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Wednesday 30 August 2006

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mercredi 30 août 2006

**Standing committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Education Statute Law
Amendment Act
(Learning to Age 18), 2006

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Loi de 2006 modifiant des lois
en ce qui concerne l'éducation
(apprentissage jusqu'à l'âge
de 18 ans)

Chair: Bob Delaney
Clerk: Tonia Grannum

Président : Bob Delaney
Greffière : Tonia Grannum

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 30 August 2006

Mercredi 30 août 2006

The committee met at 0959 in the Sheraton Hamilton Hotel, Hamilton.

**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)**

Consideration of 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 Chair (Mr. Bob Delaney): Good morning, everyone. This is the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. Thank you all for coming out nice and early this morning. We are here to consider 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.

ONTARIO TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair: Our first deputation this morning will be from the Ontario Teachers' Federation, Hilda Watkins and Ruth Baumann. Are you here? Come on up. You get the first word of the day.

Please make yourself comfortable. You'll have 10 minutes to make your deputation. If you leave any time remaining, we'll divide the time among the parties for questions. Please introduce yourselves for the purposes of Hansard and proceed.

Ms. Hilda Watkins: Good morning. I'm Hilda Watkins, president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation, and with me today is Ruth Baumann, general secretary of the Ontario Teachers' Federation.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation welcomes the opportunity to provide the standing committee on legislative affairs with feedback on Bill 52. OTF is the statutory organization representing the professional interests of teachers employed in publicly funded Ontario

schools. It is composed of four affiliate organizations: l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. It has a membership of 155 teachers—excuse me; it has a membership of 155,000 teachers.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): It's gone up.

Ms. Watkins: Yes, in rapid order.

The publicly funded education system in Ontario has undergone many significant changes over the last 11 years. One of the unintended consequences has been an increase in the number of high school students who leave without graduating. While the current government has made publicly funded education a top priority in its mandate, there is much that remains to be done. Many within the education sector have concerns about portions of Bill 52.

When a young person makes the decision to leave high school, there are many contributing factors. Most of these have been documented and described fully by Dr. Bruce Ferguson of the Hospital for Sick Children in his research on school-leavers. Young people who were interviewed for the study commented about irrelevant curriculum, the level of difficulty of courses, the feelings of isolation and abandonment, and the lack of time and attention teachers were able to give them. In addition to the research done by Dr. Bruce Ferguson, there are telling statistics from Dr. Alan King's double cohort study supporting the need to focus on these students at risk.

In order to maximize every Ontario high school student's chances of success, the current government has demonstrated its commitment to students and student learning throughout their school careers with initiatives such as the curriculum review process, increased funding in select areas, smaller classes at the primary level, and the Student Success/Learning to 18 strategy.

It is the Student Success/Learning to 18 strategy that will undoubtedly have the greatest impact on the system for high school students. OTF's concerns with Bill 52 focus on the proposed amendments to the Education Act and the complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act. Among our concerns are equivalent learning, attendance, and linking compulsory attendance in section 21 of the Education Act to obtaining and maintaining a driver's licence.

The proposals in this bill which concern the teachers of Ontario most deeply are those related to equivalent learning. General reaction to the suggestion of an alternative diploma was extremely negative. The public reaction was shared by educators that a consolation diploma devalues the students and all student learning. An Ontario secondary school diploma—OSSD—should hold the same value and significance for every student in Ontario who earns it. There is more ready acceptance for the proposed high skills major diploma, partly because it does not change the intent, content or rigour of the OSSD.

The issue for the Ontario Teachers' Federation is the proposed provisions for equivalent learning, which the bill defines as "a learning situation that falls outside the instruction traditionally provided by a board and for which a pupil's success can be reasonably evaluated." As a legal construct, such a definition is extremely vague. While the framers of the bill may have intended to convey flexibility, the definitions are so loose as to be meaningless. They may, in fact, be counterproductive in opening eligibility to activities and programs which will not contribute to the government's stated policy of keeping students learning until 18.

The legal definition needs more precision and, at the very least, there should be a requirement for Ministry of Education approvals. Such approvals should be clearly defined in regulation. The regulation should outline the rigour in standards and accountability. The process for obtaining ministry approval should be more than a requirement to obtain a business licence.

Another concern of the teachers of Ontario in this section of the bill is the silence on accreditation or standards for those who would deliver these equivalent learning programs. Research tells us that teachers are a significant factor in student success.

One of the statutory objects of the Ontario Teachers' Federation is to enhance the teaching profession. In its more than 60-year history, OTF has continually promoted higher standards and greater professional development for Ontario teachers. This section of the bill has a legal loophole that undermines student access to the most qualified teachers in the country. The current language places no restriction on or definition of "instructors." Such an oversight leaves the door open to unqualified people.

Each school board operates differently in terms of attendance monitoring and counselling. The more support there is for students, especially those deemed at-risk, through regular use of attendance counsellors, social workers, child and youth workers, and other educational support workers, the greater the chances of success. Conventional wisdom has always told us that prevention is of greater value than cure. Investments in these kinds of programs that keep students in school will pay greater dividends than punitive actions.

School boards and individual schools have a wide range of policies and practices governing lates and/or absences. Sometimes a parent is notified on a child's

third late; other times not until the 10th late. The term "habitually absent" needs a clear definition understood by all schools and boards. How will the attendance be monitored to include licensing? Will all students be treated equally? How will the payment of fines for non-attendance be administered by schools, school boards and for purposes of obtaining a driver's licence?

The Chair: Just to advise you, you have about two minutes.

Ms. Watkins: Fine. Currently, section 21 of the act deals with compulsory attendance from age five through 16. There is little evidence that tying compulsory attendance to the right of a young person to obtain and maintain a driver's licence will have the desired effect. There are some students for whom this proposed restriction has no relevance, but for others, not having access to a driver's licence is an unfair and disproportional burden. Some students living in urban areas might not feel a need to have a driver's licence whether or not they are full-time students. Many students from low-income families may never be able to afford the insurance to become drivers. Conversely, some students in rural or farming communities may be required to have a licence to help out with family obligations and circumstances.

In conclusion, the Ontario Teachers' Federation asks the government to take a closer look at the absence of clarity in parts of this bill. We share the government's goal in enhancing and strengthening the educational experiences of Ontario's more than two million students. Ontario's 155,000 teachers in our publicly funded schools are on the verge of meeting those two million students to begin a new school year. We want this year to give every student the best opportunity for success. Every student deserves a school career that ends with an OSSD. It would be most unfortunate if, due to imprecise legislative wording, the bill has the opposite effect and undermines student success. The Ontario Teachers' Federation remains willing to assist the government in rectifying these problems.

The Chair: That, almost to the second, concludes your 10 minutes, so I want to commend you on your punctuality and thank you very much for your deputation this morning.

Sausto Moreno?

LIGHTHOUSE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

The Chair: Lighthouse Christian Academy, Ms. Van Pelt. Thank you for joining us this morning.

Ms. Deani Van Pelt: Thank you for the invitation to participate.

The Chair: Please begin by stating your name clearly for Hansard. You have 10 minutes to do your presentation. If you leave any time remaining, I'll divide it among the parties for questions. Proceed when you're ready.

1010

Ms. Van Pelt: I'll begin with an introduction of myself, several broad implications of Bill 52 and then

specific concerns that I have about Bill 52 as it applies to home-educated students.

I'm an assistant professor in the faculty of education, Redeemer University College. I'm the primary author and investigator of a study involving over 4,000 Canadian home-schooled students. I'm currently the principal researcher in a study of independent schools in Ontario. I've served as an expert witness on home-schooling. My husband and I have home-schooled our three children, and I'm active in a number of home-schooling associations. I'm a registered member in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers. I've taught in both public and private schools in this province.

Bill 52 has significant broader public policy implications. This is not the focus of my presentation, but I'd like to point out two. The focus of these implications is the expansion of the mandate of the Ministry of Education. Where the mandate was once for six- to 16-year-olds, it's now expanding to include 17- and 18-year-olds. I've no reason to believe that the logic might not be extended to include mandatory participation for children under the age of six.

While the Ministry of Education once promised to provide a secondary school education for teacher-based, classroom-based education, it's now moving on to include education outside of these classroom settings. My concern is that boundaries be maintained for the reach of the Ministry of Education. I believe Bill 52 fundamentally expands the educational mandate of the Ministry of Education and is one of the most fundamental changes to the Education Act since its introduction. This may not be intended, but it's nevertheless a consequence of this bill.

Secondly, I believe parental responsibility is being subtly undermined by this bill. Employers becoming truancy officers and the high fine to children for non-compliance takes responsibility for our youth away primarily from parents and extends it to broader sectors in society.

While I offer these earlier observations as broad implications of Bill 52 for your serious consideration, I do want this government, if it's insistent on moving forward with a fundamental change to the Education Act, to consider the potential implications for 16- and 17-year-old students who are not pursuing a secondary school diploma through the public, separate or independent schools but are nevertheless in compliance with the Education Act, section 21, in pursuing their home education.

I'd like to refer you to page 6 of the written presentation that I've given to you. It's important that we understand section 21. A previous speaker probably hasn't read it lately because there was some suggestion that education is compulsory for five- to 16-year-olds. If you read it closely, it's six- to 16-year-olds. That's why I just want to take you on a quick look at section 21 of the Education Act. In my diagram, the first section shows that the following forms of education represent those that are in compliance with compulsory attendance. There are two sets of folk: those who are attending school—this is

the second layer of my diagram—and those who are excused from attending school. School, for the act, is any publicly funded school: English, French, separate or public.

Under those who are attending school are those in traditional OSSD-oriented programs. Now there is a proposal for equivalent learning—I assume those are OSSD-oriented programs—and then you've got exemptions. It's unclear to me if the exemptions go under those that are determined to be attending school or whether it is something outside of attending school and being excused from attending school. Those who are educated in private schools in this province are educated and in compliance with section 21, but they are called "excused" from attending school. Those who are home-educated fit in under this category as well.

So what's the issue? The students who are excused from attending school are not under the jurisdiction of a local principal or local school board, they are excused from that, yet Bill 52—I'm looking now at page 7 of my written presentation—only makes opportunity for compliance to be indicated or to be given by a local school principal. If Bill 52 would result in local school boards issuing compliance certificates for their local home-schooled students or, for that matter, their local orthodox Mennonite students—and I encourage you to look more closely at that community and the way they deliver secondary education—I would like to inform the members of this committee that we've been down this road before, and we have to learn from the horrific, invasive, discriminatory lessons of the past three decades.

This is a story of how home-educated students were treated in the past in Ontario, when local school boards, without an understanding of the philosophies, methods and outcomes of home-based education, took it upon themselves to determine if their locally home-schooled students were in compliance with clause 21(2)(a). Even though the Education Act has always allowed that a student is excused from attendance at school if that person is receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere—that is, home-schooling has always been legal in this province—each local school board, under a 1981-issued memorandum, opted for a wide variety of diverse interventions with home-educated students. Each school board designed a slightly different approach to interfacing with home-educated students, and because of the lack of understanding of home education, many approaches by local principals were extremely invasive. The issue was always, "Is satisfactory instruction occurring?" Sometimes well-intentioned, but more commonly deeply suspicious, local school principals invasively investigated their local home-schoolers, some with surprise visits demanding to enter homes and others with requirements for extensive reporting and personal interviews with children. Hundreds of families in the 1980s and early 1990s were referred for a lengthy inquiry process with the Ontario Ministry of Education, and yet we know of no cases where satisfactory instruction was ultimately found not to be occurring. These seemed to be

information-gathering methods for local principals and boards to learn about home-schooling.

This discriminatory, inequitable and invasive treatment of Ontario home-educated students was finally resolved in 2002, when the Ministry of Education issued PPM 131 to its school boards. It's not a law, it's not a regulation, but it told school boards to accept the fact that students are excused from attending school if they're given written notification by parents.

I caution this committee to allow for no such repetition of pre-PPM 131 attitudes towards home-educated students. For 20 years, home-educated students were treated under a pre-Charter of Rights and Freedoms memorandum. In 2002, this was finally changed. It would be a drastic step into pre-charter territory and treatment to move back to requiring the local public school principal to prepare documentation for home-educated students.

So what do I recommend? Well, Bill 52—and I'm on page 8.

The Chair: Just to remind you, you have about two minutes.

Ms. Van Pelt: Certainly. Bill 52 does propose opportunity for issuance of confirmation that students are compliant with section 21 of the compulsory attendance requirements. I encourage this committee, whatever legislation you ultimately draft, to continue in the spirit behind PPM 131, where the student's usual educator, in this case the parents, declare that they are meeting this requirement. This issue of confirmation should recognize that the child is excused from attending school.

I know other groups will be presenting to you some sort of a guarantor precedent that has been set with the passport application. There's another concern, though, and I haven't raised this yet. What about the home-educated students who have completed their home education but happen to be 17 and may be taking a break by having a year of employment before pursuing post-secondary studies or moving entirely into the world of work? How will these students be able to demonstrate that they have completed their education? Again, I suggest that parents ought to be able to complete a form, somehow with some method of a guarantor process with home-school authorities, and not work through their local school board to establish such credentialing.

While we applaud the recognition in this bill that learning can take place in jurisdictions outside of publicly funded, regulated, controlled, teacher-led, classroom-based educational settings, we are deeply concerned that this bill will result in placing the Ministry of Education—that is, the local school board and the local secondary school—in a position of authority over all these alternative educational settings.

We believe that publicly funded secondary schools should focus on providing the best classroom-based, subject- and content-oriented education that is possible and continue to respect that learning and education can occur in other settings, but they should not move into regulating, approving and controlling these other settings.

What looks and sounds like a partnership is an invasive measure.

The Chair: Thank you. That concludes the time you have this morning. I want to thank you very much for coming in and making your deputation. There will, unfortunately, not be time for questions.

HURON SHORES TECHNOLOGY CONSORTIUM

The Chair: Our next deputant is the Huron Shores Technology Consortium. Good morning, and welcome.

Mr. Bob Menard: Good morning. My name is Bob Menard. I'm here with Sandy Donald to talk to you a little bit about your legislative amendments and an organization that we've just newly created in the Bruce-Grey county area to assist in ensuring that high-quality training is delivered to secondary students in that location.

By way of introduction, the Huron Shores Technology Consortium is an attempt in the Bruce-Grey county area to pull together a number of divergent groups, which include school boards, employers, municipal governments, provincial funding agencies and anyone else who has some sort of interest and input into the coordination of the education activity we're talking about with this particular legislative amendment.

1020

With respect to our overall concepts when we approach this issue, we think there needs to be strong support for this approach, to ensure that education to 18 is meaningful and able to keep students in the classroom. We understand that there need to be a lot of choices in this process and we understand that there's a real opportunity to integrate some of the activities in the community into making those choices considerably more valuable.

The role of Huron Shores Technology Consortium in this environment is to assist all the different parties in pulling together a comprehensive plan for the communities that we intend to assist. We think this may be a model that other communities, as it gets developed, may be wanting to take a look at.

For the "need" point of this, what I'd like to do is turn it over to Sandy, who will describe some of the facts we discovered that make us believe that the integration of the legislation and community-based activities is a very important step forward.

Mr. Sandy Donald: Thanks very much, Bob. Good morning. The Huron Shores Technology Consortium has done something that is rather unique. As Bob was telling you earlier, we've taken local government, we've taken the district school boards, we've taken the large unions, we've taken large industry and we've taken the labour boards and brought them together. As you can imagine, it's like herding cats, but we managed to get all this together and it's actually working out really well. We came from a premise that we were going to be resolution-based. We were not going to be confrontational, regardless of what facet of the industry we came from. What

we've slowly but surely done now is started to liaise with some of the colleges, and we're starting to make network friendships and acquire business partners. It's giving us the ability, we believe, in grades 11 and 12, to meet the government's amendment to the Education Act under Bill 52, where we will give the children and youth some choices.

We also believe we are in such critical need, especially in the rural areas in this province. We have an inordinate number of young people who are not achieving their graduation—45,000, 50,000 people. That's not acceptable to us. To us, it's a waste of human beings. We really believe that we've got to start getting our kids into decent, meaningful jobs. Now, we're all sitting around here and, apart from the ladies, basically we're sitting with nae hairs and grey hairs. We're getting to the point where we're getting old. My dad said to me a few years back, "You'll know when it's time to retire." Well, it's time for me to retire. We have got to get our kids in behind us so we can get them into the trades. We have come up through the trades and we're seeing support from everywhere that we go. There is not any person we've approached who is not supportive of this mandate of going forward to provide tradespeople for the next 20 to 30 years. I think the provincial government's part is to allow these choices to take place. I think the provincial government's part is to get people who have come up through the trades to speak out, to tell the kids that there are choices out there. There are immense choices out there. There are good-paying choices. There are choices that will put meat and potatoes on plates for a long period of time.

I'm going to pass over to Bob to conclude the remarks, but be aware that we are here to support the government in this. If you need a hand, we will try and help you out. The model we're working to is not perfect, but it's coming.

Mr. Menard: Just to pick up on some of the points that Sandy made and to give you some data that we found, Canada will be short a million skilled tradesworkers in the next 15 years. The average age of skilled trade and other workers in Ontario is about 50 years old, and in some cases well above that. The local area that we're working for, the Bruce-Grey area, relies heavily on skilled trades and other employable workers to provide a robust economy, and we're consistently seeing an outmigration of youth in that area who need to go someplace else to get the required education that would allow them to get these high-paying jobs. And when they leave, they often don't come back.

Just to contrast that against what Sandy has mentioned with respect to the current system and how students are surviving, 32% of voluntary high school students don't gain enough credits for graduation and they will earn, on average, 40% less than those who do graduate. We just see that there's an opportunity here to put these two issues together, along with what we're talking about as a model. Basically, for this area, the Huron-Grey area, we've tried to pull the resources together, as Sandy said,

of employers, local governments, unions, local boards of education, colleges, universities, apprenticeship programs, as well as community agencies, parents, students and workers, and basically create a one-stop shopping environment where we can coordinate information, coordinate programs and ensure that there's a seamless delivery of all the different services that would require achieving a higher level of high school attendance.

Generally, in conclusion, what we're trying to do is assist the area in getting meaningful, good-paying, long-term work for the youth and others; fit in with the government's mandated learning-to-18 programs for schools; serve clients challenged with equity considerations; establish skilled trades training programs; identify and fill gaps for local employment needs other than those of indentured trades; coordinate with schools, colleges, universities, other trainers and employers to ensure seamless transition through the education and training system; develop a local labour pool that has adequate skills for a highly technical and competitive global marketplace; and retain and expand our social and economic well-being in the Huron Shores region.

That pretty much concludes our remarks. Thanks for the opportunity to make—Sandy, did you have anything to say?

Mr. Donald: Yes, I had one more thing to say. The folk we are looking at here—as we get the youth migrated into the right things, we're then going to tackle the underemployed. We have a tremendous number of people who are underemployed. I'm part of the Women's House of Grey-Bruce board, where we look at specific issues surrounding women and gender-definitive issues. There are a tremendous number of smart women out there who are not realizing their earning capacity. The government of Ontario, I believe, should then start to focus, after this, on underemployed people. There are a tremendous number of people who, once we can get them back into that system you're looking at right now—you may be able to bring them in so that they can get qualified and they can make decent wages and they can look after their kids. This will also take the burden off the provincial government in some respects.

We're making a real good start here. We know that the wheels will slip and grind and won't go very fast all the time—we understand that—but we're here to help you. If you need a hand, please contact us. Thank you all very much.

The Chair: And thank you. That, to the second, concludes the 10 minutes that you've got, so I compliment you on your remarks.

MISSISSAUGA CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOL ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Our next deputation will be the Mississauga Christian Homeschool Association, Anne Culham, please. Good morning and welcome. You will have 10 minutes to do your deputation this morning. If you leave any time remaining, I'll ask one or more parties to pose

some questions to you. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard, and proceed.

Ms. Anne Culham: Ladies and gentlemen of the standing committee, thank you for allowing me to come and speak to you this morning about my concerns with Bill 52. My name is Anne Culham, and I am the administrator and spokesperson for the Mississauga Christian Homeschool Association, a home-school support group for families in Mississauga and the surrounding area. The group I represent has 70 member families, with a total of 162 school-aged children, of whom 52 are in high school.

Alexander Graham Bell, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Claude Monet, John Wesley, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Charlie Chaplin, George Washington Carver, Winston Churchill, Charles Dickens, Florence Nightingale, Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, C.S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pierre Curie—these famous people are well known to us today. They were writers, scientists, inventors, statesmen and thinkers. The thing not so well known is that all were educated at home.

Following in the footsteps of these great home-schooled pioneers are children and youth who are becoming well known for their educational excellence, who are being accepted from home-school into colleges and universities across Canada and who are making their mark in society. Although still a small fraction of the school-aged population, there are currently between 20,000 and 30,000 children in Ontario who are home-schooled. The parents of these children are intensely interested in the education of their children. Educational policy statements and new legislation are closely examined for their potential impact on their home-schooling choice.

1030

Bill 52 will amend the Education Act by raising the compulsory age of school attendance to 18 and by making complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act. There is one point in Bill 52 that is of special significance to youth who are educated at home, and it is the subject and focus of my presentation, the section that deals with “Request for confirmation.”

Before I discuss the issue of Bill 52, let me present some facts. Home education, once considered a fringe movement, has taken its place in society as a viable and realistic choice for many families. A recent Canadian study has found that less than 2% of home-educating parents were educated at home themselves. What would make parents who were educated in an institutional setting take such a step with their own children?

Parents are increasingly interested in home education because of the superior results that have been published in study after study. The largest Canadian study, conducted by Deani Van Pelt, found that children educated at home achieve superior results from an academic, social and civic perspective. Academic results from Canadian achievement tests show that ninth to 12th graders achieve at the 85th percentile in reading, 84th percentile in language and 67th percentile in mathematics. Where students were educated solely at home, unmixed with

institutional and home-schooled experiences, the results were higher.

Contrary to common perception, home-schooled children are well involved in community activities and events. The study found that home-educated students participate on average in eight different extracurricular activities per year. Parents involve other adults in their children’s social and educational experiences, with their children taking lessons, tutoring, and group and co-operative learning. Over 70% belong to a local home-school support group such as ours, which provides ample opportunities for their children to socialize with their peers.

As adults, those who were formerly home-schooled hold responsible citizenship as a core value: 72% vote, less than 7% have ever collected employment insurance benefits, and none have received social security assistance. Over 80% volunteer in one or more capacities in the community, and virtually all have moved on to further education or have become active in the workplace.

Of course, there are costs and benefits in choosing to educate children at home. The typical home-schooling family is a two-parent family where the father is the primary income earner and the mother is the home educator. Most families exist on a single income. The direct costs for this form of education are approximately \$700 per year per child. The motivating factors for parents who educate their children at home, seen as real and tangible benefits, are strong family relationships, the ability to directly influence the child’s moral environment, and superior academic achievement. Home-schooled students report having highly satisfactory lives. All this is said to present the home-schooling community as one that is ahead of the curve in providing alternatives to learning that keep their children engaged and enthusiastic about their education.

Let’s turn to the central concern of home educators regarding Bill 52. It deals with the section on “Request for confirmation,” which states: “... in the case of a person who is not enrolled in a school of a board, a person designated by any board in whose area of jurisdiction the person resides” can provide the necessary confirmation. As a home-schooling community, we are opposed to this requirement for the following reasons:

—Since a youth who is educated at home is legitimately excused from attendance at school, we do not see the need to involve the school board in proving confirmation of school attendance.

—We feel that the school board would have difficulty in legitimately giving confirmation of attendance for home-schooled youth.

—Many parents of home-schooled youth would not willingly allow their children to go to a local school board for confirmation of attendance; rather, they would have their youth wait until they were 18 before applying for a driver’s licence.

—Home educators generally believe that a request for confirmation of attendance would become an opportunity

for the school board to question the adequacy of instruction of youth being educated at home.

—Many home-schoolers have a deep-seated mistrust of the school board, some of this being through personal experience and some through anecdotal stories told by family and friends.

As a home-schooling community, we would like to see Bill 52 amended to include an additional bullet that is applicable to youth being educated at home. As such, we propose that the section under “Compliance with s. 21, driver’s licence” be amended to include a specific statement on how youth who are educated at home may provide confirmation.

In collaboration with OCHEC and the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, we have developed a form to be used by home-schooled youth, a copy of which is included in the appendix in your handout. You’ve seen this already. The form’s content, structure and intent are based on a passport application. It presents an individual’s claims, and the claims are confirmed by a guarantor who is a member of a professional body and who has known the home educator and the youth for at least two years. We propose that the same type of confirmation used in a passport be used to confirm school attendance for home-schooled youth.

We propose that the home-schooled youth present the form to the Ministry of Transportation when applying for his or her driver’s licence, and the form be retained by the youth and not the Ministry of Transportation. It would simply be presented as legitimate evidence, much like a birth certificate or social insurance card. After confirmation of school attendance, the form would remain in the youth’s possession.

The Chair: Just to remind you, you have about two minutes.

Ms. Culham: In summary, we are in agreement with Bill 52, except in the area of confirmation. We support the tone and the intent of the bill to provide students with differing learning methods and an environment where they may succeed and graduate. Home-schooling is an educational choice that has come of age. It is a proven and successful method of training young people to become mature, healthy and contributing members of society. We want to ensure that the bill does not negatively impact youth who are actively engaged in their education at home and want to receive their driver’s licence at the first available opportunity.

Again, thank you for allowing me to address you this morning. Are there any questions?

The Chair: We would have time for one question, Mr. Klees, presuming it will be a concise preamble.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I just want to thank you for your presentation. You have been very consistent with the others we’ve heard on this issue. We’re hoping the government will see the wisdom of accepting your recommendation. We will certainly be putting forward an amendment for this committee to consider, and we hope we’ll get support from the government to ensure that this will be adopted as part of the changes to this act.

Ms. Culham: Thank you.

Mr. Klees: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for coming in this morning.

Ms. Culham: Thank you.

LANDSCAPE ONTARIO HORTICULTURAL TRADES ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Our next deputation will be from Landscape Ontario: Terry Murphy.

Good morning, and welcome. You’ll have 10 minutes to make your deputation. If you leave any time remaining, I’ll have a chance to assign one or more questions from the various parties. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard, and then proceed.

Mr. Terry Murphy: Terry Murphy, Landscape Ontario.

I represent a trade association with 2,000 members. Our industry in Ontario is an \$8-billion industry with 100,000 workers and 10,000 firms, so it’s a large industry.

Mr. Chairman, since we started 20 minutes early, I hope you won’t hold me to the 10 minutes, but thank you.

The Chair: I will hold you to the 10 minutes.

1040

Mr. Murphy: What is our interest in Bill 52? The major interest for Landscape Ontario is a tremendous shortage of labour. We can’t find enough good people to work in our industry. The government should be congratulated for this step in certain aspects, and the certain aspect I’m speaking of is the endeavour about the specialist high skills major. This is absolutely outstanding.

Don’t forget that the landscape industry is a tremendously important industry, because that’s where we get our oxygen: from plants. Young people need to know this, and the more we focus on the aspects of landscaping and its benefits to mankind the better.

Let me just mention that I think this will have a tremendous effect in general society. I think 16-year-olds are too young to work. What do you know in this life until you’re 40 years old? I think staying in school till 18 is good. The specialist high skills major is going to allow them to focus on the four pathways that exist, and many of those who are having trouble academically and who want to focus on a trade will be able to graduate from grade 12 with a major in particular subjects, such as landscaping.

I think this bill will help to keep more people working earlier in life and provide tax revenue to the system. I think it’s a great step because, obviously, having young people between 16 and 18 years old hanging around the malls is going to—have them in school. That’s where they should be. It will also lower the crime that we have in our society.

I congratulate the government for an attempt to return to the trades. To me, this is full cycle. I think govern-

ments have been remiss over the last 25 years in letting the trades escape the system. We need to focus on our co-op and guidance teachers in a big way, to make sure that they are explaining to young people—and I'm talking even about the elementary grades; that they have a good focus on the trades.

Again, I hope this bill will make a small attempt to fulfill a shortage in labour that we have, particularly in our business. If you look at 100,000 people working 40 years in their lifetime, we're losing 2,500 to 3,000 people each year. Our colleges are producing 300 graduates. I could probably put 5,000 young people to work this minute, but we can't find them—and I'm talking about skilled labour. I think the bill will help support this.

The penalties that you're proposing in the bill: I ask you to look at the penalties, the fines. Think of a single mother and a young person who is an offender under this. The mother is on social service and having trouble making ends meet, maybe going to a food bank, and all of a sudden you present them with a \$1,000 fine. Well, you and I know that you're not going to get any money. You can't get blood from a stone. I think the same thing applies to people who want to drive a car. If you prevent them from getting a licence, we'll get a society of young people out there driving automobiles without licences. We may be opening a can of worms here. I'm asking you to have a look at this.

In 10 minutes, I can't offer you solutions. I asked someone from our organization, "What do you think of the presentation?" and he said, "Don't bring a problem to someone without a solution." I believe that, but I can't give you a solution in this short a time. If you're having further hearings on it and you want someone to participate in a committee or whatever, I'd be pleased to step forward.

Members of our association support Bill 52. We really are excited about the specialist high skills major.

I think people such as Grant Clarke, Aldo Cianfrini, Audrey Cartile, Chantal Locatelli, some of the Ministry of Education personnel, are doing a fantastic job.

I thank you for the opportunity to make the presentation today.

The Chair: We should have a little bit of time for questions, beginning with Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Mr. Murphy, I agree with you about the whole problem of fines. As New Democrats, we attack this government for imposing these kinds of penalties, because we think they're not very intelligent, including the fact that if you link a driver's licence to attendance, that creates a problem because, as you said and as others indicated yesterday, they might end up driving without insurance or having a licence. That's a problem. But you indicate or you make it appear that this bill is about getting students into the trades. This bill is not about that. If it were, they would be introducing a different kind of bill. This bill is about forcing kids to stay in school until age 18. We believe it's a dumb idea. We believe there's no evidence anywhere in the world that shows that if you keep them until 18, they're going to stay.

The real problem that most of the people came to talk about yesterday is that a lot of students who leave after age 16 have certain problems. It could be that they suffer from fetal alcohol spectrum disorder; it could be that they have learning disabilities; it could be that these students have problems of sexual abuse or substance abuse, so that complicates the learning. It could be that some students simply don't enjoy the kind of curriculum that they were experiencing, and maybe you should make it more meaningful. There are a variety of reasons why there's a problem. This bill doesn't really tackle that. That's why we have a problem with it and we believe it shouldn't be passed. What do you think?

Mr. Murphy: Well, I couldn't disagree with you more. If we look at the fine print in the legislation and we look under "equivalent learning," we're looking at specialist high skills major programs. If the NDP understands where this will lead, a young person will come out of a grade 12 class with a skill that they can go to work immediately with, go into apprenticeship, further go to college, perhaps with a dual credit, or university. I totally disagree with you. This, to me and our industry, totally focuses on the trades. I suggest you read the fine print in the legislation and find out more about the specialist high skills major. I think this is phenomenal; I congratulate you. Keep up the good work, and educate the people who don't understand the fine print.

Mr. Marchese: Mr. Murphy, if you look at the fine print, this government is holding students from age 16 to 18 on the basis that they're providing this equivalent learning option. So—

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): The gentleman has provided an opinion, Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: The Chair is giving me time to complete the question. Is that okay with you, Mr. Racco?

The Chair: Mr. Marchese has the floor.

Mr. Marchese: We're going to hold students from age 16 to 18 on the basis that we have an equivalent learning option. My point is that if students are having learning problems, this is not going to solve them. I don't disagree with you that we should be offering meaningful options to students, and they could include the trades, and we should be looking at how we do that. The government claims they've already done that. Well, if they've done that, then we don't need this bill. If we need another option, why don't we include that in the education system as a way of arriving where you want to get to, which I agree with? But this bill won't get to the trades simply by saying that all of a sudden we've got an equivalent learning option and that's going to get to the trades. This is not the way to do it.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Murphy, if you wish, you can have a few seconds to summarize.

Mr. Murphy: No. I just would like to say that I would agree to disagree, and thank you for the opportunity to make my presentation.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Murphy.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): On a point of order, Mr. Chair: I'm not a regular member of

this committee; I'm just here because I'm the parliamentary assistant on this bill. But my understanding from other committees that I've sat on is that when there's a substantial amount of time, that time is divided among the three parties. We all know that Mr. Marchese will fill whatever amount of time he's given, so—

The Chair: And when there isn't a substantial amount of time, the Chair will assign—

Ms. Wynne: You had said initially, Mr. Chair, that there was going to be time—

The Chair: When there isn't a substantial amount of time, the Chair will assign one question in rotation. Thank you very much, Mr. Murphy.

HIGH DAY

The Chair: Our next presentation will be the HIGH Day home-school co-operative, Lisa McManus.

Ms. Lisa McManus: Good morning.

The Chair: Good morning. Welcome. You'll have 10 minutes for your deputation. If there's time remaining, we'll be able to assign it for questions. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard and proceed.

1050

Ms. McManus: Thank you for having me this morning. My name is Lisa McManus, and I'm a home-schooling mother to four children, ranging from junior kindergarten to grade 5. I'm also the administrator and general counsel to Grace Community Church in London. Today, I am here speaking on behalf of HIGH Day, a home-school co-operative. I'm also on the executive of that group.

HIGH Day is composed of 50 families. We meet weekly throughout the school year for the purpose of enrichment for the children and social support for the families. This September, we will meet with 150 children.

I'd like to thank Deani Van Pelt for her research on this home-school issue and for the portions of that research that were presented to you by Ms. Culham this morning. That research demonstrates that home education is successful in instilling a love and desire to learn in the youth who are home-schooled and they go on to become productive members of the community.

Revisions are needed in Bill 52 to protect and maintain the exemption from compulsory attendance that home-educated youth are guaranteed in the Education Act.

It has been said that "in the very definition of the term 'law' there inheres the idea and principle of choosing what is just and true." The punitive measures of Bill 52 extend to home-educated youth by virtue of the mechanics of the request-for-confirmation section. This is not just. A law should not extend its punitive measures to an unintended group of people.

The intent of Bill 52, according to its preamble, is "to instil in young people a lasting, positive attitude toward learning that will keep them motivated to stay in school until they graduate or turn 18 ... whether it is in the class-

room or through equivalent learning opportunities, such as an apprenticeship or workplace training program."

In short, Bill 52 seeks to lower the rate of high school dropouts. Bill 52 seeks to do this with a punitive approach. It sets out to legislate learning by withholding a great rite of passage for youth—being granted a driver's licence—and also by limiting employment opportunities.

While I support the idea that youth need broad options in terms of learning, I wholeheartedly disagree that the punitive portion of the law should in any way be an impedance to a home-educated youth applying for a driver's licence or seeking employment.

From an economic analysis, you should be concerned that the people designated by school boards for the purposes of dealing with compliance requests—I'll refer to them as compliance officers—not be burdened with unnecessary requests for confirmation of compliance with or exemption from compulsory attendance. Compliance officers will be overwhelmed with sorting out the endless equivalent learning requests for confirmation. Further, the negative impact of Bill 52 on home educators will largely rise and fall on the individual personalities of the compliance officers. An officer who is biased against home education will have the means to withhold a youth from applying for a driver's licence.

I support the form that was presented to you, I think yesterday, and that Ms. Culham also included in her report, her written submission. The form is entitled, "Confirmation of high school attendance for home-schooled youth." I understand that this form is being endorsed by a number of groups, including the Ontario Christian Home Educators' Connection, the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, the Mississauga Christian Homeschool Association, as well as the Home School Legal Defence Association. With this form in place, I believe the impact of Bill 52 on home-educated youth would be reasonable.

I implore this committee to be responsible to ensure that Bill 52 is amended to reflect the idea and principle of choosing what is just and true. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We should have about a minute per party on this deputation, beginning with Ms. Wynne.

Ms. Wynne: Two points and a question. First of all, I think you know, and other groups that we've talked to understand, that it was never the intention of this bill to interrupt the good home-schooling that goes on in the province. That was never the intention. To that end, I have met with a number of groups, including Anne Culham, who came to my office. We're very aware of the form. In fact, the ministry has got the form and we're working on those mechanisms.

The question I have for you is, given the intention of the government to expand the learning opportunities for students and, I think, in some ways, learn from some of the things that home-schoolers already do in terms of connection with the community, do you think we're moving in the right direction on that front?

Ms. McManus: I thank you for participating with the home-school community. We appreciate the co-operation. I think the spirit of instilling broader options is important, and I think that is one to be commended. I am glad to hear from you that it was an unintended result or implication of this bill to encroach upon, or potentially encroach upon, the home-schoolers. My largest concern outside of home-schoolers is with the punitive measures.

Ms. Wynne: I understand that. Thank you.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. I think your solution to it and the form that you're suggesting as confirmation of school attendance make a lot of sense. Certainly the PC Party will support that. If an amendment isn't coming forward from the government, we will be proposing one at the amendment stage.

Just one question. You said you would support broader options in terms of learning. In terms of this bill, do you support, then, the equivalent learning opportunities? Maybe you can speak about that a little bit.

Ms. McManus: While I support a broad understanding of education—are you speaking to the issue of a diploma being granted based on the equivalent learning?

Mr. Miller: Yes.

Ms. McManus: It's been the experience of the home-school community that our children, our youth, can go on successfully in post-secondary education without the diploma. In fact, they are sought after. As you hopefully know, I believe almost all of the universities, at least across Ontario, have entrance protocol for home-educated youth, and they are meeting that quite nicely. I can't comment further on that.

Mr. Marchese: Lisa, two quick points. The first one is that if the government never intended to affect home-learning, they could have easily corrected this or easily corrected it in committee to suggest that they're going to make the amendment that will fix this. They haven't said that so far. So it continues to worry me, but they could do it when they make the amendments when we deal with clause-by-clause. It might happen.

The second question that was asked by Ms. Wynne is, "Are you against the idea of expanding learning opportunities?" Who would be against expanding learning opportunities? The question is, should we force kids to stay in school from 16 to 18? Cannot we offer learning opportunities for students during ages zero to 16, and then make it voluntary for people to have expanded learning opportunities, versus, should we force them to have it, should we make it compulsory from age 16 to 18 to have those learning opportunities? What do you think about that?

The Chair: Thank you. A brief sum-up, if you wish.

Ms. McManus: I'm in favour of less regulation and not more. I'm speaking outside of HIGH Day here, but if I were providing privately run opportunity for youth for equivalent learning, I would not want more regulation from the government.

The Chair: Thank you for your deputation this morning.

LESTER B. PEARSON
COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

The Chair: Lester B. Pearson Collegiate Institute, Susan Noda. Good morning, and welcome this morning. You'll have 10 minutes for your deputation. If you leave any time remaining, we'll assign it to the parties for questions. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard and proceed.

1100

Ms. Susan Noda: Good morning. My name is Susan Noda. Over the past five years, I've been the vice-principal at Lester B. Pearson Collegiate Institute with the Toronto District School Board. Pearson is situated in the heart of the Malvern community, a community that has been identified by Mayor Miller as a community in need.

Working with at-risk students has always been my passion throughout my whole career, first as a teacher, then through my 22 years as a guidance counsellor, and finally in my role as a vice-principal. Please allow me to give you a glimpse of what I have learned through these years.

My experience has shown that many at-risk students drop out soon after they reach the magic age of 16. They drop out because of many contributing factors that are not within the realm of the school's control; however, many leave early because of their difficulties in dealing with the school system. These difficulties are related to their inability to consistently function within the structure of the school. They fail to demonstrate regular attendance and punctuality and fail to achieve school expectations and appropriate classroom behaviour.

More commonly, at-risk students leave because of their inability to handle the academics of their program. Students who run into academic difficulties generally do one of two things: try harder or give up. Those that give up, give up because they'd rather be seen as being bad than be seen as unintelligent or even stupid. Their attendance starts declining and, more often than not, they begin to act out negatively. They soon become credit deficient, where the number of credits earned is not appropriate to their age. Before they know it, they're in too deep and they drop out.

I believe that at the age of 16, they're often too immature to be making such a life-changing decision. As time goes on, they find that life on the outside becomes difficult—unemployment, their friends are still in school, conflict with their parents—and they soon regret their action. They realize the rashness of this decision, but the prospect of returning is an overwhelming obstacle for them. When they finally work up the courage to return, they find that many schools are hard-pressed to accommodate them because classes are full, and with the defined class sizes, schools find that they can't fit in any more students. If they're lucky enough to get back into school, it may mean that at the age of 17 or 18, they could be sitting in junior classes with 14- and 15-year-olds. Despite their outward bravado, their anxiety level is

high. Their friends may have already gone on to higher grades. They often lack the social skills, the self-discipline, and the support system to withstand this pressure, and they disappear again. The chances of re-engaging them become even slimmer.

With the passing of Bill 52, I believe many of our youth will be spared the harsh consequences of leaving school at the age of 16. However—and this is paramount—we, as a school system, will hinder their success if we bring them back only to have them conform to a structure that they were not able to fit into before. Keeping our youth in schools to the age of 18 means that we need to have flexible programs that will help them be successful. Without this, I believe very strongly that there would be more negative outcomes from Bill 52 than positive ones. Every school needs the flexibility to have a special program to catch these students before they fall. Bill 52 would be a step forward if there were this flexibility to serve the needs of these potential dropouts and help them attain success.

Last semester, I was able to see this theory in action when I worked with the Ministry of Government Services, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education on a very special pilot project aimed at re-engaging at-risk students who had left school without earning their high school diploma. It was entitled the OPS learn and work pilot program. Our project had the kind of flexibility needed and was able to meet the needs of the participants and help them successfully re-enter the system.

Of the 20 students who started, 16 completed the program, with 14 students earning all five credits. All 16 students are currently registered to return to school this September. Approximately 13 are continuing in a Next Steps program, a partnership with Centennial College, the Toronto District School Board, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The other three have registered in other types of alternative programs. Without a doubt, their involvement in this OPS pilot gave them the confidence and the skills to be successful.

A professor from the University of Victoria once told me that there should be a new three Rs of education: relationship, relevance and reward. In this pilot program, the teacher ensured that these three Rs were addressed. She worked with students individually and was able to regain and earn their trust. They also had an opportunity to work closely with a positive adult in their co-op workplace. These relationships gave them opportunities to develop their self-esteem and raise their confidence level. Their studies in the classroom were directly tied into their workplace situations so they were able to see the co-relationship between school lessons and the world of work. This motivated them to work harder. Their rewards were many: positive words of encouragement and praise from the many adults involved in this program and, of course, the successful completion of credits. In discussion with the students, it was believed by all that their success was due directly to the flexibility of the

program. The project was a successful glimpse of how Bill 52 could be a starting point to turning around the lives of many of our at-risk, disengaged young people.

Our last concern that I would like to share centres on the proposed amendments to the Highway Traffic Act. We have concerns about students who may falsely register in schools to allow them to get their drivers' licences. I say "falsely" because we see them registering and being assigned to classes, but never attending. This would pose a major problem for every school when we're trying to register legitimate students, but our classes are full. This already occurs when some students are trying to get social assistance and need to be in school, but have no intention of attending. Also, in discussions with my colleagues, we feel that there needs to be a process whereby young people can be exempted from this, especially in rural areas where there are no readily accessible public transportation systems. Also, many newcomers to Canada and second-generation youth between the ages of 16 and 18 have legitimate jobs that support their families. Their inability to have a driver's licence may provide undue hardship.

In summary, Bill 52 is a positive step in helping prepare all our young people to deal with the educational demands of tomorrow's job market. It is my hope that school boards have the conviction to think outside the box by providing the flexible programs that would honour the intentions of this bill.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We should have time for a question.

Mr. Klees: I would just like to very quickly ask you your opinion about the punitive aspect of this bill with regard to withholding drivers' licences. Given the circumstances that young people find themselves in, whether it's family circumstances—there are so many circumstances that are often beyond the control of the individual student and that have nothing to do with learning or their desire to learn—do you feel that that is an appropriate measure to take, or is there a better way of dealing with this?

Ms. Noda: When we were discussing this, we felt that it was on the right track, because there is a large percentage of students who are frivolous with it. Having a driver's licence means freedom, therefore they can leave school, skip—that kind of alternative. We just felt strongly that there needs to be a process where exemptions could be readily accessible. Otherwise, I think it could be harshly punitive.

Mr. Klees: How do you envision those exemptions being practically implemented? I would think it would be burdensome. Teachers and principals already have a heavy workload. How does that impact the day-to-day functioning of the school system?

Ms. Noda: How we saw this is that any student between the ages of 16 and 18 who wasn't in school and wanted to have a driver's licence, the onus was on them to show that, no, they weren't in school, but they had a job where their employer would attest that they needed a driver's licence, or that their families would honour the

fact that they needed them to have a licence in order to serve the needs of the family.

Mr. Klees: So if they have a job, if they have a legitimate place to be, your recommendation is that the exemption should be applied.

Ms. Noda: Exactly, because otherwise they would be abusing the school system. They would say that they're registering, but not register, and we're listed with these no-shows that are taking spots that we can't give to legitimate students.

Mr. Klees: To whom do you envision that exemption application being made?

Ms. Noda: I believe that if I was about to get a licence, and I was 17 years old and not in school, I would go to the driver's licensing board, get that form, take it back to my employer and/or family and then return that.

The Chair: Thank you very much for having come in this morning.

JAKE BLOOMFIELD

The Chair: Mr. Jake Bloomfield, please. Good morning, and welcome.

Mr. Jake Bloomfield: Thank you for inviting me.

The Chair: Before you begin, you have 10 minutes for your deputation. If you leave any time remaining, I'll assign it to the parties for questions. Please begin by stating your name for the purposes of Hansard and then proceed.

Mr. Bloomfield: Hello. My name's Jake Bloomfield. I'm 17 years old and I'm going into grade 12 at Streetville Secondary School in Mississauga. I'm here today to speak to you about my co-op education experience and the benefits it gave me.

I was enrolled in the co-op class in the second semester of my grade 11 year. Various placements were found for the 14 students in my class, including a radio station, a motorcycle company, a school, a music label, an emergency medical service, the military and a computer company. As you can see, placements covered a wide range of interests that my fellow students had and gave them a unique opportunity to find out if they would like to pursue this field of work as a career. We each worked in our own placement for two full weeks, usually seven-to-eight-hour days, and then went to school for one day where we talked about safety and the personal skills you need in any job.

1110

The placement that I had was at HP, Hewlett-Packard, in their credit and collections department. Some of the tasks that I performed at HP were printing off invoices, making photocopies of documents, picking up the customer hotline—which is where customers leave questions if they have a problems about their invoice or product—offset accounts and other tasks that the accounting clerks may have had. Over my four-month co-op period, I learned so much about how a company works and about myself. Some of the things that I learned about myself

are that I need to trust other people, not to get stressed as easily, to be organized and learn how to prioritize tasks.

In regular high school classes, I had really found it hard trusting other people when I was doing projects because more times than not other people didn't complete their part of the project, so I had to do most of it. I was always a leader in school. During my experience at HP, it was hard for me to get used to the idea that when someone said they would help me when I was overloaded, they actually came through. Before I started at HP, I always got stressed over the projects I was doing. During my time at HP, I found out that I felt a lot better about myself and I did a lot more, faster, when I didn't stress over it. HP also helped me to be more organized because I got used to working with Microsoft Outlook, in which I put all the important dates and meetings that I needed to remember.

In school, all the teachers had knowledge of my learning disabilities. While this is a good thing, it was very refreshing to be in an environment where my co-workers treated me as an equal and didn't have any preconceived assumptions about what I can and cannot do. Also, this gave me a really good feel about working in the real working world.

As you can see, I spent a lot of time talking about my personal development. I also had the opportunity to learn an accounting system called SAP. This system is used in many large companies, and I wouldn't have this unique opportunity to learn it at any schools.

Working at HP for my co-op placement gave me more confidence for when I was looking for a summer job. I now have better skills to help sell myself. I would highly recommend co-op education for every student attending high school. No matter what field you wanted to go into, there was always a placement for you. Everyone in my co-op class thoroughly enjoyed the program and found it most valuable. I am most pleased that the government, through Bill 52, is planning on expanding the co-operative education programming, thus offering alternative learning opportunities for students. Thank you for allowing me to talk to you about this important topic.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Jake. We should have time for one short question from each caucus, beginning with Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: Jake, I think all three political parties agree that co-operative education is a good thing. You're 17, and you were doing it voluntarily.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yes.

Mr. Marchese: Do you think—because that's what this bill does—that students should be forced to stay until age 18, whether they like it or not, whether they have problems or not? That's what this bill does. It forces students to stay in school until age 18.

Mr. Bloomfield: I don't think we should force any students to stay until 18, but make the learning experience more towards the students, towards what they like. If co-op education is open to all students for grade 11, it will make them want to stay longer because it will make them have a different experience than sitting in a class-

room and just reading out of an old education book and doing math homework and all that. It gives them a unique experience.

The Chair: Ms. Wynne?

Ms. Wynne: I'll pass.

The Chair: Mr. McMeekin?

Mr. McMeekin: Jake, thanks so much for coming out and sharing in this. I live out in Waterdown. We have Waterdown District High School out there, which my daughter, I'm pleased to say, just graduated from. She's off to Ryerson this week. I'm really pleased about that. She tells me and others at the school tell me that there are about 40 young people who have taken the decision to stay in school primarily because of the co-op program. Jake, do you resonate with that experience? Is that a true thrust, that there are young people staying in school because of the two co-op credits and expanding that?

Mr. Bloomfield: I actually took a four-credit program, which is full days. But yes, ever since I heard about the co-op program I wanted to stay that much longer. I couldn't wait until I got out of class and took what I learned and used it in the real world.

Mr. McMeekin: So it was a real encouragement for you.

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh, yes. It was an experience. It wasn't so much that I got out of school; it was more that you learn so much about yourself that you can't learn in school, about how you work and how you interact with other people who like the same field as you do.

Mr. McMeekin: Jake, that's an incredibly important perspective, and I really appreciate your sharing it this morning.

The Chair: Mr. Klees?

Mr. Klees: Jake, thanks so much for being here. I really enjoyed your presentation. Congratulations on how well you're doing.

I have just a couple of quick questions for you. Do you have any friends or people you know who have dropped out of school?

Mr. Bloomfield: I know some people, but they usually come back later on.

Mr. Klees: Isn't that interesting? That was going to be my point. Most of the experience is that young people drop out for reasons; some are personal. Would you agree that a lot of times it's because what's going on in the classroom isn't interesting them but when they find something that is of interest, they get ignited? They same way that you did. You got interested in something, you enjoyed doing it, and all of a sudden you got to experience some success at it.

Mr. Bloomfield: Of course, it's all about interest. Just sitting in a classroom for 11 years until you're able to do co-op, it becomes repetitious. Pretty much everybody in high school has somewhat of a short attention span. It may be longer than other people, but once it becomes repetitious—

Mr. Klees: So would you agree that it's really important that what the school should be doing is getting young people interested and making sure they have

courses that they can be motivated through, and that will be successful, rather than forcing them to stay there against their will? Would you agree with that?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yes. I would say that if there was more variety in the courses, that focused in more on the type of work, like in autobody but more focused, more people would stay because it's what they like to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Jake. That concludes your deputation. Certainly as the member representing Streetsville Secondary, I especially thank you for your deputation this morning.

Mr. Bloomfield: You're welcome.

The Chair: This committee stands in recess. We will reconvene in this room at 12:50 p.m. Our next deputation will be at 1 p.m.

Mr. Marchese: Mr. Chair, may I ask you a question?

The Chair: Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: Is there anyone who would otherwise be deputing in the afternoon who is here now who might want to present now?

The Chair: Mr. Marchese actually raises a point. Is it the will of the committee that if there is someone in the room now wishing to make a deputation—okay. Is there anyone in the room at the moment planning to make a deputation this afternoon who wishes to make his or her deputation right now? Going once, going twice.

This committee stands in recess. Our next deputation will begin at 1 p.m. I'll expect people to be back here at 12:50.

The committee recessed from 1122 to 1300.

BRENDAN RYAN

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. This is the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. We'll spend this afternoon considering 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.

Our first deputant this afternoon is Mr. Brendan Ryan. Welcome. Make yourself comfortable. You'll have 10 minutes for your deputation. If you leave any time in that 10 minutes, I'll assign it to the parties to ask you questions. Please give your name for the purposes of Hansard and then proceed.

Mr. Brendan Ryan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Brendan Ryan, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I spent my career in teaching. I was both an elementary and a secondary school principal. When I retired, I served as director of what was then the Brant County Separate School Board. In addition, I've been somewhat passionate about education in the sense that while working in it, I also at one time served as a trustee and as chairman of a public school board and am currently, even in retirement, involved as a member of the board of governors of Mohawk College and do some work part-time for the Nipissing Faculty of Education.

All that being said, I want to make it clear that today I am here speaking as an individual, as a citizen interested in education, and that none of the institutions or bodies that I have mentioned should in any way be blamed for my meandering. It's my own foolishness.

When I came to this country in 1965—and I may add that Dave Levac was in the first class I taught when I came over here—I was struck by the wonderful sense of egalitarianism and opportunity that was created by the public system of education in this province. It really provided opportunities for children from all strata of society to progress on merit and to aspire to better their circumstances. It was a pipeline of hope for immigrants who came from all parts of the world and for their children to have opportunities to move on into circumstances that would have been unthinkable in many of the societies that they had left. That dream is still there, and the education system still remains a magic carpet that can transport people into the future.

However, times have changed, and if we truly value something, we must always look at it critically to make sure that it meets the needs of today's society and the students we serve today. Today, you do that as you consider extending the mandatory school attendance age to 18. When Minister Kennedy, who was the minister at the time, announced the proposed extension, he described it as a major and important step in that it was the first change in attendance in 50 years and that it deserved serious attention and debate. I agree with those sentiments entirely, and I support wholeheartedly the notion of extending the age to 18. It is unfortunate that the corollary, as it were, of drivers' licences got attached to this very important piece of legislation. I consider the matter to be of dubious value in the first case, and it saddens me even more in that it has distracted attention from the very serious matter of extending the school year into the business of whether or not kids should drive.

There can be no doubt, though, if we look at it, that one of the reasons this bill was introduced was the figures that say that 70% of the students in the province of Ontario graduate from high school and that 30% of the students in the province of Ontario do not. In other words, because of that we are going to mandate that students who want to drop out of school must stay in it until they reach the age of 18. We're putting in a gate to stop them from leaving, and while I agree they should stay, we should go back and look at the fons et origo of the problem: Why is it that they want to get out of school in the first place? We must not move forward in putting in new situations alone but also look back and re-examine the current situations so that we can encourage far more of them to stay.

I recognize that the government—and apart from my friendship with Levac, I have no particular political bias to carry—has added considerably to the monies that are put into education in the past number of years. They've introduced a number of new programs, capped class sizes—and student success and everything else. But much of this money has been directed at those specific types of programs, and indeed, much of that money has

been spent to provide leadership positions for those programs to ensure that they go on there.

Very often, in our large and increasingly bureaucratic school boards, these programs become discrete little empires that operate, as it were, almost outside of the fabric of the total education system. I think, when we look at the education system, we find certain imbalances and inequalities. I quote from the Royal Commission on Learning Report: Short Version, Ministry of Education, page 3 of 7: "We spend ... significant sums of money on remedial and special education programs which are too often ineffective." And from the same page later on, in the same paragraph, actually: "a significant minority" of students do not make it through high school; and then, "among some disadvantaged groups, that minority comes perilously close" to a majority. I think we must do something to look at those types of things, not moving forward alone. We must move to solve the quagmire that is special education, where well-meaning teachers are frustrated by spending up to 30% of their time filling out forms and reports and all sorts of memorabilia that have got very little to do with teaching as such.

Another matter, of course, is the whole business of the funding formula. Quite frankly, it doesn't work. I'll quote from an editorial in the Toronto Star of Friday, September 2, 2005. It was talking about the Toronto schools, but it could have been talking about any schools at that time. It says that the parent network, which tracks programming costs, said in its eighth annual report that tens of millions of dollars which had been allocated for English-as-a-second-language education was instead being used to pay for various things such as light bills and the normal operating expenses. When that happens, we are taking away something from the immigrants that they should be having, and we must look at and remove those types of inequalities.

So that is part of the business of looking: We must look back at where we are, as well as moving forward, if we really are serious about keeping our students in school.

Let's look at some of the strategies that are in the proposed legislation: increased liaison with community colleges, increased work experiences and apprenticeship programs, extended co-operative education, recognition of other bodies and everything else. Everybody would be in favour of those. All of these are immensely laudable and should be explored, but there's a huge amount of work to be done before these noble-sounding ideas become reality—

The Chair: Just to remind you, Mr. Ryan, you have about two minutes.

Mr. Ryan: —and we must move forward on those to make sure that they do it. They must be funded. Opportunities must be set up for teachers to receive instruction. Opportunities must be set up and a format put in place so that liaison between colleges and boards of education becomes the norm rather than the exception.

It may sound as if I am being critical of the current system and the proposed changes. Nothing is further from the truth. I believe that we must move forward. I

believe we must keep students in school until age 18. Years ago, the United Negro College Fund had the slogan, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." If 30% of our students are not graduating from high school, we have a huge amount of waste, and we must do something about it. We must do that by new methods and by old methods, and I appreciate the fact that you are taking time on behalf of the youth in this province to do that.

The Chair: We should have time for just one brief question. Ms. Wynne.

Ms. Wynne: Thank you very much for being here. I don't have a question. I just want to say thank you for paying attention. I think it's really important that we hear from a range of people. It sounds as though you're pretty supportive of the idea of expanding what we mean by a classroom and allowing for some of the alternatives. In fact, if I had time, I could go through a list of projects that are actually happening around the province. They're already showing some success, and it's on that success that we're building going forward. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ryan: I was aware of them. Unfortunately, I got too verbose and used up my time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for having come in and for the thought and the effort that you put into your deputation.

HALTON INDUSTRY EDUCATION COUNCIL

The Chair: Next is the Halton Industry Education Council and Kelly Hoey, executive director. Welcome this afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your deputation. If you leave any time remaining, I'll assign it to the parties for questions. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard and then continue.

Ms. Kelly Hoey: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee. My name is Kelly Hoey. I am the executive director of the Halton Industry Education Council, as mentioned. I am delighted to be here today to have the opportunity to share our observations about Bill 52 and its intention to increase student success rates in Ontario.

HIEC is one of 10 business industry education councils in the province of Ontario and one of the founding members of the Ontario Business Education Partnership. The industry education council model has been in existence in Ontario for more than 20 years, with the intention of bringing industry, education, community and government stakeholders together to provide common solutions to shared issues in local areas.

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HIEC itself has been in existence in Halton for 17 years, with the intention of providing the vital link between Halton students and the world of work. We thought that was a really easy task when we started, and we had all kinds of ideas. As we've gone on, we've never had a shortage of good ideas, always a shortage of time and people. We have a vision to inspire youth in Halton to make informed career decisions. HIEC has enjoyed an excellent reputation in our own community of Halton,

throughout Ontario and even internationally as a leader in career development through strategic partnerships. As a matter of fact, in the last year we've had visitors from China, visitors from India and visitors from the US to look at our industry education council model.

We have worked diligently since 1989 to provide programs, services and resources to help youth in any manner possible to achieve success in their lives, and we have always known that this cannot be achieved in isolation. Over the years, other communities have referred to us as lucky, but the plain truth is that we have put a great deal of time and energy into creating a culture of partnership and innovation in the region of Halton. Over the last couple of years, the government of Ontario has increasingly recognized the local area models that are achieving high results, and through the Passport to Prosperity initiative has encouraged the central role that business and industry education councils and their partners can play at helping schools navigate relationships in their communities. There are actually 26 organizations in Ontario that work on that initiative.

I am here today to share with you some perspective on how the exciting transformation that is currently taking place in education is leading to increased opportunity for all students by extending the doors of learning beyond the classroom. And the difference is obvious. There is no doubt that young people need increased access to learning opportunities and adult role models and that the increased emphasis on equivalent learning, as it's called, is a positive step for education. Teachers, parents, industry and community stakeholders that we work with every day have great enthusiasm for working together to help build a viable workforce for the future, to do their part to help young people value their experience while in secondary school and to find the right fit for post-secondary education and training right after high school and lifelong.

I believe I speak on behalf of my colleagues in Halton but also my colleagues in the province when I say that we believe that providing experiential, community-based opportunities engages students and provides relevance to their learning. Experiential learning opportunities can come in all shapes and sizes, and it has been our experience that communities that work together with schools produce students with a more value-added diploma. This takes resources and support and a government willing to invest in changing for a better future. When I say "support," I'm not just talking about dollars; I'm talking about willingness to work together.

Whether it is the opportunity to job-shadow someone in your dream job, the experience of increasing your awareness of the skilled trades by building a house from the ground up through a program like the Sundial Homes program or through the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, or receiving your personal support worker certification before graduating from high school, innovative school-to-career programming has only just scratched the surface on how we connect young people to their options, their passion and their destination of choice. We also need support to create resources that provide consistent

messages to young people, their parents and educators about the opportunities and pathways that exist for them.

It is our observation that the significant changes currently taking place in education are about more than kids succeeding beyond their academics, but also setting a foundation for increased ownership of their learning and their futures. Teachers alone cannot meet the duality of ensuring that our young people are academically prepared and work-ready. Parents also need help in understanding their role, because it's a tricky one sometimes.

As an industry education council that is well positioned in the community of Halton, as a broker of information, as a strategic relationship builder and as a conveyor of consistent messaging, we enjoy a very positive relationship with the Halton District School Board, the Halton Catholic District School Board, our local college—Sheridan—and some 38 industry partners. Together, we have embarked on several innovative programs and ideas that have been spearheaded by industry and endorsed by educators, parents and students. Students have had life-changing experiences that have connected their classroom learning to the outside world. Things like the Halton STARS program and the HIP program are exceptional internship programs that are working one on one with students who may otherwise choose not to be connected to school.

To cite another Halton example, our school-to-career campaign through the Passport to Prosperity initiative is a marketing campaign that promotes all post-secondary destinations—college, apprenticeship, university and the workplace—as equal and unique to a student's goals. This cultural shift has been endorsed by the Ministry of Education through increased funding for the student success initiatives and the six ways the government of Ontario has developed so that students can customize their high school experience around learning that's relevant to them. Exciting initiatives like expanded co-op credits, the specialist high skills major, the dual credit programs and the proposed lighthouse projects will all need support and resources from community agencies and from employers that are willing to share their industry perspective, and particularly to welcome young people into their workplaces. There are already significant relationships in place throughout the province to help this happen.

This is an exciting time in education. I'm proud to be a part of it. When we are encouraging young people to get the information they need to make informed decisions about their future, we're encouraging them to try things on for size so they can better position themselves for their future. Business and community are committed to demonstrating to our young people that we are willing to help and that there are resources and supports along the way when they're ready. Legislative changes that support this are good news for our community, but they will take time, planning, resources, and communities that see their value in the short term and the long term and that are willing to work together to expand how and where all students learn.

Learning to 18 is a gateway to success in many more ways than the traditional route, and on behalf of HIEC I would like to applaud the efforts made on behalf of our students to work with all those involved to ensure their success, however they might find that. Bill 52 is not just keeping students in school until 18 but engaging students to stay in school to 18 by providing the right combination of opportunities for all students. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Klees, do you have a question?

Mr. Klees: Ms. Hoey, thank you very much for your presentation. MPP Ted Chudleigh has reported to our caucus on a couple of occasions and is a strong supporter of the work that you do. The transition to the workplace is critically important, and we're hopeful that the government will in fact understand the importance of supporting that transition.

I'd like to know from you, with your experience, if there is one area where you feel that government should be focusing more of its support to ensure that transition? Where would that be?

Ms. Hoey: I would say right off the top it's to give the time and energy to share some of the best practices. We talk a lot about doing new things and innovative things, and that's great, but sometimes we have some of the best examples right in our classrooms. If we could have those teachers connect with some industry folks and give them the time to do that, great things can come of that, because sometimes it's just a matter of time. It's usually a matter of time.

Mr. Klees: Thank you. I'd like to ask one last question of you. We have had presentations from some stakeholders who, in referring to equivalent learning opportunities, have insisted that whoever is doing the training or the teaching must be qualified, certified teachers. Is that your experience? Would you draw the line there or do you feel that there's room for people within that system who aren't qualified teachers?

Ms. Hoey: I think extending learning beyond the classroom is beneficial in so many ways. All students have different learning styles, and to say that it has to come from a specific type of person or a specific certified person is a tricky question. From my perspective, at our industry ed. council, we really want to make sure that industry is stepping to the plate, and sometimes they don't know their role, they don't know how they can get involved in that and they don't know what the implications are for their business. I wouldn't like to see us making that more difficult for them.

The Chair: Thank you very much for having come in this afternoon.

ASSOCIATION DES ENSEIGNANTES
ET DES ENSEIGNANTS
FRANCO-ONTARIENS

Le Président: L'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO; M. Paul Taillefer, s'il vous plaît.

Bon après-midi. Good afternoon. Bienvenue. Welcome. Vous avez 10 minutes pour votre présentation. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. Si vous n'utilisez pas toutes les 10 minutes—if you don't use all 10 minutes—les partis représentants ici vont poser des questions—perhaps the parties here will have some questions to ask. Veuillez dire votre nom pour le hansard et continuer. Please state your name for Hansard and continue.

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M. Paul Taillefer: Je me nomme Paul Taillefer. Je suis président de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens. Nous avons environ 8 000 membres du personnel enseignant, administratif, de soutien et professionnel qui travaillent dans les conseils scolaires de langue française de la province et aussi auprès d'autres employeurs en Ontario.

J'aimerais vous parler aujourd'hui au sujet du projet de loi 52. En particulier, L'AEFO est d'accord avec les objectifs généraux liés au projet de loi 52, mais nous croyons toutefois que dans sa version actuelle, le projet de loi défavorise les élèves des écoles de langue française, car il n'assure pas l'équité de service. C'est sur ce que je vais vous adresser aujourd'hui. Je vais toucher à certains points, toujours en vous parlant du contexte minoritaire et de nos petites écoles secondaires de langue française.

Quand nous parlons du programme de double crédit, pour nous ça pose des défis particuliers aux écoles de langue française, car il y a très peu d'institutions post-secondaires de langue française ou bilingues dans la province, et encore moins dans les régions où se trouvent nos écoles. C'est vrai que nous pouvons toujours exploiter les nouvelles technologies, telles que l'Internet et ces choses-là, mais nous avons des études qui démontrent que ce ne sont pas tous les élèves qui sont prêts à apprendre utilisant cette nouvelle technologie. Alors, ce qu'on essaierait de faire de cette façon-là ne rejoindrait pas effectivement toute la population qu'on essaierait de rejoindre.

Nous voulons aussi souligner l'impact négatif sur les programmes existant dans nos écoles de langue française. Nous avons des écoles qui sont, comme je vous ai dit, très petites, et la perte d'effectifs ou le mouvement d'effectifs vers un autre système de livraison mettrait vraiment en défi l'offre de cours que nous pouvons donner dans nos écoles de langue française. Ça risquerait d'entraîner la disparition de programmes. Alors, c'est un défi que nous voulons souligner.

Sur la question des cours qui sont offerts dans nos écoles de langue française, nous croyons que nous sommes pénalisés, car les écoles combinent un grand nombre de cours et de filières. Le gouvernement a déjà fait des pas pour traiter de ces situations-là l'an dernier, mais nous croyons que la meilleure façon d'éviter le décrochage scolaire pour les écoles de langue française est d'assurer que les petites écoles secondaires de langue française puissent répondre aux besoins individuels de leurs élèves en offrant un plus grand éventail de cours.

Cette mesure est d'autant plus importante, selon nous, car la grande majorité des élèves de langue française n'ont pas accès dans leur milieu à des programmes d'apprentissage équivalent. Alors, ce serait vraiment l'école secondaire qui pourrait livrer ces programmes-là. Cela pourra avoir un effet positif sur la rétention des élèves.

Vous connaissez sans doute les territoires que nos conseils de langue française couvrent. La majorité de nos écoles sont des écoles rurales, sont des petites écoles qui sont isolées, et la plupart des élèves qui fréquentent ces écoles-là utilisent le transport scolaire. Nous croyons que le gouvernement doit non seulement assurer le transport scolaire vers l'école pour favoriser l'assiduité à l'école, mais aussi vers tout site d'apprentissage équivalent, parce que les situations d'apprentissage équivalent ne sont pas aussi disponibles que l'école pour nos élèves. Alors, nous croyons que s'il n'y a pas de ressources pour permettre aux élèves de participer à ce genre de programme, on va arriver à créer deux classes d'élèves en Ontario. Je crois sincèrement que ce n'est pas la volonté du gouvernement.

Si nous parlons maintenant des crédits externes, nos élèves ne sont pas situés à proximité d'une université ou d'un collège d'arts appliqués ou de technologie de langue française, encore moins d'une école de musique ou d'une école des beaux-arts. Peu de groupes communautaires sont en mesure d'offrir des occasions d'apprentissage équivalent en langue française.

Nous avons présentement des situations qui existent où, à Ottawa, la capitale nationale, qui a un grand bassin de francophones, nos élèves apprennent présentement des cours d'éducation coopérative en anglais. Le projet de loi 52 propose de multiplier l'utilisation d'activités d'apprentissage équivalent. Nous vous avisons qu'il est dans l'intérêt du gouvernement pour la communauté franco-ontarienne d'éviter que ces activités deviennent des sources d'assimilation. Il est important que les élèves dans les écoles de langue française aient accès à des activités d'apprentissage équivalent en français. L'anglais, ils l'apprennent à l'école. Ils n'ont pas besoin de l'apprendre sur les lieux de travail qui sont, comme tels, une extension de l'école où ils doivent vivre en français. Alors, nous croyons que c'est important que le gouvernement prenne ça en ligne de compte.

En vertu de l'article 23 de la Charte des droits et libertés, les francophones ont droit à une éducation équivalente à celle des anglophones. Cela suppose un accès à tous les programmes financés par les deniers publics. Le gouvernement se doit donc de mettre en place tous les mécanismes nécessaires pour assurer la réussite des élèves francophones.

Ce sont mes commentaires généraux. Je termine en ce moment pour vous donner la chance de poser des questions. Merci.

Le Président: Merci beaucoup. Des questions?

M. Marchese: Merci, monsieur Taillefer. La question que je me pose est, oui, il est important d'offrir—

M. Taillefer: L'apprentissage équivalent?

M. Marchese: Oui, l'apprentissage équivalent, ou bien un apprentissage. C'est important. La question pour

moi est, est-ce qu'on devrait forcer les étudiants à rester à l'école jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans au lieu de l'âge de 16 ans et offrir les programmes que le gouvernement dit qu'il offre en ce moment, ou bien approfondir ces cours pour leur donner les opportunités qu'ils ont besoin d'avoir? Est-ce qu'on devrait les forcer à rester, ou bien dire que l'âge de 16 ans est bon, mais offrir des programmes dont ils ont besoin? Est-ce que vous avez un point de vue sur ce que je vous ai dit?

M. Taillefer: C'est une question fort intéressante. Je crois que pour nous, on parle de peut-être deux tiers de nos élèves qui ne se dirigent pas à l'université, et je crois que ces élèves-là, par la force des choses, choisissent d'autres routes. Si nous avons la capacité, à l'intérieur des écoles secondaires de langue française ou peut-être par d'autres méthodes qui respectent les droits des francophones, de leur offrir quelque chose qui réponde plus à leurs besoins—parce que c'est vraiment quelque chose qui date de longtemps, ce problème-là, comment on peut adresser, traiter des besoins de ces jeunes-là qui peut-être ont un différent cheminement.

Si on peut leur offrir quelque chose qui réponde à ce cheminement, je crois qu'on peut pallier le décrochage scolaire. Je pense qu'on doit faire tout ce qui est possible, et nous sommes d'avis qu'il y a certains principes qui sous-tendent le projet de loi 52 qui sont très intéressants. Cependant, nous avons de grandes difficultés avec certaines sections en fonction de la question de l'école de langue française en situation minoritaire. J'ai adressé une lettre à M. Kennedy lorsqu'il était ministre il y a peut-être six ou huit mois, et encore, nous avons les mêmes problèmes.

Le Président: Monsieur Taillefer, merci pour votre présentation cet après-midi.

JEREMY TYRRELL

The Chair: Our next presentation will come to us by teleconference. Mr. Jeremy Tyrrell, the former chair of the Assumption school council and PTA member. Mr. Tyrrell, can you hear us?

Mr. Jeremy Tyrrell: Yes, I can. Thanks for having me. It's a beautiful day in Windsor. I'm glad to be in Hamilton.

The Chair: OK. We're just doing a sound check to make sure that the members here can hear you.

Mr. Tyrrell: Sure.

The Chair: Okay, now we can hear you loud and clear.

Mr. Tyrrell, you're speaking to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly regarding Bill 52. You have 10 minutes to make your deputation. If you don't use your full 10 minutes, we'll divide the time among the parties present for questions. Please state your name clearly for Hansard and then continue.

Mr. Tyrrell: Thank you. My name is Jeremy Tyrrell. I'm the former chair of the Assumption school council parent committee, and a little error there. I state that I've been part of PTA and parent council for 20 years. It's

actually only 19, but I still have a bit of experience to share.

Our youngest starts high school in about a week. We've got three children, all of whom have done well in our school system. The oldest graduated from university last spring. Our daughter is in her fourth year of university, and she hopes to start teachers' college next year. So, Minister Papatello, I've been asked not to say anything that could cost her that opportunity and I'll do my best.

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All three of our kids have been very active in sports, in school government, in experiential learning. As a matter of fact, our youngest attended the Ontario education leadership course in Orillia last summer, and was also a legislative page in June of last year. Minister Papatello, he's in your calendar. He's actually Mr. September, and I want to thank you—

Interruption.

Mr. Tyrrell: I'm not sure how far I got, but I would like to express my support of the bill as stated in the preamble—

The Chair: Just for your information, Mr. Tyrrell, I'm not sure whether you're aware, but the minister is not present in the room.

Mr. Tyrrell: Oh. Will you pass along my compliments, please?

I would like to express my support of the bill as stated in the preamble, in that I think it addresses the issue of experiential learning. It shows a respect for school happenings, a little bit more than just inside the school building. For the most part, I think the bill works towards a good cause.

The part of the bill that I'm particularly pleased with is making it a penalty for employers to employ anybody who should be in school, basically. As a restaurateur for many years, I always made it my own personal point to make sure that if the kids were supposed to be in school, they weren't working for me at that time.

Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you. Please continue.

Mr. Tyrrell: I'd like to get right to the point of the bill which I don't agree with, and that is the driver's licence. I'm sure you must be hearing from others about that. When a child drops out of school, they're automatically marginalized from their own society. In my years on a parent council, I think that was the one thing we always tried to focus on—not just on the kids who were doing very well and not just on the kids who were involved, but on the students who are really not speaking up. You can't hear them, their parents aren't there to speak for them and they risk being marginalized. When a child drops out of school, they're automatically marginalized from their own society. By denying them the right to get a driver's licence, or by suspending their driver's licence pending their return to school, we further marginalize them, I think.

I'm calling this, for my use, the pudding clause. If you remember the Pink Floyd song The Wall, "How can you

have any pudding if you don't eat yer meat?" We look at school as the meat and the driver's licence as the pudding.

Now, I'd like to look at it a little differently than that. I'm not one of these people who doesn't believe in consequences—I do—but have you considered, has it come up, that perhaps the driver's licence could be part of the school experience? What I'm suggesting is that what if there were a credit for getting a driver's licence? What if there were classes available in the school that would study driving, make safer drivers out of these students and they could in turn get a credit out of that? Obviously that's not going to be of much interest to those who are university or college-bound, but for those kids who aren't planning on that and are looking to get a general diploma, this could count as a credit towards it and would, in the same way as your bill does, include it as part of the overall experience of learning happening outside of the schoolroom and that there's more to it than just the three Rs.

That's basically what I have to say. I'm sure you've heard from others about the driver's licence issue, and I'd be happy to entertain questions if you have any.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We should have an opportunity for each party to ask you at least one question, beginning with Ms. Wynne from the Liberals.

Ms. Wynne: Mr. Tyrrell, can you hear me?

Mr. Tyrrell: Yes, I can. Thank you.

Ms. Wynne: I just want to be clear about what you're suggesting. You're suggesting that you make a driver's licence course a credit, so that by definition, students would be in school if they're 16, 17. You're not opposed to the idea of keeping kids in school until they're 18. You're suggesting that the driver's licence become part of the Ontario curriculum.

Mr. Tyrrell: I think that would be a workable solution. I don't mean it to be sort of a trick to keep kids in school, but by definition they'd have to be 16 to take the course. It would be a reward for staying in school and something they could work towards.

I use my own nephew as an example. He dropped out of school just a couple of credits short and then still went out and got his driver's licence. I think he had something to offer; he just couldn't find it there. It might have worked for him if it were a credit.

Ms. Wynne: So you're supportive of the other parts of this initiative, which are to offer those alternative programs. You think that's fine, and you'd like to see this as part of the Ontario curriculum.

Mr. Tyrrell: I think it's a wonderful idea. It's taking great strides forward.

Ms. Wynne: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Miller from the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Mr. Miller: Thank you very much for your presentation. Your idea about drivers' licences is interesting. Certainly in my area of Parry Sound–Muskoka, a driver's licence is pretty much a necessity in a rural northern area. That's an interesting idea.

You're the first person I've heard come before the committee who supports penalties for employers. I'm just wondering why you support that, especially when you don't agree with the punitive measures in terms of the driver's licence. You say that would further marginalize dropouts. Why wouldn't penalizing someone who drops out but gets a job, probably out of necessity—I'd like to hear why you support penalizing dropouts by penalizing the employers who might provide them with some income.

Mr. Tyrrell: To clear it up, there should probably be a way if the student could prove to the necessary authorities that he had to do it, perhaps for financial or family reasons. There are a lot of reasons kids drop out beyond the fact that they're just bored, and we have to take that into account. But there are also kids who see that the opportunity to work and make some money is more enticing than attending school. Those are the ones who I think the bill targets, and that's who I meant by saying I support that sort of penalty. So there could be a system in place.

Mr. Miller: If I understand you correctly, there should be an exemption for those other cases, the hardship cases or cases where—

Mr. Tyrrell: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Marchese from the NDP caucus.

Mr. Marchese: Jeremy, I just have a couple of comments that you might want to respond to. I think the whole focus of this bill is wrong. I would have expected the Conservative government to have done it but not the Liberals, so it puzzles me.

Fining employers I believe is a mistaken thing; to say we've got to put the onus on the employer who might be hiring somebody who left of his or her own free will to find employment.

Fining a parent \$1,000 instead of the old \$200 is another wrong focus because it says the parent is at fault rather than something wrong with the student.

And third, the whole idea of creating an equivalent learning option that will require a whole bureaucracy to supervise the people who are doing the course, who is monitoring them, who they're accountable to, who's actually doing it, is a costly affair.

I think a whole lot of students who leave have a lot of social, psychological and learning problems.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Tyrrell, we need you to respond to that.

Mr. Marchese: This bill won't reach them. That's why forcing kids to stay in school is wrong. What do you think?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Marchese. Mr. Tyrrell, you have a brief moment to respond.

Mr. Tyrrell: Sure. If it were phrased in the form of a question, I would say that the bill serves to encompass the entire community as part of it. I believe there should be consequences. You just can't say, "You've got to stay in school until 18," and then somebody drops out and there are no consequences.

Secondly, to clarify the fine to the parents, it's only until they're 16, not between 16 and 18.

Getting employers involved—I think we need to have the entire community show a vested interest in having those kids get their high school diplomas and stay until they're 18.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Tyrrell. That concludes the time we have, and thank you very much for calling in to us today.

Mr. Tyrrell: My pleasure.

1340

HOME SCHOOL LEGAL DEFENCE ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

The Chair: Our next deputant will be the Home School Legal Defence Association, Mr. Paul Faris and Mary Knor. Good afternoon. Welcome. You have 10 minutes for your deputation. If you don't use the entire time, I'll divide it among the parties for questions. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard and then continue.

Mr. Paul Faris: Thank you for having us. My name is Paul Faris. Mary Knor is with me today. She's my colleague at the Home School Legal Defence Association. We are a national organization that defends, protects and advocates for home-schooling. We're made up of home-schooling parents and home-schooling children. In fact, both Mary and I were home-schooled ourselves and went on not to graduate from high school in the sense of getting an OSSD, but to complete high school studies. I went to the University of Western Ontario, got my law degree and am now called in two provinces, Ontario and Alberta. We found success following home-schooling, but neither would have fit within this bill because we would have had no way to prove that we had completed high school. Both of us completed before we reached 18—in fact, I was in university at 18—which is in fact quite common for home-schoolers.

Obviously, a change needs to be made for home-schoolers, and I think that has been acknowledged by all three political parties here. There has been contact with home-schoolers. In fact, it's a very close-knit community, so we've all talked. I can say that I support the presentations of the two that presented in Stouffville and the three previous ones today. So I want to thank you for being at this presentation and the previous ones and hearing this perspective.

The second element to this is that obviously there needs to be an amendment. How do we do that? The key is that there is nothing in this bill that directly addresses home-schoolers, so we need to put a specific procedure for home-schoolers into it. The way that needs to be done is parents having direct contact with the Ministry of Transportation and not working through the Ministry of Education. That's in fact what we've seen, the form that has been presented to you from several of the presenters, and we're in support of that as well. That would accomplish this.

I'm going to leave time for questions, so I'd be happy to take any questions on this, but we see terrible, disastrous results and a completely unfair burden on teachers and school administrators when they try to quantify or provide an OSSD for home-schooled students. You can't do it. Just as an example, there are dozens and dozens of different home-school curriculums out there, and most families don't use just one curriculum. They use an amalgam of those curriculums because the real strength of home-schooling is the ability to privately tutor each child to their own learning and their own learning needs. Just to give you a quick example, special-needs students who are home-schooled score on average higher than the average non-special-needs student who goes to school. This is an extreme example, but it shows how that specialization can really benefit a group. That is what would be lost if this bill went through as it is now, because there is no ability for the public school to recognize those dozens and dozens of different home-schooling options. I could go on at length about the results of home education. I think you've heard most of it already, so I won't go into the details, but we can get you any study you need on that if there is any further interest.

I would simply point out an interesting fact: The average home-educated student costs their parents about \$700 a year in terms of curriculum and that sort of thing; the average publicly educated student costs in excess of \$8,000. That's non-special needs, in non-special circumstances. It's estimated that there are about 20,000 to 30,000 home-educated students in Ontario. That's \$160 million, if we take the lower number, that's being saved the government of Ontario every year for home education. The academic results are very good, they're more likely to vote—all the civic statistics that you've already heard. So this is clearly something that should be fostered and encouraged.

I want to thank Ms. Wynne for the co-operation that we have seen at the previous meeting. I would encourage that to continue as this goes forward. Like I say, the home-schooling community is very small and we all talk; obviously, we all talked before coming and giving these presentations. I think we each had something unique to contribute, but the general thrust is that there needs to be an amendment to Bill 52 that accommodates home-schooling. Obviously, the guarantor form is one of those. I would encourage you to stay in contact—Anne Culham is an excellent home-schooling representative, if you want to use her—so that we can reassure the home-schooling community that the government is not going to refuse to give them licences or something terrible like that and so that when the bill comes out, we're not backpedalling and trying to amend that or change somehow in the regulations something that could have been fixed through some simple consultation before.

I'm going to cut my presentation off there, and I welcome any questions on this subject.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We should have an opportunity for each party to ask one economical question, beginning with Mr. Klees.

Mr. Klees: Thank you, Mr. Faris, for your presentation. I heard you say that you've had commitments from all three parties to make an amendment to this legislation to address your concern. Is that right?

Mr. Faris: I believe I heard those statements made while I was listening earlier.

Mr. Klees: Okay, well, certainly the PC Party is committed to that. What I'm interested in is whether you've had a commitment from Ms. Wynne and the government to do that.

Mr. Faris: I was hoping I could take the statements made earlier at face value, and I trust that will be the case.

Mr. Klees: So in other words, you're saying that you do have that commitment from Ms. Wynne?

Mr. Faris: I don't want to put words in her mouth, but I understood her words to be a commitment of that nature.

Mr. Klees: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: Paul, Mary, I want to thank all of the presenters from the home-school group for their presentation, and thank them for the commitment they make towards the teaching of their children. Because it's a commitment that is profound. I couldn't do it, and I'm sure most parents can't do it, so what you do for your kids is something to be congratulated. I wanted to say that first.

Secondly, I want to say that we would support an amendment that's brought forth by the government or the Conservatives. We oppose the bill entirely. We think it's wrong. So the third point I want to make is that beyond the amendment that I hope will come from the government or the Tories, with respect to the bill, I am one who believes that if we help kids as much as we can from whenever we get them in school to age 16, and we've done our very best, then those kids who want to stay on will continue. That's what we want. If we haven't done a good job, forcing them to stay from age 16 to 18 is profoundly mistaken, misguided.

The Chair: Thank you. I have a brief opportunity for you to respond and we'll move to Ms. Wynne.

Mr. Marchese: What do you think, Paul?

Mr. Faris: I would just say, as I think would be quite clear, home educators are profoundly committed to education and do everything they can to promote that by taking that personal responsibility on themselves. We would support anything that promotes education. In this regard, we're restricting our comments to the direct impact it would have on home-schoolers.

The Chair: Ms. Wynne?

Ms. Wynne: Paul, thank you very much for being here. I just want to be clear: What I said earlier was that the form that has been brought forward by a number of the home-schooling groups is in our possession. The ministry is looking at it. What we're committed to is looking for a solution that works for all students in the province who are in a solid learning environment up to 18. That's what we're looking for. We want it to work for everyone. I think that is what I made clear to Anne and to

the other folks who came into my office. I'm very supportive of finding that kind of solution, so I will continue to advocate for that. But I can't speak on behalf of the government in terms of what that outcome will look like, what that solution will look like, but that's what we're looking for. Okay?

Mr. Faris: May I respond with a question?

Ms. Wynne: Sure.

The Chair: You have a few seconds to sum up and then your time is done.

Mr. Faris: I suppose a quick comment and a question. First, I would strongly encourage you to focus this on home-schooling, because in my read from a legal perspective, home-schoolers were not even really thought of in drafting this bill. The language could be made to be disastrous for them, but I don't think they were contemplated. So there needs to be a specific exemption for that, and I would ask you to at least commit to trying to find a specific circumstance or a specific exemption, specific amendment that would work to foster home education.

1350

Ms. Wynne: One of the groups raised the issue of old-order Mennonites, and I'll just repeat that we are looking for a solution that's going to work for everybody.

The Chair: I'd like to thank you very much for your deputation.

BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next deputation is Theresa Harris of the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board. Good afternoon and welcome. You'll have 10 minutes for your deputation this afternoon. If you leave any portion of the time remaining, I'll divide it among the parties for questions. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard and then continue.

Ms. Theresa Harris: Good afternoon. My name is Theresa Harris. I'm the director of education with the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, but I address you this afternoon as the leader for the school-college-work initiative team, which consists of not just our board but the Grand Erie District School Board as well as Mohawk College and Fanshawe College, Brantford campus and Simcoe campus, together with Laurier University Brantford, Nipissing University Brantford and the St. Leonard's society. That group of seven has been engaged for the last two years in the school-college-work initiative program, which I bring to your attention. I'm gathering from nods that some of you are well aware of the project. This is a project that indeed seeks to find positive ways to continue to keep young people engaged in school and in transition to the next step, be it college, university or work.

I want to tell you this afternoon just a little bit about a very successful project that our group has been involved in last year and will move forward into next year. This school-college-work initiative has been operative in the

province for nine years so far. Our group has been involved for two years so far. Last year we initiated a project called SWAC, school within a college.

The school within a college consisted of providing opportunities for particularly at-risk students. We were looking at students 18 and older who were certainly at risk of dropping out because they were behind in the number of credits normally assumed by that period in their lives. We sought an opportunity to allow them to attend school on-site at a college. So we started in the fall with Mohawk College, Brantford, and we sent I believe a total of 42 students initially, 21 from each board. They attended class all day long, devoid of uniform for the Catholic students, which some of them saw as a definite perk. But the biggest perk for them was to be treated as adults in an adult environment, at a college.

While there, they studied under the guidance of secondary teachers, thereby able to get secondary credits mostly in the areas of English and math. As well, some of them took advantage of the opportunity to get credits for courses they had already tackled at another time, thereby cutting shorter the time required to study. The name of that is escaping me right now. It was an opportunity for kids to do make-up credits, if you will. In the afternoon they were taught in a team teaching environment by a secondary teacher and a tech teacher from Mohawk College.

At the end of the day, these kids had an opportunity to walk away with four, possibly five or more, secondary credits in one semester, plus they were able to garner two college preparatory credits. That met with such success that those students told their friends, who told their friends, so that in the second semester we had no difficulty launching through any kind of advertising campaign the program to go in the second semester. We branched out to include Fanshawe at that time and moved from the technical aspects, I'm going to say, that attracted the males primarily at Mohawk, to a human services program at Fanshawe, Simcoe, that attracted primarily females. The second semester was extremely successful as well and has our team going forward with full programs at both colleges for September. We have made some presentations to faculties of education about this type of program and we'll be making a presentation to the literacy-numeracy symposium in September. The model proves that it does work for kids.

If you were to interview our students—we have allowed them on many occasions to make presentations, and they tell us in spades that had it not been for this opportunity, they would not be in school any longer. One young fellow told us that the real beauty of the program was that he was now allowed to go back home to live because the deal was, "Either you're working or you're in school or you're not here." The students really appreciate the program. It takes them from that no-hope place of not being able to catch up to a place where "I can do this, people have confidence in me, and away I go."

At both colleges, the kids have been well supported by the college staff. At Mohawk College, at the end of the

first semester the dean came to help out in the graduation and said to the students, "You have all proven yourselves so well that at the conclusion of your graduation today, I am offering you all admission into Mohawk College." So, bonuses all the way around; parents are delighted with it. It is something that I think is worthy of emulation throughout the province. With that in mind, I present to you another option that is a very positive perspective in keeping kids in school.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We should have an opportunity for each caucus to ask you one brief question, beginning with Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: Ms. Harris, as an educator you may have heard some of my comments already.

I believe it's just wrong to fine parents \$1,000 if they don't comply, or employers if they knowingly are hiring somebody who should be in school. From ages 16 to 18, I'm worried about this equivalent learning option in terms of what it means and who's going to be teaching it, the curriculum and so on. I believe we should be offering those options that you suggest, but we don't have to have a law that says they have to stay, no matter what, from ages 16 to 18. Why can't we do what you suggest and make sure the system promotes these options without saying to students, "You shall stay no matter what, whether you've got problems or not"?

Ms. Harris: I'd have to support that. I have an opportunity with our student senate for our school board that meets with representatives from each of the high schools, and we certainly put this question to that group. This is a group of fairly high achievers, and to a person they all stated, as you're stating, that the positive approach is much more effective.

There are many reasons that cause people to make life decisions and they shouldn't be penalized for making them.

The Chair: Thank you. Ms. Wynne.

Ms. Wynne: I want to address the punitive piece just for a second, because we've spent a fair bit of time on it in these hearings, and you're bringing forward what I think is the more important part of this initiative.

The numbers we have from 2003-04 are that of 281 students charged with truancy, there were actually only six who were fined. So we're talking about a very tiny number of students who make it through the court and to the point where there actually is a penalty applied. To me, that is a bit of a red herring in terms of what we're trying to do with this legislation.

What you're bringing forward is exactly the point. If we put these programs in place, and there are programs like yours in place around the province—at the Hamilton board there's a Pathways to Learning, there are programs that are starting and have been in place and are being encouraged now.

Can you just comment on that interplay between the negative that we've heard about in terms of the penalties, which are really the enforcement provisions, and the positive initiatives?

Ms. Harris: Basically I'd be echoing your comments there. The punitive measures don't seem to have any effect, and part of the reason you're seeing not a lot of the cases making it through to the courts is that it could be tremendous energy consumption going on there to put together something that's not going to have any impact at the end of the day.

As an old secondary school principal, I would tell you that you have to find ways to find programs and initiatives that keep the kids there. There's nothing that can chain them there; it's not going to have an effect.

1400

Ms. Wynne: So you have the enforcement piece in place, but what's really important is the other positive programs.

The Chair: Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller: Thank you very much for your presentation and giving us information about your SWAC program. I'm interested in that. What age were the kids who participated in that program?

Ms. Harris: We focused, certainly our first time out, on what we call the at-risk students: students between 18 and 20; students who, if you looked at their credit accumulation, would recognize that they're looking at a pretty challenging couple of years before they would accumulate the credits required. Those are the kids who will drop out. They'll drop out before they graduate because they just don't see the end in sight. So we picked kids 18 and older who were deemed to be at risk because of credit accumulations.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes the time for your deputation. I want to thank you for coming in.

PATRICIA JONES

The Chair: Our next deputant, and the last word this afternoon, is Patricia Jones, who is joining us by teleconference. Patricia, are you on the line?

Ms. Patricia Jones: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Patricia, I'm Bob Delaney. I'm the Chair of the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. You're speaking to us this afternoon in Hamilton. Representatives of all three parties are sitting around the table. You'll have 10 minutes to make your deputation to us. If you don't use the entire 10 minutes, the parties may have an opportunity to ask you a question. Please begin by stating your name for Hansard and then continue.

Ms. Jones: Thank you for allowing me to be on today. My name is Patricia Anne Jones. I have been an educator for several years. When I read this tying of licensing to dropouts I was very upset and now I would like to explain to you why.

First, I don't know how you got this, but if you want to keep students in school longer—and I'm sure you have a very good reason for that—and they are not staying in school, I hope you go to the schools and not necessarily talk to the teachers and not necessarily talk to the parents or the administrators. You have to go and get a rapport

with the students who have left and who are still in school begging to leave and find out why. If you get a rapport, they will give the answers that you don't want and, if you do nothing but listen, eventually they will talk to you. I believe that and I believe that to be critical. Often, they don't get to talk; they just get to listen, and they don't listen any more because it just doesn't help them.

The second thing is more of an aside. I know of a young man who was 15 years old, who was sentenced to a facility because he was a juvenile. The sad part about it is—and I knew this boy to be learning disabled but one of the brightest people I have ever met in my life—he started to learn how to read when he was in jail. You take that as fact and then I'd like you to think of why he had been in school for 10 years and still didn't know how to read. But when he's sent to jail and he has a different type of program, a one-on-one, he started to learn how to read. That's my aside. I think you should look into that.

Why I am not happy with this at all is because I think there are some assumptions being made and one is the American experience. It has been stated that Americans' attendance, when they did this sort of thing—oh, they had wonderful results. Do you know what? I have never seen those stats, and the second thing is, I don't believe them. The third thing is, I have followed American education and, as far as I'm concerned, many parts of their system are in the toilet. Following American examples down the drain is not a solution to a problem. It's just grasping and it's assuming that they actually have the stats to back up their statements. I would like to see that link established. I don't believe it's true. I think it's another assumption and I think it's a political statement.

The second one that really bothers me is, who knows what's best? It's not that the government isn't looking out for everyone's best interests, but I don't think the government is able to tap into the best interests of juveniles. One of the reasons is, most of us, myself included, are middle class people, and most politicians are middle and upper class. You have never walked in the footsteps of abject poverty. You have no idea what some of these kids go through to get to school. You have no idea the bullying they take just because of the clothes they wear. You have no idea that many of these students can't even read and they're not going to learn how to read in our system. They've been in the system for 10 years and they still can't learn to read, but they can in jail. There's something wrong here. But to take their last opportunity for self-esteem—if you can picture yourself going to work every single day, and going to school previous to that, and you are a failure hour after hour, day after day, maybe you can get some sort of empathy—I know you can't get a feeling, but empathy—for these children who are behind the eight ball and the educational system is failing them year after year.

Go to the students. Ask them what they need. But you have to have a rapport. People coming in off the street don't have that rapport. A lot of teachers don't have that

rapport. But these kids want to learn. They don't want to sit in class and be a failure all the time. But do you know what? Some of them desperately need that driver's licence because they can get a job. They're not going to get anything else out of school. They've already been there for 10 years and have gotten nothing. But if they have a driver's licence, maybe they can get a job, maybe they can help their families. If they're on a farm, they definitely can help the family. I know of many farm students. If the children were denied a licence and these children stopped school and they were able to get a job on the farm, they couldn't have that job if they didn't have that licence. So they just go further and further down into poverty.

Excuse me, but this linkage is so unfair and it's so illogical. If you want to start fixing—and you have. You have started to fix up the Mike Harris debacle in education. Finish that job first. Don't start other side issues. Finish the first job, and go to the kids. I've already mentioned you are stripping them of their chance for employment, and I think that is absolutely sinful. I hope you have some rural people on your panel. I hope you go to poor, rural families. Go to the bloody farm and talk to these people and you'll see—

The Chair: Ms. Jones, it's the Chair. Just to remind you, you have about two minutes.

Ms. Jones: Okay. Thank you very much. Good for you.

We all know of many people who have had to drop out of school because they couldn't take the abuse, they couldn't take the failure, and they walked out with their head between their knees. But getting the job and a driver's licence put them back on. Many of these people are paying taxes now. That's what happened to them

when they were 16 and they were allowed to quit. They are now responsible. I know of three families. They're all boys. They have a wife, they have children, they pay taxes and they've got a house. They couldn't have had that if they stayed two more years in school because school wasn't going to give them what they needed. However, competent instruction in driver's ed will help some; it won't help a whole lot.

Another reason is, I don't think we are understanding how important it is for immigrants for their children to get out and help the family. They need English and they need that driver's licence to help. You don't know what problems the families have. I don't, but I know that there are families with fathers who have been unemployed due to mental illness or physical disabilities because of a farm accident. I don't know what they would do without their 16-year-old being able to drive that pickup and go and get what they need for the farm or take that grain to the elevators. They would be destitute. They can hardly hang on as it is.

Basically, my point is, you're tying it to the wrong thing. Get back into education. Teach these kids how to read, and do you know what? They will stay.

The Chair: Ms. Jones, I have to stop you there. That concludes the time you have available. I want to thank you very much for your comments today and just let you know that you had the last word in today's hearings. Thank you very much.

Ms. Jones: That's the first time in my life I've ever had the last word. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes today's proceedings. These hearings are adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1411.

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