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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 31 May 2006

Mercredi 31 mai 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 31 May 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 31 mai 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT
(LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ÉDUCATION
(APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE
DE 18 ANS)

Ms. Papatello moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Debate? The Minister of Education.

Hon. Sandra Papatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): I would like to indicate to the Speaker that I would like to share this leadoff time with the member for Don Valley West.

It's an honour to rise today in the House to speak about Bill 52, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18), 2006. If passed, this legislation will make sure Ontario's students keep learning to 18 or graduation through creative incentives that realize their individual strengths and potential, and targeted enforcements to prevent them from dropping out.

Soon after our government took office in 2003, we launched a \$1.3-billion, multi-year student success strategy. This strategy will allow students to customize their education with relevant and valuable learning choices based on their individual goals, skills and interests. It is ambitious, effective and essential to Ontario's future prosperity.

The strategy is based on the belief that every student deserves a good outcome from his or her education. The first two phases of our strategy are already under way in our schools. They include a student success leader in every school board and 1,300 new high school teachers, including 800 student success teachers in Ontario's

schools; revisions to the grade 9 and 10 applied math curriculum; and 131 lighthouse projects, which I'll cover in more detail in a few moments.

The government also invested \$45 million in technological education, which helped start more than 200 new courses, including hospitality and health care, and more than 500 upgrades to current programs, including robotics and community technology.

Further, six new locally developed compulsory credit courses were created for English-language schools and seven for French-language schools to provide greater choice for grade 9 and 10 students.

We're already seeing results. In the first year of student success, the graduation rate rose from 68% to 71%. That translates to 6,000 more people finishing high school and improving their future prospects. But just to put that into prospective, many of us would be surprised that when we became the government, the dropout rate for high school graduates was 30%—30% in this day and age.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): Unacceptable.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: It really is unacceptable. We have to demand a standard that, at a minimum, our students in Ontario must achieve a high school diploma.

Our legislation today reflects the third phase of the strategy. As you've heard, the legislation, if passed in its current form, would keep students learning to age 18 or graduation, and of course many of our students are graduating at age 17. But we're doing more than just changing the number. We're transforming high schools into a 21st-century experience that prepares our children for the future. Imagine, the Education Act, in this regard, hasn't changed in some 40 years, but life in Ontario has certainly changed in those 40 years.

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Through student success, we have introduced a menu of programming choices that allows students to customize high school to suit their individual needs and potential. This legislation is a component of the government's comprehensive student success program to be made available by all school boards. High school students would now have greater access to quality, cooperative education, dual credits, apprenticeships and other outside learning opportunities to complete their Ontario secondary school diploma, including the new specialist high skills major.

First I'll review these programs and then share how they fit into the current legislation. We'll start with our new specialist high skills major. This exciting, innovative

program gives students a head start on their careers. Students have the option of bundling six to 12 courses that help them prepare for specific employment sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and tourism. Students who major in high skills will learn on the job, with employers and skills training centres. They'll also have opportunities to earn valuable industry certifications, including CPR, first aid, construction safety and service excellence.

Moving on, you may be aware that we have expanded co-op learning. Students eager to start working or who want to test drive career options can now apply up to two co-operative education credits and one career education or learning strategies credit towards their compulsory graduation requirement. Starting in 2006, this program will run through the summer as well. We're also urging employers to help students drive their careers in high school, before making the right decision about their post-secondary destination. We're calling on all employers to become partners here in our goal of customizing the high school experience for students to better match their individual goals and aspirations.

With the next program, dual credits, students can earn several credits participating in apprenticeship or post-secondary courses and put them towards their high school diploma and their post-secondary diploma or degree. Currently, more than 300 students are involved in dual credit and dual program pilot projects already under way in 36 boards and 14 colleges through the school-college-work initiative. In 2006-07, the goal is to involve all boards and colleges in the province in providing students with opportunities to earn dual credits. A broad range of students will benefit, including the disengaged and underachieving with the potential to succeed, as well as the high-achieving students.

We'll also be introducing credits for external credentials. This is exciting. Students with specialized interests will also be able to count certification by recognized and approved organizations, such as 4-H Ontario, as high school credits. This new program will make its debut in January 2007.

I recently announced the creation of the Student Success Commission. This is a unique partnership of our teacher federations and school board management. It's the first of its kind right here in Ontario. The Student Success Commission will work with me in my capacity as minister to provide advice and to endorse the implementation of our many student success strategy initiatives. The reality is that we need to be certain that what we may be thinking here at Queen's Park can be implemented on the ground, that it will actually work for students. So this commission is tremendously important. These programs add many exciting options for the students, and in the end it's about the students.

But we know that many students are struggling, and we want to help them too. Starting in grade 8, where today approximately 20,000 students are expected to have difficulty making the transition to grade 9, our student success programs help students who need that

extra boost to keep them engaged in learning and to keep them on track to graduating.

The other day I visited with grade 8 students at Lord Dufferin public school in downtown Toronto. We spoke about the challenges ahead of them in adjusting to high school. Our government's new focus on grade 8-9 transition aims to overcome that by helping them settle in and providing support through such measures as increased individual attention and programming that's tailored to fit their individual needs. I think that broadly speaks about the student success strategy. It really is taking a high school curriculum and tailoring it to what our students need in order to graduate.

We've encouraged credit recovery programs. These additional classes are geared at helping students who were unsuccessful in earning a credit work on the expectations they missed, without having to repeat the entire course, which really never made much sense anyway. So we really think this is a good move.

Our government's innovative lighthouse projects, which I referenced earlier, feature small group sizes and tailored instruction, with a focus on alternative learning experiences to engage our students at risk. This alone is a \$36-million investment.

As an example of a lighthouse program, in the Halton District School Board, there's a board-wide continuous entry co-op program that's about re-engaging students who have left school. With the one-on-one support of an itinerant off-campus, co-operative education teacher and a willing employer, students re-engage in learning, earn the valuable workplace skills and begin to plan the next step in their education and career pathway. Of the 53 students who enrolled in the first semester in 2005-06, 83% stayed in the program. Of all of these students, they've earned credits, some earning more than three in a semester.

These really are wonderful programs. They give the students new and relevant choices. They help students take control of their education and their future. This is what one student had to say:

"In my regular high school classes there were too many students, noise and other distractions for me to focus on my studies so I ended up dropping out several times. My school then offered me a chance to recover and complete my remaining grade 12 credits through some opportunities at my local college. It was self-directed, with more one-on-one help, and now I'm a full-time college student with a high school diploma. We need more programs like these."

That was said by an Ottawa high school graduate who participated in an Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board pilot lighthouse project funded by the government of Ontario.

This really is an exciting time to be in high school. Our bill that we're speaking about tonight is called Learning to Age 18; it's not called "classroom to 18" for a very good reason. That's why we've introduced something called equivalent learning, creating more options for our students. Equivalent learning consists of knowledge and skills gained from qualifying sources outside

of a traditional high school, including colleges, schools of music or the arts, or apprenticeship or employment-with-training activities. If passed, this bill will allow all school boards to make equivalent learning available to students. What better way to engage the 30% that were dropping out?

This proposed bill would give me, in my capacity as Minister of Education, the authority to set policies, procedures, requirements and maintain high standards in all of our programs to meet the needs of secondary school students and our learning expectations. The legislation, if passed, would allow school boards to provide learning opportunities to their students in partnership with community groups, the business community, training centres, colleges, universities and other organizations that provide programming for young people. Both school boards and I, as Minister of Education, would be able to enter into agreements with these groups so students can more easily participate in non-traditional educational experiences. I, as Minister of Education, would set criteria and standards for all non-traditional educational experiences. I really think that speaks to the fact that we have got to come into the modern age here and life just isn't what it was 40 years ago. We need to find ways to engage our young people and move them through to graduation.

At this point, I'd like to add a special note about rural schools. When we talk about goals for student success, we mean every single student. Today, we know there's an unacceptable disparity in dropout rates between rural and urban areas. We're working to change that. Ontario's 75,000 rural high school students deserve the same chance for success as their urban counterparts, and we have to be certain that those opportunities exist for our rural students as well.

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Just this March, our government announced that it's providing 70 rural high schools with up to \$200,000 of additional funding each through the lighthouse program. Rural students will now have access to new e-learning, agriculture and horticultural training, advanced technology and expanded co-op programs as part of the McGuinty government's plan to enhance the viability of rural schools and help retain rural students.

In total, \$10 million is being invested in the program, the latest instalment in the McGuinty government's rural funding formula, which includes \$20 million provided earlier this year, and now represents more than \$200 million in targeted rural schools funding since 2002-03. To date, rural students are receiving 50% more funding per pupil than they would have had without this targeted investment.

The lighthouse program is part of the new rural student success program announced in December 2005. The program also includes a new rural experience emphasis in the curriculum and \$3.5 million for new e-learning pilot projects.

I've described all the measures we're putting in place to engage students in learning and motivate them to finish school. I turn now to the topic of enforcement.

While enforcement measures are intended as a backstop to our student success programs, we consider them to be a vital part of this proposed Learning to 18 bill. We have to send a strong signal that we are taking responsibility for student achievement, and research backs this up. The C.D. Howe report that looked at jurisdictions in North America that raised the compulsory school age found that one of the key factors in improving graduation rates was whether the compulsory school age was enforced, and enforced consistently.

If passed in its current form, the Learning to 18 act would raise the maximum fines for parents and employers to \$1,000. We proposed this change because we believe it's important to recognize the significant role that adults play in supporting young people's continued learning. Which one of us in Ontario would ever say to a young person, "You don't need to graduate from high school"? That is just not on in today's world.

Of course, certain exemptions would apply. For example, employers hiring young people as part of a recognized equivalent learning program would not be subject to the fine. Parents would also be exempt from the fine when the young person is at least 16 years old and has withdrawn from parental control.

As well, we believe we're introducing effective and practical enforcement with measures tied to student drivers' licences. Obtaining a driver's licence in Ontario is a privilege; it's not a right. There are already specific qualifications to obtaining a licence: age, knowledge, visual acuity. Under the proposed legislation, regular attendance at school or in approved equivalent learning would be an added qualification students would need in order to obtain and keep their driving privileges.

If passed in its present form, the legislation would require that 16- and 17-year-olds be in attendance at school or have a valid reason for being excused or exempt in order to apply for a driver's licence or upgrade to the next tier of the licence. In addition, for students found guilty of being habitually absent, through this legislation, the court would have the option of suspending a student's driver's licence.

We recognize that there may be circumstances in which it's necessary for a young person who is not attending school to drive. Fair enough. We have no desire to impose additional hardships on a young person who may already be struggling. We would have exemptions for such students. We will be consulting in the future with our education stakeholders to determine the parameters of what those exemptions should be.

In Canada, Ontario is breaking new ground on this front. While there are no Canadian provinces that tie school attendance to driving privileges, 23 states in the United States have some type of policy connecting student attendance to the privilege of driving.

I would suggest that the real penalty for struggling students isn't a suspended driver's licence; it's a lifetime of struggle and limited choices after dropping out at 16 or 17 years of age.

To underscore the seriousness of our belief in the importance of young people being engaged in meaningful

learning, at least to the age of 18 or high school graduation, which often happens before age 18, there must be a consequence for not doing so. Restricting drivers' licences is an important backstop, but it's not the entire plan.

The possibility of fines to parents, students and employers related to chronic truancy has been in place for the last 50 years. Now we propose to use a creative reinforcement by making learning to 18 an extra obligation on students to earn the privilege to drive, with due allowance for truly extraordinary situations.

Most importantly, the government is committed to having the new learning opportunities in place before licensing restrictions are going to be used. We need to stop presuming that it's okay for our student to drop out of high school and that there's nothing that we can do to motivate them. Instead, we insist our students are well prepared, as well prepared as possible, to meet the 21st century. Our high schools have to provide the kinds of programs and incentives that are relevant to students today.

I believe, with the number of initiatives that I've outlined just now, as well as the exciting changes that are still to come even in this first term of our government, we are truly behind our Premier, the education Premier, but more importantly, we are truly behind student achievement, and we want our high school students to graduate. This is just one of those means.

It will be a privilege to move forward in our future till we have a day when every student in Ontario is graduating from high school.

Ms. Wynne: It's a real privilege to speak to this piece of legislation, Bill 52, Learning to Age 18. The minister has talked about a lot of the initiatives that we are putting in place with this legislation, and I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the background and why it's so critical that we do this, as well as some of the specifics that we're moving on.

It's quite clear there's no initiative that's more essential to Ontario's future than our plan to ensure that young people keep learning. This legislation is about keeping students in a learning environment and getting them back into a learning environment because of the changes we've made, whether that's in a classroom or outside a classroom, in an apprenticeship or a workplace training program, keeping them there at least until they're 18 or until they graduate and, as I said before, getting them back in, because the programs that have been put in place are appealing enough for students who have left to come back in.

As the minister has said, our student success strategy is about customizing high schools to give every student in Ontario an education advantage. We understand that for years—and really this isn't something that is brand new to education in the province—there have been students, young people who have become disenchanted with education and have left. The difference is that when I was in school, a young student could leave at 15 or 16 and get a job in a factory and could work for their entire

working life in that factory and have a fairly good standard of living. That's not the case any more. Those jobs aren't there, and the requirements for the jobs that are there are much higher than they were when I was in high school in the 1960s.

One of the abiding themes of my political career has been excellence in public education. Nelson Mandela talks about education being the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. I believe that the initiatives we're undertaking with our student success exemplify excellence in education, and there are compelling reasons for us to move forward on this agenda.

By modernizing our high schools, we're creating more learning options. The minister talked about some of them. She talked about the high skills major; dual credits; the idea that a student could be attending high school and taking a college credit or part of a university credit at the same time; the expanded co-op opportunities, so that two co-op credits now can be used—already this year—and counted as mandatory credits; the expansion of e-learning, so the opportunities for distance learning especially in our northern and rural communities; the possibility of equivalent learning, so that may not be in a classroom but may be in a workplace training opportunity or may be in a workplace training opportunity or in a 4-H club, or there are other opportunities that are being explored that really aren't in traditional classrooms at all. All of those possibilities have to be worked out on the ground with teachers.

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The minister talked about the Student Success Commission. What is innovative about this discussion is that the ministry and the boards and the teachers are talking about how to make all of this work, how to make sure that our equivalent learning and our dual credits—all of this—is going to work on the ground in the high schools, instead of the ministry implementing something and then realizing that it's actually not going to work in the schools. The value of upfront consultation is that it's really a decision-making process about what can work and what can't work. That's what the Student Success Commission is involved in, and that is why this is going to be successful; we will have a lot of the kinks worked out of some of these policies before they're implemented.

There's more at stake than ever before for students to get a high school education. It's high-quality and it's meaningful and it prepares them for a variety of post-secondary opportunities. When I was first elected and was asked to be the parliamentary assistant in the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, I would meet with university students and they would say to me, "Why is the ministry called Training, Colleges and Universities? It should be called Universities, Colleges and Training." And I said back to them, "Do you know what? We've got a culture shift that has to happen in this province. We have to start valuing all paths to the workplace, whether it's through university, through a college or through a training or apprenticeship program."

We need to understand in this province that there are many, many options other than just going to university—

and I'm not trashing university. Obviously it's very important for those who want to and can go to university to do that. But here's a statistic that I think points to an expectation, and possibly a disappointment gap. We do a pretty good job of graduating students and sending them to university. About 33% of graduates in Ontario go that route. But 70% of parents think their children are going to go to university. So in that gap between 33% and 70% is the possibility of disappointment and disenchantment, and what we want is to make sure that the education advantage that can accrue for every student, every child in this province, is understood by parents and is valued. It's not for everyone to go to an apprenticeship program, but it's not for everyone to go to a university program either.

Students who drop out of high school face an average quarter-million dollar pay loss over a lifetime according to one study in 2003 by Bhanpuri and Reynolds. James Veale remarked in 2005 that four out of every five prison inmates never finished high school. According to Statistics Canada, leaving school early doubles your chance of being unemployed and makes you five times more likely to need income assistance. So we all know anecdotally that it's important to graduate from high school, but the statistics are there to demonstrate that. We have to fight for every one of those students who has left school or is contemplating leaving school by customizing their high school experience and getting them on a track where they're going to get some wins inside and outside the classroom.

What is it that makes the need for a differentiated environment so critical to our students? And I would suggest it has been a need for many years. It's for reasons beyond what the dropout rate tells us alone. High school is, after all, a time in a student's life when they're looking to find their way and get a glimpse of some of the paths that may lie ahead.

John Abbott, who is a British academic and president of the 21st Century Learning Initiative, who lectures internationally on cognitive development in learning and has been here in Ontario and talked to us about our strategies and what's happening in education in Ontario, asks whether the learning species, human beings, can fit into schools. He responds that the obvious answer to the question, "Can the learning species fit into schools?" is "...of course, a resounding 'yes.' If we humans are the planet's pre-eminent learning species surely none but the most" resistant "of young people" would reject the idea of the "conditions of the classroom. They should welcome the way in which the curriculum designers have delivered to them ... all they need to get good grades" on a plate.

But he also goes on to say that the most obvious answers are not always the right answers, and I agree with him. He suggests that despite the notion that "Schools can do it all," as evidenced by increased investments—he's talking about England here, but we have been investing heavily as well. He asks, what's the learning experience that we want to offer our students?

What is it that we actually want students to take away from the learning experience, and is that something that can only be delivered in a classroom, can only be delivered in a traditional teacher-student relationship?

Here's where I think the cultural shift needs to take place. As John Abbott counsels, "The learning species will never fit comfortably into schools as we know them, and we should not leave schools to function in their present way any longer." Let's face it: We have had this problem in Ontario, in Canada, in the western world for a very long time, that students have left our schools, and so we have to have a radical rethinking.

Abbott talks about treating young adults like apprentices so that they start to need less support from those they are learning from, so that we start to wean them from the kinds of support that they may have gotten in elementary school and middle school. In high school, we need to find ways to give them real responsibility: real responsibility for outcomes in the world, so creating something, building something, producing something. But we also need to give them real responsibility for their own learning, so we need to set up learning environments where they take responsibility.

A. S. Neill, many years ago in his work at Summerhill, talked about freedom and licence for children and the theory that kids will want to learn; if we set up an environment that is appealing to them, they want to learn. But they don't want to be diminished, and they don't want a lack of respect in their learning environment. We need to bear those things in mind, because often people who leave school have very high spirits, are entrepreneurial, have a lot of energy, are interested in seeing the world, are adventurous. Aren't those the qualities we want in our citizens, and aren't those the qualities that we want to capture and make sure we can channel through our traditional learning institutions?

That's what the new programs are about. That's what the lighthouse projects that the minister was talking about are about. They are innovative, creative projects around the province that teachers are very excited about. Our student success leaders and our student success teachers are very excited about the opportunities that we're affording the system right now. Barry O'Connor, who was the director in the Kawartha Lakes board—or was it Limestone? No, it was Kawartha Lakes. He has been leading this student success initiative with our ministry folks, and he is one of the people who has put in place creative programs in his own board. He had students who over a period of a year would build a house in Kingston. They were students who were engaged in a very real-life project, and that's the kind of thing that we've got to put into our school system if we expect kids to stay in school.

I think I'm going over my time here, but there's a lot to say about this because it is an incredibly important initiative. So we know a lot of good things are happening in our high schools. We want to capitalize on those. We want to make sure those best ideas are spread across the province for all the students.

Last year, 45,000 Ontario students dropped out of high school. That number grew steadily over the last decade,

and it peaked in 2003 with 49,000 students. Mr. Speaker, 45,000 students is about the same size as the entire population of Timmins or Cornwall. We can't write off a whole city of students. We have to keep those kids in school.

The minister talked about our investments, the overall \$1.3-billion investment in our student success strategy, and we know that these programs are working. The dropout rate is falling; the graduation rate is going up. We are committed that by 2010, Ontario will graduate 85% of its students, up from only 68% when we were elected in 2003.

The last time we raised the school-leaving age in Ontario was 1954. I was one year old, and that's a long time ago, I can tell you. In the 1950s, it wasn't considered unreasonable for 14- or 15-year-olds to leave school to work on the farm, to find their way without a high school education. We know that's not good enough now.

Our teachers agree with us. OSSTF—that's the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation—has said, "OSSTF believes students should not be allowed to opt out of education before achieving high school education. In order to accomplish this goal, students who have not obtained a secondary school graduation diploma should be required to remain in school until age 18."

The teachers who are on the front lines working with these students in the schools know that this is the way we have to go.

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I want to make one final comment about a direction we don't want to go in. This is a path we really don't want to follow. There was recently an article in the New York Times, March 26, 2006. This article points out a pattern where schools across the country in the United States are using up to five of six class periods to focus on math and reading. Students who have been identified in this category in these jurisdictions in the States are being allowed to study only math, language and a little bit of phys. ed. for five out of six hours of the day.

What's happening with those kids is their horizons are being narrowed. It's in the name of improving literacy and math skills. I understand that and that's a laudable goal. I believe that what we need do for students who are struggling is, yes, we need to invest in those literacy and numeracy skills and we need to put people in place to work with those students. That's what we're doing with our student success teachers. But beyond that, we have to broaden their horizons. We have to make sure there is a wide range of opportunities for those kids, because they are the students who are looking for different options. Yes, we need to improve their literacy, but boy, do we need to provide options that keep them alive and interested and learning.

That's what this student success initiative is about, making programs relevant to young people who may later on in their lives want to do a purely academic program. They may want to come back after they've been in the work world. They may want to come back

and build on their work experience and do an academic degree, do an MA, a PhD, whatever, but in those early years of their late adolescence/early adulthood, they're not there. They don't want that academic experience, so we need to give them options that allow us to weave the academic learning into another kind of learning.

We need to get more students choosing a successful post-secondary destination, whether that be the work-place, college, university. We need to facilitate colleges, high schools, universities and apprenticeship programs working together, because as in any sector there are always turf issues. If we succumb to the fear, perhaps from colleges, that high schools are going to infringe on their turf, or from high schools that colleges are going to infringe on their turf, we're going to lose opportunities. We know there are already articulation agreements between colleges and high schools that can allow for the development of a dual credit process, and that's what we have to do. We have to put aside those turf concerns and really focus on what's positive and what's possible.

I am very proud of this initiative. I think this is a very important step forward for education in Ontario. It's a profound and important departure from what we've done in the past, where we have said, "Well, we'll just do more of the same and hope we're successful." That's not going to work. We have to do something different. That's what this legislation is about, and I look forward to seeing those successes as we go down the road.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I enjoyed the presentation this evening brought forward by the Minister of Education and the member for Don Valley West. The member for Don Valley West said that she was almost out of time, and yet there were about 23 minutes on the clock, unfortunately, when she sat down. I gather from that that the government whip and perhaps the government House leader are continuing this strategy of trying to muzzle the government backbenchers so they're not able to participate fully in these debates, and I'm not sure why that is, but I hope they are given the opportunity to speak to these issues as long as they would want when there's time on the clock.

I know the Minister of Education has now had almost two years in her responsibility—or two months, rather.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Six weeks.

Mr. Arnott: Well, almost two months, because I understand you were appointed on April 5. I have not yet had the opportunity to congratulate her in this House on her new responsibilities, now that the member for Parkdale-High Park has stepped down and left this House. Of course, this is a bill that was left over from his tenure as Minister of Education. It was introduced by him in this House on December 13.

I'm told that when he introduced this bill he stated the fact that the dropout rate in the province of Ontario was something like 30%, yet I'm also told that on December 16, 2005, Statistics Canada released data showing that Ontario's true dropout rate was less than 10%. I'd like to ask the minister a question as to how she would reconcile those two facts.

Having listened to her speech as well as the speech of the member for Don Valley West, while they talked about the noble goal the government has of reducing the dropout rate, they didn't talk too much about this punitive measure that the government has brought forward in Bill 52, which is actually the principle of the bill, to take away the driver's licence of a student who is unwilling to continue in their education up until 18.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Were you not listening to me? Did you come late?

Mr. Arnott: No, I listened to it, and there was very little talk about that. I was wondering, perhaps, if the government is considering amending the bill and taking that particular feature out of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: For clarification, I would say that this is questions and comments, not further debate. Thank you. The member for Nickel Belt.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the comments that were made by the government side, let me say the following, because the minister talked about how 23 states in the US have some type of policy that connects student attendance or achievement to the privilege of driving. What she didn't say, of course, is that any of the research that's been done has not proven that that similar tie-in is what is getting kids back to school.

Let me just read from the Toronto Star article, Sunday, December 18: "Nine American states make attendance a requirement for obtaining a driver's licence and five states have minimum academic performance standards for initially applying for one.

"Ten states designate truancy or lack of academic progress" as a reason "for suspension of a licence.

"Five states have policies that address both the initial issuance of a driver's licence and the ability of the state to suspend it for academic or attendance reasons, according to the Education Commission of the States," which was consulted by the Ontario government in the drafting of this bill.

It says: "However, the problem with these 'No School, No Wheels' policies is that no one seems prepared to stand up and proclaim that it works.

"Evidence is anecdotal at best and the measures seem to work better in some areas than in others.

"Molly Burke, a researcher for the" Education Commission of the States, "explains why it's difficult to measure the success of the programs.

"We don't often know whether someone came back to school because they lost a driver's licence or got a better teacher," she says," and I'll be referring to that a little later on when I speak.

Secondly, I heard the member for Don Valley West say, "We've got to stop doing more of the same old thing if we want to be successful." I would think the government would want to get at the heart of why students in the current system seem to think the system is failing them so badly that they drop out. I don't for one moment believe that all of those students drop out because they don't value or appreciate learning. This government has done nothing with respect to what those determinants are.

Is the system failing these kids because they didn't get the special education resources that they need? Is the system failing these kids because their parent or parents don't put a value on education? Is the system failing these kids because they're being bullied at school? Maybe we should get to the bottom of some of that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): In my brief two minutes, I want to congratulate the minister and the parliamentary assistant on their comments today. I was just looking at Bill 52 today. The preamble speaks quite eloquently of how important our government sees this initiative and wants to see this come through. I just want to read a small section of the preamble: "The people of Ontario and their government:

"Believe that all secondary school pupils deserve a strong education system that provides them with a good outcome and prepares them for a successful future in their destination of choice, whether that is a work placement with training, an apprenticeship, college or university." It goes on further to state other key points.

The last part of the preamble is important because it affirms "that no initiative is more essential to the province's future than a plan that ensures young people keep learning until they graduate or turn 18, whether it is in classroom or through equivalent learning opportunities, such as an apprenticeship or workplace training program." Then it goes on in this bill, of course, to provide the necessary amendments.

I think that this bill is at the very heart of what this government is trying to achieve in terms of providing proper education. I can think of friends of mine, people my age, who have children attending public school, and maybe some of them are going to private school, who want to keep their kids in school. I spoke the other day with a city councillor friend of mine, Gerry Altobello, who wants to keep his young daughter in school until she's 18. Let's say this child wants to leave at an earlier date. This act says, "If you don't want to stay in school after 16, then you can go into some other kind of apprenticeship training or learning program. The same with my brothers and sisters who've got children in schools right now. The kids may want to leave after age 16, but this bill says, "Stay in school until you're 18 or at least find something equivalent." I think it's the right way to go and I support the government and that initiative here today.

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Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): Just in the moment I have, I would like to comment very briefly on the issue raised by the member from Don Valley West. In her comments she talked about the importance of establishing a sense of responsibility, and I think all of us would agree that as part of maturation, young people need to understand the consequences of their actions; they need to understand the growing importance, as they mature, of having a sense of responsibility. I think that all of us appreciate the fact that part of that comes from the whole issue of having consequences for your actions.

I find it interesting that the member spoke on this particular issue in the light of the comments made by the minister yesterday in talking about the grades 8-9 transition, because one of the things that I felt was very important in that context was the whole issue around social promotion and the fact that if you are going to be successful in high school, one of the most important features of that is that you are able—that is, you have been successful at the grade 8 level in order to be able to assume that you can then take on the additional complexities of grade 9, of high school. So I think that one of the things this government might want to consider is that part of that responsibility is, of course, the whole area of meeting those standards and being successful at them. That gives everyone the sense of accomplishment. Certainly the individuals who assume that achievement are the students of the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I really am delighted to hear some of the comments that we've heard today in the House, in particular from my parliamentary assistant, Kathleen Wynne, who has done so much work for us on the education files, on a whole number of them. I'm very proud of her work and to be able to work so closely with her. She is a dynamo in education. I have to say that any young person that I am going to meet—it's our responsibility in this Ontario Legislature to make sure every single kid gets an opportunity through our education system to earn a high school diploma. That is the basic minimum. I cannot abide by a comment in this House that is going to be opposed to this legislation, because what that says to me is that they are prepared to sit back and watch our children fail and not be prepared to step forward.

Now, we are a government who watched two different political parties running the education system in Ontario. I have to say that this has not been a part of the agenda in previous governments. I acknowledge that. They had their other priorities. For the Ontario government under Dalton McGuinty, this is the priority. Student achievement is the priority of Dalton McGuinty and that will not change. We are determined to make it work for kids. I could not abide by an individual anywhere in this province not going to our high school system, knowing that we can make the difference in their high school experience. To drag them in and engage them, to make them absolutely love what they are doing, love learning, taking the programs, the new initiatives that are customized, more individualized, with student success leaders who are tracking our kids to make sure they are going forward to graduation. In this day and age it is the bare minimum that we can expect. I will not meet a parent who would not agree that they want the best for their kids, and this bill is going to help us get that.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Arnott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity this evening to speak briefly to Bill 52. I first have to seek unanimous consent of the House to allow us to stand down our leadoff speech so as to allow our critic to do

the leadoff speech when this bill is next debated. So I would ask unanimous consent to stand down our lead-off speech so as to allow our critic to do the lead-off speech when this bill is next debated.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Arnott: Members of the House didn't want to hear me for a full hour on this subject and perhaps that enhanced my opportunity to get unanimous consent.

I want to start off this discussion on Bill 52 by relaying to the House some of the comments that I made to the people of Fergus at the opening of the Centre Wellington District High School a few months ago. We were glad that the Premier of Ontario was present for that event, when we opened our new high school in Fergus. If I could just indulge the House for a few minutes with some of the comments I made on that particular day, because I think it's important to start from that point when we talk about education issues as far as I'm concerned, from my perspective as the MPP for Waterloo-Wellington. I said to my constituents: "As the MPP for Waterloo-Wellington, I believe fervently that our education system and everyone in it entrusted with the special responsibility of teaching our children must strive to make our schools not just the best in Canada but the best in the world. We are already blessed with excellence, but the rest of the world is not standing still, and this reality challenges us to continue to build on our strengths and our success if we have any hope of maintaining our economic standing and status as one of the world's most admired, even envied, nations.

"How do we confront this challenge? How do we create a culture of continuous improvement and lifelong learning in our schools? How do we work together to embrace positive change? How do we stretch the available financial resources to address priorities and ensure that money isn't being wasted? How do we measure educational results and outcomes, to be more accountable to the parents and taxpayers in a way that isn't threatening to ourselves but instead identifies positive opportunities for improvement? How do we involve our wider community in constructive and helpful ways to use their talents and expertise to add to our students' school experience? How do we ensure that our very brightest students reach the stratosphere, that the ones in middle find their special talent and follow their dreams and, every bit as importantly, how do we ensure that our students at risk reach their full potential and aren't left behind?

"That last challenge is one of the hardest and the one with the greatest consequences for our whole society if it's overlooked."

I was pleased that the Premier was there to hear me give this speech to the people who were assembled at the opening of the high school because I believe these are important questions that need to be responded to by all of us in terms of our approach to education issues, and I think the Premier was pleased with what I said. Obviously I was pleased that he was there and approached my comments in a non-partisan way.

I would have to start my comments by asking whether or not Bill 52 in any way answers these questions, and I would say that the government's goal of reducing the dropout rate, of course, is something that all of us in this House support. We want to see more kids complete their high school education so that they're better prepared and better equipped to go out into the world, whether it be for post-secondary education at college or university, skilled trades training or the world of work. Obviously those are goals that we all share, and we would want to support policies which in fact lead to the outcome of a reduced dropout rate, diminishing to zero.

I was a little bit disappointed with the Minister of Education's response to a couple of questions I posed when I had my chance through the questions-and-comments phase after her speech. The government, when this bill was first introduced, indicated that the dropout rate in Ontario was 30%, and yet approximately three days after the bill was introduced, Statistics Canada released data showing that Ontario's true dropout rate was less than 10%, not 30%. I'm not trying to understate the severity of the problem. It just appeared that the government was using an inflated number in an attempt to justify this particular bill, of course, and this bill, I have to say, is quite punitive in its approach in the sense of taking away a young person's driver's licence if they quit school between 16 and 18 and they have a driver's licence. It's something that is the subject of some debate in this House and in the media, which I'll get into later on in my comments.

Again, I would suggest that in the comments that have been brought forward so far by the government they've talked about some of the wonderful things they see themselves as doing to reduce the dropout rate, but they haven't really focused on the punitive aspect that has been universally criticized by even some people in teachers' unions who have said it's not workable and is probably wrong-headed.

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The Education Act, through Bill 52, is intended to be amended to raise the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 and to enable the development of learning opportunities for pupils who fall outside the instruction traditionally provided by a board. This is termed as "equivalent learning" in the act.

The Highway Traffic Act is amended, through Bill 52, to authorize the making of regulations that would require persons who are under 18 years old to be in compliance with section 21 of the Education Act, compulsory attendance until age 18, in order to apply for any class or level of driver's licence or for an endorsement on their driver's licence, or to take practical or written examination in respect of a driver's licence or endorsement. In simple language, this means that if you're not in school until age 18 and you have a driver's licence, you may lose your driver's licence if you quit school, or you may not even be given the opportunity to try to acquire a driver's licence if you're not in school until age 18. The bill has a number of other amendments that affect this act.

I would have to say in response that our caucus has taken a strong position. We have responded to this bill by saying the McGuinty government is once again proposing legislation without consideration for its practical implications. This is a pattern that we have seen on a number of bills through the course of the last number of months. It would appear that the burden and the cost of enforcement for this legislation falls on school boards and the Ministry of Transportation. I don't think the government has fully considered the impact on families who rely on their young family members, in some cases, for transportation due to circumstances which might exist in that particular household. The government certainly has not considered the effects in rural and northern Ontario, where there is no public transit in many, many cases; there are no alternative forms of transportation or it may be very limited, and the ability of young family members to drive may be very integral to their daily life.

I don't believe the government has considered the financial implications for students, who may depend on their ability to drive to keep their part-time or summer employment. I think back to my own experience. When I was 16 or 17 years old, I was employed at the L&M Food Markets in Arthur. I worked at the grocery store, and I did deliveries. I had my driver's licence, and I was given the opportunity to deliver groceries to people's homes. That was my part-time job for a couple of years when I was in high school.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): Did you drop out, Ted?

Mr. Arnott: No, I didn't drop out. I had the opportunity to continue through to grade 13 at the Arthur District High School, and I was pleased to have had that opportunity.

I don't believe the government has considered the implications for businesses which would typically employ students. It is an offence under the legislation, Bill 52, to employ someone during school hours if the employee is under 18 and hasn't graduated from high school. Teenagers who drop out of school, usually the most alienated and troubled kids, will find they cannot even get a driver's licence, if Bill 52 is passed in its current form unamended.

The legislation also wrongly puts the focus, in my opinion, on coercion of students rather than putting it on motivation, the improvement of curriculum and providing practical alternatives for students who are not academically focused. The legislation ignores the fact that there are many personal and unique circumstances in students' lives that may require a temporary or longer-term alternative to the traditional school environment.

I would say that we have a concern on this side of the House that the McGuinty government has misrepresented the Ontario dropout rate, no doubt, we believe, for—

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the member to withdraw "misrepresented" and perhaps phrase it a different way.

Mr. Arnott: I believe that the government, in terms of its presentation—I would withdraw, first of all, Mr.

Speaker. I apologize. I didn't want to offend you or anybody else in this House with my characterization of what has happened. But, again, it is my understanding that the government has been saying that there is a 30% dropout rate, yet Statistics Canada says it's 10%. So if it's not that, I'm not sure what it is, but certainly we need to have some explanation which reconciles those two numbers. I think Statistics Canada is considered to be a fairly credible organization for bringing forward these statistics. Clearly, we need some explanation in this House. The former minister, the member for Parkdale-High Park, has used that 30% figure as justification for this legislation, which we would call into question.

The Statistics Canada study further calls into question the former minister's scheme to suspend the drivers' licences of high school students between 16 and 18 who drop out of or are truant from school. On this side of House, we believe the McGuinty Liberal government is once again encroaching on the personal lives of Ontario families. The decision concerning whether or not the privilege to hold a driver's licence is a condition of school attendance should be left to parents.

This legislation, in sum, is punitive, impractical, unenforceable and may very well be found to be discriminatory under the age provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms if it is challenged through the courts. I don't know if the government has any legal opinion from the Attorney General as to whether or not this bill conforms with the charter of rights. If they do, they haven't talked about it as of yet, to the best of my knowledge. I would challenge them to table any legal opinions they may have as to whether or not this conforms with the charter of rights. I suspect there's a good chance it will be challenged at some point through the courts, and it may very well be found to be unconstitutional.

I want to inform the House of some of the press reaction to this Bill 52, because I think it's very important. We have compiled a list of clippings here that are, in most cases, critical of the bill and its approach.

Starting back to when the bill was first introduced, there was an article in the Toronto Star—interesting—on December 14, 2005. It was by Rob Ferguson of the Toronto Star. There are a number of interesting quotes in it, but most interesting for me was the quote by Rhonda Kimberley-Young, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Ms. Kimberley-Young was quoted in the Toronto Star, just before Christmas, as saying that "restricting access to driver's licences is worrisome...."

"I expect there will be young people who do see it as punitive," she said, predicting troubled students in rural areas will be harder hit than urban teens because there is no public transit to rely on."

She continued on, saying, "I think the risks are the uneven impact."

The minister is quoted in the article as saying that "he is not worried about the law being challenged under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms," but again, when you

hear the head of the OSSTF expressing concerns and reservations, it's something this government normally would not dismiss, coming from one of the senior voices in the teachers' federation.

When we look through some of these other articles, we find some more interesting quotes and comments. From the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, which is one of the most important daily newspapers in my area, Waterloo-Wellington, there is an article by Luisa D'Amato. There were parts of it that drew my attention. There was a quote from Annie Kidder, who is the head of People for Education. Annie Kidder, of course, has had a great deal of influence with this current government in terms of its education policy, and is someone the government has looked to to speak in public about its education policies in an effort to bolster public support for what they're doing. Annie Kidder says this about the provision in Bill 52 involving driver's licences:

"Today's announcement about drivers' licences and new laws does nothing for the students who are currently in school without a hope of graduating," she said. "The students who are struggling are not dropouts. They're trying to graduate but they do not have appropriate curriculum or sufficient course choices."

"She also noted that Premier Dalton McGuinty promised this fall to introduce an alternative secondary school diploma that gives prominence to the ability to develop a skill or trade. That promise is nowhere to be seen in the new legislation, she charged.

"Ontario has an official dropout rate of about 30%"—according to this article—"which the government hopes to cut in half to 15% by 2010."

I think this article came out before—yes, it did—the Statistics Canada report came out, which called into question the numbers the government was using.

Here again we have one of the Ontario residents who has had a lot to say about education policy in recent years, Annie Kidder, being critical of Bill 52.

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We carry on here to a clipping that was in the Owen Sound Sun-Times on December 16. I know that our member, the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, has been vocal on this issue and has talked about the impact this bill will have if there are no changes, if there are no amendments through the public hearings process, and the negative impact this bill will have on rural Ontario in particular. I would read from this opinion and analysis piece in the Owen Sound Sun Times:

"See how the other measures work before introducing the driving penalty. It's a heavy hand that would force Ontario teenagers to stay in school or deny them their right to drive. And it's probably not necessary, at least not yet. And, even then, it probably wouldn't work.

"But earlier this week, the provincial Liberals introduced legislation that would force youths under 18 to prove they are an active student in order to get their driver's licence. Those students who drop out before graduating or turning 18 could be punished by being refused a licence to drive, or by having a licence already in their possession suspended.

“The idea, of course, is to cut Ontario’s dismal high school dropout rate..., which is a good idea, a noble goal and all of that. But the driving penalty is questionable.

“To the Liberals’ credit, this measure wouldn’t take effect in Ontario until schools establish a wider array of courses and add more co-op and apprenticeship programs to keep at-risk students in class. These classroom changes would be mandated under the proposed bill, which includes the driving penalty for truants. Wouldn’t it make more sense, however, to see how the other measures work before even introducing the driving penalty?”

“Ontario teenagers drop out of high school for a variety of reasons, ranging from disinterest in the curriculum to an inability to comprehend it. Like everybody, teenagers are also a product of their environment. If their friends don’t think a good education is important, and if their parents don’t think so either, would they believe it?”

This is interesting commentary on this particular bill, calling into question whether or not it makes sense to have this punitive measure in the legislation.

I’m hopeful that the government is listening to some of this reaction in the province, and I’m hopeful that the government will bring forward amendments to this bill to respond to this criticism in an appropriate way and improve the legislation by removing this provision that so many people find objectionable, even people who have tended to align themselves with the government in a public way and support them on so many other issues.

Now, on December 17, one of the most significant daily newspapers in the province of Ontario, the Toronto Star, in its—no, this is a letter to the editor, I should say, that was published in the Toronto Star from Patrick Rutledge, trustee, ward 22 in Toronto. He says this:

“I found the Education Minister’s attempts at motivating students to stay in school a little ill-informed. I have the rather unique position of being a high school dropout who has returned to university at age 45 and also serving as a trustee on the Toronto District School Board. I have been asked a lot about the Ontario government’s attempts at keeping kids in school and I was struck by how out of touch people are about what motivates one to stay in school and what the reasons are for leaving.

“First, why do students leave? There are many reasons. Some students need to leave because school is just not working for them and they have to get out and try to figure life out. This was my experience. For others it could be an abusive home life, bullying and harassment, not connecting with teachers or with the curriculum or any other combination of these and other reasons.

“That is what is so frustrating about the minister’s proposal to deny driver’s licences to kids who drop out. Losing a privilege is not what will motivate dropouts to stay in school.

“Two reports done in the last year, the Early Leavers Report from Dr. Bruce Ferguson of Sick Kids Hospital and the TDSB’s Stop The World, I Want To Get On”—and I’m sure the member for Don Valley West is familiar with that particular study—“detail the experiences of students who are thinking of dropping out or already

have. In their responses lie some of the solutions. The single biggest factor is whether a student establishes a meaningful relationship with a teacher. This is the number one indicator for why kids are successful and is the determining factor for them sticking it out. Second is the teacher’s ability to make school relevant.

“I would never tell anyone contemplating leaving school that it is a good choice. I would only say that for me, it was the right thing to do. If they do choose to leave, we should be open and ready to make it easier for them to return to school, whether it be adult education, college or university, and we must be willing to provide them with support to be successful. That is the kind of incentive that will encourage people, not withdrawing the privilege of driving.”

Again, that’s Patrick Rutledge who is a school board trustee for the Toronto District School Board, someone who has gone through the experience of dropping out of school and has returned to formal education later on in his life.

So I would ask the government to consider all of these thoughts over the course of its consideration of Bill 52, and I hope we will see amendments coming forward that will reflect many of these concerns.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: I appreciate the comments that were made by the member for Waterloo–Wellington. I want to focus first on his comments about dropout rates, because he did reference both what the minister had to say and then after that the statistics that appeared from Statistics Canada, which I saw as well. I also want to read into the record comments that were made by a trustee from the Thames Valley board, who said the following:

“The problem for schools and boards, however, is they don’t know their dropout rates.

“In fact, they’d like to know how the province comes up with its figures, said Thames Valley operations superintendent John Thorpe.

“I’d love to have numbers like they do. I just don’t know where they get them,” he said.

“It’s impossible to tell which students leave school because they’re truly dropping out and which are moving, he said.” That came from the London Free Press, Wednesday, January 4, written by Kate Dubinski.

So when we question the government’s numbers with respect to dropout rates, I think there’s a legitimate reason why we do that, and I’m glad the member from Waterloo–Wellington talked about the statistics from StatsCan to point that out as well.

Secondly, I appreciated him reading into the record the letter that was done by a school trustee, Mr. Rutledge, from TDSB. I listened to the Liberals tonight talk about how it’s their responsibility to make sure kids get an education. Well, do you know what? If there are kids out there who don’t want to get an education for whatever reason, then maybe we’d better be looking at why that is and how we can support them in other decisions they are making.

I said earlier and I'll say it again: I don't believe for one moment that the kids who are dropping out are doing so because they don't value education or don't understand how necessary it's going to be for them in their future. They're dropping out for all kinds of reasons—stuff that's going on at home that could be unspeakable, lack of parental support for the value of school period, bullying at school, racism at school, any number of factors. For us to stand here and say it's our obligation to make sure we make sure kids go through school is really silly. It's our responsibility to support all of these kids who are having difficulties.

Ms. Wynne: There are so many reasons that members on all sides of this House should be supporting this initiative. On the issue of the dropout rate, I would point the member for Waterloo–Wellington and the member for Nickel Belt to Dr. Alan King of Queen's University, who has done some groundbreaking research on this issue and on the statistics around the dropout rate, and some of the discoveries he made around the math program that had been put in place by the previous government and the really detrimental effect that the early high school math program was having on students, discouraging them in grades 9 and 10, leading to a very high dropout rate, including the punitive literacy test as it was first implemented by the previous government. We've already started to change some of those things to help kids be able to have an applied math program that actually works for them. We've started to change those things. That's how the graduation rate is improving.

As far as the driver's licence and the punitive measure comments, there's a very small number of students who would be affected by actually losing their driver's licence or not being allowed to have their driver's licence. The point is that there's no student in this province, whether they have had a bad experience at school or not, who doesn't need some support if they're on the brink of dropping out. The driver's licence piece has focused the discussion. It is not going to be put in place until the programs that support the students are there. The previous minister said that over and over again when he made the initial announcements. So there's no expectation on our part that the driver's licence punishment is going to be an incentive to keep kids in school; it's a consequence.

What's really important about this legislation and why you should be supporting it is the programs we're putting in place.

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Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I commend the member from Waterloo–Wellington. It was a very balanced response to a government bill that's been questioned by many. I know he has a serious commitment to education, and quality education in the public system, I might add. I believe his wife's a teacher.

Many members here like to streamline—characterize us in negative terms. My wife is a teacher. We're proud parents of five children, and there are always different needs with each child. Having spent two or three terms as a school trustee, trying to find ways to deal with school-

leaving and truancy at the board level, I'd say that I kind of support the preamble, the explanatory note here. It's changing "the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 and to enable the development of learning opportunities for pupils that fall outside" the traditional model of providing that.

David Lindsay, the executive director of the college system, has provided some input. He's probably written to all the members here. They're up, ready and willing, I believe, to provide an alternative structure, providing opportunities in skilled trades and other innovative ways that are a departure from the traditional up-to-grade-12 model today. That's really what's needed, some innovation—breaking away from the traditional 9 to 4. There were a lot of students I talked to for whom getting to school early and those kinds of things just don't suit their lifestyle.

The point has been made as well that they all realize the importance—it's a knowledge-based economy, and they need to find the niche that's comfortable for them. As a parent whose children are through the post-secondary system, and listening to the member from Waterloo–Wellington, who is a parent with children in the current system, we want to make improvements that work for children, not just for the unions.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I did listen very carefully to the remarks from my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington. It seems to me that from time to time there are issues that are less partisan than others, and I think this is an issue that is. We could spend some time this evening on statistics for the level of dropout rates. We know that there is a group that is dropping out of the school system; we know that for sure. What we have to do collectively as legislators is find a way for these people to get back in the system and complete their education.

Like the member from Durham and the member from Waterloo–Wellington, my wife teaches grade 8. She's actually departing tomorrow to take her grade 8 students for a tour of Ottawa. I have a son who's eight and a daughter who's six. They're both in French immersion in St. Anne's in Peterborough. One of the things we can accomplish collectively is to make sure that we have an education system in Ontario that allows my six-year-old and my eight-year-old and those other eight-year-olds and six-year-olds across the province to have the opportunity to go through the school system to achieve their legitimate goals and pursue their dreams and their careers.

As I said, this is an opportunity to cater and design an approach for those individuals—who, for a whole number of reasons, have become somewhat disenchanted perhaps with the academic side of the education system—to have the chance to get a diploma. In fact, many of those careers one pursues outside of community college or university are actually gold-collar careers that have the economic potential and earning power to make far more than we who are in this chamber this evening. The key is to find that structure that will encourage—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member from Waterloo–Wellington has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Arnott: I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt, the member for Don Valley West, the member for Durham and the member for Peterborough for responding to my presentation this evening. None of them were particularly critical about what I had to say, but the member for Don Valley West pointed out her view that the number of students who might lose their drivers' licences as a result of Bill 52 would be a relatively small number, and she said that the driver's licence punishment would not come into effect until after the government's programs are put into place.

That being the case and that being the stated position of the government by the former minister and by her, as the parliamentary assistant, let's see an amendment to the bill that ensures that that will be the case. Perhaps you can take that part of the bill right out, and then, if need be, bring forward another bill later on.

I'm looking forward to hearing another presentation tonight by one of my colleagues, the member for York North, who has no small amount of information to give to the House. In fact, it wasn't that long ago that I was reading a copy of the Professionally Speaking magazine, which is the magazine of the Ontario College of Teachers. I was very, very interested to see the quotes by Tyler Stewart, a musician who's well known in many circles in this province as a member of the Barenaked Ladies. He talked about the most important teacher that he'd ever had during his education in the public system, and it was Mrs. Julia Munro. He talked about what a wonderful teacher she was, how much she had influenced his life and given him the encouragement and the aspiration to become what he is now: a world-famous rock star; a very, very creative young man. I am sure it was in no small part due—and that's what he said—to the outstanding education he had from Mrs. Munro.

I want to congratulate the member for York North for all that she's done in her private career before she came in here. We look forward to her presentation. I would encourage the government to listen to her.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: On that last point, I hope Ms. Munro gets free tickets to some of these concerts as a result. I'd sure be after that if I could.

Speaker, I need to ask for unanimous consent to defer our leadoff because our critic is in committee right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for deferral? How do we stand? It is agreed.

Ms. Martel: I want to raise three concerns tonight with respect to the bill that's before us. First, I want to deal with the main changes that are being made to the Education Act, specifically changing the compulsory age from 16 to 18, but also to talk about these new programs—equivalent learning—that appear in the act. Secondly, I want to say a little bit about the bill as it ties young people under age 18 to be in compliance with the new section 21 of the act—that's the compulsory age—until 18 in order to apply for any class or level of driver's

licence. Third, I want to have a bit of a discussion about kids who are home-schooled, and the concerns that are facing them. I have been made aware of this by some of my relatives, and I understand the government hasn't responded to these concerns at all.

Let me first deal with the new programs the government is talking about, the equivalent learning as it appears in the bill. It's interesting. If you look at the explanatory notes, it says: "The minister may establish policies and guidelines with respect to equivalent learning. Boards would be required to implement any relevant guidelines. Both the minister and boards may enter into agreements with other parties regarding the provision of equivalent learning to board pupils."

My first question is: Who's paying for the programs? Who is paying for all of these new and wonderful programs that the government says are just going to keep kids in school and stop them from dropping out? As I look through the bill, I don't see any provisions regarding funding of these programs. I don't see any mention at all that, as these programs are developed, the Ministry of Education is going to fund the necessary monies to the school boards across the province of Ontario to support these programs. Indeed, I don't see any mention that there's going to be a change in the funding formula to ensure that the money is there to develop all these new and wonderful programs that are going to be so helpful to the kids who are thinking of dropping out.

So my first concern is, here we go again with the government with a lot of rhetoric about new programs, a new mandate, a new responsibility for boards—because it is going to be a new responsibility for boards—and what is null and void is any mention of the necessary funding that of course would be required if you're actually going to develop, establish and maintain some of the new programs that the government is talking about. Whether that be in the school setting, or whether that be through the agreements that the minister has talked about that the ministry may develop with colleges and universities, that the ministry may develop with community organizations etc., someone's got to pay for this. I haven't seen the government step up to the plate yet in anything that they've said about this bill to indicate that the equivalent learning, the new programs, are going to be fully funded by this government.

My second and third concerns actually go back to something that OSSTF talked about, because I noticed some members quoted OSSTF but they didn't quote the concerns that OSSTF has already submitted in its preliminary draft on this bill to the Ministry of Education. The first concern from OSSTF, which is also a concern that I have, was just what these new programs are going to look like, who's going to be responsible and who's going to develop them.

2010

So in their draft submission to the ministry, I quote as follows:

"It is the details of these 'equivalent learning' establishments which causes considerable concern for OSSTF members. We note that acceptable learning locations will

be further defined in ministry and board policies and guidelines, which are subject to much less scrutiny than regulation”—or legislation for that matter. “Who will set the standards and requirements for the board policies? Who will approve the providers of equivalent learning and their courses or programs? We are also very concerned that the requirements for achieving secondary school credits will be watered down.”

And of course those are concerns that have yet to be answered and certainly weren’t answered here this evening, but they are very legitimate concerns regarding these new equivalent learning programs.

Here’s the next concern, and it has to do with what the government is going to use as a model for these programs. I said earlier I heard the minister talk about post-secondary and agreements with colleges. I find that hard to imagine. If a student is thinking about dropping out of high school, I find it hard to imagine they’re going to want to go to a post-secondary or college institution in order to further their education. This doesn’t make sense to me. I really don’t see the likelihood of partnerships in that regard.

Now, perhaps there are going to be partnerships with community organizations. Let’s look at two provinces that have done some of this work before in terms of having equivalent credits for secondary school credits—two provinces. Let me reference them, and this comes from the OSSTF brief again:

“Two other provinces recognize equivalent credentials for secondary school credits. The most clear-cut examples may be found in British Columbia, where the official list of course codes for secondary” school “credit includes a number of provincially recognized external credits. BC developed its program between 1997 and 2001.... In BC, the Ministry of Education centrally evaluates these courses, ensuring that there is documented systematic learning that can equate to appropriate subject areas in the curriculum. While 81 out of 408 listed courses that count for a BC secondary diploma are external credit courses, almost half of them are in music, dance or fine arts, only 12 in applied skills areas such as first aid instructor, ground search and rescue, Outward Bound, pony club or Red Cross swimming instructor, and only three in technical subjects (wood-working and tourism). Almost none of these credentials are likely to be obtained by students at risk.”

And that’s really a key point, because with the majority of the courses that you’re talking about—and BC is the one model you might look to because they have equivalency learning now—most of the students we’re talking about who are at risk probably don’t have a parent or parents who can afford to enrol them in music, dance or fine arts, so the thought that we are going to find a broad range of courses out in the community that are going to work for the students who are most at risk—it’s something that I just don’t think is going to happen very easily at all. And, as OSSTF says:

“Therefore their usefulness as a model for the Ontario program (except perhaps for adult students) is severely limited.

“British Columbia also allows students to take post-secondary courses and count them towards secondary school graduation.... It is also of very limited value for encouraging students under 18 to stay in school, since teenagers do not normally drop out in order to go into post-secondary studies!”

That’s why I question what the Minister of Education had to say tonight in terms of her making the argument here that the ministry was going to enter into partnerships with colleges and universities with respect to equivalency learning. I don’t think kids who are dropping out of high school are then going to be bound for college and university. I just don’t think that’s going to happen.

Ms. Wynne: You may be wrong about that.

Ms. Martel: I may be wrong, but we’ll wait and see. I don’t think I am. I think there are reasons that they’re dropping out of the education system, and hoping that they’re going to go to college where requirements might be even stricter, or university where requirements certainly will be stricter, is a little hard to fathom.

The other jurisdiction that has equivalent learning, so could be used as a model, is Newfoundland. Here again, OSSTF said the following:

“Newfoundland, the only other province to recognize external credentials, recognizes courses taken through air cadets, army cadets and sea cadets as well as Royal Conservatory of Music courses. Again, there is little to be learned here in terms of attracting students to stay in school in Ontario until age 18. While admittedly Ontario students are allowed to count the highest Royal Conservatory of Music achievement for a high school credit, the students who have taken years of music lessons are usually university-bound and not the target clientele for student success initiatives.” I think OSSTF has hit the nail on the head.

So we look forward to seeing who the Ministry of Education is going to partner up with in terms of delivering these programs, but I’ve got to tell you, I have serious concerns, because nowhere in what we’ve heard today has the ministry confirmed that it is going to fund these programs with new funding being allocated to school boards in the province and not instead require school boards to take this money out of the scarce resources they already have. Secondly, there has been no mention about who is going to be responsible, and how, for dealing with who determines if these scenarios and situations are appropriate for equivalency learning. That was a concern that OSSTF raised. And I agree with OSSTF in terms of their third concern, about what model you are going to use. The models that are already in place in two jurisdictions have pretty well shown that the target clientele—the kids who are dropping out, the kids who are disadvantaged, the kids who don’t want to be in a classroom—don’t want to be in any of these other programs either, and the programs are not very likely to meet their needs.

Those are the concerns that I want to raise with respect to the new programs that the ministry says are going to be so effective in attracting kids and keeping them in school.

Secondly, I want to look at the second part of the bill, which is the tying of the driver's licence to staying in school. I want to begin with the US situation, which of course is one that the Minister of Education referenced. I think it would be incumbent upon me to give some additional details, because I think some were lacking in the presentation that she made with respect to what goes on in US jurisdictions.

Let me begin with this. It was printed in the Toronto Star, Sunday, December 18, and written by Tim Harper:

"Tomorrow, some 2.7 million American students who should be in the classroom will be somewhere else.

"More than three in 10 American students who enter grade 9 will not complete high school—and only half of the black, Latino and native Indian students will graduate.

"In the south, dropouts are three times more likely to be imprisoned, and represent \$29.7 billion in lost wages per year.

"In the US capital, 15% of high school students are truant on any given day.

"To combat hard-core dropouts and truants, local and state boards of education have been getting tough and creative....

"Some 23 US states have some type of policy connecting student attendance or achievement to the privilege of driving."

I named nine states that have some requirements around drivers' licences, 10 that designate truancy or a lack of academic progress as a cause for suspension of a licence, and five states have policies that address both the initial issuance of a driver's licence and the ability of the state to suspend it for academic or attendance reasons.

I think what was key and what the minister neglected to mention is that, according to the Education Commission of the States, and I'm going to quote Molly Burke, who is a researcher for the commission:

"We often don't know whether someone came back to school because they lost a driver's licence or got a better teacher. Evidence is anecdotal at best, and the measures seem to work better in some areas than in others."

"'It often doesn't work in urban areas,' said Burke. 'You just get students saying, 'I wasn't going to drive anyway.''"

"In a study provided to Ontario officials"—when they were considering this mechanism—"Burke was blunt, appearing more hopeful than definitive.

"'Little research has been completed on the effects these types of laws have on truancy or dropout rates,' she wrote, 'but state policy-makers should consider that, for many teenagers, driving is real currency.'"

I'm not sure why the government is referencing what's going on in the States if this is the kind of information that was given to the government—and it's clear that it was—when they were developing this bill. The Education Commission of the States made it very clear that there was no evidence to show that these kinds of measures, tying drivers' licences to compulsory attendance at school or to truancy rates, really worked in

getting those kids back to school. So why are we heading down a path where there has been some experience with this model and where, at best, the experience about whether or not it worked is anecdotal? I don't understand why we're going down this path, especially when the commission gave information to the Ministry of Education in Ontario about these programs and about how their effectiveness was anecdotal at best.

2020

Let me quote some other folks with respect to this tying of the driver's licence to staying in school until age 18. The Toronto Star said the following on Sunday, December 18:

"The Ontario government is taking the right step by making it compulsory for all students to remain in school ... but the legislation contains several controversial provisions the government should consider dropping.

"First, any student who leaves school before 18 would be denied a driver's licence." That's in the legislation.

"Second, students and parents could be fined up to \$1,000 for chronic absenteeism, while employers could face similar fines for putting students to work during school hours.

"Kennedy fails to provide any evidence that such coercive steps actually result in students remaining in classes any longer. Without some indication that it works in other jurisdictions"—and we don't have this from the US—"Kennedy needs to rethink this idea."

From the National Post, December 15:

"Trying to keep 16- or 17-year-olds in school is a worthy objective, but only if the students understand the value of an education and are there willingly. Mr. Kennedy surely knows this, which makes his plan all the more contemptible. In return for a few headlines, he is evidently willing to make matters worse for dropouts and committed students alike."

The last one I want to read into the record comes from a grade 12 student from Simcoe. His name is Nathan Lachowsky. He's the president of the executive council of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association. He wrote this in the Globe and Mail on Tuesday, December 20, 2005:

"Education is lifelong, and the longer that students stay in school the better prepared they become for life. But, in proposing to connect a high school diploma with the right to drive, Ontario is travelling too far over the edge of reason.

"Gerard Kennedy, Ontario's Minister of Education, proposed last week that the province revoke the driver's licences of students who drop out of high school before 18. The 'Learning to 18' initiative would also force 16- and 17-year-olds to prove that they are still in school before being allowed to get a driver's licence.

"While the work the education ministry has done to keep students engaged and interested in high school is commendable, this step is an unnecessary infringement upon the lives of Ontario adolescents. If you have to enforce staying in school with such punitive measures, then there is something really wrong with the system.

The government should find better ways to encourage students, instead of scaring them into their own education.

“Mr. Kennedy has certainly succeeded at finding something close to the hearts of young people. Our first step towards independence and adulthood is being able to drive and controlling our transportation and life. It is something we look forward to for years. Students are angry and shocked by this plan. They cannot believe that their education should be tied to their ability to drive.

“While students who are academically successful are somewhat more supportive of the initiative, those students who aren’t as successful in the system feel that it creates negative pressure. This proposal is especially unfair to students who suffer from leaning disabilities or have difficulties in the classroom setting.

“Those who can’t, or choose not to, succeed at school would lose so many other options by not being able to drive. Without a licence, they won’t be able to transport themselves to and from work or hold delivery jobs. Without transportation, they lose social and economic activities.”

The third concern I want to raise in the time I have remaining has to do with concerns raised by the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents. My cousins, Alan and Rachel Ross, home-school their eight-year-old son Justin. They raised these concerns with me some time ago and I want to put them on the record tonight. This is from the website of the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents:

“Bill 52 and home schooling:

“When the bill was introduced in mid-December 2005, the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents sent a letter to the education minister (at that time, Gerard Kennedy—the current minister is Sandra Pupatello) to ask how the act might affect home-schoolers and to request a meeting to discuss our concerns. As of the end of May 2006, we have not received a reply.”

On the website, dated April 3, is a list of their concerns and I want to read these quickly into the record. This is what the OFTP urges with respect to the government and this bill:

“(1) Amend Bill 52 or abandon it altogether. To implement under existing legislation a modified plan to provide more access and recognition of non-traditional learning opportunities. Promotion of the above alternative process of recommendation would accommodate and support more young people than would a narrowing of non-traditional options into those considered to be equivalent learning for the purposes of receiving an Ontario secondary school diploma.

“(2) Abandon plans to raise the compulsory school age to 18.

“We urge the government to recognize instead that young adults over 16 are at an age to be treated with increased respect for their personal choices and granted more leeway for their growing independence and autonomy; that, given financial and moral support and practical means, they will gladly attend learning environments that support and cater to their individual

strengths, needs and interests; and that such opportunities should be provided by the government as a service rather than imposed as a legal requirement. We affirm that learning can be effectively validated and supported without excessive regulation

“(3) Abandon any plans to link school attendance and drivers’ licences.

“We believe the education system cannot ‘instill in young people a lasting, positive attitude toward learning’ by imposing sanctions through coercive and restrictive legislation.

“We urge the government to recognize that linking drivers’ licences to school attendance is a punitive measure, unfair in its incongruity, and oversteps the boundaries of the state into the private affairs of individuals.”

Finally, “(4) Consult with dropouts, potential dropouts, and home-schoolers, to gain a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of reasons for leaving school and the solutions that would genuinely and supportively change the motivation or ability to stay.

“We believe that genuine motivation is self-motivation arising out of a desire to learn and reach goals, not out of fear of coercion or punitive legislation,” and they go on to state what is required.

Those are the concerns that I want to raise here this evening with respect to this legislation. I would certainly encourage the government to finally acquiesce to the request for a meeting that has been made for a number of months now by the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents. I think they have a lot to offer by way of information and advice, and I hope the minister would at least listen to them.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Wynne: I’d like to comment on the remarks by the member for Nickel Belt. First of all, I did mention in my remarks the Student Success Commission. She raised the issue of whether some of the programs and some of the options and initiatives that we want to put in place will actually work, and concerns on the part of some of the teachers. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation is sitting on the Student Success Commission, having that conversation with boards and ministries, to figure out how to work out some of the nuances around the new programs and dual credits and so on. So that is happening and that is a very strong initiative. I would ask that the member for Nickel Belt talk to some of her friends in the OSSTF and find out how they feel about that.

Secondly, new money for these initiatives; there are millions of dollars going into this initiative: \$45 million for technological education already; \$36 million for the lighthouse programs from which we’ve taken some of the initiatives and the successes. There are 800 student success teachers already in the system. Programs mean having teachers. If we’re going to have new programs, we have to have new teachers, new adults in the schools to run those programs. That’s the most important component of setting up a new program. So there are already 800 student success teachers in the system and another

300 going into the system this year. Those teachers are the drivers of the new programs and they are there.

I would suggest that the member for Nickel Belt talk to some of the teachers on the ground to see how they feel about the initiatives we've put in place, because what I'm hearing from the schools and teachers in my area is that we're in very good shape in terms of putting those programs in place. That means that the new money is working.

Finally, I just wanted to say that I certainly am very aware of the home-schoolers' concerns. I have had an initial conversation with some of the folks in the Mennonite community who have some similar concerns. Those are not issues that are going to be shoved aside. There will be a conversation. I can't say exactly when that is going to happen, but as I say, I have had an initial conversation with some of the folks from the Mennonite Central Committee.

Mr. O'Toole: It's a pleasure to listen and respond to the member from Nickel Belt. She certainly does her homework. I'll just respond to a couple of things on the research she has done. Our critic, Frank Klees, will be speaking on this issue, as will Julia Munro, the member from York North. They also have an understanding and interest in this area, as most of us do.

The member from Nickel Belt raises two or three very good points. The work done by OSSTF needs to be respected. I understand and endorse that. I probably would go so far as to say that even the suggestion of cadets is something that, if that's what suits—I was at a cadet parade this past weekend and am going to one this weekend. They do learn a lot of nautical and aeronautical skills. Their skill base may not be the traditional type, but there's discipline involved in it, there's compliance involved and there's structure involved. Other than not being in school, I think those are worthy considerations as parallel credits.

2030

I think the punitive part, the driver's licence issue as a way of pressuring or leveraging some compliance, is a negative thing. I wonder how they'll get out of that, because in rural Ontario, as the point has been made by the member from Nickel Belt, and certainly in my riding of Durham, people living in most of it are not serviced by public transit. Most of them do have jobs on other farms or in small towns, in close villages. In fact, some of them are in trades all the way through.

If you look at the success of the Newfoundland program—and I'd say that one of the things that I think worked well when we were in government was OYAP, the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, and its great success of linkage with children who are going to the world of work and trades. That program should be looked at. Working together with trade unions: The non-traditional provision of service, working in partnership with trade unions, might be a very good bridge to reality.

So there are innovative things. I think the member from Nickel Belt has done some homework, and I appreciated her comments.

Mr. Berardinetti: I do appreciate the comments made by the member from Nickel Belt.

I have a few comments again about what our government is trying to achieve here. The McGuinty government has clearly launched a very aggressive program here to make student success a key in the educational program overall.

We've had various phases in the past few years brought into being and announced. Phase 1 of the student success strategy was introduced back in 2003, and it already has yielded a number of results: Student success leaders are implemented at every school board; there's been a 3% rise in high school graduation rates, from 68% to 71%; over 82%, or 14,000 students enrolled in 105 lighthouse pilot projects, have successfully acquired their course credit; \$45 million has been invested into technological education; and six new locally developed compulsory credit courses have been done. So this is the first phase.

The second phase, it's important to reiterate, was launched in May 2005 and added further results.

Phase 3 is currently under way. That new phase 3 allows for new specialist high skills majors in the Ontario secondary school diploma that will allow students to complete a minimum bundle of courses in specific high-skills areas. It also has new dual credit programs to allow students to earn several credits towards an OSSD through post-secondary and apprenticeship courses. The key, again, is that there's a combination here of education as well as apprenticeship.

I think it needs to be reiterated that we have committed by investing \$1.3 billion in a three-phase program to ambitiously and effectively get our students into school programs and either involved in education or apprenticeship programs till age 18. I support that very much.

Mrs. Munro: In the few moments that I have, I'd like to comment on those remarks made by the member from Nickel Belt.

I think all of us recognize the fact that providing opportunities for education for an entire society is something that is always of enormous challenge. But I think the member here has particularly identified some of the limitations that are inherent in the bill that we're discussing: that is, quite frankly, the fact that the bill doesn't talk about the kind of innovation that the minister talks about. Those are not required legislative initiatives; those are things that a ministry and a minister can do.

What we're looking at is a particular piece of legislation that is essentially punitive in its nature. I think people need to understand that while the government can talk about all of the various programs that they are contemplating, I would stress that they're also asking us as legislators to look at a piece of legislation that essentially is the stick. So while the conversation might be about the carrot, the legislation is about the stick.

The fact that the member from Nickel Belt has been able to demonstrate that in other jurisdictions where people have looked at this as an opportunity—I have to

say that it just sounds like social engineering at its best. So now, in the same way that the parent grounds the student, the parent grounds his own offspring, the government comes along and says, "No, thou shalt not drive."

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Martel: I want to thank those members who made an intervention.

I would say to the member from Durham that in the same briefing that was given by OSSTF to the ministry about this program, they did talk about the Ontario youth apprenticeship program and made a recommendation that additional targeted funding be provided for expansion of co-operative education and technical education programs and facilities.

Secondly, with respect to the comments made by the member from Don Valley West, I'm trying to reconcile the comments that were made by the minister, who said very clearly that part of equivalent learning was going to be partnerships between the ministry, post-secondary institutions and community groups. So who's paying for the partnerships between the ministry and the community groups? The examples and the information that you provided to the House, I say to the member, essentially, as far as I can understand, appear to be all school-based. Those are programs that are being provided within the four walls of the high school system. If you're seriously going to look at partnerships with community groups and having courses recognized because community groups are teaching skills, etc., then where's that money coming from? The money you've mentioned so far, as far as I can tell, all has to do with what school boards might be doing in this regard, but certainly not with what community groups might be able to do with that. So hopefully we're going to get a clarification.

Finally, I don't know why the minister hasn't met with this association. They wrote to the minister right after—

Interjection.

Ms. Martel: I know. I hope she will read my comments, because it's very clear they've got some serious issues, but they've got some good ideas. It seems to me they have been totally forgotten in terms of how this bill was drafted. I know they have, because there are issues in here that clearly, when the drafters were putting this together, they did not think at all about students who are being home-schooled. I would encourage the minister to meet with this association as soon as possible to hear about their concerns and to come to terms with how they might be responded to.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I want you to know that even at this late hour, for us, I am delighted to speak to this bill. The first thing I want to say is I want to congratulate the minister and the parliamentary secretary, truly, for their sense of enthusiasm. I share that. I was a PA for a while in education; I was critic for education at one point. There is little, other than perhaps health and the environment, that is more important than education.

Seeing the job that my colleagues have done in terms of laying out the bill, I want to move in a little bit different fashion. I want to talk about the context. I want to talk about the social context that we face as Ontarians and that we face as Canadians down the line and how this fits with this bill.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, I would like to give a few examples of the interrelationship of training, skills development, colleges, high schools, and even elementary schools in some cases, when we talk about lifelong learning and we talk about the opportunity for a seamless system with a variety and a range of opportunities, especially when we know that every single child and youngster and person learns somewhat differently from the next. We're moving away from this cookie-cutter approach to education and saying, "All children must, at this particular time, be able to answer these particular questions," even though we have some of that. I have my personal feelings on some of that. But I see the system moving more and more, with the leadership of the government, to develop a more flexible system with greater alternatives.

I would like to say to the member from Nickel Belt, by the way, just two comments, if I might. One is that she asked, where are the models for some of these things? My response is that when you talk about a philosophy of innovation, sometimes there are no other models. There are some, obviously, that we've looked at. We have people who do research in other jurisdictions within Canada, in the United States, in Europe, as far away as perhaps northern Europe and Japan. But sometimes we create our own, and that's what a pathfinder is. That's what leadership is all about, it seems to me. In innovation sometimes it means you can't necessarily look to another jurisdiction to copy what they do.

2040

I would like to read a very short comment:

"The Ontario school system must do more to facilitate careers for young people in the skilled trades, says the president of the Residential Construction Council of Central Ontario.

"Richard Lyall says creating more opportunities for high school students would not only help relieve the continuing shortage of skilled tradespeople over the next decade, but perhaps reduce the number of high school dropouts.

"I would say in the last few years, there's been an increase in interest in trades careers, although I'm not aware of any measures of that"—and I would be happy to tell Mr. Lyall that indeed there are measures. He refers to the stigma against the skilled trades. He says that from his point of view, that's largely mythological.

"People are recognizing that these are excellent jobs that pay well. The problem now is, 'How do I get into it?'"—talking about the students: "If they want to be a doctor or a lawyer, they know what steps to take, but not if they want to work in the trades." That's precisely what part of the program in this legislation is supportive of.

“When people say young people are not interested in the skilled trades, part of it is that the pathways aren't there.” This, we are addressing.

He goes to talk further about some of the programs already there within the system. I will address a few of them myself.

When we look at this particular piece of legislation, it has been said, and indeed it is true, that this is part of a much larger government initiative, as you well know, called student success. This is actually part of phase 3, introducing legislation that, if passed, “will require students to keep learning in a classroom, apprenticeship or workplace training program until age 18 or until they graduate.” This is a statement that was made by the minister, and a recent one was also talking about adding a new specialist high skills major to the Ontario secondary school diploma, expanding co-operative education and creating new dual-credit programs to allow students to earn several credits towards their diploma.

Often members don't read the full bill, and I must admit that it is true from time to time for me as well. But I did take the time to read this bill, and I don't know who the drafter was, but in particular I thought, “Maybe it wasn't a lawyer,” because the preamble to the bill was very succinct and essentially says what the bill is attempting to do. I'm not going to read all of it, because it's about a page long, but I'd just like to reiterate that this is why we're talking about this particular piece of legislation. I feel excited about it because we're moving into a sense that the systems, the organizations, of education themselves are becoming more of a learning organization. We talk about all of these beautiful phrases of “lifelong learning,” “organizational learning” and “adaptation”; if you're going to have vibrant company, then you have to have an organization that is growing and learning and changing as well. This bill moves very nicely down that particular path.

This bill says:

“The people of Ontario and their government:

“Believe that all secondary school pupils deserve a strong education system that provides them with a good outcome and prepares them for a successful future in their destination of choice, whether that is a work placement with training, an apprenticeship, college,” university or otherwise;

“Recognize that the education system must challenge and engage pupils with different learning styles”—that's very important—“and make learning more relevant to them;” a big challenge for all of us and for the teachers.

“Recognize that the education system must continue to provide broad supports so pupils can succeed and graduate; ...

“Believe pupils must have a real choice through equivalent ways of learning that meet the requirements of the Ontario secondary school diploma”.

There are other points to be made. I would encourage my colleagues to take a look at, if nothing else, the preamble and the purpose of this particular bill.

We know that Canada is facing a shortage of about 25,000 workers, needed immediately. It's estimated that

by the end of the decade, we will be talking about close to a million skilled workers and people with advanced education being required in our workforce. If any of you doubt that, spend a bit of time taking a look at Calgary today. As a matter of fact, we don't have to go as far as Calgary. We can talk about parts of Ontario. As a matter of fact, we can talk about parts of Sudbury.

When I was in Sudbury last, I found it somewhat strange that the company was sending people to Europe for their technical people for mining and various aspects. It seems to me that we have to do a better job with linking up the programs in our colleges and universities to produce them, because I've met so many young people from Sudbury who want to stay and live in Sudbury because it's a great city. It's a fabulous place to live. They don't want to leave, but we have to increase and improve the job opportunities. There is one particular area that I think our education system can do a better job on, and I know we'll begin to address that.

Let me address an issue that was raised earlier, and the parliamentary assistant talked about it. This is the Student Success Commission, which was set up recently, composed of six members representing all of the teacher federations, six representing all levels of school board management. “The first of its kind in Ontario, the commission will allow for real engagement between high-level professionals in the education sector. It will focus on the success of all high school students.

“The commission was created to advise the minister with respect to the implementation ... of current and proposed student success initiatives.”

Let me read just a few recommendations that we have—and by the way, the member from Nickel Belt asked, “Where's the money?” This is part of the government's \$1.3-billion student success strategy. A lot of these perhaps have been ballpark figures that were worked out, but they recommend:

“—Student success leaders hired at every school board;

“—1,300 new high school teachers hired with 800 dedicated to student success programs”—the parliamentary assistant already talked about that;

“—Technological education equipment”—because we know if we don't have labs and if we don't have the equipment in the high schools that is somewhat up to date with the reality out there in the scientific world, the business community, wherever, then we're not going to helping our students; we're going to be creating gaps between the reality of what we're helping them to learn and the reality of the business community or the labour market;

“—131 lighthouse pilot projects aimed at increasing credit accumulation”—and this is, of course, an attempt to reduce the dropout rates—“... linking more programs with colleges and encouraging students who left school to return and complete their diploma requirements.”

It goes on, and there's a list of other things. I know one of the members—I don't want the member from Nickel Belt to think I'm picking on her, but I'd like to engage with her. I have a true respect for your critique,

which is usually very thoughtful. You ask, where does some of this money come from, when we talk about working with community groups or businesses or boards of trade or commerce or what have you. As a matter of fact, in Ottawa we just established a very interesting model, a brand new model, never been done before. It's being tried out in Ottawa—and this is in the post-secondary area: internationally trained people who need to get their skills upgraded somewhat. The shared costing is there, but I believe it's less expensive in the long term. The business community—or whatever the destination is—knows how costly it is to not have those skilled labourers, because they have to send people around the world; they have to train people from scratch. To immediately be part of a selection process to engage people who are a good way along the path of the skill level that's required for employment in fact is far more frugal, far more effective, we believe. That's why the model is being put into place, and that sort of thing will move ahead.

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Do we have the answers to all of those? No, we don't, because we are still working through some new ways of trying to engage students. As we said, they learn in different fashions, in different ways. Some people are far more hands-on; some people are far more academic; some people are far more cerebral. Others are far more visual in the way they learn. We know this. Those of us who have worked in human relations, communications and education know for sure that each child learns in a different fashion. That's the beauty of a skilled teacher, to be able to pick that out, where a couple of the kids get it and some of the others don't. The teacher spends time to make the connections with the mind of that other child who may understand it with an analogy to music or to sports or to some other example—maybe their own experiences.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is rapidly moving along here, but I'd like to read a recommendation from the Rae report. I know the member from Nickel Belt will certainly be anxious to hear this. These are recommendations concerning apprenticeship training in Ontario:

“Recognize apprenticeship as a post-secondary destination.... Assign to colleges the government's role” that is presently being played “and outreach to employers” for those apprenticeship programs that are delivered by colleges as a core business, and “work collaboratively with colleges to designate apprenticeship as a post-secondary program.”

Why is that important? I think it's important because, as I began with Mr. Lyall before, people have felt there is a stigma; there's no question about it. In Ontario we saw how people were almost abandoned, and it was a second-rate area to look at trades and other than university pursuits. Now we're recognizing that was one big mistake. We are recognizing that all new schools need to have opportunities for labs and shops that provide flexibility, to put in the kinds of equipment that technology will provide for you to be up to date with the community, the

business community, for example, or whatever it is, whether it's in automotive manufacturing, health care; it doesn't matter what it is. The technology is moving so quickly that it's a challenge to learn about the very process of education and the anticipation of what is happening. That's why it's so fundamental to have people from the community where the students may be employed. That's why it's so fundamentally important to have them involved in the process of helping to guide the content and the usage of certain machinery and pieces of equipment.

Therefore, these are going to be exciting times. I think we will all learn greatly by this experience. Frankly, I know it's a challenge for big government or big systems to demonstrate flexibility. The anathema of big government, often, is flexibility. It's not easy for it, because it wants to be fair to everybody, and in the name of being fair to everybody, sometimes it's not fair to some people who are the exceptions. That's what makes it a challenge for all of us in government to be able to respond in such a fashion to the differentials of the human condition.

Mr. Speaker, I will stop my comments now and welcome any comments or questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: I listened intently to what the member from Ottawa Centre had to say. Let me offer the following comments in response. He said that sometimes in a philosophy of innovation there might not be models you can refer to and you have to create your own. I just want to make this point: Where we don't want to be is in a position where we're undermining the Ontario secondary school diploma. So I think you need to be really careful about what you're accepting as a program that's going to qualify for an equivalent learning program. I'm going to assume, although I've not had any discussions with the BC Ministry of Education, that that was the same thing they were thinking about when they were setting up their equivalent credentials for secondary school credits. If I look at BC, I would have to say that it looks like they've covered the waterfront in terms of looking at courses which would comply and could be recognized as equivalent programs.

So 408 programs are listed courses that count for a BC secondary school diploma as external credit courses, or equivalency learning courses, as we are defining them in this bill—408. That's a significant number. I would have thought they looked at all potentials and all opportunities, especially because they did the work between 1997 and 2001, so it's not that far past. But the problem I see is that the courses they came up with would probably be very ineffective as courses for students we would consider to be at risk and the ones I'm assuming we're trying to help.

So I say again, yes, you can look at other models, and maybe you create your own, except that I'm not sure how much room you really have to move. That's what my concern is. They had 408 courses that they thought were equivalent or had good value that weren't undermining their high school education diplomas, yet the over-

whelming majority became courses that would be the least likely to be accessible by kids who were at risk.

Ms. Wynne: I want to build on the comments of the member from Ottawa Centre and give some examples of programs that are already working. These are programs that were funded through the school-college work initiative in 2005-06. The first one is called Apprenticeship Plus. It's a partnership between Rainbow District School Board, Sudbury Catholic District School Board, the Conseil scolaire de district du Grand Nord de l'Ontario and the Conseil scolaire de district catholique du Nouvel-Ontario and Cambrian College. Some 25 grade 12 students will earn a combination of secondary and college-delivered basic cook apprenticeship in-school training, level one. Students will also receive a college certificate for the completion of the first semester of the advanced cook apprenticeship and may be eligible to write exemption tests for advanced standing in the advanced cook apprenticeship level. So that's a start.

This one is called Destination College. This is a partnership between Northern College and the District School Board Ontario North East and Northeastern Catholic District School Board: 15 students who are likely to become school leavers will complete secondary graduation requirements at Northern College and obtain advanced standing credits against the college diploma through team teaching between secondary school teachers and college staff.

This one is Trades, Technology and Transition: Simcoe County District School Board, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and Trillium Lakelands District School Board in partnership with Georgian College and Canadore College. Some 25 students will attend learning centres in college campuses at Georgian and Canadore Colleges to earn secondary and college credits with a focus on trades and technology.

The school-college work initiative has been in place for a number of years, but it has had a light shone on it and new money has gone to this initiative to develop programs like this around the province. So I think it's important that all members in this House recognize that these programs do work, and we're supporting them and nurturing them through our student success initiative.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I'm pleased to comment on Bill 52. I think this bill is really one of those examples of good intentions making bad law. Everyone agrees that the intention to have our children go as far as possible in school or in trades is a very good thing. As a matter of fact, it's more than a good thing; it's an absolutely necessary talent to have when we're looking at competing on the world stage for good, worthwhile and well-paying jobs.

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So there is no doubt about the good intentions. The question is, can we tie these good intentions to penalize children, for they are children—so says the law—by removing from them a privilege that many of them require in order to make a living, to even have a part-time job?

Now, we have tied many things to drivers' licences. As a matter of fact, I sat on a committee where we proposed and did tie your licence to the support payments for your children, and upon default, your licence could be lifted. That was for the first time the tying of unrelated subjects, and here the person was penalized by losing his licence. I don't think the lack of initiative to continue at school is reason enough to penalize a child in this manner. I think it's punitive, and I think it will fail in its good intentions.

Mr. Leal: I was pleased to be here to listen to the remarks from the member from Ottawa Centre.

I hope the province of Ontario happened to be tuning in about 10 minutes ago when the member made his remarks, because he was quite articulate and quite clear. The member from Ottawa Centre has a lot of experience in this House and certainly has a very diversified background. Coming from Ottawa, he has been involved in a number of different activities over the years and has worked very closely with students and young people, so when he talks about a new model being developed in Ottawa to assist the training of individuals—young people—he knows what he is talking about because he has been working with them for so many years.

The real opportunity, as he's talked about, is to combine education with the ministry that he's currently with—training, colleges and universities. The first real opportunity is to bring the Ministry of Education together with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and to provide a platform and opportunity, particularly for those young people who are now seriously looking at the trades again and entering into apprenticeships. I mean, the potential there today is just unlimited.

If members had the opportunity perhaps to attend the lunch with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, one of the issues that they raised today based on surveys with their members, not only here in Ontario but throughout Canada, is the shortage of skilled tradespeople, and it's becoming a very serious impediment for economic growth in these small businesses—not having a skilled labour force readily available to join these businesses and expand their growth opportunities. So anything we can do to address this—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for Ottawa Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Patten: Let me thank the members from Nickel Belt, Don Valley West, Cambridge and Peterborough for their comments.

To the member from Nickel Belt, I would say I think your caution is a good one, a wise one, for looking at the range of things and that they just aren't all grabbed at and put together.

I am pleased that we have one bit of a different structural thing, and that's the commission that is there to oversee that: the Student Success Commission. There are a lot of checks and balances and support in the system now that we didn't have before, so I am hopeful that will work its way out.

But it doesn't try to address—and I think the member from Don Valley West, who gave some examples of the

sorts of things that are going on, is saying that a good part of the system is your requirements, which are obligatory, and then you have some electives, and now there is an opportunity for some local reality of where you live, whether you're in a rural area or an urban area, whether you're in the north or in the south, wherever you are. And I think it's two co-op credits for experience in something that relates to your particular area. I think particularly of the rural area and the agricultural community, and there are numerous examples of that happening here. I'd be happy to share it.

To my friend from Cambridge, I would say that the privilege that you talk about and the possible punitive element, which is of course always there—my hope is that that will be debated further in committee. I think the spirit that the government and the minister are attempting to promote is that you want to be fair. You want to look at if there are real needs for exemption, and if it's not possible, this is truly punitive. If it defeats the purpose of engaging someone, then of course we wouldn't want to do that.

I've run out of time. I did want to say something to my friend from Peterborough, but I'll tell him privately.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Munro: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments with regard to Bill 52. I think that everyone, not only in this Legislature but most people in Ontario, probably recognizes the kind of importance that lifelong learning plays. Certainly I think that for about the last 20 years there has been a growing movement that recognizes how important it is. We have the futurists who have told us that, depending on your age, you probably have to look forward to as many as four or possibly five career changes in your life.

When I think back on my father-in-law and my own father, at that time, the expectation was that when you finished school, you found a job and you were there until you retired, not the whole notion of the kind of mobility that exists in today's workforce and the kinds of pressures that are on all of us to be current, to continue our learning and be prepared to make those kinds of shifts.

It's in the context of those kinds of imperatives that we're looking at this particular piece of legislation and its attempt to address some of these issues, recognizing that in the course of the last 20 or 25 years we've not only seen the globalization of our community, of our culture and of our economy, we've also come to recognize the fact that we must prepare our young people in their ability to compete globally. If you look at every level of education, from the local high school through to the community colleges and the universities, all provide various forms of continuing education. Sometimes it's referred to as a credit or non-credit, but it's still dealing with that whole issue of lifelong learning.

We know that many, many employers look at methods of providing opportunities for their staff to become better educated in the specifics that are required for that particular area of job.

We also have things like the re-emphasis on apprenticeship programs. I can recall when the Ontario youth apprenticeship programs were first begun and encouraged within the high school systems across the province. It was based on the fact that those had fallen into disuse. I can recall that in my own high school where I taught, the equipment, the machinery, the kinds of things the students had to work with dated back to the 1960s, and this was the 1980s and the 1990s. So in the 1990s, there was that recognition that we needed to get back out and do a better job of making those connections.

For me, one of the most alarming statistics was that the average age of an Ontarian going into an apprenticeship program was 27 years of age. That suggested to me that for approximately 10 years, these individuals had been searching for what kind of opportunity would best suit them. When you look at the context of today and the kind of social imperatives that we have, obviously the whole issue around education and that continuing lifelong education is important. But there have been many, many things, as I've mentioned, about the institutions that have responded to the need as well as, certainly, all of the e-learning that is available to all of us, the long-distance education programs that are available. So we've got many, many opportunities for people to access information and to provide greater skills training.

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But what we're looking at, and the dilemma, then, is on the issue of the kids who drop out: who they are and what's the best way to deal with them. One of the things I feel—and there are a number that I want to talk about—is in trying to develop a profile, if you like, of the student at risk, the student who is unlikely to be successful or want to stay in school. Certainly, some of those individuals have been promoted for what is referred to as social promotion, and they know they didn't understand what they took in a particular grade level. They know they start day one in the next year at a disadvantage. So they are constantly, then, under that pressure and under that cloud of not feeling that they are going to be successful. I think that is one of the most unfortunate things that has been perpetrated, quite frankly, for quite a long time.

When I appeared many years ago as a deputant to the Royal Commission on Learning, I suggested at the time that one of the responsibilities of a parent was to send his or her child well rested, well fed and emotionally stable. I know that is the ideal, and the reality is that there are many children who come to school missing any one or all three of those, but I think it's important to be reminded that that is a parental responsibility. When you look at what the schools are trying to achieve, as I was in making this presentation as a secondary school teacher, it is very difficult to do that without those kinds of prerequisites. There are also the students, I recall, who simply have the kind of personality that doesn't lend itself to the regular school program, and many of them find themselves being extremely successful once they go beyond school.

There are many programs that have been designed to try to capture the interests of those students who may be

at risk. I think back on programs such as alternative education, which did a wonderful job of students who had dropped out—and I think it's important that there is recognition—who then decided after a year or so that maybe that wasn't quite the best decision they made, but they needed to have an ability to fast-track. They needed to be able to choose courses that were appropriate for their learning style and for their goals.

There has also been the extraordinary expansion over the years of co-operative education. I think that program has done a great deal to give students the sense of the relevance of what they're doing in the classroom and what it means when you step outside, into the community. Certainly I saw many, many students who benefited enormously from even one semester of a co-op education opportunity.

When we were in government we introduced equivalency. This is an opportunity that was available, actually, to Canadians in most provinces but not in Ontario. This meant, then, that for those people who had life experiences, it would allow them to be able to look at an achievement level without having to go back and take grade 10 math, or something like that, as a method of making sure that door is always open to lifelong learning. That's what the GED program does for young adults.

As a member of the former government, the whole notion of creating mandatory volunteer hours was one that allowed students to step out into the community. As a teacher, when I had people come from various agencies within our community to give students a sense of what was available and what were the needs of our community in the broader sense, they found that extremely valuable. It's the same with being able to provide volunteer hours. So I think we need to look at this piece of legislation in the context of a great deal that has gone on before in attempting to find those ways where we will provide the best for our young people.

There has been some comment made, and I would be remiss if I didn't echo the sentiments expressed already, with regard to the cost and complexity of equivalent learning. I've given some examples to demonstrate that there are avenues and doors that are open for students who find that the regular classroom program is not suitable for them. When we look at what the government has laid out, there are two issues around the question of equivalent learning. You have to be very, very careful, I think, (a) in terms of the cost and (b) in terms of the quality of what actually constitutes equivalent learning. I fear that it may be what one of my friends describes as "same dog, new hair," that you are looking at maybe an elaborate process which at the end of the day isn't going to do much more than what is currently available in terms of choice. I think we have to be very, very careful about processes that simply become very bureaucratically driven or open to question in terms of their equivalency.

I'd like to talk for a moment too about the whole principle that's behind this bill of enforcement, of making people stay at school. The bill is silent on the issue of when is a student a dropout. My experience is

that students don't wake up one morning and say, "Okay, this is it. I'm going to the main office in the school. I'm now leaving." It's generally a drifting. It's generally something like, well, they don't go for a couple of days and then they're missing their assignments, or maybe they think they'll get caught up on them. So, "Maybe I'll go next week," and that sort of spreads out.

When is a student actually a dropout? And then how do you find them? There are attendance counsellors attached to each board, as I understand—certainly in the one that I'm most familiar with. It was always a difficulty in the fact that kids move away if they're actually giving up. They'll go and live with another parent or somebody else, but they're gone. Then the question becomes that not only are they now actually a dropout, but how do you find them? What is the cost of enforcement? Those are all issues in terms of the notion that you're going to be able to just have a simple process that says, "Okay, this person has gone."

When this person has gone, apparently, now we deal with the issue of the driver's licence. It's rather interesting to look at some of the public comments that have been made about trying to find a relationship between staying in school and having your driver's licence. I'd like to take a moment to quote from Kate Heartfield, who was writing in the *Ottawa Citizen* on Tuesday, December 20. She says, "Okay, so anyone who doesn't want to take their 'learning as far as possible' shouldn't be allowed to drive? By that logic, the province should remove licences from smart high school graduates who choose not to go to university, or from adults who stubbornly refuse to learn how online banking works."

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"Pursuing an education has never been a 'corresponding obligation' for the privilege of driving a car. Mr. Kennedy just invented it. The students to whom this rule applies could have grandparents who didn't finish high school, but have been driving" a car "since the Korean War. There is no connection between writing an essay and handling a car. They're both very useful skills, but one is not necessary for the other.

"Dropping out of school has inherent consequences: the missed opportunity for an education, the low chances for good employment and a fulfilling career. Truancy is punishable by fines and probation. There's no need to impose another consequence—an arbitrary one at that.

"Government by whim is no way to instill respect for authority. When a teenager refuses to let her sister use the phone, an appropriate punishment might be the removal of phone privileges. Removing the car she needs to get to her summer job would be cruel and ineffective.

"Since the province seems to want to play the role of the parent, it should at least try to be a good parent. It should restrict itself to punishments that have some connection to the crime...."

I think that probably demonstrates, in a way, the leap between the notion of staying in school and losing your licence. I also think it's a rather interesting thing, because to me, when the bill was first introduced, one of the

things I thought of was the fact that it presumes all kids have driving licences; it presumes they have families where a car is available to them. I would suggest that that's simply not the case. There are many, many students who might fall into the category of being at risk for whom this penalty is absolutely meaningless.

The real challenge then is the question of the relevance: Where are the jobs? What's the future? It is speaking to things like that that frankly is important to kids. They understand that it is a challenge, that there is the need for lifelong learning, that therefore they should stay in school, but that will happen with a carrot, not with a stick.

As I say, there is no correlation between driving a car and staying in school. In fact staying in school has everything to do with motivation; it has everything to do with making sure that that's why you want to go to school: because there is that motivation. Whether you have a driver's licence or whether you have access to a car has absolutely nothing to do with why you should stay in school.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: I want to thank the member from York Mills for her contributions, particularly for her insight regarding what she saw when she was in the classroom with respect to decisions that young people make about dropping out.

I just want to quote a little bit further from the Ottawa Citizen, from the same article that she was using. I really find the government's intention around linking the driver's licence to staying in school such a silly thing to be doing, especially when there's no evidence from the US, despite what the minister had to say tonight, that any of this works in convincing students to stay in school.

Kate Heartfield also said the following:

"So teenagers who do drop out—the most alienated, troubled kids for whom the rules mean nothing—will find they cannot even take a driver's licence test, or get a day job. They'll drive without licences and take jobs at night if they can find them. Or they'll end up on the streets.

"This legislation and the Tories' Safe Schools Act are two sides of the same bad coin. The province is pushing and pulling young people in and out of school.

"Mr. Kennedy does also want to address the problems they're having while they're in school. A more flexible and interesting curriculum could" probably help.

"I doubt it can eliminate it. There are 16- and 17-year-old dropouts who are struggling with depression, parenthood, addiction, or sheer listlessness. Some of these young people might not be ready for grade 11 or 12; a year off to get well or just to grow up might be the best thing for some of them. Not everyone will finish high school on the government's schedule.

"Citizens grant the provincial government the power to license drivers, in the interest of safety. They don't grant the government that power so it can punish and isolate troubled teens."

I thought that Kate Heartfield described it really well in those remarks. I don't understand why the government

thinks somehow that this punitive measure is really going to entice kids to say in school. I think quite the opposite is going to happen. They're going to see it as very punitive and be even more compelled to drop out.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I am very pleased to rise this evening to speak to Bill 52 in support. I do want to thank the member for York North for her comments, speaking about what we can do to move our young adults forward. That's clearly what I heard.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about a program that's available. The Bluewater school board is one of the school boards that I have the privilege of representing at this Legislature. I have five school boards in total in the riding of Huron-Bruce.

There is a specific program that I do want to make reference to that is happening through the Kincardine high school. What they have done is a masonry program. They take 12 students who have had, I would say, the most difficulty in school in what I would call a regular four-walls standard work area, and dropouts are very high. What they have done is taken these students and gone out into the community, and they actually do, all morning, masonry work. This program has been going on for the last couple of years. I had the opportunity to go and meet the students. They were able to tell me their stories about how this had changed their lives, which have turned around entirely their outlook and what they will bring forward.

We know that the traditional methods are not always what work for everyone. What this bill does is give opportunities to all of our students in recognition that we have different needs. When I look at the masonry program in Kincardine and how successful it has been, we need to do more. This bill does that.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Martiniuk: Thank you very much once again, Mr. Speaker, for the second-last word of the evening.

I'd like to thank my colleague the member for York North once again. She brings to this place a wealth of experience as a practical teacher, a teacher in the classrooms; not theory, but practice.

One of the points she raises is something that occurred to me she defined, in my mind, to a greater degree. Like most of us here I spent some time in school, a little longer than I wanted to on some occasions. I get this picture in my mind of individuals who don't want to be in the situation they're in. I can recall students—they were nice people. However, for whatever reason, through intelligence, through motivation, they just did not wish to be in school. Unfortunately, not all of them, some of them did play a most disruptive role in the classroom.

So we're asking our teachers, who work so very hard, to stretch the limits of their talent, to stretch the limits of their experience, by attempting to control the situation with individuals who do not want to be in that situation and could prove disruptive to other students in the classroom. It's a practical matter but it's something that must be addressed.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for York North, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Munro: I appreciate the comments made by the members from Nickel Belt, Huron–Bruce and Cambridge. I found it interesting that the member from Huron–Bruce made reference to this program, which I think I've seen demonstrated. I think they were in Toronto a while ago, a year or so ago. It was a good demonstration of the kind of flexibility that I would argue exists in our schools at this point.

One of the points I made was that stepping into this whole, rather murky area of equivalent learning obviously is of great concern for people in terms of how it's going to be. We heard this evening of examples in other

jurisdictions. I think the member from Huron–Bruce has simply supported my point, which is that a great deal of flexibility and opportunity currently exists. It is that kind of work that needs to be continued. It's not the kind of costly programs and questionable issues around developing equivalent learning, and it's not about providing some kind of costly punitive system because obviously, as I've mentioned, the question of compliance, the question of taking away the driver's licence or preventing it has nothing to do with staying in school. I think that, frankly, the bill is taking us in the wrong direction instead of looking at and celebrating what we have.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 of the clock, June 1.

The House adjourned at 2132.

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