conservative Party, but I can tell you as a former teacher, having been in education for 10 years, that the college was something that was seen by many teachers as an unduly and overly politicized college that really did not represent the interests of teachers and safeguard the public interest. That is something now that in Bill 78 we are prepared to do. It's something that we think is the right thing to do, and we think that teachers are capable of doing the right thing when it comes to self-regulation with respect to the college.

I should also say that when the standing committee reviewed the colleges and regulatory bodies to report back to the standing committee, there were 60 colleges and regulatory bodies reviewed: dentists' organizations, the law society, the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons, pharmacists, and the like. If you asked which one has the lowest percentage of working professionals as members, the answer is teachers. Even as newly proposed, with 51% being working teachers, it is still the lowest of the 60 organizations. And when you have 4% of teachers turning out to actually vote in elections for the college of teachers, it tells you that something is very wrong with the college of teachers and needs to be changed.

We are pleased that we are moving forward with a college that is non-political and that removes the union membership from the college, that you truly have teachers representing the public interest as well as monitoring themselves.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has two minutes.

Mr. Miller: It's a pleasure to respond to the comments from the members for Hamilton East, Northumberland, Durham and Sault Ste. Marie.

The member for Sault Ste. Marie talked about the college of teachers, and I would like to point out that I was quoting from three different parties, three different former Ministers of Education, all highly respected people: Dave Cooke from the NDP, Sean Conway from the Liberal Party, and Bette Stephenson from the PC Party, all of whom think this is a bad idea. So it's not my words; it was their words. They all think it's a bad idea. I think it's worth listening to those three respected people from three different parties who are no longer involved with the political system, so they are less partisan than perhaps we are.

One of the things this bill talks about is class size. I had the opportunity with the Legislature to visit Alaska and to attend the Council of State Governments, and I got the opportunity to sit in on the education seminar. They had a federal US expert talking about education. One of the questions from the audience was to do with class size and how important it is. Of course it's important, and you get better outcomes with smaller class sizes, but it's not the most important thing. It's better to have smaller classes, certainly, but this bill is allowing the government to break another election promise, to break their hard-cap promise, get around that. The hard-cap promise was a bad idea to begin with; let's face it. Yes, we want smaller class sizes, but a hard cap is a bad idea, just like it was a bad idea to say you were going to shut down coal-fired generation in 2007, before you had a replacement for it.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Because you did nothing.

Mr. Miller: We could go on and list many, many other things, and I'm sure the Minister of Health would like to list some of them himself.

I'm out of time now, so I will pass on to Mr. Marchese from the NDP, who I know is going to talk to us a lot more about this Bill 78. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Marchese: I want to welcome, as usual, the citizens who are watching this political program. We are on live. It's almost 10 to 8, and we're going to be here for another hour and a half, more or less, give or take.

I've got to tell you, every time we deal with educational issues it's an interest for me to stand up and talk about the revolution that the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot said the Liberals are engaged in. There is no revolution; I can tell you that. There may be some evolutionary changes here and there that I will comment on, but that it's not a revolution, I can guarantee. I can also guarantee that this bill does nothing to boost performance of students.

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You will have heard, those of you who are watching—about an hour ago, when the minister introduced this bill, she said, "This is about boosting the performance of students." There is nothing in this bill—and I defy all of the members who are here, including some former

trustees and other teachers, to point to any aspect of this bill which speaks about performance of students and how the performance of students is going to be increased by the mere mentioning of any of the issues outlined in this bill. There is absolutely nothing. So you've got the minister and the parliamentary assistant talking about a revolution and talking about the key to improving student performance, Bill 78, but there is nothing.

I will point out that there are a couple of things I agree with in this bill, but after I mention the couple of things I agree with I will focus all of my attention on what I find particularly disturbing about the bill.

I have to say the teacher induction programs are good. And it's better than the teacher testing imposed by the previous government. Recall: The previous government, otherwise known as the Conservative Party, said that we needed to test incoming teachers so that we could feel good about their abilities. Some of you may or may not know that 99% of those new teachers being tested by the previous Conservative government passed the test, which suggests to me, at least, that we were wasting our time, money and attention on giving a test to new teachers for so very little value, except that it makes a whole lot of Tories feel good to say, "We are testing them, you see? We're good, you're bad. We are making teachers accountable, the others are not, and therefore re-elect us for the next election because we'll do it again." That argument about the teacher test was baseless, political in nature and not pedagogical at all.

So the government has done a good job of getting rid of that test. We, in opposition with the Liberals at the time, opposed it. The government has eliminated that test and introduced this induction program for teachers. We think that's good. Is this really a big, big deal? I've got to tell you, it's not much of a big deal in my view. Would you call this a revolution? I wouldn't call it a revolution. Would you say this is better? Yes. Well, when you look at what you had before, and what you're putting in now, okay, marginally better, because we think it's pedagogically better than the political stuff that the Tories did. But please don't call it a revolution.

They are giving an honorarium to student trustees, which is good. Why? Because they deserve it, because they put in a great deal of time representing students. I would remind you that boards and provincial governments—this one and the previous one—give no or give little or gave none by way of support to student trustees. In fact, students said, when they came in front of the committee, that the majority of students don't know who they are or what they do, and they would love to put out some information explaining who they are and what some of their powers might be and why they are there. Boards could be helpful and the province could spend a couple of bucks to say to the student trustees, "We want to help you publicize who you are; we want to be able to publish some information that explains the role of school trustees." But you're not doing that, and boards are not doing that. It costs a few dollars and boards are broke.

The province loves to honour trustees and gives them very little support.

But now, they are going to be offering a \$5,000 honorarium. Is the government offering the \$5,000 honorarium? No, you're not. Nowhere in this bill or in discussion in committee was it ever stated by the parliamentary assistant, who is close to me, or the minister, or any other Liberal member in that committee, that the honorarium for these school trustees would be paid for by the government. In fact, the government will say, "Our boards have loads of money. They can dip into this and into that, and they'll be able to pay the student trustees." They're broke, but the government will say, "We give them lots of money to be able to take from ESL, special ed and so on."

So yes, there is money to be stolen from other programs to be able to give the honorarium for student trustees. Okay. Good thing you're giving student trustees in our area; bad thing that the money is likely to come from ESL, special ed, the French-as-a-second-language program, or indeed any other program that at the moment is under threat with the Liberal revolution imposed upon school boards.

So these are two good things. I can hardly say that they're a revolution, but they're nice things. It recognizes that they're better than what the previous government had before.

The third thing is that they're finally recognizing, after three years in their mandate, close to the end of their mandate, that trustees serve an important function.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Renewal time.

Mr. Marchese: Sorry, George? With my help?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: They're finally recognizing that trustees are an important political part of the educational structure and, as such, they're going to get an increase in their pay, assuming boards pass a motion saying that they can. The government says, "They can; we will impose a cap." We haven't seen a figure, but by regulation they will impose a cap on what trustees can earn. But they have to force boards to go out again and consult their parents as to the increase the trustees may or may not be entitled to, based on a political meeting. You want them to go out to parents and say, "Look, the government says we can raise our salaries, but we needed to come and chat with you." Imagine saying, "We, as boards, are broke," and you, the trustees, have to go out there and say to the parents, "We think we deserve a little raise, because we work hard." And they do. But in the climate of boards being broke, they have to go out and tell the parents, "Please, we need a raise. Do you agree?" What are parents going to say in some of these boards? Are they going to say, "Yes, we're happy to give you an increase even though we know you're broke, even though we know that your reserves are empty, even though we know that you're dipping into ESL, special ed, the French-as-a-second-language program and God knows what else? We're happy to give you an increase in your trustees' salaries"?

You understand what I'm saying, Speaker. It's a problemo, right? If you agree to give trustees an increase and you impose it, a cap at least, it will allow the boards to go out there and say, "Pass a motion. Okay, we're done," because the provincial government says it's okay. But, no, they've got to go through a consultative process to get beaten up by parents for increasing their salaries. If they get beaten up and they're not going to get a salary increase, too bad, so sad. The government can say, "Well, we tried. We put it in the bill. You can have it; just go out and get it." Former Minister Kennedy was happy to oblige and was happy to throw them to the wolves. "Go get 'em, boys. Go get your pay increase. Here you go." Gerard was a clever guy, I've got to tell you—a clever, clever, clever guy.

But not to minimize this, at least they have the potential to increase their salary, because they deserve it. Trustees and some boards work on a full-time basis, and in some boards parents demand that trustees be there on a full-time basis. They don't understand when you don't return their call. They don't like it when you don't return their call. In fact, they demand that you return their calls because you got elected as a school trustee. Whether you make \$5,000 or not, it's not their problem. You got elected, so you've got to serve. The potential salary increase for trustees is good. The process, in my view, is hurtful and bad because trustees are going to be most surely attacked by the parents out there. That makes them, in my view, vulnerable.

So these three things are okay. They're good, positive features of the bill.

Now let me get to the other components of the bill, because there's so much to say—to attack, mostly.

The bill begins with the collection of personal information: The minister may collect, directly or indirectly, such personal information as is reasonably necessary for purposes related to "administering this act and the regulations, and implementing the policies and guidelines made under this act ... ensuring compliance with this act, the regulations, and the policies and guidelines made under this act." And it goes on.

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The question I was asking that they simply could not answer is, what kind of information are you collecting? Is it on students? Is it on teachers? How will this information be stored? Where will it be stored? To whom will it be made available? Will private operators have access? Will parents and teachers have to sign release forms? Can they refuse to have that information collected? No one could answer: not the staff; not the PA, with all due respect; not the other members of that committee. No one could answer. They're members of the committee. They're not given all of the information that they're entitled to, and even if they were, they might not want to be able to tell you what they're collecting, because it could be a conflict. It could be something that could damage them. So even if they knew, they wouldn't be able to tell you, but because I didn't get any answers

whatsoever, they just didn't have a clue. But we were there asking the tough questions.

So they're going to be collecting data on students that most school boards collect, for one reason or another, at the moment, yet this government is introducing some other central component of collection of data because the government deems that to be okay; centralizing information under the Liberals is okay. If the Tories were collecting information centrally, the Liberals simply would not like it, but if Liberals are collecting information centrally, it must be okay. Why? Because they're Liberals, and Liberals are good people, as you all know, and they wouldn't collect information for deleterious reasons or damaging reasons, or for any nefarious reasons. They're simply collecting information for the public good, for the provincial interest, for the public interest, and blah blah blah, as you might understand.

I just wanted to point out for the record that if Tories were collecting it, you'd be attacked. *Mon ami M. Gerard Kennedy, qui n'est pas ici avec nous parce qu'il est plus important, va chercher une position plus importante parce qu'il est un homme important etc. Mais je suis content qu'il n'est pas ici avec nous pour partager ses expériences, pour partager tout ce qu'il sait de notre système de l'éducation.* That is the first part of this bill connected to the collection of personal information.

Oh, by the way, they had an amendment in committee. Because they got nervous about what people might have been saying, they have some clause that says, "The minister shall not collect or use more personal information than is reasonably necessary to meet the purpose of the collection or use." So they thought, "Just in case we did something bad with the original language"—they then put in another amendment saying, "The minister shall not collect or use more personal information than is reasonably necessary...." For us to know later, when the regulations come out, as to what reasonably may or may not be, as to what information may be reasonable or not—we don't have a clue. The government, by regulation, will be able to collect whatever it is they want. God bless the Liberals. Don't you love them? Yes, everybody loves Liberals.

Moving on: I've got to tell you, it would be lovely to have an Ombudsman in this particular case. I've introduced Bill 90, which would have oversight of the educational system by the Ombudsman. Similarly, my colleague from Hamilton East put in Bill 89, or 88—

Ms. Horwath: Eighty-nine.

Mr. Marchese:—I think it's 89, which would give the Ombudsman oversight of—

Ms. Horwath: Children's aid societies.

Mr. Marchese:—children's aid societies. Why? Because at the moment they are completely independent, and they are independent of government. We have no power. Nobody can dig into the problems that children's aid societies are involved in, may be involved in or have been involved in. So the member from Hamilton East introduced a bill that would have the Ombudsman do a review, have oversight over children's aid societies.

Because we all know the multitude of problems that exist in that public institution, or not-so-public institution. Similarly, in our education system, when a parent has a problem that he or she cannot resolve with the principal, with the superintendent, assuming the person is able enough to progress through the system, with the trustee, with the board—if you can't do that and you're already frustrated as a parent, where do you go? There's nowhere else to go. We feel the Ombudsman should have oversight over education issues so that he or she—the parent—would be able to go to someone, to the Ombudsman, for redress. We think it's a good thing.

Why wouldn't the government, the good Liberals, support such a bill? Why wouldn't they support it? I just cannot fathom their objections to having an Ombudsman having oversight over education and children's aid societies. Yet we have been stymied by the good Liberals for quite some time. Here is an area where, if we had an Ombudsman, someone to whom people could run on the basis of, "What is it you're collecting information about that may be damaging to me?"—I want to be able to go to someone and have him or her address my issue. I wanted to throw in the fact that, wouldn't it be nice to have the Ombudsman there just to be able to have the oversight that we so desperately need?

Moving on, because I want to focus on the bill, the next section of the bill deals with regulations regarding provincial interest. That's page 2 of the bill. You recall that the minister was here just a few moments ago—an hour and a half ago or so—when she said that the one-size-fits-all that the Tories introduced when they were in government was wrong, and they are breaking that bad habit. She said that, didn't she? I was here. Yet when you look at this "Regulations re provincial interest," it's all about the one-size-fits-all; it's all about micro-managing; it's all about centralizing the educational interest at the provincial level. The minister said it's about improving student performance, and it's not. She said, "We are, through this bill, eliminating the one-size-fits-all," which was a policy introduced by the Conservative government, yet here we have, on page 2 of the bill, "Regulations re provincial interest," and it's about one-size-fits-all regulation. What does it say? "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations prescribing, respecting and governing the duties of boards, so as to further and promote the provincial interest in education." This is about promoting a provincial interest. Is it about flexibility? Is it about reflecting what boards may or may not be doing, could or should be doing at the board level? It's not. It's about "prescribing, respecting and governing the duties of boards, so as to further and promote the provincial interest in education."

"A regulation made under subsection (1) may require a board to,

"(a) adopt and implement measures specified in the regulation to ensure that the board's funds and other resources are applied,

"(i) effectively, and

"(ii) in compliance with this act...

“(b) adopt and implement measures specified in the regulation to ensure that the board achieves student outcomes specified in the regulation.”

What do they mean by “outcomes”? Is this about the student test that this government loves, as did the previous Conservative government? Is this about the test that the Liberals are talking about, where they want to improve student measures by shortening the student test by half, from 12 hours to six hours? Is this about the same test where students can now use calculators for complex mathematics questions and simple mathematics questions? Is this about the very test that has been simplified in order to get the results that the Liberals are talking about, which is to have students achieve at or above a standard, to have 75% of students achieve at or above that standard? Remember, that standard was at 55% when the Tories were in power. Remember too that in order to get to a 75% level, meaning to be at and/or to surpass the provincial standard, it takes a great deal of work. It takes more work than teachers can do; it takes a lot more work done outside our educational system. It requires good housing so kids have a good place to live and stay. It requires that if for some unfortunate reason you are on welfare, you get the benefits you deserve, to have some quality of life.

2010

We are not all lucky enough in this world to be gainfully employed, to be able to go out and find employment. We are not all lucky enough not to have a mental illness. Fifteen per cent of the public have a mental illness; that's a huge number of people. They may not look as if they are mentally ill, but they are, and they're on welfare. They're entitled to have some decent social assistance from government. The government claimed that that's what they were going to do; they claimed they were going to end the clawback at the national level. The federal government gives money to people who are on welfare, and the provincial government—the Liberals, like the Tories—steals that approximately \$1,500 a year from individuals who otherwise need it and could use it, and these good Liberals make the claim that they are using this money for all sorts of good things that welfare people may or may not need.

People on welfare deserve a break; people on welfare deserve to get some decent support from government. We hoped that the Liberals were going to do it, and they haven't.

Ms. Horwath: So kids can go to school ready to learn.

Mr. Marchese: So kids can go to school ready to learn, with good housing and some good food on the table that's healthy, and not unhealthy, so they don't get to school unprepared. Living in squalor in some of this public housing that is waiting for the \$225 million the Liberals were saying they would flow through so that buildings could be fixed, one of the very buildings where George Smitherman, the Minister of Health, went and slept to show how good a Liberal he was, to see the kind of squalor they live in—225 million bucks that the Liberals were saying would flow to fix those buildings.

Those buildings are still not fixed, eh, George? Thank God we have good Liberals here who are worried—

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Regent Park: I was there.

Mr. Marchese: I know. We're glad it's being re-developed—I'm not sure with what provincial money. How much money are you guys giving?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I was there with \$9 million.

Mr. Marchese: He was there with \$9 million. This is happening with federal dollars, to a great extent, and with the creativity of Toronto Community Housing; not initiated by the provincial government but by Toronto Community Housing, so Regent Park will be redeveloped for the good. Some of you fine Liberals smiling about the squalor in public housing should go and check it out.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: We're there all the time.

Mr. Marchese: I know George is there all the time. That's why we expect more from you, George. We expect much more from you: to convince the Minister of Housing to deliver the money to fix all the other public housing units that are waiting for you—

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: We're building new housing.

Mr. Marchese: George says, “We're building new housing.” The Speaker knows, because we've been critical of the Liberals for quite some time—three years—and only now are we seeing a trickle of projects coming down: 10 here, 19 there. But you didn't see the minister announcing all the thousands of public housing units coming on board prior to this month. You didn't hear it because they weren't coming. You heard the Minister of Housing say, “We built 5,000 units of public housing.” It's not true. It's not public housing they've been building; it's rental housing that accommodates the very well-to-do.

I don't want to waste too much time on things that are not connected to the bill too much. Moving on:

“Regulations re provincial interest

“In compliance with this act, the regulations and the policies and guidelines made under this act;

“adopt and implement measures specified in the regulation to ensure that the board achieves student outcomes ...”

I spoke to that. The student outcome is about manipulating the student test—nothing short of the manipulation of the student test. Those grades will improve because, as the previous government did, this government is changing the test to make sure the test results are increased to the levels that the Liberals have decreed. That's what this is about. It's about decreeing that the boards and the teachers will achieve the outcomes that the Liberals have prescribed. That's what this is about: making sure boards do what Liberals want them to do provincially.

“adopt and implement measures specified in the regulation to encourage involvement by parents of pupils of the board in education matters specified in the regulation;

“adopt and implement measures specified in the regulation with respect to the provision of special ed...”

I've got to tell you that this concerns me, because we believe—and I believe strongly—the government is about to, yes, revolutionize special ed but not in the way that some of you think. They will revolutionize special ed in this way: making sure less money gets to the boards to deal with kids who have special needs. This is what this is about. It's reducing the incidence rates of those who are identified as special ed. In fact, I predict most students or many students will not be identified by an identification placement review committee because they will be thrown into classrooms and they will force the teachers to teach them, no matter what. This is about saving money.

This is about setting provincial interests and setting these interests centrally in a way that I believe undermines the stated purpose of this government, which was to provide the boards with the flexibility they deserve. This bill does not give the flexibility; in fact, this section takes away much of the power from boards and administrators centrally.

I can recall Gerard Kennedy saying, "The main role of school boards is to adapt provincial standards to the needs of students in local communities. We will ensure that they have the resources and the flexibility in spending those resources to respond to local needs. We will respect and enhance decision-making powers at the school level."

That's what Gerard used to say when he was here. This section contradicts what Gerard said.

Applause.

Mr. Marchese: I know you're clapping the contradiction, but that's what it was. This contradicts Monsieur Kennedy's remarks about giving boards the powers and the flexibility they need, including the resources they need. This section takes all that away.

The Toronto board spoke against this section strongly. People for Education said this section should be eradicated, should be deleted from this bill. What did the government do by way of an amendment? They said, "Well, we'll consult." So they actually put in an amendment that said, "We will consult." What good is consulting if the government is going to do what it wants anyway to protect its provincial interest? What good is consulting if the government has already made its decision as to what they will do?

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): It's not consulting. That may be how you define it.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, no. That's the way you're defining it. I don't see it any other way. I can't imagine that the government is going to say to the Toronto board, "Listen, we've got some ideas in mind, but we just want to chat with you about what we're doing." The Toronto board says, "Well, we disagree." What is Kathleen Wynne going to say when they say they disagree?

Interjection: Ask her.

Mr. Marchese: She's going to have two minutes. We'll see what she says.

So the Toronto board says, "We disagree." She's going to say, "Well, too bad, so sad, but we did consult

you, didn't we?" You go out there and you tell them, "We consulted you. Even though you might disagree, we consulted," and the Liberals feel good. You see, they put these things in and they say, "No, but a number of boards said that's what they wanted." They put it in, thinking they have calmed the waters and dealt with the issue. New Democrats say you haven't dealt with it by simply doing that. The Toronto Board of Education chair said this is one of the most dangerous things she has ever seen, although she didn't repeat that in the committee. The two trustees who came to the committee, Bruce Davis and the chair, Ms. Ward, spoke strongly against this bill, and I suspect the parliamentary assistant, Ms. Wynne, might speak to that.

2020

What more is in this bill? We have the college of teachers, where the government has determined, and for good reasons, that the majority on the college of teachers should be teachers. The majority is one. It's not a lot, it's not what Monsieur Kennedy had promised, but it at least gives them a majority. I think it's a good thing.

Unlike so many others, former members of the college of teachers came to the committee to decry these changes. One of them actually said that this is like giving away everything to the unions, because there is one teacher on that board that flips the balance to teachers over the others, and that they're giving in to the unions.

If any one of those members is affiliated and is performing the duties of a union members, recall that this government says they cannot be part of the college of teachers. Recall that. In spite of the objections of many of the federations who said that that does not respect them as federations, they're not entitled to go there as federation members. They can go in as teachers, but not as federation members and/or as a union.

I asked one of the members, "Are you saying that when teachers go there individually as teachers, they are 'the union,' as if they were the union?" He said yes. Quite frankly, I am prepared to say, for the record, that many of those teachers who go there, go there as teachers. Some of them may be reflecting the perspective of the federations that they are members of, but my suspicion is they go there as teachers.

They said, some of the deputants as well as the Tories, "This is the worst thing that could happen." Sorry, I just don't see it. The Liberals haven't defended this very well, and I'm not sure why I'm defending it for them. I haven't heard in second reading Liberals defend this with vigour, clarity or strength. It happens to be a New Democrat who is defending what they're doing. But I'm glad to do it, because I quite frankly believe that when those teachers go on the college of teachers, they are there to protect the interest of students.

Where a teacher makes a decision on some teacher who is accused of child abuse, I do not believe for a moment that any teacher in the right frame of mind would be able to say, "I'm going to protect the child abuser because he or she is a teacher." I just don't see it. I just don't know what makes some Tories and others

believe that once a teacher gets in there and has a majority that somehow teachers are going to defend abusers. What would possibly grip a teacher to defend any abusive person who is hurting students? I just don't get it. What other kind of decision might a teacher be making that offends some people? I don't know.

What does the college of teachers do? They certify. They issue a teacher's certificate. And they take that certificate away on the basis of something that you have done, either abuse or incompetence, or any other factor that entitles you to be gone.

It is in the interest of teachers to make sure those bad teachers do not stay in their profession. It is not in their interest to defend incompetent teachers. I quite frankly don't see what the fuss is all about.

Then we come to the other section that I so, so strongly oppose and revile with real strength. That is the public interest committee. The public interest committee shall have no fewer than three members, but they can have up to five members. I said to the Liberals members in that committee, I said it in second reading, and I say it again: They're going to be well paid. They have to be. What are they going to do? They're going to need an office, because if they're going to have oversight over the college of teachers, they're going to need an office.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I'll put a word in with the minister.

Mr. Marchese: Thanks, George.

I think they need staff support. If you have five bright men and women, one secretary just wouldn't do. You need a couple, and good ones, like George. You need some office space somewhere, and it can't be at the college of teachers because—or it could be, I suppose. Why not have the oversight committee over the oversight committee right there in the same place? Why not? You could.

As lawyers say, I put to you that this is going to be one expensive oversight committee of a college of teachers that essentially issues a teacher's certificate and takes it away. The college of teachers administers an oath presently, but they're going to have to take another oath, a different kind of Liberal oath to protect the provincial interest. Then we're going to have this other oversight committee to administer the oath. It must take a lot of work. It's going to take five competent, well-paid individuals, with staff, in some office, to administer the oath. To do oversight of what? God knows. I just don't get it.

I thought I was very persuasive the last time in second reading debate and I thought in committee I made good arguments, just to say, "What are you guys doing?" If on the one hand you say, "We've got the college of teachers and we have full trust in the teachers, really we do"—right, Ted?—and then they introduce this public interest committee, automatically, perforce saying, "We don't trust them," it's a contradictory message.

Mr. McMeekin: It's got nothing to do with the teachers.

Mr. Marchese: Ted, Ted, Ted. Yes, it does. Ted, it does. The PA has it all wrong. I know you have to defend

the minister. That's your job. You're the PA. You have to defend the minister at all cost, and I appreciate that. But you're wrong and so is the minister. You're all wrong in this regard. How can you defend spending public money that you don't have, that we don't have, to pay for an oversight committee of a college of teachers which basically issues licences and takes them away? I don't know what you people are doing. You can't be talking to me about a revolution in this regard. You can't be talking to me about student performance when you introduce measures like that, which do not speak well of you. They do not speak well of Liberals at all.

I just want to tell you this: You look bad. All of you look bad. How you could be defending it is unimaginable to me. I know you're not defending it. You put no good arguments in committee, you put no good arguments in this House and you won't put any good arguments today on third reading, because you have none. In fact, you're so embarrassed to talk about it, you prefer to avoid talking about it. But that's why Marchese is putting it up on the floor, so the good citizens of Ontario watching this are able to have the debate here, right?

Why did we have only a couple of days of hearings? So you could move this stuff fast, move it out. Talk about student performance: "This is so, so good and so revolutionary." Get it out of the way and then you can say, "Ah, Bill 78, another great achievement." There's no achievement here. There is nada here. There is very little here to brag about with this bill, with the exception of the induction program, the honoraria for the student trustees and the possibility that trustees might get a raise if the public says okay when they get consulted. Apart from those three things—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: But the college of teachers—okay. But you see, as I keep on repeating over and over again, although I supported the college of teachers act, I just don't think their function is all that extraordinary. I know there are a lot of parents who want to have this faith that somehow the college of teachers is really doing a big job and a great job and an important job. Look, I think it's an okay institution. In fact, one of the few things that I believe the college of teachers does well in terms of its purpose is that when a teacher is fired, the college of teachers ascertains that that teacher cannot any longer go to another board. In that regard, I believe the college of teachers has introduced something that's really positive. But apart from that, please, don't exaggerate the big bureaucracy we have there simply to certify teachers, to issue a certificate and to take them away. Don't overdo it. That's why I say, when you compound it with a public interest committee, man, are you doing an incredible disservice to people.

2030

I want to talk about class size briefly. The government talks about maximum class sizes. I've often said in committee and in this House, why doesn't the government build in caps in this bill? There's no mention of caps. You'll hear the parliamentary assistant talk about

reducing class size. I've got to tell you, a lot of the reduction of class size is happening because we're losing kids. We have fewer and fewer kids in the educational system. So merely by attrition, we're reducing a whole lot of classes in a whole lot of places. In fact, in some places this is so damaging to boards because every time one student doesn't show up, that means we have \$7,000 less for that board. But the buildings still have to be run, heating has to be paid. Heating costs still have to be found from some special education line or from some ESL line or from FSL line, because they don't get any money for hydro. Maybe some boards get special deals from the ministry to keep them quiet, but by and large, they don't get very much.

In fact, the Toronto board is having so many difficulties with their budgets, they're resorting to looking for charities to bail them out. Can you believe that? Can you imagine a board going to a charity, saying, "Please, we need your help"? Can you imagine that? I can't. They're going to the United Way and the United Way says, "Okay, we're willing to help you. Why? Because in so many places in the city we need the services that you provide as a board." So the United Way, which gets money from people who donate, is going to give to a public institution underfunded by the provincial government to be able to provide the programs they are providing now but won't be able to provide in the future. Don't you find that laughable? Don't you just want to crack up and say, "Man, what kind of a revolution are these Liberals offering us?"

So the Toronto board is obliged to go to charity. We donate to the United Way—I think it's 20% that you get as a credit. We donate. You get a 20% credit that the government pays, and then they pass that on to the board of education that gets money from the province, but it's not enough and they have to kick in money to be able to pay for essential kinds of services. Doesn't that crack you up, Ted? It cracks me up each and every time I think about it.

The Toronto board is ready to close schools. Why? It can't afford to keep them open, because the money isn't flowing in, because that teacher salary line is so underfunded. I know the member from Don Valley West knows this very well because she was a trustee for a long time. That teacher line was underfunded when the member from Don Valley West was there as a trustee. She was there when the Tories were there. What does that mean? Teachers get a salary, and remember, 80% of what goes out of the board's finances goes out to teachers. So they're being paid. The problem is, they have not gotten the commensurate dollars to be able to pay for those teacher salaries. That teacher line has been underfunded for 10 years. So they have to rob from other programs to be able to pay for those teachers.

I'm not saying that paying teachers is bad. Teachers have to be paid. The problem is, the governments are not giving enough money to pay for that teacher line, which is 80% of all boards' money, and, as a result, they have to pilfer from other programs. They pilfer under the tutelage

and support of the provincial government that says, "It's okay. If you take money from ESL, we sanction it. It's okay." I know the member from Don Valley West. I know she feels deeply about ESL, continuing ed and adult ed. I know she does. That's why, if she were a minister, she would have a hard time with this. It's easier, as a former PA, to be able to defend special ed, ESL. "Yes, we really are for these programs and yes, we put more money." But she knows that it's not enough. The member from Guelph-Wellington knows that it's not enough, because she used to be the chair of a provincial trustee organization. She knows too, but she's not going to talk about it. She can't talk about it, because if she did, she would have to reveal, yes, indeed, we're not paying for that teacher line adequately. So neither the member from Guelph nor the member from Don Valley West can talk about it, because if they were to admit that, they would be in trouble with their own government. They have to toe the line and say, "We've given more money to boards." You haven't been giving more money to boards. Yes, relative to the Tories you have, but we haven't kept up. You recall Dr. Rozanski in 2001-02 said, "We have to put in a whole lot of money, \$2 billion worth"? We haven't put that money in. I remember Gerard Kennedy, mon ami Gerard, who used to say, "Not only have we given what Rozanski said; we have surpassed."

Ms. Wynne: Exactly.

Mr. Marchese: Somebody said, "Exactly." Was that you, Kathleen? She kills me. I'm telling you, she kills me. She stands up here and says, like Monsieur Kennedy, that they have not only met Rozanski, but surpassed Rozanski. And Kathleen's saying yes.

I've got to tell you that if Kathleen, the member from Don Valley West, is admitting that they have surpassed Rozanski, she is obviously in line for that cabinet seat, which means she'll say anything. I didn't think she would be capable of doing that. I didn't believe she could do that. Because, you see, when you've been there and you know, it's hard. It's hard to be oleaginous about it; it's really hard. It's hard to mask your feelings. I don't know how to do it. I just couldn't do it. I remember when my friend Mr. Cooke would do things that I didn't agree with. I hid from it, because I disagreed with some of the things. Rather than do what the member from Don Valley West was just saying, I let Dave Cooke go and defend himself as a minister, because in many cases we disagreed. I know you, Kathleen. You disagree with some of these policies.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Okay. I just want her to stand up and defend herself. That's why I'm saying this.

Look, boards are in trouble. Many boards are dipping into their reserves. This bill doesn't deal with any of that. You might say it's not intended to. But don't tell me it's about student performance, because it isn't. You are centralizing power provincially in a way that is offensive to what you stood for when you were in opposition. We have been waiting for you to introduce the standing

committee on education for three years now. It was a promise you made. The parliamentary assistant said in debate on second reading that we were going to have it. It's not in Bill 78, and you know what? It's not going to happen. I'm predicting to you, Parliamentary Assistant, that it's not going to happen. It's a prediction; I could be wrong. I could be.

We are waiting for that Liberal promise, as indeed we've been waiting for so many Liberal promises. But this one, a provincial standing committee on education, so we could have regular discussions and debates about what you're doing, so we could analyze you, so that you could defend your revolution and I could attack it—if you're so proud of your revolution, why haven't you had the nerve to set up the standing committee on education so we could have a healthy debate, so you could defend things as you want? Why not have the standing committee so we could talk about capital projects?

You'll remember the minister, Monsieur Kennedy, mon ami Monsieur Kennedy, who is no longer with us—he's moved on to more important things—announced two years ago that he was going to spend \$4 billion on capital projects. What it really means is they would spend, in terms of a mortgage—I don't know what it might be—\$280 million I think is the number that he had said. So if you put up \$280 million as paying for your mortgage, you then can leverage \$4 billion worth of capital projects. The first year, the minister claimed he was spending \$75 million—\$75 million. That was going to generate \$1 billion worth of capital projects. My assistant and I, just two weeks ago, saw some of the numbers that the member from Don Valley West may not have seen.

We thought they actually spent the \$75 million that the minister, mon ami Monsieur Kennedy, claimed was spent and all the Liberal members claim has been spent. The \$75 million, by the way, has not been spent. That would have represented 20%. Do you know what has been spent so far? It was 6%. We saw the figure, and we want to show it. We're putting it out in our newsletter, Kathleen, if you just want to check our website. We're putting it out so you can see, right? It's 6%, not 20%. The \$75 million is not \$75 million; it's a third of that or less. It's a quarter of that. So all these claims Liberals make about, "Oh, so much money we're spending to fix schools, more than any previous government in the history of this province," blah, blah, blah, are nothing. It's so, so pitiful.

2040

The Liberals are big on appearances. The Liberals are big on what they claim they're spending, like the capital budget: \$75 million—20%? Not even that. They had \$280 million to generate \$4 billion worth of capital projects, and many are in dire straits and need to be fixed; 120 to 130 of those schools need to be torn down and rebuilt. We don't have a clue how many they've built because they don't tell us. Kathleen told me, "Go around the province and check out the billboards." I said to Kathleen, I don't want to go around the province checking the billboards. I just don't have the time to do

that. Sorry. The province of Ontario is three times bigger than Italy, and I don't have the time to drive around. So I said to Kathleen, "Give me the numbers." You guys collect good numbers. Mon ami Gerard Kennedy said they have good statistical information at their disposal. Well, when you look for it, you can't get it. When you ask for it, they don't give it to you. Capital projects? Not 20%, \$75 million, but 6%. It's all you've done. It's pitiful. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, all of you on the side of government, including those of you who are teachers and former trustees.

ESL: You know, so many trustees who were there and teachers know how important ESL is to students. We are robbing in the GTA, where so many of our immigrant kids end up; we have a reduced number of programs in ESL. Where the need is great, we have fewer ESL programs. I often show the People for Education chart, which shows a decline in programs that happened even under the revolutionary Liberals. Even under them, there's a decline of ESL programs. How can they justify that? The Liberals will stand up and say, "We're spending more." Fewer ESL programs.

Librarians: We're short of librarians. We so desperately need librarians because they're such a key part of education and student performance, yet we don't see the librarians in the school system. Liberals stand up and say, "We poured billions of dollars into the education system." Does anybody see it?

Physical education teachers—where are they? Where are the music teachers? "We're spending thousands, there are thousands and thousands of extra teachers in our education system." Where are they? I don't know. I just don't see them. I'm looking for that good statistical data that mon ami Gerard Kennedy said he had, and I just don't know where it is. I can't find it. Nobody is going to give it to me. I asked Kathleen, "Please, Kathleen, you're my friend. Give me some of that information. Share it with me." I asked for a special education report that presumably is out. I just got it last week. I asked the minister, "Can I have it?" "Oh no, it's not available. It's a draft. We're discussing," blah, blah, blah. I got the report that Kathleen co-authored. What's the big deal, hiding reports instead of sharing them?

I'm telling you, what that report speaks of is that there will be fewer students identified, more focus on the regular classroom. Yes, they will provide programs for kids, but it's going to be kids in the regular classroom. There are going to be fewer and fewer special education programs. We don't have the time to discuss that report, but I've got it—a report that's so secret. What are they hiding? What's Kathleen hiding? I don't get it. She could have given me a copy. Here it is. Now it's public. The Toronto Star person Mr. Urquhart got hold of that report. He didn't give me a copy; I had to get it on my own. What's the big deal? What are you hiding?

Special education is in trouble. The government says, "It's too expensive. We've got to cut down. How do we do it? Well, we're going to devise some system." Wait until you all see that report. It's an airy-fairy idea about

what we need to do. It's all so nice and idyllic. No money is going to be spent, but it sounds nice.

There are fewer ESL programs under the Liberals.

The transportation funding formula: We have been waiting for a new funding formula since 2005, the very formula that the minister said was a draft when I accused him of having redone the formula right there and then in 2005. He claimed it was a draft. He said that he was going to redo that draft with a new transportation policy. We're still waiting. Mon ami, M. Kennedy, n'est pas ici. Il s'en est allé. Now we've got another minister. We're not getting a new transportation funding formula; we're not going to get it.

We've got problems in the system. Peel Catholic had a \$15-million deficit. They said, "We can't cut programs." The government sent in an investigator. I want to tell you that on page 10 of this document, it still keeps a Conservative problem, which is personal liability of members of the board:

"(3) If a board that is subject to an order made under subsection 230.3(2) applies any of its funds otherwise than as the minister orders or authorizes, the members of the board who voted for the application are jointly and severally liable for the amount so applied, which may be recovered in a court of competent jurisdiction."

This is the same government that says, "We respect teachers; we respect trustees." But you don't respect them enough when you say, "If you don't spend as we say"—under the section on page 2 that I described earlier on, that talks about the provincial interest—"we'll make you personally liable. In fact, we'll even take you to court. We have so much love for you, boards and trustees, that we'll take you to court, just like the Tories did." In fact, they have so much love for the trustees that when the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board said, "We've got a deficit of \$15 million and we're not going to cut the programs," they sent in an investigator, just like the Tories did. The Tories sent in three investigators.

As soon as the Peel Catholic board declared that there was a \$15-million deficit, they sent an investigator. But you love them; you love them differently than Tories: "When we send an investigator, we send them with love and we send them with care. We don't send them like the Tories did. Oh, no. They were evil. But when Liberals send them, we send them with love to try to fix the problem that the Catholic board has, because they need help to cut ESL. They need help to cut supply teachers. They need help to cut caretakers. No, no: We're doing it to help them because we're so different. We just love them." That's the Liberal revolution.

Bill 78, with the exception of three minor things, is so, so bad. I did my best in this one brief hour to articulate so many issues that need so, so much attention, but I wanted to focus on this Liberal magic, this peace-and-stability party. They hide under peace and stability and hope that the public will fall asleep and not look at these problems that the system is having for yet another year, to dream of another re-election where they'll come back and have

more peace and stability as board after board struggles to deal with their deficit. God bless you.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

2050

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm delighted, actually, to tell you all that I have some good news here tonight. I think the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka will be particularly interested, along with my colleague from Nipissing, because we just got the news that the schools in the Near North District School Board are to reopen tomorrow, Tuesday. It's great news. If I could read you the release:

"The McGuinty government applauds the Near North District School Board and its occasional teachers for reaching a tentative agreement and reopening schools so that students and teachers can return to the classroom," Minister of Education Sandra Pupatello announced today. "Our government is on the side of Ontario families who want their children in the classroom learning," said Pupatello. "That's why we've been encouraging the board and teachers to get back to the table and are now congratulating them for reaching a tentative agreement and putting students first. With this tentative agreement across the province"—

The Acting Speaker: This is questions and comments on what the member said. You'll have an opportunity to speak next.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Go ahead, then. It's straying pretty far.

Mrs. Sandals: This is peace and stability. I'm just demonstrating that we have peace and stability. In fact, to precisely that point, all 31 contracts between public school boards and elementary occasional teachers have now been concluded. They will be four-year agreements running from September 1, 2004, to August 31, 2008, and will continue the tradition that we have built of peace and stability. Good news for our students, just as this bill that we are discussing tonight is good news for our students and for our teachers.

Mr. O'Toole: I respect the member for Trinity-Spadina. He always speaks with passion and enthusiasm, for sure. Just a breaking point there: It would be important to realize that he spoke briefly of David Cooke, the NDP Minister of Education who set about to change—revolutionize, if you will—education with the Royal Commission on Learning, and out of it was the genesis for the college of teachers. That's where it actually came from. So it's important to keep in mind the history of what this debate is about.

In fact, on May 8, Joe Atkinson as well as Margaret Wilson appeared at the hearings on Bill 78. Just for the record, I would like to commend their unsolicited input. This is what the former chair of the college of teachers said:

"I am here to express our concerns about changes proposed in Bill 78 that will adversely affect the college's ability to protect the public interest.

“Put simply, Bill 78 will pass control of the Ontario College of Teachers to the teacher unions.... However, the issue at hand is not one of teacher advocacy but of public interest. To change the law to give the teacher unions control of the professional body is flat-out wrong.”

This is from the former head and a former teacher and a professional educator. He went on to say:

“Former education minister Gerard Kennedy said he wanted to revitalize the college and give control to working teachers. I’d like to put this myth of working teachers to bed. “The college council has 31 members. The government appoints 14. The other 17 elected members must all hold a teaching certificate. Some, such as those elected by principals and supervisory officers, are simply teachers with additional” responsibilities. “Teachers are already the majority....”

On Studio 2 he talked about the comment with respect to David Cooke, Sean Conway—

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

Ms. Horwath: I too am pleased to make some comments on the fabulous speech by our critic, Rosario Marchese, the member from Trinity–Spadina, because he knows this file inside and out, he knows this bill inside and out. I would wager—well, okay, so I wouldn’t wager; I’m not a gambling person. But I would suspect there are members in this very Legislature who have received a little bit of an education as to what this education bill is all about and I would suspect that some of the backbenchers were quite shocked to hear what their government, minister and parliamentary assistant might not be telling them about what is and isn’t in this bill.

I think it was appropriate that the member from Trinity–Spadina took about 10 minutes at the beginning of his speech to indicate that there are a few things—a very few, but a few things—that New Democrats can live with. But then he went on quite strongly to indicate the parts of the bill that are simply odious from the perspective of New Democrats.

He talked about, at the very beginning of the bill, the issue of the collection of personal information and really how frightening that is when you consider that there are no real parameters being put around this new power, this new need to get personal information collected on students. He talked about his initiative to try to get the Ombudsman having some oversight of the education system.

He talked about the issue of provincial interest. Interestingly enough, the current and previous ministers talked about flexibility and used all this wonderful language: getting rid of the one size fits all. The member for Trinity–Spadina quite accurately indicated how this very piece called “provincial interest” does exactly the opposite and in fact prescribes things that the boards need to do, outcomes that are supposed to be achieved. I could go on about the special-ed issues that were raised, the college of teacher issues that were raised, the public

interest committee—needless to say, there is a heck of a lot that New Democrats are concerned about.

Ms. Wynne: I want to respond to three things that the member for Trinity–Spadina talked about.

Section 4 puts in place a process whereby the ministry and boards will discuss and determine the nature of guidelines on a range of policy issues, not just finances. The member for Trinity–Spadina says, “What good is consulting?” In 1986, when I was a young mom—and I believe the member for Trinity–Spadina was on the Toronto school board at that time—I would have loved for there to have been guidelines that came from the ministry, that had been developed in conjunction with school boards, around a range of issues—around parent involvement, around staffing, around class size—all of those things that we’re talking about, there being a discussion and a consultation between the board and the ministry. That would have been a very good thing. I’m surprised that the member for Trinity–Spadina wouldn’t support it.

On special education, the sole aim of this government is to make sure that students with special needs get the programs they need and get them in the way they need them. There is \$1.8 billion being spent on special education right now. That is the whole amount. There’s approximately \$50 million more being spent this year just on the high-needs students. What we heard repeatedly before we were elected and since we’ve been elected is that the identification process was onerous, was burdensome and took the focus off the delivery of program and put it on administrative identification processes. That is what we must change if kids are going to get the programs they need. So I look forward to the member’s comments once we know exactly how we’re going to move forward there.

The final thing is the public interest committee. I want to just say that I believe that the establishment of the public interest committee is a direct result of the diminution of the role of teachers that was perpetrated by the previous government. We are now in a position where we’re having to make it crystal clear to anyone who bought the Tory line about teachers that the public interest is being served, and that’s what the public interest committee is about.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Trinity–Spadina has two minutes.

Mr. Marchese: First of all, on the regulation regarding the provincial interest, I’ll read to the member from Don Valley West. Here’s what it says: “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations prescribing, respecting and governing the duties of boards, so as to further and promote the provincial interest....” It doesn’t talk about guidelines; it talks about “prescribing, respecting and governing the duties of boards.” When they consult with boards, once they’ve decided what you do, it’s too late, is my argument.

On special ed, when the Tories introduced that measure to have students identified for special education needs, trustees said, “Don’t take it away now.” I remem-

ber trustees in Oshawa telling me, “We’ve done the hard work, but now that we’ve done the hard work, don’t take it away. How else are we going to identify students with special needs?” So I’m looking forward to seeing what this member, with her minister, is going to propose by way of special ed. But I’ve got to tell you, I’m not too confident about what Kathleen Wynne and the minister want to do. I just don’t see it. I don’t know how they’re going to identify students who have special education needs and need the care. Forty thousand students are not getting attention—just like under the Tories. But Gerard Kennedy wouldn’t have it when he was in opposition. Now that they’re Liberals, “We love special education kids. We just don’t mind having them wait, because we’re better than the Tories.”

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On the issue of the special interest committee, I disagreed with Mr. Cooke. He’s a capable man. I disagreed with him strongly, as I disagreed with the Tories and as I disagree with Kathleen Wynne, who made a statement in defence of why they’re doing it which is incomprehensible—it doesn’t make any sense. What she said absolutely doesn’t make any sense. That provincial interest committee has got to go, and I hope the people of Ontario know this.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Oraziotti: It’s a pleasure to rise this evening in the Legislature to add some comments on Bill 78, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act, otherwise known as the student performance bill, in what seems to be a fairly lively discussion over a few key issues in the bill, in particular the college of teachers and some of the other responsibilities that we’re raising in the legislation.

I want to say first and foremost that as a former teacher I’m very pleased with the progress we have made in less than three years in restoring peace and stability to education in Ontario. I think you just have to get out there and talk to the parents, the students and the teachers to find out very quickly what a breath of fresh air the last couple of years have been in restoring much of the peace and stability in the classroom. I would be happy, as time moves on toward the election, to put our record of education up against the NDP or Conservative records at any time. I recall, when I was a teacher starting in 1993, the social contract, and I don’t recall a lot of consultation when 140,000 teachers’ contracts were ripped up without any consultation. Certainly over the last eight years of the Conservative rule with respect to education, there wasn’t a lot of consultation either. Rozanski’s report clearly indicated that billions of dollars needed to be invested in education that weren’t. I think unrest was something that was typical in the Harris-Eves government and part of their legacy in education, when you have an education minister who set out to create a crisis in education and certainly did that. About 400 public schools closed under the Conservative government and 200 private schools began. I think it sends a very clear message on where the Conservatives stand when it comes to publicly funded education in the province of Ontario.

With that, I want to focus on four main features of Bill 78: teaching excellence, new responsibilities for boards and the ministry, the Ontario College of Teachers, and openness to the public.

There is a wide range of factors that influence the effectiveness of teaching. Increasing student performance means supporting leadership in the school, the availability of resources, the quality of curriculum and strategies being used by the school and the system. It also means providing the support and recognition for what teachers and educators do on behalf of students each and every day. We recognize the need to strengthen the skills and abilities of teachers as well as improve these other factors which are vital to ensuring overall teacher excellence and increasing student success. So we are replacing the pen-and paper test with mentors and classroom experience. The old qualifying test, the Ontario teacher qualifying test, was criticized in terms of its relevance and the fact that it did not actually evaluate classroom experience, a very common complaint among those in the education sector, that the measurement used was not really reflective of the responsibilities and duties that were required to perform well in the classroom and in terms of educating students.

Subject to the approval of the Legislature, the requirement for teacher candidates to pass the OTQT as a condition of certification would be revoked. In its place, teachers would be required to complete the new teacher induction program, the NTIP, that supports their orientation, mentoring and professional development, which is already under way in many schools across Ontario. The new teacher induction program is designed as a positive second step for new teachers, giving them valuable in-class support during their challenging first year of practice. It would complement their formal one year of pre-service training with another full year of support, and the result would obviously be better prepared, more confident teachers who are better trained in the classroom.

If approved, the program would replace the qualifying test with more meaningful assessment of actual teaching practice focusing on teacher success through feedback and performance and growth. It would also provide a variety of supports for new teachers, including professional development and training in areas such as classroom management, communication with parents and other activities aligned with the current ministry initiatives. It would also include mentoring for new teachers by experienced teachers and orientation of all new teachers by the school and school board.

If approved, successful completion of the new teacher induction program would be required. Two satisfactory ratings on their performance appraisals would also be required and noted on the teacher’s certificate and on the Ontario College of Teachers public register. This is accountability. This is a way to support teacher training, and it is certainly in the public interest.

Under the framework of teacher excellence, professional development days are also important. We know that teacher professional activity days or development

days were reduced significantly. They're designated during the school year, when teachers engage in a variety of activities such as student assessment, curriculum development, meetings with parents and overall teacher professional development. In recent years, some of the PA days have also been used to supplement preparation time for elementary teachers, as part of their local collective agreements. That is something we want to move back into the proper time allocation so it's not part of collective agreement processes.

In 1997, the previous government reduced the number of PA days from nine to four, just as they were introducing entirely new curriculum. In other provinces the average is nine. Four days out of 194 in the school year does not allow principals and teachers enough opportunity to engage in shared problem-solving, team learning and the latest teaching techniques. These teaching techniques are critical for teachers to assist the government in implementing key student success initiatives such as improved student achievement in literacy and numeracy, and to reduce the secondary school drop-out rate.

We've made a commitment to add two full days that would be designated for teachers' professional development and, if the Legislature approves the proposed amendment, we would intend to amend the regulation to provide for an increased number of professional activity days for the provincial initiatives that are needed. The total would obviously be six, and we would be undoing some of the damage under the past government, giving that opportunity back to teachers.

Also, adding the two days within the school year would not involve additional costs to the school boards or the ministry. There would be no additional salary costs, since they're already covered, and there would be no additional cost for supply teachers.

With respect to new responsibilities for boards and the ministry, the bill contains measures that would support the government's ability to build confidence in public education. To support the government's ability to ensure confidence in public education, the ministry has identified key areas of provincial interest such as class size, fiscal responsibility and improvements in literacy and numeracy, as well as safe schools. The bill would permit regulations to clarify ministry and board responsibility related to those goals particularly concerning student performance. It would enable the ministry to set provincial outcomes and require the boards to meet these outcomes. That's accountability. That's what this bill does to improve the relationship with accounting when it comes to the public interest and when it comes to the responsibility of school boards across the province.

Unlike the Conservatives, our government has a solid record of advancing its goals through consultation and co-operation, and we're committed to continuing this approach. We acknowledge and respect the valuable role of school boards in our publicly funded education system and are committed to working together to achieve excellence in education for all students. That co-operative

working relationship is only enhanced by a clear understanding of the responsibilities and expectations of the ministry and school boards. The government understands that the delivery of education programs and services is through a partnership of both government and boards. We understand the importance of consultation and having buy-in regarding any standards that might be established. We're not interested, as the past government was, in taking over school boards in Ontario and usurping the elected authority of trustees who are committed to acting in the public interest to ensure the best education for students. We want to work with our school boards. In addition, previously established punitive measures that personally penalized trustees who failed to comply with directions, orders or decisions of the minister would be repealed.

To further ensure public confidence in education, the government intends to establish a standing committee on education to hold public hearings every year on the effectiveness of provincial funding.

In addition, as we know, technology is becoming an ever-increasing factor in education and certainly in reaching remote and more isolated parts of the province. This proposed legislation would also give school boards the authority to provide instruction by electronic means to students who aren't able to be in a classroom setting.

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As we know, the Education Amendment Act of 2005 repealed previous legislation and provided for negotiation of two- or four-year collective agreements. We've also announced measures to encourage longer-term contracts, including salary increases, investments to support student success and provincial dialogue on workload issues. If the bill is passed, obviously we would allow the extension of labour agreements from two- to four-year terms.

Class size: If passed, the bill would repeal sections of the Education Act relating to class size limits and replace it with the authority to make regulations governing class size that support phased implementation of our commitment to reduce primary class sizes in the primary grades. All of the research, as we know, indicates that the earlier we can provide supports to the youngest Ontarians, the better chance they will have of success in the education system.

With respect to the college of teachers, which has been raised several times this evening, there are some notable changes in the bill that will improve the relationship of the college to the parent community as well as to the teaching community across the province. We believe it's time to revitalize and depoliticize the Ontario College of Teachers and make it truly a self-regulatory professional body. Teachers are professionals who deserve the privilege of self-regulation. The benefits of a successful college in Ontario should be obvious to those in the province. If passed, the legislation would change the governance structure of the college to depoliticize it and have a majority of classroom teachers on its council. These changes would support the government's excellence-for-

all commitment to a college comprised mostly of working classroom teachers, just like the college of nurses and the college of social workers, which are mostly comprised of working members in those professions.

I was told earlier that at the standing committee on social policy there was a report back on about 60 colleges and regulatory bodies such as the dentists, the law association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, pharmacists and the like. The question was asked, which body has the lowest percentage of working professionals as its members? It would still be the Ontario College of Teachers; even under the new model, the 51% would be the lowest of those reported bodies. Certainly, allegations and suggestions that the teachers' unions are going to be taking over the college couldn't be further from the truth. These are working teachers who are not permitted to be part of the union leadership in any way, sitting on the Ontario College of Teachers and acting in the interest of families, students, and teachers as well.

The member from Trinity-Spadina pointed out a number of things in the bill. One of the things that he did say, and I give him credit for recognizing it, is that teachers are very concerned about the integrity of the profession, the relationship that they have in the community, and would not want to see that damaged in any way. I think it goes without saying that any profession in the province of Ontario is disappointed and disgusted, and their morale shaken, when individuals in their own profession engage in activities that are unbecoming of individuals in that particular organization. I think very strongly that teachers in Ontario who are respected professionals are going to act in the interest of families of this province and will do the right thing when it comes to decision-making on issues of integrity or performance.

If passed, the legislation would change the governance structure of the college of teachers, as we know, to depoliticize it, and we would have a majority of classroom teachers on the council. Under the previous Conservative government, the college of teachers was unduly politicized, and it had negative results. In the last college election, a mere 4% of teachers bothered to cast a vote, a second consecutive decline in voter turnout, indicating a profound loss of confidence by teachers themselves in the college. That's not the kind of involvement and morale building that we want to see in the college. Four per cent of teachers participating I think sends a very clear message that there's something wrong with the college, and it needs to be addressed. That's what we're doing.

In return for having the privilege and responsibility of self-regulation, we will be strengthening the college's duty to serve the public interest. Subject to the approval of Bill 78 by the Legislature, representatives of specific union organizations would be precluded from assuming office on council. Our reforms will also ensure that teacher representatives on the council are working classroom teachers. The best way to serve and protect the public interest is to have the people who are actually

teaching our students make the decisions, not the people who are on leave to other organizations or other workplaces. We want teachers who are in the closest contact with our students every day to tell us what they need to improve conditions for teachers to develop into as highly qualified, motivated professionals as possible.

Bill 78 also creates a public interest committee comprised of three to five members who will be appointed by the minister. The committee will advise the council with respect to its duty to protect the public interest, so there is a component of public interest worked into the new formula and the new framework of the college of teachers.

The maximum number of years that a council member could serve on council would be reduced from 10 to seven consecutive years. This would increase turnover on the council and bring in new and different ideas and different perspectives from different individuals who would serve on the new council or college. An open, fair and transparent election process that would increase voter participation and encourage teachers to play an active part in the governance and regulation of their profession would also be included as part of the new framework. These measures are among the strongest conflict-of-interest provisions of any professional college in the province of Ontario, and none of these provisions existed under either of the two previous governments.

Our government is on the side of teachers and students. Our purpose has always been to restore respect and public confidence in the education system. Restoring respect and public confidence means that we have to make some of these changes to the system, changes which I think many people would agree are long overdue.

Finally, the college's obligation to establish fair and transparent standards, practices and procedures for the college's registration process for all applicants, including internationally trained teachers, would be statutorily affirmed; in other words, in legislation.

In addition, empowering student trustees is a first step in the ongoing student trustee development. The legislation, if passed in its present form, would provide student trustees with a variety of rights, including a scholarship at the completion of their term, equal access to all board resources and the same right to attend trustee training opportunities as other board members. This supports the minister's commitment to address the Ontario Student Trustees' Association recommendations to empower student representatives on the school boards.

We will also be making a new proposal in the future for discussion on student engagement, touching on character education and citizenship values, the ability for students to influence their school environment, and new models for student trustees to review as well.

One of the other issues that has been on the front burner, so to speak, in the education sector has been trustee remuneration and the role that trustees play in the province of Ontario, working hard to safeguard student interests and the interests of families. The hard work and contribution of trustees towards increased student success has resulted in a productive environment of peace and

stability and school programs through improved student achievement and improved services. Trustees' capacity to undertake their role is an important ingredient in the successful improvement of the education system.

If passed in its present form, Bill 78 would permit school boards to set trustee compensation up to provincial limits that would be set in regulation, in line with school boards elsewhere in Canada. It would allow them to grant authority for regulations to provide a retroactive increase to trustees' honoraria for the current school year and permit the government to require a process to assist boards to set compensation. It would also eliminate arbitrary and paternalistic penalties to which trustees are exposed, which were enacted by the previous government. We would also provide greater clarification about their respective roles in stewarding education.

Public reporting: The legislation also, if passed, would give the ministry the ability to require school boards to publish reports respecting their compliance with specific operational requirements that will be set out in regulation, fostering greater public accountability and openness in education. In response to concerns around privacy regulation, the collection of student information, after closely working with the ministry and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, a motion was passed at committee to ensure that the bill conforms with the federal and provincial privacy legislation. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has no objection to the legislation in its current form.

What I would like to conclude with is that Bill 78 definitely does relate to student performance. Numerous aspects that I've highlighted do just that. I think it's misleading for opposition members to suggest this has nothing to do with student performance when the focus of our government for the past nearly three years has been to improve student performance and create greater peace and stability in the education system. Bill 78 has numerous components that do this and I encourage members to support the bill.

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The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Jackson: I want to commend the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his comments. As a former teacher, being a member of the teachers' federation, he obviously brings a great deal of personal experience to the debate. I too bring some experience to this debate, having been a school trustee for 10 years. I got elected when I was 24, so I suspect I felt like a student trustee at some times during the course of some board meetings.

I personally am not as exercised as most in this House about the province taking on additional oversight responsibilities with school boards. I've had some very bad experiences with the Halton Board of Education in terms of complying with the legislation of the day. Our school board blatantly refused, in light of the legislation, to allow for the Learning Disabilities Association of Halton's nominee to sit on its special education advisory committee. I recall taking this to Minister Kennedy, who I found was quite good at responding to things when they

weren't confronting him on the floor of the Legislature. I went to Gerard and said, "This is the law of the land. This is right in the act," and he wrote me a personal note saying, "Yes, the school board should be compliant," but nothing was really done.

So that section of this legislation, although some are arguing against it—I sat on that side of the House when we attempted to do certain things that would force school boards to be compliant with the law. If, in fact, that is the purpose of that section, I will be pleased to support it.

I also support the notions around prescribing specific guidelines. The Halton school board, for example, got involved with this policy governance. This thing got so badly out of whack that when the school board closed down schools, the trustees said, "We didn't even make the decision. It was our administrators. Trustees never had a hand in it." I look forward to debating this bill in further detail when it's before the House again.

Ms. Horwath: I too want to make some comments on the remarks by the member from Sault Ste. Marie. His speech, if I recall, began with a bit of a review or report card about some of his concerns about what other governments did. That's not really helpful, because what we're here to do is talk about Bill 78 and what this government is doing. I have to say that in that regard the member made some remarks around the idea that student—

Interjections.

Ms. Horwath: Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker: Order. It's getting late.

Ms. Horwath: —that student success initiatives around literacy and numeracy were something they could be proud of. But I know our critic has been quite concerned about the manipulation of the function of the testing, as something that has been of concern. The member is pretty much taking credit for things that really are not a credit to anything that has happened in regard to dealing with improving the way students learn and those results therefore getting better, with improving the school system and therefore the test results getting better, but rather with knowing that the tests have been changed so that students can achieve better on them.

I'm not saying one way or the other, this or that. I'm just saying that you can't take credit for something you really had no hand in. Yes, the students may be getting better scores, but that's really just a function of the changing of the test to make it a six-hour instead of a 12-hour test, to make it more multiple-choice oriented and to make the ability of students to achieve better because they could use a calculator in more parts of the test, including the multiple choice.

There's a number of other issues, particularly issues around whether or not this government is really achieving what it said it was going to achieve, particularly on special education and ESL—still failing miserably there.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I'm certainly glad to be able to comment on the debate that the member from Sault Ste. Marie has put

forward. I want to just touch specifically on two of the things he talked about.

One of them was the matter of the bill giving school boards the authority to provide instruction by electronic means to students who aren't present in the classroom. I think that also extends to students who don't have access to all programs that they may want for themselves. In rural and northern Ontario, where we see declining numbers in our schools, we hear very often from school boards that are worried about being able to provide programs to those students who require certain programming. E-learning is something that I look forward to in my riding. I think it's going to offer a lot of options to students without forcing them to leave their communities or forcing the boards to even consider closing schools.

Another thing I want to talk about is the student trustee. I had an opportunity to attend a local school board meeting with the Thames Valley District School Board, and during the evening the discussion of the student trustee came up. I was surprised to learn that the student trustee didn't have access to the same resources that other trustees did. I assumed that they always did. I know that compensation was an issue, and I know they're happy to be getting the scholarship as compensation, but I was surprised to find out that the student trustees in Thames Valley didn't automatically get to attend conferences and learning opportunities that the other trustees did. I think it's about time they were treated the same as trustees. They certainly take on the same responsibilities and have the same workload. So I think this bill will offer them the compensation they deserve.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Sault Ste. Marie. He did mention a couple of things. There's no bill that doesn't have some noteworthy attempts to make the system better, regardless of who is government. One example that we'd agree on, certainly, is the student trustee.

Once again, it's always important to look to history. There's a report here that I had asked for from Larry Johnston, who's a research officer on the standing committee. The report was issued May 9. In it, he talked about the Royal Commission on Learning and the important work done by David Cooke, and subsequently by our government, that instituted the school trustee initiative. So you're right to take that to the next logical step. The member from Sault Ste. Marie may not know that this was instituted when we were in government.

One of the more objective reports on this thing was Ian Urquhart's article in the Toronto Star. In that article, it says "Alarm Sounded Over Teachers' Regulatory Body." That's on May 8. I thought that article was quite good. There's actually another article by Ian Urquhart

and others—I think I would also mention this article: "Province Probes Board: Dufferin-Peel reporting \$15-million deficit." Mr. Kennedy, the minister then, sent in an audit team. This report found that there were no irregularities. But this is a pretty true accounting that there's every attempt by the McGuinty government to buy peace at any price.

The evidence that will be coming down the line here is that most boards, not just Peel boards, are now in operating deficits. There are problems in special education—not just autism—there's trouble in busing, there's trouble in northern schools. This government is in trouble on the very agenda that they think they own: education.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Sault Ste. Marie has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Oraziotti: I'm pleased to hear the comments from numerous members here this evening who have responded to the comments I made earlier with respect to Bill 78, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act, also known as the student performance bill. There are numerous aspects of this piece of legislation that I think as a government we can all support.

There are some very positive changes that need to be made that have been long awaited in the education sector when it comes to ensuring that our new teachers are supported and have the resources they need. The old pen-and-paper test—after countless tests and countless exams, after years of university, after additional professional training at a teachers' college program in the province or elsewhere, once they reach that point, it's time to ensure that the resources are there for the teachers in the classroom to do the job that they need done. This is a significant change, the new teacher induction program, where they will have mentored support for the first year. They will need to pass their performance appraisals on two counts to ensure that they have completed that successfully.

As well, there are the new responsibilities for boards and the ministry to ensure that the board is meeting all of those requirements and regulations in the new piece of legislation, and being accountable to the public for the changes that they're required to implement. That aspect of the legislation is incredibly important. Additional aspects of the legislation include the four-year collective agreement, historic agreements that were reached in Ontario, giving us peace and stability in education that we have not seen for many years.

I encourage members to support Bill 78.

The Acting Speaker: The time now being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2131.

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