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Wednesday 25 November 2015

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 25 novembre 2015

**Standing Committee on
Public Accounts**

2014 Annual Report,
Auditor General

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

Rapport annuel 2014,
vérificatrice générale

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
COMPTES PUBLICS**

Wednesday 25 November 2015

Mercredi 25 novembre 2015

The committee met at 1230 in room 151, following a closed session.

2014 ANNUAL REPORT,
AUDITOR GENERAL

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
ALGOMA DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
LAKEHEAD DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Consideration of section 4.05, education of aboriginal students.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): It is 12:30, so we'll call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. We're here this afternoon for the consideration of section 4.05, education of aboriginal students, of the 2014 Annual Report of the Officer of the Auditor General of Ontario.

We have delegations this afternoon from the Ministry of Education, Algoma District School Board, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and Lakehead District School Board. I see we're all prepared to participate in our adventure here this afternoon. We want to thank you for coming in. You will have, collectively, 20 minutes to make a presentation to the committee and then we'll have 20 minutes each for the caucuses in the go-round. This time it will start with the government side, I think. They'll be the first, and they'll get 20 minutes and then we'll go around. The second half, we'll divide whatever time is left and give it equally and make a second circle with it. It's usually about 17 or 18 minutes from each one.

With that, thank you again very much for coming in. I would ask each one of you, as you are speaking or asked to speak, to introduce yourselves into the microphone so it will be recorded for Hansard. I always find that works a lot better than me trying to say them all first and then having it all wrong in Hansard.

With that, we turn it over to you. Thank you very much for being here to help us out.

Mr. George Zegarac: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I would like us to start by introducing ourselves first, but we'll introduce ourselves as we speak as well. I'm George Zegarac, Deputy Minister of Education. I'll ask

my ministry official and then the school board officials to introduce themselves.

Ms. Janine Griffore: I'm Janine Griffore, assistant deputy minister responsible for French-language, aboriginal learning and research.

Mr. Rusty Hick: Rusty Hick, director of education, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. Thank you for having me here.

Ms. Lucia Reece: Good afternoon. I'm Lucia Reece, director of education in Algoma District School Board.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: Good afternoon. I'm Sherri-Lynne Pharand, superintendent of education with the Lakehead District School Board. I'm here today on behalf of our director, Ian MacRae, who was unable to attend due to health reasons.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll start with a quick overview. I want to, first of all, thank the committee and the Auditor General for giving us the opportunity to provide an update on the ministry and board activities as they relate to our aboriginal education strategy and the Auditor General's five recommendations.

May I add that both the ministry and the school boards have benefited from this process? To begin, to give you a quick overview, we've made significant progress in establishing partnerships, building trust and working in partnership with First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and organizations, education partners and the district school boards across the province.

We've also established a working relationship with the federal government to support First Nation students. We look forward to building on our relationship and engaging with the federal government and First Nation partners to support student success and well-being.

We're seeing progress in the province. The level of voluntary, confidential aboriginal self-identification has increased significantly. There have been notable increases in the achievement results for self-identified aboriginal students. In addition, the gap has narrowed between self-identified aboriginal students and all of our students.

As you know, Ontario is committed to the success and well-being of every student and child. Last year, the government launched Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education. Goals of the renewed vision include enhancing public confidence, achieving excellence, promoting well-being and ensuring equity for all of our students. As part of our renewed vision, we have re-

affirmed our commitment to providing aboriginal learners with the tools they need to reach their full potential.

In keeping with the proud and diverse heritage of our province, we also want to ensure that all of the educators and students build greater knowledge and awareness about First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, traditions and perspectives.

Let me begin by providing you with an overview of the Aboriginal Education Strategy. More than ever before, we are taking a proactive and comprehensive approach to improving student achievement and well-being outcomes for all of our aboriginal students. In 2006, the Aboriginal Education Office was created to provide ministry-wide leadership on aboriginal education issues and initiatives. We work in collaboration with the aboriginal communities and organizations, school boards, post-secondary institutions, other ministries and the federal government.

In 2007, the ministry launched its Aboriginal Education Strategy with the release of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework. The framework provides the strategic policy context within which the Ministry of Education, school boards and schools work to support First Nation, Métis and Inuit student success. It also provides the impetus for us to help raise the awareness and knowledge of all students about First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples' cultures, histories and perspectives.

In the framework, the ministry made a commitment to release a progress report every three years. In 2009, the ministry released the first progress report, which was called Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead. The Minister's Advisory Council on First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education was established in 2009 and serves as a valuable forum for engagement on these issues.

In August 2013, the ministry released the second progress report, entitled A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework. The second progress report also includes Ontario's first baseline data on aboriginal student achievement for the 2011-12 school years. This valuable information is based on voluntary, confidential First Nation, Métis and Inuit student self-identification.

In 2013, the minister struck a working group of representatives from the minister's advisory council to help develop the implementation plan. In 2014, the ministry released the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan, which helped to build the Aboriginal Education Strategy into a real, implementable plan. The implementation plan builds on the progress to date in the implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit policy framework from 2007 and it guides the work of the ministry and school boards through to 2016.

The improvement in the rate of voluntary, confidential First Nation, Métis and Inuit student self-identification is one of our success stories. The data is used by the

ministry, by school boards and schools to understand their student populations and implement targeted strategies to meet specific needs. According to the preliminary October 2014 data, approximately 59%—which is about 38,000—of the estimated 64,000 aboriginal students have self-identified. This is an increase from the 44% who had self-identified in 2012.

Let me speak specifically to the recommendations. We have made significant progress on all five of the recommendations.

The ministry agrees with recommendation number 1 of the Auditor General's report that implementation plans are necessary to support initiatives to close the achievement gap. In 2006, only 10 boards had voluntary, confidential self-identification policies. It is worth noting that now 76 district school boards and authorities have a self-identification policy, so all of our authorities and school boards. All 76 district school boards and school authorities implemented a board action plan in 2014-15, and boards are in the process of implementing their action plans going into 2015-16. And 74 of the 76 school boards and school authorities already are reporting out data.

In March 2014, the ministry released the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan to build on the Aboriginal Education Strategy. The plan is organized around the 10 performance measures included in the framework.

Since 2014-15, the ministry has allocated funding to boards to support the development of the board action plans on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education. These include programs and initiatives to address the 16 strategies and actions identified in the implementation plan of 2014.

The ministry continues, around recommendation 2, to support voluntary, confidential, self-reported self-identification efforts across this province. As I've already mentioned, we've made tremendous progress, and very shortly you can hear directly from the boards who are represented here today.

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As of October 2014, as I said, 74 of the 76 boards and authorities are reporting voluntarily on the confidential aboriginal student self-identification data, and as of today, since we shared the report with you, an additional board, which brings it up to 75 of 76 now reporting data.

Beginning in 2014, the ministry provides aboriginal analytical profiles to each of the 76 boards and authorities. These products expand the dissemination of data while ensuring that the use of data is consistent and accompanied by appropriate contextualization.

A guide was also prepared as part of this initiative and the approach shared with the minister's advisory council working group. In addition, 70 of 76 district school boards have an aboriginal advisory council that actually helps the boards review the materials and guides them going forward.

The ministry has continued provincial engagement and supported board and school engagement with local aboriginal partners and communities to explore data

sharing that builds understanding and increases the number of students and families choosing to self-identify.

Recommendation 3: As suggested by the Auditor General, the ministry released Ontario's first baseline data on First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement through the second progress report in 2013, and we've done that by focusing on our EQAO results. This use of data allows boards to continue to refine their strategies and develop new initiatives to close the academic achievement gap between aboriginal students and all students.

We've been monitoring and tracking the achievement results for self-identified aboriginal students from 2011-12 and 2013-14. We've seen notable increases. For our First Nations self-identified students, they've improved in five of the nine EQAO assessment indicators. For our Métis self-identified students, they have improved in six of the nine EQAO assessment indicators. For our Inuit self-identified students, they've also improved in six of the nine EQAO assessment indicators.

In addition, I'm happy to report that the data also shows that the achievement gap is narrowing for many of the indicators between self-identified aboriginal students and our general student population in some of these assessment indicators.

The ministry supports school boards and engages with aboriginal partners to develop targeted student achievement activities, and the boards will speak to these in a moment.

Recommendation 4: Related to funding, we have moved forward on a number of fronts. We've modified how we allocate funding through the education programs—our "other" stream. Allocation based on student population and self-ID is a part of the funding formula, so now that part of the funding is actually based on you identifying the self-ID; there is an encouragement for communities to self-identify now.

We are also in the process, in terms of our consultation around the 2016-17 Grants for Student Needs, which is our predominant funding for school boards—we've created a consultation guide on the First Nation, Métis and Inuit supplement that has identified a number of key discussion points that we are currently consulting on. So we're consulting with boards, but we have a separate consultation also with our aboriginal communities.

This year, the focus is around equity as we look at our funding formula. This again will focus predominantly on groups like our aboriginal students. In 2015-16, the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education supplement of the Grants for Student Needs is projected at about \$51 million, which is an increase of over \$40 million since the grant was introduced in 2007.

Recommendation 5: The ministry agrees and is showing progress on this recommendation to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students living on reserves.

We've continued to pursue tripartite agreements with the federal government. We're happy to report that in April 2013 the government of Canada, the government of

Ontario and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation signed an historic memorandum of understanding on First Nation education. We will continue to work with our federal partners and First Nation communities on further developing tripartite opportunities, where possible.

Just last week, in a bilateral agreement, the province of Ontario and the Anishinabek Nation signed the first Master Education Framework Agreement and will now proceed to negotiate the master education agreement. Negotiations of the master education agreement are targeted to begin in November—this month—and be implemented by April 2018.

We'll continue to seek progress on this type of agreement, and other agreements, to improve educational outcomes for students on-reserve.

I'd also like to point out that we provide supports to teachers and education workers on-reserve. They have access to our education resource bank for our electronic educational materials. We also invite them on our regional sessions. They are free to participate in our professional development activities.

In conclusion, I want to reaffirm our commitment to continue on the progress we've made on the five recommendations, and we'll continue to report back to the committee. With the Chair's permission, I will leave the rest of my time to my colleagues from Algoma, Kawartha Pine Ridge and Lakehead District School Boards to elaborate in more detail.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): It's yours.

Mr. Rusty Hick: Thank you. It's Rusty Hick speaking. In Kawartha Pine Ridge, across our 7,000 square kilometres and with just over 32,000 students in total, we have three—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Is this geography?

Mr. Rusty Hick: Fair enough—we have three First Nations communities: Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation and Curve Lake First Nation. We have tuition agreements with each of these three First Nations. Curve Lake is the only one that has its own school on-reserve. It has a kindergarten-to-grade-3 school, so the students come to us in grade 4 at Ridpath Junior Public School up in Lakefield.

We also have, across our system—and I think this points to the importance of the First Nation-Métis-Inuit framework being applied to all schools for all students—780 self-identified students, which translates to meaning that we have more students outside of those tuition agreements or outside of those First Nations who are, in fact, identifying as being of First Nation, Métis or Inuit heritage.

We have worked closely with our three First Nations over many years and developed strong and positive relations. That takes time and energy, and it takes respect, first and foremost. We have seen a growth in that relationship to where we are, in the very near future, for example, having a signing ceremony of our most recent tuition agreement with Hiawatha First Nation. They came up with the idea. They wanted their chief and council to be present, and we'll go to Hiawatha First Nation with

the chair of our board, as well as me and others, to have our formal signing ceremony—something that we haven't done in the past, which recognizes or acknowledges, I believe, the importance of these agreements to the communities and the feeling that they believe we're working closely and with respect.

As I said, most of our First Nation, Métis and Inuit students are not from our three First Nations, but what we have done across our system, I think, are some very important things, and that is when we look at this group as a whole, as the deputy minister has pointed out, our student achievement has increased very significantly—and we have been able to close the gaps between this group, which, as a group, was underperforming relative to the average for all students. We've been able to narrow that gap, which we're proud of. We believe it's some of the dedicated focused effort that has gone forward.

Frankly, I would agree also that this committee, the drive to quantify data and to put more than anecdotal things forward, to put hard numbers forward, is very important and certainly things that we continue to work on.

I would like to point out also that our self-identified population from 2010 to 2014 has gone up from 499 students to 780 students. So it's about a 56% increase in students. There are lots of reasons for that, and I'm sure the committee's aware of that. It's a feeling of trust, confidence and pride, in some respects, of one's heritage to be able to put it down on that paper.

There are other sides to that as well. There are logistical things that we've put in place, for example, secretarial training and so on to emphasize the importance of our school staff in getting that information as students register.

One thing, and I recognize our time—

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes.

Mr. Rusty Hick: Sorry. One thing I do want to point out—and perhaps I'll have time in a second—is a partnership with our dual credit at Fleming College. Thank you. I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

Ms. Lucia Reece: Good afternoon. Bonjour. Aanii. Boozhoo.

The Algoma District School Board office is located in the heart of the Great Lakes in Sault Ste. Marie. We cover a geography of 72,000 square kilometres that extends five and a half hours north of Sault Ste. Marie and two and a half hours east. We have 39 facilities, elementary, secondary and JK-to-12 schools and serve a population of just over 10,000 students. Currently, 14% of our students self-identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit.

1250

The statistics in Sault Ste. Marie indicate that our community of 75,000 includes 10% of the general population who have self-identified. We educate 488 students who pay tuition fees from 10 different First Nation communities and the North Shore Tribal Council. Our self-identification policy has been in effect since 2007,

and we believe we have a near 100% participation rate on behalf of our aboriginal students. Our staff is also encouraged to self-identify, and this has been met with positive results.

Since my last visit to this table, we continue to work with our First Nation partners to develop trust, respect their traditions and work on student achievement. I'm pleased to indicate that since my last visit, we have signed two memorandums of understanding with two of our First Nation bands that allow us to share student data on a daily basis, thereby working together in a proactive manner to monitor student achievement and progress. We align, share and distribute our resources where they are needed most.

We continue to see our Urban Aboriginal Alternative High School as a success story. It's in its 12th year of existence and has a current enrolment of 190 students, who use this school as a re-entry to secondary education. The alternative program is delivered in partnership with the Indian Friendship Centre and continues to meet the needs of our learners. This school is a proud partnership between the Algoma District School Board and the Indian Friendship Centre and, to date, we have graduated 98 students and granted a total of 1,357 credits. In June 2015, the Indian Friendship Centre advised that we graduated the highest number of First Nation graduates in Ontario.

Our aboriginal education committee continues to meet and has developed a five-year strategic plan to support students in our board. That committee is comprised of First Nation education officers, representatives from the Métis Nation of Ontario, the North Shore Tribal Council and the Indian Friendship Centre, as well as Algoma University's indigenous student office and Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology.

We believe our greatest pride in public education is that when we say "all," we mean "all" and that we are committed to working with our First Nation partners to improve student achievement. It's important that all groups believe they have a strong voice in education and that we have the ability to meet their needs. We see ourselves, in the Algoma District School Board, as a learning organization, and we pride ourselves on learning, continuous improvement and feedback. We know that when we learn, we must do better and we must include our partners in doing that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That is 20 minutes and nine seconds. We'll start the questions, and hopefully a question will go to our third presenter and she can take her time to make her pitch.

With that, we're going to the government.

Mr. Han Dong: Actually, I'll share my time with the third presenter and just give her a chance to talk about what she has to say.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Very good. Thank you.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: Boozhoo. Sherri-Lynne Pharand nindizhinikaaz. Thunder Bay nindoonjii. My

name is Sherri-Lynne Pharand. I'm from Thunder Bay and the Lakehead District School Board, which incorporates the cities of Thunder Bay, Armstrong and Collins.

We are very committed to the success of every student and, as such, we're proud of the work that we've been doing to support our First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners, as well as the work to incorporate indigenous knowledge into all areas of the curriculum and the classroom, thereby benefiting all students in our board.

We currently have 1,921 students who voluntarily self-identify, or one in every five students in our board. That is higher than the StatsCan data for our region, so we believe that indicates trust in how we use the data to improve student learning. Of those pupils, 196 are tuition-paying students from 12 to 15 communities, depending on the school year. The majority of our student population are urban aboriginal students.

Our aboriginal education advisory committee, our elders' council and community supports guide our work, and it's highlighted within our board's strategic plan, operational plan, board improvement plan and our aboriginal education committee work plan. We work hard with our community to ensure that strengths and needs are identified to implement programs to support learning.

To highlight a few new initiatives since the report back—we've developed the aboriginal youth leadership program, which is a summer program developed with many partners, that focuses on traditional teachings, key life skills, leadership development, healthy relationships, positive self-esteem and connections to education that foster self-identity, self-esteem, self-confidence, and enables students to bring that to the school setting. In addition, we offer K to grade 6 literacy and numeracy success programs to address summer gaps in learning.

Our aboriginal education tutors at each secondary school provide a supportive, safe place that fosters leadership skills, and provide academic tutoring and support transitions of those students from our First Nation community partners.

Our students say, "We find this space much more of a home than a classroom. The tutor is like a second mom and she's helped us all. If not for the tutor, we may not be as successful, because she pushes us to use our full potential."

Our collaborative increase has seen the development of new initiatives at many schools, a key one being the peer mentorship program at our high schools. Of his learning as a peer mentor and peer leader, one of our students said, "Leadership to me means picking up the people who can't pick up themselves."

Re-engagement programs that have been developed support our students who are at risk of not graduating, who have left school and who need alternative supports to bring them back into programs that help them on their life journey.

Our third round of staff training for all staff, based on our handbook, *Aboriginal Presence in Our Schools*, has also been completed since the last visit to this committee.

These are a few of the highlights of the many initiatives that we've implemented in consultation with our community partners that have contributed to improvement in all areas. Specifically, credit accumulation in all subjects over the past five years has narrowed the gap between First Nation and non-self-identified pupils.

I'd be happy to answer any questions. Thank you for the time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. With that, we will now start with the government side and we'll take the time off the second round. You've got 20 minutes.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you very much. I want to thank you for coming this afternoon, presenting to us and, hopefully, answering some of the questions we have here at the committee.

I want to go to the Auditor General's first recommendation, where she suggested that to "reduce the gap in student achievement ... the ministry ... and school boards should:

"—develop specific implementation plans that identify and address the key obstacles faced by aboriginal students and routinely review and update these plans to assess what progress is being made," and there is a second part to it.

If the ministry can give us an update on implementing these recommendations and maybe talk about some of the achievements that have been accomplished within aboriginal education.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll start off and then I'll pass it off to Janine, and maybe the school boards can speak specifically to their examples.

First of all, I'd like to clarify: We are working not only with the school boards, but very importantly with our aboriginal communities around the implementation plans, because this can't be done, quite frankly, without ownership of all three parties. That does take time and that has taken time through the dialogues, but we've had very progressive and supportive conversations with all of our aboriginal communities as we've developed the action plans. Those action plans have actually been informed by some of the work that has been done by various regional communities and school boards as we share some of those best practices of what's working.

I'll turn it over to Janine Griffore and then to my colleagues, if they want to add to this.

Ms. Janine Griffore: Thank you. More specifically, as the deputy indicated, as we develop, in working together with our aboriginal partners, the ministry implementation plan, we have the minister's advisory council working group, where we come to a common table to be able to discuss issues, concerns and challenges that are being encountered by our aboriginal students. Going through the 10 performance measures, as indicated in the policy framework, we were able to develop 16 different actions or initiatives to be able to address the needs of our aboriginal students.

Stemming from that—so that was the ministry implementation plan—we then invited boards to develop board

action plans, and that was starting in the school year 2014-15. As the deputy indicated in his opening remarks, all 76 school boards and school authorities in 2014-15 developed those action plans; and those action plans are again developed with the aboriginal advisory councils for school boards.

We are able now to put in place very targeted activities, very targeted initiatives, depending on the needs that are demonstrated in the various communities, because with this population it is not a one-size-fits-all. So depending on where communities are coming from, be it from urban settings, rural settings or remote areas, boards are invited to gear those initiatives with their First Nation partners and with their Métis and Inuit partners to meet the needs.

1300

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Next?

Mr. Han Dong: Sorry; do I have one more, if that's okay?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: The ministry allocates funding to the boards to support the development of the board action plan on First Nation, Métis and Inuit education. Can you explain what this funding includes, and how it supports your implementation planning?

Ms. Janine Griffore: We allocate approximately \$5.6 million to school boards in terms of trying to, in a very concrete way, support the aboriginal students within their boards. So boards develop action plans, and those action plans are submitted to the Aboriginal Education Office of the Ministry of Education. We take a look at what those targeted initiatives are and the activities that have been identified by the school board, but in conjunction, as I said earlier, with the aboriginal advisory councils of school boards.

Not only do school boards have the education program's "Other" funding—the \$5.6 million—but also through the GSNs, the Grants for Student Needs, they're able to allocate the funding that best meets the needs in supporting their aboriginal students.

Mr. Han Dong: That's good.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Next?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Sure.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Mr. Potts.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you very much, Chair.

Welcome to Queen's Park, particularly for our friends from outside of the city. Welcome to the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

I represent a downtown Toronto riding. I wouldn't ask you to speak on behalf of our local school board experiences, but maybe the ministry can. Do we see the same kinds of issues related to performance indicators for off-reserve people in downtown Toronto within our school board system that are being addressed in the same way? I'm assuming that the experiences in the rural communities may be very different. I mean, 20% of your population base identifying—that's incredible. And the experience you've had in the Kawarthas of increasing

that identification is very—do we have the same kind of identification issues in downtown Toronto?

Mr. George Zegarac: Certainly, we have data, and I'll get Janine to speak to it. The challenge we have is that we have agreements with each individual board and their aboriginal communities as to when we share that data. Our three boards have that permission. We can get that, but we have to work with the TDSB, for example, to share about—Janine can give you a quick overview of what we're seeing as opposed to specific TDSB data.

Ms. Janine Griffore: As I mentioned, all school boards are developing board action plans, and so that would be inclusive of TDSB.

They are working with their mostly urban aboriginal partners. The OFIFC, for example, would be working closely with TDSB in establishing priorities, because the needs—you're quite right in identifying that urban aboriginal student needs could be quite different than what we're seeing in maybe northern communities, or remote communities. So they are targeting their initiatives and their activities according to what they are seeing the needs are through the data that they're collecting.

That's why it's so important for us to collect the self-identification data, because that is the only way that we have in being able to monitor and track student achievement levels and the well-being of our students.

So TDSB would have access to their board analytical profiles that the Ministry of Education provides to each school board now on a yearly basis, starting in 2014-15. We've provided two different aboriginal analytical profiles to school boards, and they're using that information to grow their board action plan.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Right. The auditor identified—and I think it's an updated number from her report—that it's about \$170 million that's been allocated to new student needs in aboriginal communities for those who have self-identified. We had a long discussion earlier about how that allocation takes place. There's some evidence that it was being allocated disproportionately to actual populations of aboriginals in school boards. Maybe you could talk to that a little bit. We also talked about the dollar amounts that are available, and then trying to track how those dollars are used. Are they used student-specific? Are they used for programs that all students are benefiting from? Maybe you could speak a little bit to how we've addressed that issue of disproportionality.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll speak briefly to the overview of how we've changed our funding, and then I'll talk about how the funding is tied or not tied to individual students.

As Janine referenced and as I referenced in my opening remarks, we're using more of the self-identification as part of the actual formula, both in terms of—we used some StatsCan data, I think about 60%, and 40% is based on self-ID. We're starting to shift it to as real a number as we can in terms of the populations in those communities, both in terms of percentage of population and in terms of the nominal number.

We are now, as I identified, into a discussion around the GSN, a bigger value of our investments and how we're actually targeting some of that funding to these struggling populations, aboriginal being one, youth in care another, and special needs. So that discussion is under way, being informed by data and by the evidence that we actually have in terms of our best practices.

I'll get Janine to maybe get into the details of the numbers, but I would say that the funding—special needs is enveloped. Do you have to use that for special needs? Some of the aboriginal EPO funding is enveloped. Some of the GSN is not. That's why we have to look at whether we need to tighten some of the rules around the overall funding to be more specifically targeted to these communities.

I'll turn it over to Janine, and then maybe the boards may have something to say.

Ms. Janine Griffore: In terms of the funding amount, what is being projected for the school year 2015-16, as the deputy indicated, around the GSN, the Grants for Student Needs, is approximately a \$50.8-million envelope. That's the bulk of the investment. As part of that \$50.8 million, there is approximately \$8.9 million being allocated to native languages; \$21.2 million being allocated to native studies, and those are specific courses; and \$20.7 million that is then being allocated to the per pupil amount. That's for the \$50.8 million.

Then there is an envelope of approximately—I believe it's \$12.8 million. From that \$12.8 million, there is the \$5.6 million that is allocated to school boards through the EPO, Education Programs—Other. There are also very targeted projects that the Aboriginal Education Office funds, to the amount of \$3.3 million. There's the alternative secondary school program, and I believe that Lucia mentioned the success in the Algoma District School Board with that particular program. There is \$1.4 million being allocated to that program provincially; and to third parties, for projects that we work with our aboriginal partners in different organizations, \$2.5 million. That gives you a broad overview of how the funding is allocated within our aboriginal education strategy.

Although this is funding that is allocated for our aboriginal students, district school boards have envelopes of money, be it through special education or other different programs, that they do use as well to serve the needs of all students. As we indicated when the boards were talking, boards are taking a look at how we serve all of our students regardless of their backgrounds.

Mr. George Zegarac: I don't know if the boards want to add anything to that.

Mr. Rusty Hick: I would just add, in terms of specifics to follow up on that, that the funding has provided us the opportunity to hire dedicated staff. We have two and a half full-time-equivalent staff to work with our First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, but who also do some work with the broader student body, so all of our students. So it addresses both. It also provides funding for resources. We have a resource called We Are All Treaty People, as an example—so spreading that out.

Then tomorrow, for example, we have another event where we invite secondary students, just of First Nation, Métis and Inuit descent or who are self-identified, to come together and have an opportunity to attend workshops and then to have an opportunity to network. So it does all of those things on a specific board level.

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Ms. Lucia Reece: I would add to that as well that part of the benefit of working with our partners through this has been the ability to address unique needs. When looking at the data, if the opportunity is there and a need arises, we're able to put our heads together with our First Nation partners. As well, I don't want to miss out on saying that we've been asking students themselves: In terms of their achievement and well-being, what do they need in our schools? We've been able to, as you've heard, put in some very unique programs to support some of our students.

I also want to acknowledge that our First Nation partners have been aligning their resources as well because they also want to work with us. We have examples where they support, through counsellors and mental health support at some of our school sites, and programs where we can offer after-hours support to students—so they're not only working in our schools but they're going to band offices after, continuing that learning through some of the counsellors and supports that they've put in place as well.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Three more minutes? Go ahead; sorry.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: Thank you. In addition, I believe that our aboriginal partners, through our advisory committee and our First Nation communities that we work with—the funding enables us to offer a native language, which we would not be able to do without that funding. It's critical to our partners that we're able to offer that.

It also enables us—we have a very large geography—to travel and outreach to the communities who send their children to us for high school. Without that funding and without that support, we wouldn't be able to do the outreach.

The involvement of elders and community in our schools, actively participating in our classrooms, is also enabled through the funding, and creating welcoming environments along with the resources, in addition to the staff and the staff training that have been provided.

Mr. Arthur Potts: How many minutes?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have about four minutes.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Perfect. Just another quick one: The self-identification, we know, is so important, and because there are dollars attached to it, it's important to school boards, as well as being important to the students who are benefiting from it. So I also appreciate very much the fact that it's a broader education so that everyone can be feeling proud of people's aboriginal heritage, and that will help raise the self-identification.

In my own community in Malvern, I was very happy to present—or Mr. Bartleman presented his award for

aboriginal youth creative writing to Justice Ryan, who is a member of Malvern, and that sense of pride that she had in being there, that she could come out in her community and identify. It was very, very important.

But we talked earlier this morning about—because there are dollars attached to it, is there an expectation of a certain level of aboriginal blood attached to this? There are people I know who self-identify as Métis who probably have maybe one-twelfth of their heritage, but it qualifies for cards and such. How do you go about with that sort of definitional issue?

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll turn it over to Janine, but we don't get into that level of detail. It is self-identification. There is a bit of trust. As everyone knows, rebuilding trust with this community has been really part of the objective.

We're actually sitting down—tonight we had a meeting with Regional Chief Isadore Day, and we talked a lot about the data aspect. We are now just at a point where everybody is comfortable, quite frankly, with how we're using the data. Part of their history has been that we've done things to these communities; we haven't necessarily done things with the communities. We've had the same reaction from our Métis partners and others.

We've actually landed in a very good spot, I think, where we're in a good foundational place in terms of relationship with these communities. Now we're actually focused on: What does the data tell us? That first part, quite frankly, over the years has been rebuilding a relationship. That has been a very important part. As we talked a bit about the time it takes—you can't rush that. You can't rush trust.

But I would just say that that conversation is now occurring. The other thing I would point out is, we're now going to be engaged together with our aboriginal communities, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and looking at what our data needs are going forward. Last week, we announced a project where we're going to be looking at data needs. With the removal of the long form in the census, we'll take a look at what we would recommend.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think it's coming back.

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes, but this is our opportunity to actually say what should be in there. The long form didn't have all the things we needed to begin with. We're going to do this with our aboriginal partners so that we can actually be informed as to how we want to progress going forward.

I don't know, Janine, if you want to add anything to that.

Ms. Janine Griffore: To address your question, that's why we call it a voluntary, confidential self-identification policy, because if you identify with the group and you want to self-identify, then you can self-identify through the school board forms.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Han Dong: I have a very short one. Listening to the talking about data collection and analysis, I noticed

that in comparing the students' achievement, specifically the EQAO passing rate, the self-identified aboriginal students are significantly lower. One of my colleagues this morning asked the question, when we got the briefing from the AG: "Do you think that had anything to do with the language they used in the test—so for grade 3, if it was done in their native language maybe the score could be higher or the passing rate could be higher?"

Mr. Rusty Hick: I think we can look at a broad number of reasons. Language isn't always the issue. Our self-identified students: Many of them would speak English as their first language and may not have any understanding of their traditional language, as an example. Others coming from a First Nation community would perhaps be exposed in their early years but would also be receiving it as a second language even in their own school, for example. The language of primary instruction would be, in our instance—I can't speak for the others—would be English.

Having said that, there are other sociocultural and historical reasons for groups being disadvantaged over time and having a lower-performing rate. There are a number of groups who fall into that category. We all know that poverty is one indicator that helps to push students toward lower achievement, and we try to overcome that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair. I promised her I would ask that question, so there you go.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we now go to the opposition: Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the opposition, I'm going to start out with—our job is to hold the government to account and being a little bit critical, I guess. My question, really, is: Why is it taking so long? I'm reading from the auditor's report and it says that in 2005 Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs was created, and then in 2006 the Ministry of Education identified aboriginal education as a priority, with a focus on closing the gap in academic achievement between aboriginal and non-aboriginal students by 2016. I do agree that some progress has been made, but I think it's safe to say that that 2016 goal, set in 2006, is not going to be met; that the gap will not be fully closed by then. Maybe you can help us understand just why it is taking so much time.

Mr. George Zegarac: I would say two things and then I'll open it up to my colleagues, who can add to it. I think the first I've already spoken to, which is that we didn't move forward unilaterally. This is a strategy that was consciously selected to be a collective strategy of school boards, ourselves and our communities. Our aboriginal communities have different interests and different perspectives, so you won't get a uniform answer from any of our parties on what we need to do. We've had to invest time to do that.

We've got delegations coming from all over the world to look at our improvements in literacy, numeracy and

graduation rates. I have to remind everybody: We're at 84%, and our target for graduation is 85%. But we're now in 2015-16. We started this a number of years ago. It has taken time. We're learning as we go. Frankly, it is more difficult as you deal with students who are struggling. It's not just a cultural issue. Some of these students are not just in aboriginal community backgrounds; they are youth in care; some of them have special needs. They are not simple issues. When we're down to the last 16% in terms of our graduation rate, it's going to be tougher. It's going to be harder slogging in terms of our strategies.

The important thing is that we are using research and evidence to guide us. Collectively, we've invested a lot of money in data across the entire system, in terms of the province. Our MISA infrastructure is giving us the ability to understand what the impacts of our decisions are. We have Ontario researchers who are renowned across the world for the research they're doing here in Ontario.

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So I would just say that there is no shortcut to this. This is about perseverance. I have to say, I've been in the provincial government for 30 years. I've actually served all parties at some point. Everybody has had the intent of helping this community. There's not a government that I've served that has not tried. The challenge has always been the perseverance to keep at this, and I think we're in a great foundational position here.

I'm going to turn it over to my board colleagues to maybe elaborate.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: I'd like to concur that it really is about building the relationships and taking time to work with the community and to identify the unique and specific needs of each community. I think, in addition to that, it's about helping our staff and our teachers to know and understand the broader context and to think about different ways of knowing and to respect different ways of knowing in our classrooms.

Just as an example to highlight that: When we looked at our grade 9 and grade 10 science and math results, we noticed that our First Nations students were not achieving at the same level as their non-self-identified peers. We have spent time with Seine River First Nation, Lakehead University and Fort William Historical Park developing a wild rice initiative, where we're going to be growing and developing and monitoring and researching wild rice within the classroom and out in the community, and using data to measure that and monitor it and grow it—environmental science, mathematics, statistics and research.

To do those different types of engagement and learning in the classroom, to bring different ways of knowing, to learn about and respect different cultures and to bring that into the classroom, really takes time. But we know that when we take that time and we involve our community partners and when we involve our First Nation members, it really does make a difference. We believe, through our data, that we're on the right track, but we do have more work to do.

Mr. Norm Miller: To follow up on some of the questions asked by the government on this self-identification

issue: How much of a role does the ministry play in that? Maybe you could run me through just how it works. Is every student in the public system asked at some point if you identify as whatever? Is it random? Is it voluntary? I gather, initially, the auditor pointed out that only 50% of the population were self-identifying and that this is important for funding. So perhaps you could run through the mechanics of how that works and whether it varies from board to board, and whether the ministry does put out a template for the various boards.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll speak at the higher level and then let Janine speak to the specifics.

The boards got involved in self-identification back in 2007. That was kind of our launch. In the initial stages, there was an issue of building trust: "Why would I give you a self-ID?" As I articulated earlier, I think there's been a lot of mistrust in terms of historical educational experiences across this nation. So it took time. The good news is, we've gone from 44% to 52% to 59% and we see an attitude—the discussions I've had recently with our First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities is that they now feel that they can step in front of this with us. They weren't necessarily there, because we were rebuilding both the trust in terms of relationship building, but also clarifying for them how we would use this data. That was very important because they were communicating back to their communities and having, quite frankly, to sell on our behalf.

We're now comfortable, I think, that we're going to see some rapid increases in this. The good news is, it'll be done because people feel that they're going to be well supported in the discussions going forward with regard to good data, and that the intent is actually to provide support for these communities. It's not intended to blame or shame anybody with regard to data. That was very important. There are jurisdictions across the world that, as we know, have used data to take funding away from the communities where they're not performing well and to, quite frankly, shame certain communities. That is not the intent of this government, nor is it the intent of the school boards.

I'll turn it over to our colleagues if they want to add something.

Mr. Rusty Hick: I can just say, specifically, that our secretaries have been trained. So, on the initial registration of any student to our system, they are given the opportunity to identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit. We don't gather any other heritage sort of statistics. I think that was part of your question.

Mr. Norm Miller: So every student gets asked, then?

Mr. Rusty Hick: They have the opportunity, yes. Then, annually, they can update their registration form, yes.

Mr. Norm Miller: It sounds like it's different board to board, then: that each board comes up with their own way of doing this. Does the ministry play any role in giving a best practice to the boards?

Ms. Lucia Reece: I can say that we certainly do the same, where it would be right at JK registration that all of

our students would be asked. I think the role that certainly the ministry has supported for us has been at sharing across regional sessions, where we've been able to share best practices. We've been encouraged to do that. I think all of us have shared all of our materials and practices across all of our regions to support our colleagues in other boards.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: We also have the same practice as outlined by my colleagues. The other piece that I'd like to add is that we outreach to the community regularly, as well, in order that, in our urban aboriginal community, parents and families understand why we're collecting the data and how we use that data.

Mr. Norm Miller: So there's an education component for the community to see that there is a benefit for them to self-identify.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Does the ministry play any role in that, in the education portion of it?

Ms. Janine Griffore: The Ministry of Education helped or assisted school boards in the developing of the policies. When we mention the fact that all 76 school boards and school authorities have policies, the Ministry of Education supported the boards in developing those policies. Now the ministry is in a position to share best practices.

Now that we all have a policy in place, it's more about trying to explicitly describe what the added value to self-identification is within each one of the boards. Students will often ask, "Why would I self-identify?" The onus is on school boards and on the ministry to be able to describe what are those targeted initiatives, what are those supports that are added, and what are the benefits of self-identification for students.

Mr. Norm Miller: The federal government, of course, plays a role with the on-reserve schools. You had mentioned that—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Very badly.

Mr. Norm Miller: What's that?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Very badly.

Mr. Norm Miller: You had mentioned that you're engaging more with the federal government, because, obviously, if you're eventually getting a lot of those students in the secondary schools and they're not doing as well—and they aren't doing as well, I think, historically—that's a problem that has got to be addressed.

The province is the expert on education. Can you describe a bit the role you're playing with the federally run on-reserve schools to get better results?

Mr. George Zegarac: Right. As I mentioned earlier, we've been proactive in not waiting, quite frankly, for some of these changes to occur. We've actually started sharing resources and professional development opportunities, because we can't wait. We've actually engaged with our school boards in local communities to make sure all of our research and all of our evidence is being shared with those who are educating and providing supports in those schools.

So that's kind of been our active strategy. We've engaged directly. We have one tripartite agreement. I think that's a great success, which I referenced, back in 2013. We need more of those. We need to rebuild that conversation.

I think that we have tried, on many occasions, to engage the federal government around this issue. There was, as you're fully aware, a consultation that was not supported by our aboriginal communities here in Ontario. Part of the problem is how that conversation occurs. We can't have a bilateral with the feds without having our community partners at the table.

That's kind of a prerequisite that we would want to engage in with the new government, which has demonstrated, at least in terms of their programming, that they want to address this issue. We will certainly put efforts into engaging in that conversation as quickly as possible.

Anything from our school boards?

Ms. Lucia Reece: We also have transition programs for students who come to us off-reserve. Many of them, for example, have never gone to a restaurant; they haven't travelled on a bus; they've never been to some of these social situations that many of our students would be familiar with. So we have mentoring programs and we have counsellors that we have on hand to support them. We make a very definite point of reaching out and supporting them. I believe my colleague to my right, minimally—I'm not sure about Rusty—would have a similar program.

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Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: We do have a similar program. We also provide tutors in the classroom and a safe space for students who wish to engage with an adult who is looking after them and a way that they can connect with home.

I would like to speak, however, to the partnerships that the deputy minister mentioned a moment ago. We are part of the area where they have the tripartite agreement with the NAN community, Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Most NAN communities send their children to us for high school. We do reach out. We invite the staff from our NAN community to our PD sessions. We attend their conferences as well. We have a lot of sharing of information and resources. Through that partnership and tripartite agreement we've jointly developed a transition protocol for early registration so that we can develop strengths-based timetables for students.

Shared staff training: We do shared community visits as well. We go up and speak with the parents who are sending their children with us. We did have one school staff who actually came and shadowed within our community at another school, and they had a partnership for quite some time with the purchasing of resources, some common PD and some work that they did together. So we are really beginning to build those relationships between federal schools and provincial schools.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you. I believe the member from Timmins—James Bay has a private member's bill he's working on to see the province take over the on-

reserve schools. Is there any province that does that, that runs the schools on-reserve in Canada? Are you aware of that?

Mr. George Zegarac: I don't have any knowledge of a province that's—as we said, there are provinces that have had treaty agreements and have had more individual authorities given to the individuals but not where the province is running them that I'm aware of.

Mr. Norm Miller: Have the First Nation communities communicated whether they think it would be a good idea for the province to be more involved and perhaps even run the on-reserve schools?

Mr. George Zegarac: I think the conversation we've actually had with our communities is how they would grow their own capacity to run the education system in their communities, and what we're doing is continuing to work on capacity building because that really will be important to us, to make sure the students succeed right now, but in any endeavour of taking over additional responsibility in the future it's all about having the capacity to do so. That's where our conversations have been, not necessarily in that discussion that you raised.

Mr. Norm Miller: How much time do I have, sir?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have about four minutes and eight seconds left.

Mr. Norm Miller: One minute?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Four.

Mr. Norm Miller: Four. Okay. That's enough time to ask a question.

Getting back to the recommendations of the Auditor General: (1) was develop “goals and performance measures as outlined in the framework ... and report aggregate results” of the progress made. I'd like to ask a bit about what goals have been established, when the data is available and what data is currently available.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll let Janine Griffore speak to this.

Ms. Janine Griffore: Within the policy framework there were 10 performance measures that were determined jointly with our aboriginal partners back in 2007. From those 10 performance measures, I would say that four of them relate to a pillar that we would call “using data” to support student achievement. Taking a look at province-wide assessments in reading, writing and mathematics, looking at increasing the graduation rate, improving our First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement in general—that particular pillar.

Then there are performance measures that are associated with supporting educators, because we're talking very much about the Aboriginal Education Strategy focused on our First Nation, Métis and Inuit students right now. But there's also another component to the Aboriginal Education Strategy, which is increasing the knowledge and awareness of all students in the province around First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, world views and perspectives. We want to be able to measure how we enhance that particular knowledge and awareness.

There's also a performance measure around building the professional development capacity of our educators to

be able to deliver on that curriculum in the regular provincially funded schools to all students.

Then there's the other pillar around supporting students, what we've been talking about—those targeted initiatives for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Taking a look at board action plans: What are the needs of our students, and what kinds of initiatives and programs do we need to put in place?

Then there's the enhancing and building the engagement piece of our First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners, because it's very much around not the government having the solution for our First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners around education, but how we, together, collectively, working with our partners, have the solutions to enhance student achievement.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Just one minute left.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay, then I'll ask a brief question. You mentioned that you'd signed master education agreements. Could you tell me a bit about that, please?

Ms. Janine Griffore: Last week we had the historic signing ceremony with the Anishinabek Nation in Ontario. It is a bilateral agreement and it is the framework agreement. Ontario has entered into discussions with the Anishinabek Nation to be able to focus on those areas that, together, we feel would be important for us to address as they continue on and build their own education system.

We've had an opportunity over the course of the past year to share with them our promising practices, the programs and the services that we offer in our provincially funded schools to our students, and they've had an opportunity to share with us those programs that currently exist within First Nations schools on-reserve.

We're taking a look at what might we do to build the capacity of our staff reciprocally, because it's not only what we have to offer to our First Nation partners, but they have a lot to offer to us as well in terms of growing the awareness and the knowledge. That master education framework agreement is basically an agreement on the topics going forward that we would like to negotiate in a master education agreement.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. With that, we'll turn to the third party. Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Let me just make this comment at the beginning: I think, in fairness, there has been progress made when it comes to education for aboriginal children in urban settings in our public schools—our Catholic schools or public schools, whatever boards they might be. And I think you're right; the deputy minister referred to this as something that every government has grappled with in order to try to figure out how we give kids in our communities the same chances as every other child, because if you look at the stats, they don't bode very well for aboriginal children when it comes to success rates, when it comes to graduation and being able to compete with other kids. I just want to say, as a member who represents a large geographic area that has a fairly

significant native population, I recognize there's been some progress made within the provincial system and somewhat within the federal system—but I'm very critical still of the federal system.

I've got a couple of questions that I don't want to dwell on, but they're just follow-ups to the auditor's report. Then I want to get into the nut of what I'm interested in with regard to where we go from here.

The money that they get out of these initiatives is not in their GLCs; it's separate, right? The self-identification: There's money attached for children who are self-identified as First Nations. This is not in their GLCs; this is separate, is it not?

Ms. Janine Griffore: There are two different pots of money. One is within the GSN, and so—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, I said "GLC"; sorry.

Ms. Janine Griffore: Yes, the Grants for Student Needs.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes.

Ms. Janine Griffore: That is the \$50.8 million, and that is to meet the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in school boards.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I understand what it's for. I'm just trying to figure out how it's flowed. So it comes within their normal education grants?

Ms. Janine Griffore: Yes, and then there's a second pot of money that is proposal-based. That is through the board action plans. That's the \$5.6 million.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And that's everything from cultural awareness to language to whatever. Okay.

Ms. Janine Griffore: And that part is based on the self-identification numbers.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The one that's part of the actual education grant: How many dollars per student are we talking about in addition to what would be normally given?

Ms. Janine Griffore: The per pupil amount allocation is \$20.7 million out of the \$50.8 million.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: What does that mean per student, though?

Ms. Janine Griffore: I don't have that information.

Mr. George Zegarac: We can get that number and report back to the committee.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can I please request that the committee be given how much that is per pupil in our—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much—and also how much per pupil does it work out to with regard to the additional monies that are applied for by school boards across Ontario?

Mr. George Zegarac: We can start to do that. I just want to caution: We have a number of projects that we provide to school boards that are innovative. Part of that population will be aboriginal students. So trying to draw the line—but we will do our best in terms of those who are specifically targeted.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Please provide the committee with that.

The other part is, I know that the Lakehead board—because I have some experience with Lakehead, and the people up in Sault Ste. Marie are doing some great work, as they are at TDSB and other school boards around the province.

Do we know that the money that is being targeted for the support of aboriginal children is actually being spent for the support of aboriginal children? Is some of that money being used—let me just put it simply. As I understand it—maybe I'm wrong; you can correct me—you get your grants based on how many students you get, and then the board decides how that's going to be spent when it comes to the various needs of the board when it comes to educating the kids who are in their care.

This money that then goes separate to those grants, which are targeted for aboriginal children—my question is, do we know that it's all going to that, or is some of it going elsewhere?

Ms. Janine Griffore: In terms of the GSN component, you're quite right: Those are decisions that are made at the local board level. As for the board action plans and the \$5.6 million that we allocate to boards, there are reports that come in to the Aboriginal Education Office. That money is definitely tracked according to the targeted initiatives that are in the board action plans.

There is also the component of the aboriginal advisory councils within the school boards. That's where school boards—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's where some of the accountability would happen.

Ms. Janine Griffore: Exactly.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can you please provide this committee with the reports that you get, which you just mentioned?

Ms. Janine Griffore: Yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: If you could please provide us—

Mr. George Zegarac: Could I just add for the member: The other part of the conversation, which I tried to address in my opening remarks, is that right now we're consulting on the GSN itself for the exact reasons that you've raised: Do we need to tie some of the money more specifically to targeted communities that are struggling? So we are in that conversation and we can be able to report back on that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, because I checked back with one of the boards—I'm not going to say which one because I've got four of them. My understanding is that it's not part of their general grant; it's separate. That's the way it was explained to me.

Ms. Janine Griffore: There's a line in the GSN that is called First Nations, Métis and Inuit education supplement within the GSN. That is an envelope of money that is geared toward the First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay. If you could please provide us with the accountability of where the dollars are spent, how much per student and what measures we have when it comes to knowing that this is working. I see anecdotally, within the community, that there are more kids

now who are in our school board, trying to finish their grade 12. There's a great program run by the friendship centres across this province where they're capturing a lot of these kids who dropped out of school who are now back, getting their grade 12. I've got to say, that has been very effective. But I still would like to see that.

Now, let me get to the other part, and this will be my little hobbyhorse. I'm probably in the minority here in the sense that, if I talked to most of my friends who live in communities like Attawapiskat or Albany, whatever it is, most people would want to see education stay with the federal government, under local education authorities on-reserve.

I think that's a mistake. I look at the results that those schools have provided, not because they don't have good staff, not because they don't the will to do what's right for the kids, not because of the parents, but the federal government is not in the business of education; we are. We are really good at what we do.

I'll just put it in the context of this. We just recently transferred the administration of hospitals—the last one, which was Weeneebayko—to the province, about two years ago. Trying to get a decision by the federal government to deal with some of the basic issues we had before having to do with hospitals was pretty slow. We just had a spill in Attawapiskat, a diesel spill underneath the hospital. I give full credit to the Minister of Health. Within, I would say, a week of my contacting him, the decision was made to support the Weeneebayko hospital and the community to clean the spill. Never mind who caused it; never mind all of that stuff. Just make it fixed.

We are now moving back into our hospital. We are now going to be dealing with our second phase of the cleanup, again with the full support of the minister. But I believe it's not just a question of the minister, although I do appreciate his support. It's a question of: The province is in the business of delivering health care; the federal government is not. So we have a capacity within the Ministry of Health to be able to respond to these things in a fuller way, contrary to what we saw in the education file on the First Nations side.

I am bloody mad at our federal government for having taken over 20 years to build a new school in Attawapiskat, a school that was contaminated because of a diesel spill. Kids were left in portables for 20 years. It took parents having to protest by pulling their kids out of the school to get the federal government to even put portables in place.

I don't think it's because the federal government is evil; I don't believe it's that at all. I think all politicians on all sides of the House, whatever their parties are, try to do the right things. The federal government is not in the business of education; I come back to the same point.

So I'm sort of trying to work towards getting some buy-in within the First Nations community—and I've got to say, it's difficult—that we move to a system where, if the First Nation chooses and the provincial government, obviously, is willing, we negotiate a transfer of responsibility for education from the current system, federally,

to a school board model that would be aboriginal school boards.

Let me just say this—can you put your translators on? Because I want to make a point. I'm going to speak French in about a second. I'm just doing this for the point. You're going to need translators, for those who don't understand French. I'll just give you a couple of seconds.

Moi, je suis francophone. J'ai appris le français à la maison. Mais si je parle encore le français aujourd'hui et je suis capable de l'écrire et de m'identifier comme francophone, c'est parce que j'ai eu une école en français. J'ai été capable d'aller au primaire, comme au secondaire, et aussi même au postsecondaire, dans ma langue pour me donner la confiance de compétitionner avec n'importe qui dans cette province. Puis ça, c'est une des affaires clés pour la francophonie : s'assurer que les francophones ont la même opportunité quand ça vient à l'accès à l'éducation dans leur langue—qu'ils peuvent se trouver et s'afficher fiers comme francophones. Cette identification vient à travers la langue.

Back to English; I made my point in French. If I'm standing here—what am I now? A third-generation Ontarian, still able to speak French, still able to write French. My daughters do the same. One of them went to a French university. My grandkids all speak French and go to French schools. It's because we have a system in place that allows that to happen.

One of the things—and there's a question coming here. I'm doing all of this because I'm both lobbying and looking for answers. That's a job you do as a member. That's what we do: We try to advance ideas, and all members here do it well.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You do it great.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, you do it not so bad yourself, Lou.

The point I make is this: You made the comment earlier—and I sincerely believe that's the case—that, and it was Mrs.—what's her name?

Mr. Han Dong: Hoggarth.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Hoggarth who made the point, and I think she was right. If kids are confident about who they are, they will do much better in their school and you'll get much better results. It's not just a question of is Cree their first language or is Oji-Cree their first language. I think that's part of it, but the other part is that you have to feel good about who you are.

As a francophone, I've never worried about who I am because I am Gilles Bisson, a francophone from Ontario. I want aboriginal kids to feel the same, to learn their language and to embrace their culture through that language. I think the best way to do that is through an aboriginal school system that is federally-provincially funded and that is agreed to by First Nations, because this ain't going to happen unless individual First Nations buy in. We all know how that one goes.

I'm not looking for an endorsement here, but my question is, and I guess it's sort of—I guess I am looking for an endorsement. I'm trying to get around it very softly.

It seems to me that if we can start to move in that direction, to where we actually have school boards that are run by aboriginal people as far as trustees—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I would just stop the member there and point out that we are dealing with the auditor's report, not education policy well beyond the scope of this committee.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think the auditor will appreciate this question.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I think you're dealing in the area of policy that's going to be decided by a different panel than the one that's before us today. I would just ask the member to get back to the auditor's report.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Chair, for that direction, but everywhere you go, you try to do your job. I will try to stay away from a question that boxes them in.

My point is this: In your estimation—what we're doing at the school board level, I think, is bringing results. If we can do that on-reserve, it seems to me our results would be augmented.

I'll just leave it at that and see what you have to say.

Mr. George Zegarac: Okay. I will jump in on a couple of points.

First of all, I am very confident in the capacity we have in our provincial school system. We have jurisdictions that come from all over the world to look at that. Can we run schools really well? I'm very proud of our system and how our educators and our education workers collectively deliver that service. Is there a gap that we are all frustrated with with regard to capacity in certain reserve communities in particular? Yes. What that solution is, I would go back to the Chair. That's a policy question for political discussion—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And that's what I'm having.

Mr. George Zegarac: —and probably not something I can answer.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you. On to the next part of this.

Back to how we measure our success within our own school boards, one of the things that we're having a few problems with this morning, to be fair, is that as we were looking at the auditor's report and looking at the recommendations and your responses, I think some of us were a little bit disappointed, I'll just put it that way, at being able to figure out how we actually measure the success that we have. It didn't seem to me in your response to the auditor that that was actually being addressed as fully as it needs to be.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll speak to two facts. One is that we are, as I reported, using the current measures we have, which we agreed to with our aboriginal communities. Those were the EQAO scores. We've shown, and I think I highlighted, the progress we've made, both in terms of increasing the performance and closing the gap in those areas.

I would also point out that the current dialogue is not just about progress. It would be a continuous-improve-

ment discussion. We'll have more data to be able to assess the improvement.

But it would be unfair for me to say that that is where we've left the conversation. There is a lot of conversation right now that that's not enough and that the well-being aspects, the measures on well-being—and that's true for all of our students, not just for the aboriginal community, but in particular for the aboriginal community. We have to have a sense of educating the whole individual and showing the progress.

Some of the observations you shared with us we would support. You have to have self-esteem and confidence if you want to succeed.

So how are we measuring that in our student population? Are they engaged? We did research. I was leading the student success initiative in the ministry. One of the dilemmas we had is we didn't know why kids were leaving. We actually did something innovative: We actually had a researcher go talk to the kids. They told us, "You know what the real problem was? Nobody in that school knew anything about me, didn't care about me."

That was not a pedagogical—in terms of pedagogy, teaching. It was how we engaged our kids, that we care about our kids. When I speak in particular about our at-risk kids, and that would include our aboriginal youth, our youth in care and our special needs kids, the conversation I have is, "If this was your child, would you give up on them?" That's the way we need to be able to approach these issues.

Is there enough information for us to be certain of the progress we've made? No. We need to look at other measures. But are there enough indicators that are saying we're making progress? I would say yes, and I would say not just on the fact of the indicators themselves, on the academic achievement, but the fact that the aboriginal communities now sit with me and say, "You know what? We are in a great place." That is not a conversation I've had or many have had in previous years. The conversation now is, "Where do we go together?" I think that's something that we should collectively be very proud of, that we've invested, we've rebuilt that and we're working with them.

I don't think the solution is bilateral in any way. I think this is going to have to be a discussion where it's a tripartite discussion of how we move this. There is capacity-building that for sure has to occur in those communities. As I said, I think the political discussion is how you build that capacity.

But I think we will continue to look at what those measures are, and we'll work with this committee to update you on what we think is probably a better measure in the future. But right now we need to continue to show the progress we have on the measures that we have right now.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think it's also a question of all of us understanding what we signed when we did the treaties.

Mr. George Zegarac: Absolutely.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Treaty 9 is obviously the one that I'm more preoccupied with because it covers our area.

Part of the covenant of that treaty was making sure that kids got access to education. Why did a lot of parents choose back in the day to come in off the bush and have their kids go to residential school? It's not because they wanted to put them in residential school. They were trying to find some way to give their kids an education. What we're seeing is, a generation after that, people are now starting to come to terms with: How do I build an education system that we can have trust in?

Certainly the first pass was a bad one. The residential school experience is still felt in all of our communities quite severely. So now the kids who have gone to residential school have had children and those kids are now becoming adults with parents who are making decisions on how to build an education system. I think that's the group you're starting to see who are saying, "All right. We know we signed this treaty and we know what it was supposed to do. It didn't do what it was supposed to do, so how can we make it happen?"

I give the ministry credit and I give the school boards credit, because I see it in my riding as well, that there is a recognition that we need to do things differently. We need to do them better, and just because we decided this might be a good way to act now, this might change in the future to something else that is more appropriate.

Mr. George Zegarac: If I can just add, as you mentioned the treaties: I just want to point out that one of the things I'm proud of is the work that we've done with school boards in sharing our treaty maps and educating our students around the treaties themselves, and therefore understanding how we actually got into this relationship at the beginning. I think that's making a difference, and not just with them but with parents. We get letters now—and the whole residential school issue and then the reconciliation commission recommendations have brought an awareness in the public that I think we need to act on.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. That concludes the time. So we'll now go to the government: Mr. Rinaldi. This round, we'll have 16 minutes per caucus.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you for being here today. I must say, although there have been some challenges getting from there to here today and based on the auditor's recommendations, which I believe you fully support, and knowing the challenge that you face, congratulations. I just want to say that because it's not an easy task.

I have a First Nation community in my riding, so I'm going to be a little bit selfish on that piece. I have a fantastic relationship. I have eight municipalities, one county and one First Nation community, and I treat them all the same. As a matter of fact, just a week or so ago, I had meeting with all the mayors of our municipalities and I included Chief Jim Bob Marsden from Alderville. That's the first time that has happened in our community. I visit their councils, but there is a difference. We recognize there's a difference, and we need to deal with those differences.

I must say that here's a First Nation community 10 or 15 minutes north of Cobourg, just north of the 401, but I also had the pleasure of visiting some of the communities that my friend Bisson represents. I should say—I'm probably embarrassed to say—that maybe I didn't visit enough of them. The difference between what's along the 401 in my riding and what's in Mr. Bisson's riding—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We'd like a road; that would be a good thing.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Yes. We have a road. So it creates those challenges. But enough of the commentary.

I've also been privileged to be invited to the Alderville First Nation graduation that they do with their own students every year. I think I missed one or two because of conflicts. They don't have a school in their community, so they all use our public system. This is just an observation, and I don't have numbers, but every year, the kids who are at this graduation—they also get recognized for special things like sports, music, the arts, whatever—the number of kids and parents grows every year. Well, this year it was three and a half hours. I think the first time I was there it was maybe an hour at the very most.

1400

So I guess the question, maybe, is to Rusty. Maybe you don't have these numbers, Rusty. When I look at the increase of self-identified kids within the three First Nation communities that your school board represents—from 400 to 780, in, I'm going to say, a very short time—do we have any way of following up, once these kids leave your school board, or maybe the Catholic school board in our case, on how many of these kids go to post-secondary? Do we have any sense, even a ballpark?

Mr. Rusty Hick: That's an excellent question. I'm also very proud of the achievements of our Alderville First Nation students. There have been several years, I think you're aware, where we've had a 100% graduation rate for that cohort of students. So we've been proud of that, and, of course, they've been very proud of that, as well.

Unfortunately, I don't have that data for you. It's one that does come up. We need to do a better job not just for our First Nation, Métis or Inuit students but for all of our students regarding what career paths they choose. Thank you for that.

Mr. George Zegarac: If I could just add: You may or may not be aware that we've just approved legislation that has just now given us the powers to use our Ontario education number throughout the system, so that we'll now be able to track. We've never had that authority before. We will now be able to start to track not just graduation rates but what happened afterwards. We've just started to utilize that.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: What took us so long?

Interjections.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you so much for that. I don't need the numbers; I don't need to have your staff spend a lot of time. I guess that it's really, really important to know that the efforts which we entrust you with, as educators and stewards of our education system, I think

for the general public or, even, yourselves—it's a good statistic to have. That's just my opinion.

More to the Auditor General's report: I'm going to refer to recommendation 2 a little bit. Can you give some sense—maybe this is to the ministry or individual boards—of the self-identification piece? When did we really start doing that? I know that, at least, the three here use the same process, basically. When did we start doing that? The other point, in the same question, is that we'll probably never finish. There will never be an end. Can you just highlight that a little bit, maybe?

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll start and then I'll turn it over to the boards. I think that I mentioned in my earlier comments that it was about 2007 that the initiative started. Around 2008, we started collecting data. This will be continuous. One of the things that we're trying to do is have better data, especially as we get into the equity part of our four goals, to actually understand how these populations that are not succeeding at the same rate as the general population are doing.

It is now capacity-building in terms of the data part, that we're focused on so that we can start to focus on linking datasets so we can say, "We know where they are. What difference has it made?" That's really the Auditor General's comment, which is, "You're now investing money. Do you know where the money is going and what the impact of that investment is?"

We're along in that journey. It will take some time. But we're monitoring what impacts we have along the way for the population that has self-identified. As that number gets larger, I think we'll be able to tell you more.

In terms of how it has been implemented, I'm actually going to turn it over to my colleagues from the school boards to maybe elaborate on that.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: We also began our process of voluntary self-identification in 2007. It followed about two years' worth of outreach to the community so that there was knowledge and understanding of why we're doing that and how important it was and how we would use the data. We've collected it since then. We do regular report-backs to the community—anyone who asks. The achievement data that we share with our trustees, we'll also share with the community.

We have recently changed our policy because, in our tuition agreement discussions with our First Nation partners—we have multiple partners—they would like us to be able to desegregate the data and give the data back to them separately about how each community's students are doing within our schools. We've recently updated our policy to enable us to do that.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Mr. Potts?

Mr. Arthur Potts: In the auditor's report, she talked about the number of schools that are on-reserve and the number of schools that are off-reserve. We understand, with the funding agreements, the transitional opportunities for on-reserve students, when they move—and I think, Rusty, you talked about having one school that goes to three, and then thereafter.

Can I get a sense from the boards of the level of quality that's coming off-reserve? I know Mr. Bisson has spoken about the funding per student being probably half, on a federally funded reserve for educational purposes, than it is in the provincial system. Is that an issue? I know we've talked a bit about sharing information—trying to get curriculum information—back into on-reserve schools, but what is the experience from your boards as kids are transitioning from on-reserve to off-reserve funding of school opportunities?

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: As students are transitioning, we have developed a process together with our First Nation communities that's a transition protocol so that we can identify student strengths and needs, because we do find that at times there has been either a different curriculum, because the federal curriculum is not the same as the Ontario curriculum in all cases, or there may be gaps in learning.

I know that our partner at NAN had done a study that indicated that many of the students who were coming to high school in Thunder Bay were achieving, in grade 8, at a grade 4 level on the standardized test that they used. They shared that data publicly, so I'm not sharing someone else's data.

We have put in place plans to work with the First Nation communities to share resources and also to provide supports in our schools when students transition who need that. Not all students do, but we have an assessment that they do to identify needs and learning strengths when they come to schools.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm guessing that must be incredibly deflating to a student to come in—maybe even being successful on the on-reserve school—but then to come, and feel it's very different. I know that my daughter felt that when she went to university. Her first year of university was very different than her last year in high school.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I felt like that the day I came here.

Mr. Arthur Potts: There's a bit of that as well. It is deflating.

I'm delighted. Do the other boards have those transitional policies in place? I wonder if you could talk further about that.

Ms. Lucia Reese: Very much so. I think, as has been said, it's about achievement and well-being. To your point, I can't imagine having to leave my home to go to high school somewhere else, never mind somewhere where I haven't had very similar experiences.

Quite often, the bulk of the transition period is about the well-being of the students who are coming, and wrapping around them any services they need, any assessments they need, and making connections; because, to the MPP over here who said that until they feel they belong, until they feel they're welcome and they're accepted, the academic piece is going to be tough. It really is about wrapping around them every service and everything they need to make them feel a part and welcome. Then we can focus on the academics. You really do need both pieces: the achievement and the well-being.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Excellent. The tuition agreements: Can you maybe talk a little bit about how the tuition agreement program is working, and any successes that you're having with that?

Mr. George Zegarac: Why don't we start with Janine from the ministry's perspective, but I'll turn to the ones who actually have to implement these and negotiate to get into more detail?

Ms. Janine Griffore: In terms of education service agreements, the Ministry of Education worked with First Nation partners to be able to develop a template of some kind. It's not a standardized template because, as you can appreciate, tuition agreements will focus on different components depending on where you are at in the province. We had an example this morning from a First Nation who said, "Within our tuition agreements, we worked in meal plans for our students." That would be something that would be very particular to that First Nation.

Working with our First Nations, we were able to develop a guide, and that guide provides the basis for the boards to engage in those conversations with the First Nations in their communities.

Maybe what I'll do is turn it over to the board.

Mr. George Zegarac: The only thing I would add to Janine's comment: Those guides were actually developed not just with First Nation communities but with school boards themselves.

I'll pass that on now.

Mr. Rusty Hick: I can speak directly to this. About 10 years ago I was a superintendent in the Peterborough area, which included Curve Lake First Nation in the area that I was responsible for. It had built a very strong relationship with the education manager of Curve Lake, Shelley Fife, at the time. Part of that process over time has been to do better at education service—or tuition agreements, as they're commonly referred to—to the point where we have common frameworks and templates. The ministry has been very good about supporting us in sharing those best practices and in having the template.

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We have a standing committee that works with our First Nations—each of the three First Nations. We sit and meet together about the service agreements, but then individually also. This is about respect and needs and contextualizing an agreement where one First Nation may want something and another might want to negotiate something else. There's allowance for that as well.

There's a common template, but there's also a flexibility and a respect to address unique circumstances—as I mentioned earlier—to the point where we are about to have signing ceremonies, whereas years ago that would have been unheard of.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Okay.

Ms. Lucia Reece: I would echo that. That was certainly an area we discussed when we were here previously, as well.

The template has been extremely helpful and extremely well received. September 23 of this year, we

actually met with all of our First Nation education directors and managers. Each of them have now taken back a draft education tuition agreement to their chief and council, which is certainly not a place we would have been, so we're pretty excited about that.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Great.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have about a minute and a half. Mr. Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): A minute and a half.

Mr. John Fraser: A minute and a half. Okay, I'll really have to condense this.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You can do a one-minute waltz in 30 seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm not so good at numeracy.

What I would like to ask is about the intersection of jurisdictions—so on reserve, the federal government's responsibility—and how that impacts off-reserve education. How much transferability do we have in terms of students moving from a federally designated service to one that is a provincial, tuition-based one? How often does that happen?

Mr. George Zegarac: It happens quite often in terms of—in fact, most aboriginal students in Ontario are in our provincial system. They eventually move from the federal to the provincial system, which is why we want to look at how we can better support the capacity-building before they get to our system. Because if they fall behind, we know for all of our students that if you fall behind early, it's much more difficult, so that's where our focus is right now.

Mr. John Fraser: One-second answer: Does the federal government do anything like EQAO at the elementary level? Is there any measurement? Are there any metrics for those federally—

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll let my colleagues speak to this.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: We do have students who move multiple times within a single school year, at times, between the federal and the provincial systems, if they come to Thunder Bay and go back to their home community in between.

In terms of EQAO, some schools in the First Nation community are accredited by the province of Ontario. If they are, then they do have the choice to do EQAO. So some of our First Nation partner schools do have that data and some don't.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes your time. Now we'll go to the official opposition: Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: I guess I'll start with 1(a) again, the implementation of specific implementation plans. I guess my question is, why did it take so long? It was just in 2014, based on the information I have from the auditor, that implementation plans were put in place. And also, why did you think in 2013 that you had met that

recommendation and then the auditor went in and found that you hadn't actually met that?

Ms. Janine Griffore: Prior to 2014-15, the province was in a mode of what we call pilot projects. As we had done with our regular population, school boards were developing pilot projects that were tailored to what they saw with their partners—the First Nation, Métis and Inuit populations—of putting programs and initiatives in place to address those needs.

Over the course of the years, the ministry harvested the best practices to see which of those targeted initiatives, which of those pilots, actually generated the greatest success. There were promising practice-sharing sessions, be they regional symposia or aboriginal lead meetings, and so they were sharing among themselves which of those initiatives, which of those programs, actually made a difference for our First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. Then, as we were progressing through 2014-15, the Ministry of Education embarked on a process with its First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners and the minister's advisory council working group, and developed a very concrete action plan: 16 different activities or initiatives that we saw as being crucial in raising student achievement levels and closing gaps. From that implementation plan, it stood that board action plans would have to bring that at a very local level. That was basically the process that the provincial government embarked on.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay, thank you. Back to the funding issue: There has been talk about the amount of funding—I think it's \$250 million, roughly, to date. Has the funding been adequate for what you're trying to achieve? Is that a challenge for you?

Mr. George Zegarac: Well, the funding is what we were allocated. I think what our effort is focused on is making sure that whatever funding we have is spent effectively. That's where the effort, collectively, has been. It's to say, "What do we know about the expenditures that we're making? What impact are they having?" Quite frankly, the decisions on funding occur outside of our realm, and our responsibility is to make sure that we utilize that funding to maximize the benefits for the students of Ontario.

I would just say that. I don't know if my board members want to add to that.

Mr. Norm Miller: Following up, then, on the tuition agreements question from the government, can you help educate me a little on how they work, where the money flows? I assume money must flow from the federal government to the band, or to the First Nation or aboriginal community, that then flows the money to the province?

Mr. Rusty Hick: Yes, that's how it works. There's a formula. It's a prescribed formula so we can't pick out of the air or decide on our own level of tuition, for example. It's a set formula that dictates the tuition that they pay per pupil. You enter into that agreement and there's an agreement about what that looks like and services and sharing of information and that sort of thing. That is

signed, in our case, every three years. We work toward three-year agreements.

Mr. Norm Miller: Is it the same across the province or is it different in different communities?

Mr. Rusty Hick: My understanding is that the tuition formula is the same.

Mr. Norm Miller: And does it fully compensate the province—the monies originating in the federal government—for services?

Mr. Rusty Hick: My understanding is that it does. The challenge that we hear from the First Nations is that, on their funding side, they don't receive the same amount of per pupil funding as we need to charge them. We spend more in Ontario on education than the government does.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, it's my understanding that the funding level on-reserve is well below the provincial funding level.

Mr. Rusty Hick: That's correct.

Mr. Norm Miller: That was part of the reason for my question: when they make an agreement with the province, whether they, then, do step up and fully fund it or not.

Mr. Rusty Hick: Our experience is that they have funded it, and my understanding is that they have had to draw on other resources to do so.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay. I'll go back to the auditor's recommendations and go to 3, which was to establish a baseline for the performance measures identified in the framework and set realistic targets. Again, in 2013, it was reported as being met, but then in the follow-up by the auditor, it was found to be in progress. Can you talk to me more about that recommendation and what the current status is?

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll turn it over to Janine Griffore. But I'll just point out that in my introductory remarks, I pointed to our second progress report. That report became our baseline. Janine will speak to the specifics.

Ms. Janine Griffore: As the deputy indicated, in the second progress report the baseline is determined as the 2011-12 EQAO results for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, as compared to the all-student group. When we talk about all students, there would be within that all-student group also First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, because some have chosen not to self-identify. Within that progress report, we are reporting on grade 3 reading, writing and mathematics scores; grade 6 reading, writing and mathematics; grade 9 applied and academic mathematics, and the grade 10 Ontario secondary school literacy test results.

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Going forward, we will be monitoring and tracking our achievement results and closing the achievement gaps from that 2011-12 baseline that was determined. We publicly will be reporting, within the third progress report, the achievements accomplished. But boards are monitoring and tracking on a yearly basis because EQAO administration of tests is done on a yearly basis.

Mr. Norm Miller: And when will the third progress report be coming out?

Ms. Janine Griffore: I believe it's 2017 when it will be released.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you. Also, recommendation 5(c), "separately measure the effectiveness of initiatives ... to address the unique challenges faced by on-reserve students..." In 2013, it was not met, and now the status is "in progress."

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll start and then I'll turn to my colleagues on this one.

This one is a shared responsibility. We can control our part of this conversation, but as I pointed out, there's a federal partner in much of this. We are doing our best to pursue as many tripartite agreements as we move forward.

I would also say, though, that we are engaged in discussions around those measures. We just talked about transitions, which was a big part of the conversation we had with our First Nation communities this morning. One of the things—we're going to actually put a working group together—is around transitions. So that will become a big part of the discussion as we look into recommendation 5 because we know that any time a transition occurs for our students, whether it's aboriginal or not, they are in a risk environment. What we need to do is understand what the best practices around those transitions are. We're also looking at other solutions to try to keep aboriginal students in their communities as long as they can.

That goes back to other discussions we've had around e-learning and other more innovative technological solutions. We will continue to try to address that challenge through discussions with our communities, both the aboriginal communities but also other levels of government as they pertain to that issue.

I think we would say we're in progress. We haven't accomplished it because we're not the sole individual in control of that conversation. I don't know if our colleagues would want to add anything.

Mr. Rusty Hick: Just briefly: We have become more concrete in what we measure and put down on paper and then, of course, follow up. The other vehicle we use: We have an advisory committee on aboriginal issues where our First Nation partners work with us on a monthly basis and talk very openly about what the issues are and how successful or not our initiatives are. It's an advisory committee, but it's an accountability measure for our board. Our staff are there as well. First Nation trustee representation is on the committee—she is on the committee, as are our Métis partners and our First Nation partners. So they're there; they're talking about it.

The numbers of students on-reserve in our instance are pretty small, particularly as you go for each First Nation. They're reluctant to share those results publicly because it could identify individual students. But the conversations are candid, they're happening at the table and they're happening on a regular basis.

Mr. Norm Miller: Including working with the aboriginal communities to try to improve education on the reserve.

Mr. Rusty Hick: Absolutely. They have absolutely the best interests of their students of course at heart and work hard to do that, absolutely. We share the same goals.

Mr. Norm Miller: I believe my colleague Ms. Munro has a question.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you. I have listened this afternoon, and a great many of the questions that I had have been raised by other members. But I want to come back to the question about self-identification because it's obviously unique in this kind of situation. A 14-year-old or a 15-year-old coming to high school: What would encourage him to self-identify or not? What would be a motive for that?

Mr. George Zegarac: First of all, I think that the communities themselves are now engaged in, "We want to know how our students are doing." Being able to self-identify would help that. What they want to make sure is, "You're not going to identify me; you're going to identify me within a group." That's what we've had to try to convince people of: that it's not about your individual performance; it's how we are supporting that community. I think that's part of the conversation that's occurring.

The other thing that we're now trying to point to is the fact that we are willing to put more investment where these students are. As students are addressing and raising issues, such as, "I don't feel included. I don't have"—as Mr. Bisson identified, we have, in our French system, included visual supports and things that make them feel culturally accepted. We need to start working on that in our communities. Some of our communities have done a great job of designing schools to incorporate some of that. We're learning from that and we're sharing those best practices.

As we engage in conversation, both with the aboriginal communities and the students themselves, we're trying to explain why it's a good thing, both in terms of being about to report back and trying to help them but also providing some infrastructure that would address the issues that students themselves told us they'd like us to try to address.

Ms. Lucia Reece: I can add to that as well. I think the deputy's comment about the visuals is really important. We have nine cultural rooms. All of our high schools would have cultural rooms. We have drumming groups and we have jingle dancers, and they're not just filled with First Nation students, which is very exciting. Whenever the schools have assemblies, they would be very prominent. As a 14-year-old entering a school, maybe for the first time, to see that and see others in the school would certainly be very reassuring, I would think, and would maybe spark them to realize that they belong and, hopefully, recognize and join in, as identifying, in being able to access some of the other supports that would be available.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you, because I think that it's really important that, as you are able to expand that identification, we understand the opportunities that it represents for young people.

My other question is, really, more of a crystal-ball question as opposed to something that you are doing right now. I wondered, as you were making your presentation today, whether you see, in the future, flexibility within the system that you're creating, through the framework, where it will be more closely tied with economic development or things like that—skill sets that will engage young people in careers, because that's why most of us go to school. So I wondered if you have that kind of long-range opportunity.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll turn it over to Janine in a moment, but I'll start and then Janine and maybe our board members as well. We know that we needed to change, quite frankly, how we were assessing learning, both in terms of how we actually engaged students in learning—we created High Skills Majors, which have been extremely successful. That really gave opportunities, first of all, for students to specialize in specific categories of education, just as you did when you went to university and got a specific degree. We started with six and now we have 19 High Skills Majors, so you can actually graduate with not only an Ontario secondary school diploma but a High Skills Major in construction.

We've expanded those opportunities because we know that our kids demonstrate learning differently. Some kids learn really well sitting at their desks, as we did; some kids do not demonstrate their learning in that environment. If they can follow their passion in where they want to pursue their future, they will demonstrate great opportunities to demonstrate their learning. When we launched student success and the High Skills Major—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll have to stop it there. Thank you very much. The time is up. We'll now go to the third party: Mr. Bisson.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much. A couple of follow-up questions on the funding of the initiative that's in place: If a school board had the same number of students in year one that they have in year two, would they get the same amount of money? Does the formula change year per year?

Mr. George Zegarac: Well, I'm going to just mention that we just started the change in the formula for the EPO funding last year. So we're now assessing both the EPO and, as I mentioned, the GSN. We're now engaging boards about how we want to change that funding for future years. We've got one year of experience in terms of the EPO, and we'll now have more input as to how we want—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're saying the funding has only been in place for one year?

Mr. George Zegarac: For the change in terms of—when I'm talking about using the self-ID funding, sorry. We've changed the formula. As I mentioned before, it was based on student enrolment. We said, "Okay, we

can't do it just based on student enrolment. We want to actually reward people for self-identifying." So we added both a percentage of individuals who self-identify and the numeric number that they self-identify, so how many students—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Let me try the question a different way to the school boards: If, year over year, you've had the same number of students, is there a possibility that the funding will actually go down? Is this really stable funding? This is what I'm trying to figure out.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Go ahead. This is where you can be free; just let yourself go.

Mr. Rusty Hick: There are tweaks to the funding formula every year, as we know, but the overall level of funding has actually grown over time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So it's fairly stable? That's what I'm trying to get at.

Mr. Rusty Hick: I would say yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So year per year, if you have the same number of students, you're not constantly—like at a hospital or whatever, where you're going, "Oh, my God, my funding's going down." It's not that kind of scenario.

Mr. Rusty Hick: No. We're not in that scenario.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay. The other question I have: In the funding envelope that's provided to school boards, is there an emphasis put on trying to help aboriginal students to do some pre-apprenticeship training and get into trades, and if so, what are they?

Ms. Lucia Reece: I can certainly speak to that one. We have great partnerships with both Algoma University and Sault College. We also have dual credits going on, as well as some Pathways programs. Sault College offers some very specific programs for First Nation students. So we have a number of days—we start as early as grade 6, bringing our students over for career days and Pathways days, where they can go into Sault College and see what kinds of apprenticeships and programs are there. It has been very successful and our students look forward to it every year.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What kind of success are we getting for grade 12 students leaving the high school stream and going off to college to do pre-apprenticeship training?

Ms. Lucia Reece: I don't have numbers on me, but I can certainly say that the partnership that we have with Sault College through the dual credits has been very successful. We have a number of students who would carry on at Sault College in some of those programs, and beyond. A number also go to Algoma University.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Now that you're tracking what's happening with the students after they leave high school—which is a good idea, I must say—are we in any way tracking what's happening to kids as far as what their choices are coming out of grade 12? The reason I ask is really simple. Across your area north of Thunder Bay and in my area north of Timmins, the development is in the Far North. It's the Ring of Fire, if that would ever happen, or De Beers or Detour Gold or Musselwhite or

whoever it might be. We don't have a lot of kids that end up in apprenticeships, partially because you have to have a math requirement etc. and it may not be quite enough for them to get through.

So my question is: In our training that we're doing within our own provincial schools, is there an emphasis in order to bring those skills up in order to help them pre-qualify, or to qualify eventually, for pre-apprenticeship training?

Ms. Lucia Reece: Another program that we would have would be the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, which is also a very strong program. We have a number of success stories where students begin with a particular company in a small capacity and who have actually gained employment through that at the end. So that's another program, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, that is very, very strong.

I think you want to add to that one.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: In addition, we've developed a Specialist High Skills Major in mining because the Ring of Fire is also in our area, and so we know—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's actually in my riding, excuse me.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: Okay. Well, we have students who come from—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My friend from Kenora—Rainy River—we have this fight all the time.

Ms. Sherri-Lynne Pharand: It's a big area.

So we feel that that would benefit students. In addition, we outreach to First Nation businesses in order to have co-op placements for students in First Nation business. We have student success programs that provide intervention and support for literacy and numeracy if students need a boost in order to be able to get into the college Pathways programs.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There's really good success, at least in high schools in my area, when it comes to giving high school kids a chance to go to work somewhere in an employment of their choice. Is there the kind of buy-in that we need from the private sector when it comes to the mining and forest industries in order to give kids the opportunity to see what that's like so that, "Maybe I'll be the electrician, the mechanic, the machinist," or whatever?

Mr. George Zegarac: I going to speak to this one and I'll then turn it over to your local condition.

Co-op in itself has been a very successful program over the years. It is one of the conversations that we are actually having, both politically and engaging in the communities. We need to have more—not just private sector. There are broader, not-for-profit and public sectors that we need to actually step up. I've spoken with The Learning Partnership, which is an organization that has education as their predominant agenda. They're represented by a lot of large companies. I would point out that many of them, despite the fact they talk about, "I'm not getting trained individuals," aren't stepping up. To their credit, a number of them, as soon as I finished speaking to this and I ask them to go back and see how

many students they had, went back and stepped up in bringing in co-op students.

Part of the dialogue needs to continue. I know the minister and I are actually meeting with a group very shortly around this discussion. We do need to get the entire community engaged in the opportunities for students to succeed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, and it's a larger problem in our community overall. It's not just for aboriginals—

Mr. George Zegarac: No. I'm speaking to the overall population, but it's even more challenging, quite frankly, in some geographic zones, yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, it's more challenging. That's the point I was getting at. I come out of a generation where, if you didn't go to university, you were a failure. I decided to become an electrician and made more money than most of my university friends because it was a union rate. It was a great job.

But the problem is that if you look at high school, when I was in high school back in the olden days, we actually had trades programs—electrical, mechanical. There was a lot more emphasis on that than there is today. As I look at the possibility of employment for everyone, including First Nations, in the Far North, that is one of the places where we really have to put an emphasis.

I guess my question was, is part of the funding that we have under this particular envelope earmarked to try to encourage that in some way? Is there a mechanism?

Mr. George Zegarac: Well, I think there are two things that I'd speak to. We've got a number of programs where we're trying to actually create the opportunities. The government just announced Experience Ontario, which is really targeted to students who are struggling to figure out what they want to do next. We were trying to give them three rotations so they would get that. We are providing, I think, \$2,000 per rotation for employers to actually take our students on.

I think we are trying to find opportunities. I do think we've had great success in some of our apprenticeship programs. I know the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities would say that's not true across all our programs, and we're actually looking to redesign those programs to get a more long-term impact. They may get an apprenticeship opportunity; are they landing that job at the end? I think that's an area we need to focus on. I don't know if anybody else wants to speak to it.

Ms. Lucia Reece: I would just add that certainly our feedback from students and parents, both from the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program and the Specialist High Skills Major, has been very, very positive. Many of our students have told us it's the reason they get up and go to school every day.

We've had some very great success stories with our construction house building as well. We have a house-building project. It's one of the most popular programs. One of our local builders has hired a number of our students following graduation. It's very motivating for kids when they can see that lifelong piece at the end of

their experience. But for many of them they have told us that is the reason they get up every morning.

Mr. George Zegarac: If I could just add to that very briefly? The results—we've won awards, actually, for the High Skills Major, from IPAC. The kids are telling us because they're voting with their feet. Part of the challenge is not our students. They have a personal desire in some of these fields. What many of us know, because many of us may do this even in our own homes, is that sometimes it's parents who will restrict the capacity of students to follow their passion, whether it's in trades and others.

That's one of the challenges we have because—to your point with regard to your experience on the electrical side, the person who came to do my renovations in our house is driving a much nicer car than I am. So we need to look at that.

The kids who engage in this—we're addressing gender biases. In construction, we have a number of women involved in welding and electrical.

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We started this as a pilot project, and I went to see how this was going before I tried to blow this out to the whole system. I tell this funny story all the time when I speak on this. I went out with the builder, in southern Ontario, and I got a chance to see the students. They were so engaged. There were women and men working together, demonstrating their clear learning capacity. They were demonstrating in a real way what they had learned. They were passionate about what they were learning. I had to ask the question, "Does anybody buy these houses once they know our kids worked on them?" He said, "George, they're the first to go. Do you know how many nails a grade 12 puts into a two-by-four? That house is never coming down."

So they are actually voting with their feet, because we've now blown this up in terms of numbers and the number of sectors. Kids want to do this.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a different question altogether: On some reserves, or next to some reserves, there are provincially funded schools like Bishop Belleau in Moosonee or Ministik on Moose Factory Island. Are there any particular challenges that they face when it comes to dealing with some of the funding issues related to the monies available for aboriginal students? In that case, they're about 99%. Is there anything to be learned there?

Ms. Janine Griffore: I'm not aware. They have not shared those particular challenges with us at this particular time.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm just wondering if they've figured out how to do things better than most because they're in a majority setting. It's not like the kid who comes to TH&VS; they're in a minority setting. If you're at Bishop Belleau or Ministik, you're in a majority setting, with other Cree kids. Have we learned anything from that, as far as how to utilize that money in a way that gets the biggest bang for the buck?

Ms. Janine Griffore: We would have to go back and do the study.

Mr. George Zegarac: I would say that we share discussions. Whether that specific discussion has occurred at a table with some of our staff, I can't answer. But I can tell you that conversations with those communities occur all the time in terms of sharing, both at the regional level and at the provincial level. So—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just one second. Let the committee record show that Stew Kiff came by to visit us. We say hello and welcome. Stew is a good friend of ours. Have a good one, Stew. I just wanted to embarrass him.

Mr. George Zegarac: So, specific to that, I can't answer that. But I would say that those conversations do occur, and we're trying to learn from each of the jurisdictions.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But is there any sense from you guys at the school board level that they're doing things differently there? Is there any kind of dialogue back and forth?

Mr. Rusty Hick: I'm not familiar with that specific situation, so I can't say.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would just suggest that it would be worth looking into. Is there something there we could learn from? Obviously, in those settings, it's a very different reality than urban settings like Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie or Timmins.

I think I ran out of time; right?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Just about; you have a minute and 10 seconds left.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I want to get back on the aboriginal school board act—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Oh, no, you don't.

Laughter.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'll be looking forward to your support when we bring that bill forward; as a discussion—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): If he has concluded—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes, do you have a comment that you would like to make?

Mr. Rusty Hick: I would just like to make one comment with respect to students pursuing the trades, whether they're aboriginal or not. A lot of times, students need a role model, someone to look up to, an example. As our communities grow—say, our First Nations community—whether they're through economic development or what have you, the more there are examples within their community of people being whatever it might be—an engineer, an electrician, whatever—that they will be able to say, "Hey, I can do that too." So it's a bit aspirational as well.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I was going to say, if one of those students is looking for a role model, if they're looking at becoming an electrician, we know where to find one.

This does conclude the time for your presentation, and we thank you very much for taking the time to come and help us out with the review of the auditor's report on this section. You did a great job.

The committee will recess for just a moment while we clear the room, and then we'll go into closed session to talk about where we go from here.

The committee continued in closed session at 1449.

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