



ISSN 1180-4327

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 4 May 2016

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 4 mai 2016

**Standing Committee on
Public Accounts**

2015 Annual Report,
Auditor General

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

Rapport annuel 2015,
vérificatrice générale

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
COMPTES PUBLICS**

Wednesday 4 May 2016

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The committee met at 1233 in room 151.

2015 ANNUAL REPORT,
AUDITOR GENERAL

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
HAMILTON-WENTWORTH
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
TRILLIUM LAKELANDS
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
YORK CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I call the May 4 meeting of the public accounts committee to order. We're here this afternoon to deal with section 4.03 of the 2015 Annual Report of the Auditor General of the province of Ontario. We have a delegation here this afternoon from the Ministry of Education, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Trillium Lakelands District School Board and York Catholic District School Board. We thank you all, first of all, for coming in.

We apologize for the lateness of the hour that we got here. All of a sudden my political training came into play and they told me that you can't make a grand entrance if you're the first to arrive, so I wanted to make sure that everyone was here before I came in. We apologize. The House did go a little bit longer at noon than was expected.

We thank you for coming in. We will have 20 minutes for your presentation. We will then start questions in 20-minute rotations through the three parties, starting with the official opposition. With that done, in the second round we will then divide whatever time is left in the same rotation with the minutes that are available.

With that, thank you again for coming here, and the floor is yours.

Mr. George Zegarac: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon. I'd like to start by introducing the senior ministry officials and our school board representatives who have accompanied me here today, but I'll start with myself first: I'm George Zegarac, the Deputy Minister of Education here in Ontario. To my left is Denise Dwyer, the assistant deputy minister, leadership and learning environment division. Also, I noted, when we put forward our list, Eileen Silver, director of the safe schools and well-being branch, who will come up to the

panel at times—and Eileen is right behind me. We have, to my right, Manny Figueiredo, the director of education for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. To his right is Patricia Preston, the director of education for York Catholic District School Board. To her right is Larry Hope, the director of education for the Trillium Lakelands District School Board. It's our privilege to be here. It's a hard-working, committed group of individuals, along with our ministry staff and our partners who are so dedicated to our education system and moving this agenda forward.

I'd also like to thank the panel for the opportunity to provide an update on the ministry's activities as they relate to the Healthy Schools Strategy, specifically our healthy eating and physical activity policies, and the Auditor General's four recommendations. As I noted for the Auditor General, we take these recommendations very seriously.

As you know, the Ministry of Education is committed to the well-being and achievement of every child and every student in Ontario. That is why promoting well-being has been elevated to one of the four interconnected goals for education, along with achieving excellence, ensuring equity, and enhancing public confidence, as laid out in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

We at the ministry are fully committed to supporting all of the children and students to make healthy choices, and we continue to do a lot of great work on this front to help schools make the culture shift. Much like the challenges faced by our colleagues at the Ministry of Transportation, who first introduced seat belt laws in the 1970s, and our colleagues at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, who continue to work towards a smoke-free Ontario, we are facing a long road to change established behaviours and attitudes towards healthy eating and physical activity.

Like all other jurisdictions in Canada with healthy eating and physical activity policies in their schools, our efforts to change the culture in schools has many challenges. The Healthy Schools Strategy involves everyone: from government, to schools and educators, to parents, to children and students, and to communities and partners working together. Our partners include organizations such as the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, OPHEA, and public health units, which support us immensely through on-the-ground support and hands-on resources and training.

In addition, our sister ministries are critical to the success of the Healthy Schools Strategy. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Healthy Kids Strategy aims to improve children's health and well-being through new and existing programs. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport's after-school program aims to help children and youth get active, develop healthy eating habits, gain confidence and do better in school. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services' student nutrition program helped to provide nutritious breakfasts, snacks and lunches to almost 848,000 children and youth in schools last year. Working together, we create a positive culture of well-being in our schools.

This past September, we updated our health and physical education curriculum for all students. In this curriculum, we have a healthy living strand, which covers a broad range of topics. This includes ensuring that students understand the factors that contribute to healthy growth and development and are able to apply this knowledge to make decisions about their own well-being.

To support their learning in the curriculum, in 2011 we implemented our school food and beverage policy. This policy requires all food and beverages offered for sale on our school premises to meet the policy requirements, including the nutritional standards. While the policy has been challenging to implement, we do have many success stories. For example, in six schools in Toronto, FoodShare has successfully implemented Good Food Cafés that serve food prepared using locally grown fruits and vegetables. The cafés charge about \$3 to \$4 per meal and serve more than 400 students every day. These successful cafés demonstrate that you can make food that meets nutritional standards and that students will buy.

Physical activity in schools also remains a priority for the ministry. In 2006, the daily physical activity policy came into effect. This policy requires school boards to ensure that all students in grades 1 to 8 have a minimum of 20 minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity in each school day during instructional time. But I do know that the DPA does not have any evenly applied policy throughout the elementary schools.

1240

Since we know that this is important to our children and students—to be active during the school day—our approach to physical activity in schools needs to change. This being said, there are classrooms in schools throughout Ontario doing wonderful, imaginative and innovative things to increase physical activity while implementing the policy. For example, in the Simcoe County District School Board, there is an innovative program called NumerArtsy to help students learn math through physical activity. Every day, students skip, hop, run or choreograph dances in their classroom. These activities, while providing movement, also help students to learn basic numeracy and explore symmetry and patterns.

We know that there have been implementation challenges with both the DPA and the school food and beverage policy. With this in mind, and as communicated

to the Auditor General in our report back, we are working closely with our partners to review the policies. Currently, we're going through environmental scans and consulting with healthy school stakeholder groups, and we'll be connecting with school boards to help us improve both policies.

We're proud of the work that we are doing to promote the well-being of our children and students, but the school-based policies are just one component. We know that there is still more work to be done, but we are determined to meet this challenge. By being persistent, focused and working together, we can continue to build healthy learning environments for our children and our students.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Auditor General's report. Now, with your permission, I'm going to turn it over to the school boards to give a little more detail as to what's happening at the school board level.

I think I'll turn to Manny first, from Hamilton.

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: Thank you for this opportunity to provide a summary of Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's efforts in implementing the ministry's Healthy Schools Strategy, specifically the Auditor General's recommendations within the areas of healthy eating, daily physical activity, communication with parents and co-operation with ministries and partners. With respect to all these important recommendations, we understand the importance of creating processes and tools that measure and monitor compliance, as well as monitoring learning that leads to changed behaviours and beliefs, which is more challenging but vital.

With respect to the healthy eating recommendations, our purchasing department has developed a new process for monitoring compliance of our nutrition policy. Our target is to have all secondary schools completed by 2017 and to begin elementary schools in the 2017-18 school year.

We are also developing a focus group to capture additional data on the benefits and challenges of implementing our nutrition policy. School administrators have also received training at our March principals' meeting on our nutrition policy. This information was then shared with educators at school staff meetings and learning sessions. Looking forward, we are including nutrition policy in training for our new administrators as part of our formal mentoring program and we are developing a survey compliance tool that will request confirmation of key compliance indicators in our nutrition policy, which is that all food sold to the students outside at special event days will comply with the standards as outlined in PPM 150, in our nutrition policy.

With respect to daily physical activity recommendations, we are assessing options and opportunities to bring exemplary practice to our teachers and we are offering job-embedded and after-school training through a network model facilitated by our consultant. We are also recognizing the importance of DPA training as part of our new teacher induction program and providing digital

tools that are accessible and provide a range of options for our educators and students.

We have also made a concerted effort to meet with our parent involvement committee. They have provided advice on the best communication formats and tools to reach out to parents. In addition to parents as partners, we have also developed key partnerships to support training resources and measurement with Start2Finish and their 20/20 Challenge, as well as involvement in the Healthy Kids Community Challenge with public health.

In summary, we are taking the Auditor General's recommendations seriously and will be moving forward with our implementation.

Mr. Larry Hope: Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair and the committee, for having us here today. We appreciate the opportunity to share our key areas of improvement, or the areas that we have made significant changes in over the last number of years as a result of the Auditor General's report.

I'm happy to report to you that our efforts with regard to compliance with PPM 150, the school food and beverage policy, have been enhanced at both the elementary and secondary level. We're very pleased with what we're seeing there, and we're happy to share some of the details later.

We established a healthy schools advisory committee in 2014, which has taken a very holistic approach to this whole thing of student nutrition, quality daily physical activity and healthy living. We focused on school nutrition programs with this group; quality daily physical activity, as I said; and we've enhanced communication with the home and the school.

We have significantly enhanced training and support for our schools through establishing the healthy living consultant role as well as a healthy schools lead in every single one of our schools. They are responsible for a number of things related specifically to sharing and professional development for our school-based staff.

We've enhanced our data collection, and we've made decisions based on the data that we have collected. As an example of that, I offer that we have, so far this school year, served about 900,000 meals to our elementary-aged students across the district. That is significant in that every single one of those meals has been signed off on—not individually, but collectively—by the nutrition coordinators, as well as the dietitians who work very closely with our schools. We have identified, through this kind of data collection, the need for additional resources, i.e. money, to support feeding students at school. We've made significant progress there.

We have dramatically increased our involvement with outside organizations to provide opportunities for students. Most notably, our district looks after Haliburton, Muskoka and the Kawartha Lakes. You can well imagine the outdoor providers and the opportunities that exist for young people to participate in physical-activity-type events. We've developed a wonderful menu. We have been monitoring daily physical activity levels through surveys at the school level and through monitoring of

school timetables, ensuring that students are in fact time-tabled into those opportunities. But we've also been sharing wonderful examples of opportunities to incorporate physical activity into the daily schedule without necessarily being in a gymnasium, per se.

We've supported the implementation of policies and procedures related to concussions, as well as Ryan's Law and Sabrina's Law. We've provided specific support materials for our schools, for our front-line workers, to be able to help them implement these policies and procedures in all of our schools. We have increased and enhanced our participation with OPHEA, particularly as it relates to safety guidelines. The guidelines that are available to us are not always widely known by individual staff and schools. We've done, I think, a really good job of ensuring that they know what the guidelines say and what the guidelines recommend.

We have increased communication dramatically between school and home and between board and home. I offer to you the package that we put in front of you as just a very small sample of some of the things that we've attempted to do to reach out to engage moms and dads and caregivers across our district in helping them build their knowledge and understanding of healthy living.

We've enhanced partnerships with health units, nutrition coordinators, outdoor education providers, as well as organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs and children's foundations in our communities and those types of organizations that share this interest in helping young people develop healthy lifestyles, healthy habits and a better understanding of what it means to make healthy decisions.

We are, as my colleague from Hamilton-Wentworth said, very committed to ensuring that the Auditor General's report and the recommendations are taken seriously and that we respond appropriately to them. We also know that this is a journey; this isn't something that we do overnight. Like any large-scale change, when we attempt to change behaviours or we attempt to build knowledge, it does take us time to do that.

I think, as an opinion in this, we should be very proud of the work that's happening in our schools. We should be very confident that we are making a difference and that we are having an impact on students and their lives.

Ms. Patricia Preston: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The York Catholic District School Board serves 55,000 students from kindergarten to grade 12. It operates 105 schools in nine municipalities across York region and is consistently one of the top-performing boards in Ontario.

We continue to work at connecting initiatives in healthy eating, daily physical activity, mental health, and well-being to support our schools in providing a healthy environment. Research has shown a connection between increased levels of physical activity and improved academic achievement, concentration and the ability to cope with stress. We also know that students learn best when they're well nourished, as healthy eating is linked to better school attendance and therefore student success.

To support our goals, York Catholic has developed policies which have guided our board's improvement plans in the area of student well-being, and hired a full-time health and physical education consultant to lead training, to build partnerships, to create an additional qualification course in physical education, and to develop a curriculum website.

1250

We have also implemented a comprehensive mental health strategy. We've impacted positive change in our secondary schools' cafeterias by capturing student voice through school climate and exit surveys. Healthy school committees have been established in all of our schools. This year, the board applied the healthy school funding for in-servicing school teams on the revised health and phys ed curriculum.

We continue to partner with various municipalities as well as public health to implement healthy living programs such as "My Healthy Lunch Challenge," "Healthy Kids Community Challenge" and "Swim to Survive." We know that stakeholder communication is vital. Memos are sent regularly to update healthy eating concepts and DPA to our staff. Parent newsletters from York region public health are shared regularly. School and board websites offer a number of valuable resources that parents and staff can easily access.

We know that student well-being is best achieved when all of the partners are working together: the ministry, school boards, community partners, staff, parents and parish partners. We know that our message of healthy eating and physical activity is resonating with our students, and I look forward to sharing some of those examples with you today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That's the end of the presentations. We will start with the questioning. Ms. MacLeod?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you all for coming in here today. I must admit that when I was looking at the auditor's report I was really disappointed that many of the recommendations had gone unfulfilled or there was a lack of implementation. But then—and this might surprise you—I started to consider some of the challenges that you might face, as school boards and as a ministry, dealing with the complexity of this.

I think you've alluded to a couple of things that strike me as—first of all, it is a culture change and it's a mindset change. When my generation went through school, that's when hamburgers and fries first started. I don't want to date myself, but I'm getting older myself and I remember that. It was okay. I think that was the Shake 'n Bake era sort of thing. Mums and dads were starting to struggle; you started to see both parents in the workplace, and everything was about convenience and affordability. I'm a parent myself now. A few of us earlier were talking about this, about the complexity there because you have to deal with parental responsibility as well: making sure that mum and dad know what healthy eating is, and then: Can they afford healthy food?

Then you're dealing with students right across the province at two different levels—one in elementary and the other is secondary—and of course you're looking at physical and emotional health and how they eat. I started to actually be much more sympathetic toward all of you—I'm getting more sympathetic in my older years too, my colleagues will tell you—but I started to regard that.

Maybe what I would like to ask of the three different boards at the moment: What are your biggest challenges? Ministry officials mentioned that there were challenges, but I'd like to hear it from you, the closest to the ground. What are the biggest challenges for an elementary school to adopt some of these criteria?

Don't all speak at once. They can't deal with that at Hansard.

Mr. Larry Hope: I'm happy to respond. I appreciate the use of the words "helping parents know" when you were introducing your comments. For us, one of the great challenges is: How do we ensure that we are getting the right messages out, and, more importantly, how do we know that they're being received? Certainly, as the Auditor General's staff was working with us, that was one of the great challenges that was identified, and that is the metrics of knowing whether or not it makes a difference or not. We really don't know how to get at the very bottom of that issue. We've said it and we've put it out—as you can see in the package, wonderful examples of how to support your youngster and all the rest of it—but we don't always know that they've gotten the message clearly.

It also, I think, shows itself in the choices that parents make. Lots of times, while we don't ever want to hold our parents in judgment, we do pay attention to the habits and the trends that are in our schools. If I could make an observation, I would say that our school principals and school staff would say we're seeing far more examples of nutritious lunches coming in, for example.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh, really?

Mr. Larry Hope: The events that are being held in our schools are serving much more nutritious kinds of snacks and foods than we might have had seven or eight years ago when, yes, I dare say, it might have been french fries and hot dogs and hamburgers.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Does anyone else have anything to add on that—what the challenges might be?

Ms. Patricia Preston: Well, I understand what you're saying when you talk about the challenge. I'm thinking how, often in the past as well, our students have been the leaders. I'm thinking of the environmental issues. The students brought to light the fact that we should be doing more recycling, and became the ambassadors in the schools. We're starting to see that with some of our students, as well, as we get more information out there and they become involved not only with school events but also community events where there are challenges to eat healthily or to be involved in physical activities, whether it's the run around the pond or something at the school level. So I think the partnerships are helping us with this.

I guess one of the challenges that we have felt as a board that has a number of very large schools is often the space. There's only so much time for the gym so we had to be creative to get the kids outside and to be integrating more of the physical activity in the math program as well. I see us moving forward.

I guess a lot of our evidence at this point is just anecdotal from some of the stories we hear. I was talking to the mom of a four-year-old a while ago, and she said, "Really, I can't take the pressure. He's telling me now I have to have protein for lunch. He's telling me now when I pack my lunch"—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: But then they don't eat it. You can send it; it doesn't mean they're going to eat it.

Ms. Patricia Preston: Maybe that's why she was frustrated and brought it to my attention. I'm not sure. Thank you.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We can just all send it over to Mr. Milczyn. He does his job.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Did you have any comments?

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: Thank you. I think the greatest challenge is really about modelling behaviours. We know that what precipitates changed behaviours is new knowledge, but the opportunity we're seeing now in our elementary schools in terms of nutrition is that our nutrition programs are really modelling for kids that you can have healthy choices that are affordable and that also taste okay.

We've seen that shift in our elementary schools in terms of our nutrition bins and programs and snacks. Kids are now seeing that there are affordable snacks, and we're trying to model it. I think that is really our greatest challenge: that adults need to model what's expected for the youth.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, I have so many more questions but I do want to split my time. I'm going to ask just two quick ones to the deputy, and I'll ask them very quickly together.

We have just three boards here, and so I want to talk about where you see them in terms of the implementation of these recommendations, what their challenges are, and then, finally, what are the other boards doing? How are you monitoring that in terms of compliance, particularly with respect to vendors that are in the schools?

Mr. George Zegarac: I think these boards are representative of the movement that has actually occurred. I think they've acknowledged that seven or eight years ago, we weren't where we needed to be. We've shown tremendous improvement.

They've shared with me, even with respect to responding to the Auditor General's report, the fact that they grouped together and shared what was going on was beneficial to them. We've actually been trying to do that as a ministry as we've visited a number of boards. We've now visited all but 25 boards to review, and we plan to visit the remaining 25 boards. And as we visit, we actually share the effective practices that we've been exposed to. So the same experience they had in terms of

sharing good, effective practices in taking up some of the ideas of the other boards, we're actually trying to do that.

We put grants out in 2014 both for physical activity and for healthy eating. Those were individual projects that were applied to by boards and had student and parent involvement as well. We're actually evaluating each one of those to say, "What's working?" We have third-party researchers that will be reviewing that material and will be sharing those effective practices going out.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Excellent. I have many more questions for you but we don't have time.

Mr. George Zegarac: We're here for a couple of hours.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very for coming. At the outset, I want to really date myself by saying that I appeared at the public hearings for Living and Learning that was done back in the early 1990s. One of my comments there in my submission was that as a teacher, what I needed was a child to come well rested, well fed and emotionally stable, and I could guarantee at least close to being successful in that child's academic work, if that was the raw material I got. I'm sure you would agree that it hasn't changed. What has changed is things like a very crowded curriculum.

1300

I have three things that come to my mind as obstacles for you: the crowded curriculum, the question of the funding—nobody has talked about that, and I think it's an important thing to talk about—and the third, your parent partners, parental involvement. So those are my three issues that came at first blush, and I would appreciate your response to them.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'm going to start, and then I'll turn it over to my colleagues from the school board.

On the curriculum, we've heard this issue before. One of the things that I think people are unaware of is, when we, for example, looked at the 20-minute policy, we worked with teachers and looked at timetabling to make sure it could actually work. The issue is trying to train all the teachers and get that knowledge into each of the classrooms. Having that experience, you'd be aware, it is—we've had turnover of teachers. We have to get out to teachers and explain how that fits into the curriculum, how you can integrate it into other lessons, and we've had great experience from various boards as to how they've done that.

We've continued to increase our funding for school boards. I think the school boards would be best suited to talk about the impact on revenues. Revenue from cafeterias is only a small part of that, I would say.

Then, with the parents, that's one of the big changes that we're all trying to get to. Even in my own family, my two sons are well past it, but when they were in high school and we started this, they were the ones stopping and holding me up in terms of shopping and looking at the labels, which was great. I think that's slowly getting there, as Pat mentioned. I was at environment during the years when the Blue Box Program started. It took time, but it was the youth who actually started to educate their parents on this. I think that's happening now.

One of our great successes: As part of our student success program, we started high skills majors in high school. We started with six; we're up to 19 now, I think. One of those original six was culinary. It is the most popular high skills major in all school boards. If we're going to actually change behaviours, getting them to cook healthy is the starting point, and they're doing a great job.

We're going to work with them. I've said that one of the other things school boards have experienced—and I know from reviewing school board plans that two things have made a big difference: giving students a voice so they're actually involved in talking about what types of foods they would like to see in their schools; and giving them choice. For example, I was at George Brown College, and in their culinary program, they were working with the TDSB to create new menus that would be enticing and nutritious. So we need to give them a voice and a choice. That's making a huge difference.

I'm going to turn it over to the boards, if they want to elaborate on those three questions.

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: In terms of the funding: The ministry's support in terms of the money we receive for Swim-to-Survive, even our outdoor education funding, provides us with a great opportunity to support the daily physical activity. We know that 20 minutes of DPA, as my colleague said, doesn't happen in the one gymnasium you might have in your elementary school; it happens in different learning environments. The ministry has been very flexible to say, "What are the outdoor spaces we have, and how can we use some of that outdoor education funding to complement and supplement that piece?" So that's one piece I wanted to speak to.

I did want to speak to the crowded curriculum. I would say that the curriculum, right now, with the overall expectations, actually gives us flexibility at the local level to say that those are the real drivers of our curriculum. If you look at the overall, there are multiple opportunities for us in elementary schools to integrate so our subjects are not taught in silos.

Ms. Patricia Preston: I just want to comment on parent involvement, because we know how important that is. We do have healthy schools committees in our schools. On many of these committees, we have a parent participating. If we're not fortunate enough to do that, we take it back to the Catholic school councils and get input there.

We find that parents are coming into the schools for different kinds of things now. It's not always just to sell the hot dogs and the kinds of things that they used to do. They're involved in organizing fitness nights for parents and students, walkathons, activities that get the students out biking and walking as a group. That has been positive.

When we first had the change with our cafeterias, we did see a drop in revenue; that's for sure. They were looking for the same things.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Is it coming back?

Ms. Patricia Preston: It's coming back slowly, but we are on the upswing now. The key to that bit of success

that we will continue was getting the voice of the students. We wanted to know why they were—well, we guess we knew we weren't serving what they wanted, but what would work for them. We talked to them and they were looking at not just the food but a more welcoming environment, where they were comfortable with their friends and where it wasn't noisy and they could have an opportunity to have a book or a laptop. They gave us input into the kinds of foods they would like and then we looked at those foods in terms of compliance. How do we order baked fries? How do we offer pizzas that do comply? That has made a difference.

Also, at some of schools, we run a hospitality program and the students work with a chef. They take input from the students in the school, they prepare the foods and they sell the foods at lunchtime. We're finding that student engagement is making a big difference there.

Mrs. Julia Munro: That's good.

Mr. Larry Hope: So I would say, with regard to the crowded curriculum, there is no doubt there are a finite number of minutes in a day, but I will say that I believe our teachers are masters, as Manny said, at integration. They find and create ways to integrate various subjects together so that things are not seen necessarily as a silo or a stand-alone by themselves.

The other really exciting part about this is that I believe we're at a time where teachers are hungry and excited and happy to find ways—there is so much good research out there that speaks to the value of physical activity, as you said earlier, and how it relates to how a student can learn and function throughout the day.

We know that through our training opportunities we've been able to increase our teachers' and our support staff's capacity to be able to take the fitness moment throughout the day. It doesn't have to necessarily just be, as I said earlier, in a gymnasium.

The funding issue is also a fairly complex one and it's one that we've had to manage because as much as we may have kidded a little bit about the good old days of selling the hotdogs and the chocolate-covered almonds door-to-door and those kinds of things, that truly has been an expectation of our parents and our communities, so we've had to work really closely with them to help them identify alternatives to raising funds. That means everything from—it's spring; you're seeing seeds being sold right now, for example, and magazines, those kinds of things.

Where we may have historically relied on revenues from a cafeteria to support school programs, they've had to be creative. Again, our schools are masterful at being creative and finding new and alternative ways.

With regard to parents as partners, this, I think, is a journey for them too. You heard a couple of examples of young people influencing our behaviour as adults. Whether or not they actually eat what we provide for them after they've talked about it is another thing. However, our parents, we do find, are more and more engaged through our district school council, through our schools councils at the school level in finding alternatives to the

fundraising and finding healthy alternatives for young people in our schools and in making those things happen on a day-to-day basis in our schools. We see that every day in our schools.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Do we have any time, Chair?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Three minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We have three minutes? All right. I have some questions here.

I think that the question I would ask is: Has the ministry considered options for increasing the physical activity of students at the secondary level? I think we're focusing a lot on the elementary level. Obviously, I have an elementary student so I'm more interested in that, and I spend a lot of time in elementary schools. But in terms of secondary schools, I think that you're looking at a whole different set of challenges where there is less parental responsibility, and when you have those kids between the hours of 8:30 and 3 o'clock, you really have to make every second count.

Mr. George Zegarac: Right. I think the strategy is multi-pronged. It is the elementary because if you're going to change behaviour, you have to get to them early, but we can't forget about the secondary school students.

Let me talk about daily physical activity. There is a mandatory phys ed course; many take more than one. What we want to do and one of the things we're trying to do is encourage club activity, physical activities, intramural sports, because that has increased over time and it makes a big difference. We know kids generally don't wake up and say, "I can't wait to get to school and go do math," but they do engage around those other activities. So what we are trying to do is to create the opportunities for them to be engaged at that secondary school level. As I said, even in the culinary program, we created that opportunity for them, not to get educated by sitting in a classroom and reading about it; they were actually producing healthy foods. So trying to find—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, that's magnificent, actually.
1310

I'm wondering, and this is a quick follow-up: With respect to that, are you doing more integration with other ministries and outside agencies? One of the ones we had recently come here was Michael Smith and Half Your Plate, in terms of vegetables and that sort of thing. I'm wondering: Are you working with any of them to integrate them?

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes. We have multiple partners. I have Eileen Silver here, who can maybe speak to some more details. At local levels and at the provincial level, we work with OPHEA. We work with our public health units, who have been a big partner in addressing this. We've also had celebrities, like the Jamie Olivers, who have, quite frankly, given us a champion on some of this and have worked with school boards.

We have many, many partners. I think the school boards can speak to some of this because they've had local chefs and others who have really been—and that's what we need. It is a community change. It is a culture change that is not going to occur just at the school. I

think everybody has been trying to reach out to those partners.

Maybe I'll turn it over to the school boards on that, if you don't mind.

Mr. Larry Hope: Sure. I would say to you that it's not just about the phys ed piece for us in our secondary schools; it is also about the other habits that go along with healthy living. We consistently see the grade 9 food and nutrition course being oversubscribed in many of our secondary schools, which is great to see. Obviously there's an interest there. We also see—it's TFJ, I apologize for the acronym, which is hospitality and tourism, being one that is also heavily subscribed in most of our high schools.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): If you could just hold it there, that may fit the next question. We now go to the third party. Ms. Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. Thanks for being here today. It's really interesting to be here at this place right now because we were both former trustees. When this policy rolled out, I remember being a trustee, and we were trying to figure out how we were going to make it work.

I'm the finance critic and so I like to always talk about money. The auditor found that the ministry had spent \$7.8 million over the three fiscal years from 2012 over to 2015, and prior to that, \$5.8 million, beginning from 2009, so in total, almost \$14-million-plus over those years, which, in education these days and in our current fiscal environment, constitutes a fair amount of money.

I'm trying to figure out where this money went, because I know that the ministry had introduced the secondary school grants program, and that totalled \$3.2 million. Now you've hired an external party to evaluate whether or not those grants or those projects will help those respective school boards across the province meet the objectives of the ministry. I'm wondering why the ministry is not able to do that evaluation itself, and so the rationale for hiring additional consultants, because it ultimately is the ministry's responsibility; right?

That's to the deputy minister. Can you explain a little bit more about the money perspective?

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes. I'll speak to some of the money. As you mentioned, in 2014 we had two groups of grants—and I'll get Eileen to talk about the activities before that. We had \$1.3 million that went to our physical activity in secondary schools—we call it physical activity in secondary schools, which is PASS. We have acronyms for everything in education.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

Mr. George Zegarac: There was up to \$20,000—there was \$1.3 million in total, and it was looking at what we could do to increase activities at the school level. The healthy eating grants were \$3.2 million in 2014, up to \$50,000 per project. In each of these, we did have evaluations and, to a certain extent—here's the dilemma: If we evaluate ourselves, we get criticized for being biased. To a certain extent we want some third party, so we got Charles Ungerleider, who is a well-known re-

searcher. He used to be a deputy minister in another province. It's a small fraction of the cost, but what we want to do is to have the discipline in terms of the right research questions to say, "What's effectively working?"

I ran the student success program, and we had what we called lighthouse projects back then. They were similar to these. They were pilot projects, to talk about what could work to get our kids to stay in school and to graduate. Quite frankly, it was those lighthouse projects, just like these pilot projects, that helped us define some of the most effective instruments to get kids to stay in school and stay engaged. The high-skills major that I talked about that was so successful came out of that, and out of that research.

So we need to do some of that, and we need to have some critical eyes. We do have staff who evaluate this, so it's not that we don't. But we do bring in third parties at times to validate, to make sure that we're being objective in terms of the evaluation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So what I'm trying to get to is that—so this report is going to come out in June?

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Because we have to decide what we're going to do, because the non-compliance has been long-standing. That's what the Auditor General's report came out—and then also the review. There's a number of factors here. If you're a researcher and you look at little or no progress, despite the success, despite the fact that school boards have been very creative and innovative in trying to adapt to what continues to be an inundation on local school boards from the Ministry of Education—not to say that this program is not incredibly important.

I reference the grants in particular, the granting program, because we know that the schools that are really effective in applying for that grant—that granting program is also somewhat problematic, if you will. It's the schools that are incredibly well organized and have the dedicated resources to apply for grants—the most successful schools are the schools that have the most resources to apply for the most grants. Has the ministry considered a more equitable way to support schools, going forward, to implement the Healthy Schools Strategy?

Mr. George Zegarac: To clarify, the grants are only a part of the funding. We have our GSN funding, which is the general funding. Many of our boards—I'll let our boards speak to this—use the general funding to do this. They don't have to do applications to actually dedicate some funding towards these activities. Many boards have done that. They haven't just solely waited for the application process to move forward.

I don't know if any of the boards want to speak to this.

Mr. Larry Hope: Sure. Certainly, in our instance—I'm sure as a former trustee, you would appreciate this—our trustees, our elected folks, have said to us on an annual basis, "We want a pot of money put aside for schools to come forward for enhancement types of activities." Much of that is tied to what the staff in the schools want to undertake related to a myriad of things. Many of

these things relate specifically to outdoor education-types of activities, where teachers and support staff can get kids outside and involved in those kinds of things that help encourage a healthy lifestyle.

In addition to that, we've all been given outdoor-education-specific funding. The really exciting part about this is that it's not being used to purchase equipment; it is being used exclusively to get kids outside. Much of that is project-based or application-based. Certainly, in our board, we ask the staff to come up with their ideas. Rather than saying, "You're all getting \$1,000 or \$2,000 or \$3,000 per school," we say, "Come to us with the very best ideas you have."

I understand what you're saying about being well organized, but I would say to you that we are not seeing a preponderance of the really well-organized schools getting the money. It is actually very nicely spread across.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But I think you would agree with me, though, that up to \$50,000 is a lot of money at the local school level.

Mr. George Zegarac: Eileen could just finish the answer, because Eileen has some background—she's our director for the branch—as to how we actually supported some of those smaller schools with our grant funding.

Ms. Eileen Silver: Our process for receiving the grant applications was such that we really emphasized that we wanted a broad range of boards applying for the funding. We encouraged each and every board—and they got more points, so to speak, in our application process, if they were partnered with third parties. We had third parties like FoodShare, like CUPE, all kinds of organizations that did have the expertise to work with some of those smaller boards so that their applications were sufficient and comprehensive. We did approve small, medium, large, rural, urban, French, English boards. We were very cognizant of wanting to get the full range of the province involved in this project.

1320

Ms. Catherine Fife: But it is an application process, right?

Ms. Eileen Silver: Correct.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So on page 608 of the Auditor General's report—the ministry has made a commitment to actually build capacity, right? That's what you've talked about doing, and there's been some funding to apply for that. It says, "The ministry continues to make resources available to teachers and administrators on how to implement the policy, and in March 2015 it announced it would provide school boards with \$6.4 million for"—actually, that's this year's school year—"to promote students' well-being."

I remember when the legislation changed, where school boards had the responsibility for well-being. But, the definition of "well-being" is hard to measure, obviously. So I'm wondering: Has the ministry given any—because that's the missing piece, I think, here. It's a very subjective thing, what constitutes well-being, especially in what—I would agree with Julia. The curriculum is

incredibly crowded, and the tension in a classroom in the province of Ontario to try to find those 20 minutes, despite the creative options, is very real. It's a very real tension between that.

School boards could choose to use some of this funding for training purposes; that's from the Auditor General's report. So \$6.4 million went out. School boards could choose to use some of this money for training purposes. That's a lack of accountability, as far as I'm concerned. I want to make sure that the ministry—my question is to the ministry: How are you ensuring that when that money gets down to the school boards, who, quite honestly, can find lots of creative options with that money—is it enveloped? Is it tied specifically to the Healthy Schools Strategy?

Ms. Eileen Silver: Yes. Those funds—

Ms. Catherine Fife: And you make sure that that money gets spent in that way?

Ms. Eileen Silver: Yes. Those were application-based funds that were provided. There were interim reports required of the boards, and final reports. And, as you mentioned, we have a consultant in place right now, actually, who with our staff is visiting some of the sites to ensure that the funds were spent.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Auditor General's report said that it wasn't actually applied to teacher training. Once again, on page 608, it says that, "However, with the exception of some health and physical education teachers, at the time of our follow-up the board had not provided training to other teachers on how to promote healthy eating concepts in the classroom."

Are you focusing on physical and health teachers, or are you trying to make sure that that money gets spent in the general population of teaching and support staff?

Ms. Eileen Silver: Each board will assess their needs in terms of—if we're talking about healthy eating initiatives and physical activity initiatives. There are times when teacher training is a priority for the board, and there are times when curricular activities are a priority for the boards.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll just add to this. The boards can probably speak to this, because I know boards have used this money to train their principals, to train their teachers, both on physical activity and on the healthy eating aspects, but on all of our PBMs in the policies.

The consultation we had two years ago when we renewed our vision actually told us that we have well-being embedded in a number of activities, whether it's safe schools or whether it was in our school board improvement plans. What we've come back with is that actually elevating that, as I mentioned in my introductory remarks, is our fourth goal now, and to umbrella this around all of these activities. It's not a choice; we're not picking one or the other. We're actually looking at what the local needs of those schools and boards are and giving them the capacity and the support to actually move forward on that. I think they're best situated to address that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: How much time is left?

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. I'm going to leave the rest of the time for my colleague.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: That was a perfect segue to my question, actually. We know that funding is based on a per pupil basis—a head count—rather than on a needs basis. So we see students with greater needs, and those needs are often not being met because school boards are stretched, specifically in special education funding. So what we're finding is that more and more boards are being faced with having to close their smaller community schools—the neighbourhood schools. Many boards are moving to the model of K-to-12 schools, because, frankly, that's the way that the ministry has set it up. If you close schools and consolidate schools, and you put in a case for a larger school or one that will encompass all those schools, then you might get a chance at having a new school.

I'm wondering—and this is very significant to Windsor-Essex county. It was just announced that we have many of our small, core area schools that are up for accommodation review, that are up for closure. We had some rural schools in my colleague's riding that have been closed. What we're finding is that more and more students are not able to walk to school, run—if that's what they choose to do—or bike to school. More and more students are getting on a bus and getting bused to a school outside their neighbourhood. In some cases, they're on a bus an hour each way. So I'd like to know how that works within the framework of the ministry promoting the health and well-being of students and physical activity, when the move has been, more and more, to move kids into larger schools outside of their immediate neighbourhoods.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll talk about the funding. A good portion of the funding—I'm not going to refute that a lot of it is enrolment-based, but we have socio-economic factors and other things embedded in the funding format. So I just don't want the committee to feel that all we fund is based on enrolment. It is true that we have reduced funding for what we used to, quite frankly, provide for empty seats. We are trying to make sure the funding goes to where the students are.

In some of the cases, it is part of the capital planning in terms of—some of these schools are quite old. Rather than invest in some of these older schools, we're looking at what the other alternatives are. As you know, those are local board decisions. We allow that ARC process to occur with community input, and, in some of the cases, yes, there is further distance occurring. They do have the supports in the busing, but it is all about trying to balance these issues.

I'm not saying that it is not making some opportunities a little more challenging, but in some of the cases, some of the programming that actually occurs is actually enhanced. That's what the objective is: to have a critical mass of students in these schools—in particular, in high

schools, where they can actually have a grade 11 physics class, because they want to actually go on to university and have that. In small schools, that becomes a problem. So much of the decision-making we want to promote is what's best for programming supports. In some of these cases, they've been able to build great facilities, in terms of phys ed facilities and shared facilities, with other school boards.

These are complex issues in terms of trying to balance off, as you said, the ability to walk locally with providing the right programming, educational supports and also extracurricular supports that we want to provide to them. But, yes, in some cases—I'm not going to say—it's challenging. But I don't know if, at the local level—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: To the point of the older buildings, the aging buildings, I'm going to reference another Auditor General's report, which states that the ministry has underfunded renewal needs for boards. So one might argue that the ministry has actually created the case to be closing the smaller community schools, those that have higher renewal needs. Again, having been a trustee—so I'm very passionate about this—I think you would find many trustees would say, and many boards would say, that you actually forced their hand when it comes to making the decision to close these schools rather than renew, especially in smaller communities and rural communities.

I think that's an approach that the ministry really needs to look at: How are you supporting these smaller schools, these rural schools and school boards, when it comes to their renewal needs?

Absolutely, I will agree that there are some schools that are beyond repair, and the best option would be a new school. But often, what we find is that the move, based on the funding and based on the approval, has been to close many schools, consolidate many schools and build a larger school in order just to get a new building for these kids to go school in. So that's something that I think the ministry really needs to look at. I think you would find many trustees and many school boards would appreciate a move away from forcing their hand in closing these schools.

I just wanted to touch on—I know I don't have much time left. From the board perspective, there was a lot of discussion around initiatives that come from the top. Administration goes to meetings and training and then talks to their colleagues and passes that on down to classroom teachers and support staff. I'm wondering how much is actually initiated from classroom teachers and support staff, or how much opportunity they have to say, when you come to them, "I don't think that's really going to work all that well," or, "It's not working. We need to tweak it this way or tweak it that way." How much input do they have, because they're the folks on the ground with the students?

1330

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: To that question, we know that in initial implementation, there is some train-the-trainer model that is provided around key communication

and the big ideas of the implementation. But as feedback has been provided to us and we provided feedback, the best job of a PD is when it bubbles from the school up.

In Hamilton, we have this model of continuous learning improvement, where the school decides on the greatest learning need and we provide job-embedded support. In terms of the daily physical activity, we have a consultant who is working closely at schools, but not just one school at a time.

If we can bring networks of teachers together who identify the need—especially around the generalist teachers, who need some support with TPA—we find that to be the most effective model, so we do have a hybrid of both: some system PD around train-the-trainer initially, and then we go to the job-embedded facilitated networks by our consultant.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you. Does anybody else want to weigh in?

Ms. Patricia Preston: In our board, we have the committees at the school level. That does allow teachers to have a voice. What we're finding, too, is that very often it's the teachers on the staff who are passionate and who are the ambassadors for the program. That does give them an opportunity.

And, just our last—in servicing around the new curriculum, we didn't use the train-the-trainer model; we looked at servicing school teams.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Fantastic.

Ms. Denise Dwyer: And may I just add to that as well that for our ministry resources that were developed to support the DPA and the food and beverage policy, we had teacher input on those as well, for those resources.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Larry Hope: I think, certainly from our perspective, it's important to note that we take the responsibility to develop our staff as fully as possible very seriously. I think some of the miscommunication sometimes that happens is that we expect a teacher to do everything all day long, every day in their classroom. That is simply not the case. I think what you're getting at is us needing to do a better job of helping people fully understand the intention behind the professional learning opportunities; that is, around capacity-building, helping people to have the knowledge and understanding, and the ability to pick and choose the tools that we provide them with when it's important.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I hate to cut the same people off every time, but that concludes the time.

Mr. Larry Hope: You get used to it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go to the government side. If I could, I want to make sure that everyone understands that I don't want to pick on anyone individually, but that we stay on the topic of the report, not on the generalities of the ministry. Mr. Rinaldi?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you for being here today. I wanted to go first because I can't be here very long. I have to go and open a brand new high school and announce an addition to a public school, so I'm in education mode today.

I want to make a bit of a statement, but then understand the healthy eating and exercise piece; right? I think we heard it here today and I think we all agree that it's something that's not going to happen overnight. It's a generational change. I compare it to—and I think somebody touched on it earlier on—when we talked about recycling and all of those things. This might date me a little bit, but when my kids were going to primary school—because once they got to high school it was too late. It was beer, cars and girlfriends and boyfriends that were a priority; right?

I'm talking about when the kids were at the primary grades. I say this as a husband and wife with four kids around the kitchen table. You'd ask, "What did you do at school today?" One day, one of my kids said, "Well, we had somebody come in to tell us about recycling, where we do this." Living out in the country, I'm not afraid to admit that, 40 years ago, I would have a burn barrel in the back somewhere. Of course, when my kids talked about recycling and what they learned in school, I turned to my wife and said, "What are they teaching kids in school today? I thought they go there to learn math, English and those kinds of things."

Fast-forward to 40 years later—or a lot quicker than that—and recycling has become a household thing that we all do. I don't have a burn barrel anymore. I know that some people still do, but I don't.

I guess my point that I'm trying to make is that we've undertaken—when I say "we," we collectively as a society—that we need to talk about nutrition, what we eat, and exercise. I know it took us a lot longer to learn that than probably my kids or grandkids.

As we go down this road through policy, do we need more time? Are we on target to get from point A to point B? I'm not sure how long point B is. It would be nice to live in a perfect world, but we don't. I look at this as the initial first steps, although we've been at it for a few years. I guess I'm just asking for your opinion: Can we do more?

Mr. George Zegarac: Maybe I'll give the context, too, going back to revisit the discussions we had around smoking or drinking and driving. If we said, "Are we happy with where we are? Are we in compliance?", we could have given up and said, "No, we're not progressing as fast as we should." But we didn't. One of the things I tell our students, in terms of what factors contribute to success in high schools, is that it's perseverance and resilience, and we've got to keep at this. One of the things we do want to do, though, is to learn from the experiences we have, what's working and move that as quickly through the system as we can.

The other thing I would say to the members is that one thing we're also doing is that we know we need to get to them in elementary. That's how we got the recycling done. You get to the kids young, and they're not set in their ways. They ask those innocent questions of parents that guilt you into changing your behaviour.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Absolutely.

Mr. George Zegarac: You know what we're doing now too? I have the benefit that I have child care as well.

Maybe just to point a few things out, in addition to the changes we're making in modernization for our child care act, we've included in our phase 2 regulations a proposal to require 30 minutes of outdoor time and before- and after-school programs run by licensed child care operators.

We're also proposing that authorized recreational and skill-building programs provided as after-school programming for six- to 12-year-olds under the Education Act dedicate 30% of the programming, or 60 minutes of that time, to active play.

We're going to have to keep at this. I think we're just going to have to understand that it is a longer journey and to keep the pressure on all of us, as we are here today, to say, "What more can we be doing? What is it that we've learned that is working?"

One of the things we've also learned, particularly in pilot projects, is what's not working. That's equally important to share.

I would say—do we need more time? We always need more time. The issue is, are we doing the best we can with the time we have, and are we using effective practices?

We have jurisdictions that come from all over the world. Quite frankly, there are some who are looking now—as we put well-being as one of our four goals, other jurisdictions are looking to Ontario as a leader in this now and are looking at what it is they can learn from us. We're frustrated. We want to improve for sure, but I think we're showing progress.

As the boards have articulated at the local level, quite frankly that's where you see the returns: the relationships they're building with their communities, and the relationships they're building with partners and parents. It is about changing behaviour. All I would say is that it will take some time, but I don't think it takes the pressure off us to try to accelerate and use all the instruments available to us. That's what we're trying to do, and that's why we've also embedded some of these strategies into our child care activity, because we want to get them even before they get to elementary schools.

I don't know if the boards want to add.

Mr. Larry Hope: I would say that very much like you have constituents who have expectations of you to continue moving the bars forward, so, too, do we in the school system when it comes to these particular aspects of what we do. The moment we step back and say that we're there, I think that we have a problem on our hands with moms and dads out there who say, "What's next? What more will you be doing to help educate my children?"

As the deputy minister said, this is not a destination for us. This is truly about the path we take forward to help not just our kids today but, frankly, their kids.

To your examples that you've used: Think about what's happening with texting and driving right now even. I was guilty—not anymore—of this. My own children corrected me when they saw me pick up a telephone in a car. I'm sure we could all tell similar stories. We

know these things are making a difference and having quite an effect on what happens, but we can't let off on our efforts to keep going and raising the bar.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you. Oh, sorry.

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: I could just add to the notion of culture change. What I have in front of me here, which I probably would not have had 20 years ago, is a list of about 40 partners in the city of Hamilton who are wrapping around this cause around physical activity and nutrition, because they know that those are two core pieces of well-being. From our public health to the Hamilton Bulldogs to Dofasco to public health with Metrolinx around safe routes to school, walking plans, Boys and Girls Club—there's an endless passion out there from people who want to support this cause. Prior to the ministry policy, they were far and few between.

1340

So it's great to see. It must be an indication of ministries collaborating. From our perspective, we're messaging that we can't do it alone. One of the leading indicators for us is: Who are the community partners coming to the table? In Hamilton, we're thrilled to say that people are coming to the table, because they see that this is not just between 9 and 3.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you all for being here. Before I get to my first question, I just wanted to say to Director Preston: What a great event that was at Our Lady of Grace, the 60th anniversary on Sunday. I was there. I didn't get a chance to talk to you, but it was a fantastic event—a great school.

Just to set the stage a bit, I have three children, long out of education—the youngest is 23; the oldest is 27—but I noticed something: When it comes to nutrition and exercise, particularly, that seemed to be the generation where things started to tip. When my daughter was 12, she declared that she was going to be a vegetarian. I noticed my three children and, more importantly, their friends were far more aware of what they were eating, with exercise and the whole bit. I'm quite happy to see them, as young adults, far more active than perhaps I was and far more aware of their nutritional needs. Even in those days, good things were happening, and I think a lot of it was linked back to the school, even though, heaven forbid, we had cupcake days and those kinds of things every now and then.

What I wanted to get at—just a couple of comments. I was also a councillor with the town of Aurora. We worked very closely with the school boards when it came to things like active transportation, when we were planning new subdivisions, making sure that there were off-road trails, that kids could get from their house to a school without having to cross busy intersections and those kinds of things. So I'm very aware of how the school boards have been involved in working with municipalities to make sure that happens, and we need to do more of it. So when we get to the question, if you have any comments around that, that would be great.

I was interested in the comment about students as leaders. If you can make some comments, to begin with—I'm interested in drilling down into the weeds a little bit, especially around students in the elementary schools. What sort of things do you have them doing? Just as an example, I was chair of our school council and it was the young people who came to me on the q.t. and said, "You know, they want to put a pop machine"—this was before we outlawed it. "They want to put a pop machine to raise money." It was the young kids who came to me and said, "We don't think that's right." The school council got together and said, "We agree; that's not right." Those kids were showing some real leadership then. What sort of things are we doing to give them the voice and the choice in the elementary schools?

Mr. George Zegarac: I'm going to start just in terms of what we're trying to do to give voice. I'll let you speak to the elementary schools, but the minister actually has a student advisory committee, and over the years they've been instrumental, quite frankly, in influencing our policy. In fact, we did eight regional sessions when we did a renewal of our vision. If you go to the Achieving Excellence document, we have in the centre of that document a pictogram that came out of the student advisory group, who defined what they thought the vision should look like. They are amazing. We did seven more sessions and we could have ended after the students, because they hit all the marks that we heard seven more times.

Giving them the voice—and the advisory committee is just one opportunity they have now at the local levels, and I'll let the school boards speak to that. We are using that student voice in much of our policy discussion now, and they're influencing, quite frankly—we had a session yesterday on well-being. We had a young aboriginal girl who talked about her experience and some of the challenges she has had. Those are the voices, because we will allow—some of our students are going to get along just fine without us, both on the healthy side and on the academic side. It's the others who are challenging, and our job is to make sure they get the opportunity to succeed as well.

We've given that opportunity at the provincial level, but I'll turn it over to the boards to talk because they've got lots of examples.

Ms. Patricia Preston: I'd just like to start with a couple of very concrete examples. One of them is a program called PLAY, and that is Peer Leadership for Active Youth. Its goal is to create safer, more organized and fun playground environments. In an elementary school, the grade 7 and 8 students would be trained to be the leaders. They would develop games and activities and would be working with the younger students at the school to have worthwhile activities at the lunch break and at recess time. It's also part of our campaign to have more caring environments and less bullying in the schools. That's working very well. We have it in a number of schools, and plan to expand it.

We have a program called Girls on the Run. It's a transformational learning program for girls ages eight to

13—a lot of awareness about self-esteem and empowering girls to be the best that they can be. Part of it is physical training. For a number of weeks, they're running and exercising every day. Then in early May, there's an opportunity for them to have a 5K run in the York region.

We're now partnering with Aurora. We met with the mayor just a couple of weeks ago to look at some community projects that we can be engaged in. We're talking about times when the streets will be closed and we'll involve our students with Aurora to get out and run. They're looking for a student voice on their committees as well.

We have a fair access program. It's a drop-in after-school program for students in grades 6 to 8. They have opportunities to learn some new sports, learn about nutrition, and the leadership is there for the students as well.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Good.

Mr. Larry Hope: I would say—am I going last?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes, you're going last.

Mr. Larry Hope: Thank you for your commentary on that generation of young people you were talking about. I would submit to you that if you go into any one of our schools today, you would probably be faced with what I would consider the finest generation of young Canadians we've ever seen—better than us, I am sorry to say with respect to everybody—in that these kids today are so in tune with social responsibility, with the things that you're referring to with regard to living a healthy life, giving back and all those kinds of things. We've seen incredible things driven by young people in our schools.

I would echo many of the things Pat talked about. Our schools do a remarkable job of engaging so many organizations in helping to move these things forward within our schools. We have an undertaking in our district called Feed All Four that you can see in the package that I've provided you with. It is a deliberate attempt on our part to feed the mind, the body, the spirit and the emotional well-being of our young people and our staff alike.

What's really exciting about this for us is that it is not a top-down undertaking, where we send our principles or our teachers away and say, "Okay, go back to your school and do this." What we've found is that our kids have helped us develop and identify incredible things that support physical well-being, emotional well-being and spiritual well-being. It is truly something that is transformational for us—and frankly, it's new ground for us to see our kids leading this way.

Education has typically been the teacher in front of the kids. We are seeing less and less of that and more and more of the voice and the input and the contribution of our young people than we've ever seen before. It is truly remarkable to see what's happening.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Good.

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: Thank you. I just want to speak concretely about three examples.

In Hamilton—it was also mentioned by my colleague here—we have what we call an active recess program,

supported by our Canadian Intramural Recreation Association, where student leaders or the teacher champion organizes the activities for younger children outside. We want to take advantage of that opportunity, and that's been very successful.

In addition, we talked about our nutrition programs. Our students are keen on nutrition programs in schools because they bring their voice in terms of: What are other options? The kids are sort of getting tired of the same old food. What other options are out there? They work with our partners to make sure that we're following the policy, and they are bringing new options to the table.

The last one that we're seeing with our students—we work with Start2Finish, a partner, around our 20-20 challenge: 20 minutes a day of daily physical activity for 20 weeks to try to improve literacy scores. This 20-minute challenge—we have student leaders running it with teachers. They're running it in the schools and running some of those daily physical activities for the younger students in the school.

Those are three concrete examples of when the student voice in the elementary system is making a difference.

1350

Mr. Chris Ballard: Very good. A quick comment, if I may, before I turn to the next question—and maybe it's a bit of a plea going back to my days in school, as my kids would remind me, when the earth was new and dinosaurs ruled it. The other thing I'm hearing—I still hear this from younger kids today—is how they feel over-programmed. Every second of their day is in school, and then they're picked up and dropped off here and they're picked up and dropped off there. What I've heard from young people when I'm doing my consultations is that at some point they want to be left alone to self-organize some playtime.

I don't know how we fit that into their life, but it's a plea I make to parents when I talk to them and to educators when I talk to them. They're telling me that this is really important to them. I don't know how we fit it in, but I'll leave it there for now. Thank you for the work you do. I know everyone is an education expert even if they don't have any kids. So we know what you're up against.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'll turn it over to Mr. Thibeault.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you. So I have about one minute, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I could have kept going.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thanks for that.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Sorry about that.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I guess I'll be the last one to speak now. Thank you, Chair. I'll be very, very brief, obviously, since I have less than a minute now.

I know my colleague MPP MacLeod talked about how, as we get older, things change. I also still feel like—my father was 101 years old when he passed last year. I find that I'm becoming more and more like my father. I have two daughters, 12 and eight, who are

asking for rides to school all the time, and I'm like, "You need to walk to school both ways uphill in the snow," which is what my father said all the time.

You've talked about cultural change and leading by example. My kids bring home from their school in Sudbury forms that we help fill out as parents—pizza day, sub day—and we talk about healthy eating. In the last six months, I've been diagnosed with diabetes, so I've had to make a huge health lifestyle change, and my kids have adapted to that. So every time I'm in the fridge, my eight-year-old now runs up to see what I'm eating: "You can't eat that, Dad," or, "You should eat that, Dad. Here's an apple."

My question, I guess very briefly, and if you can comment at some point, is: How is the ministry working with the school boards to ensure that we're starting to see the policy being implemented to make sure that—I know we're seeing the cultural change with our children and they're learning from us, but it's also that shared responsibility between the ministry and the parents and the school boards.

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll just speak to the fact—and it was mentioned earlier. We've been working with parent groups from the beginning. We have SpeakUp grants, which actually come up from the students. I think we just need to keep doing more of that. I think we need to continue to work with parents because, honestly, it's the same situation in my house. I'm the guy they lecture. I don't have to teach them.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We're going to get more of it in the next answer. I was just hoping you weren't going to try and answer it.

We're now at the next round. We have 16 minutes per caucus. We'll start again with Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much. I appreciate it. You know what? I'm going to ask a question because we have talked about mental health. A few of you have mentioned emotional health. I'm wondering if I can ask the deputy why the Healthy Schools Strategy talks about healthy eating and physical fitness but it doesn't talk about emotional or mental health.

Mr. George Zegarac: That's just part of our well-being strategy. We've initiated a lot of initiatives to support mental health and addictions, I would point out. I was Deputy Minister of Children and Youth Services working with, at that time, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, when we launched our mental health and addictions youth program. We've put a mental health leader in every school board. We've put social supports in those school boards. It is, for sure, a part of the well-being strategy that you'll be hearing about over the coming weeks as the government launches that.

It is important part. When I was going around as an assistant deputy minister looking at the challenges we had in our high schools, I did, at that time, talk to—at that time, it was Premier McGuinty, and I said, "We have an 85% goal to reach in terms of our high school graduation rate. We're not going to reach that goal if we don't provide the supports we need."

The government has invested in those supports. Right now, I meet with my colleague at children and youth services and our deputy in health around mental health and addictions. So it is definitely on the government's radar, and I know it's on the radar of the school boards. There's lots of activity occurring there. I don't know if I'm going to just pass it to the boards, if they want to say anything about the mental health and addictions activities.

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: I would just speak concretely. It's timely because this is international Mental Health Week as well as education week. Yesterday, one of our schools—a secondary school in Hamilton: Sherwood—took the issue of teachers, champions and students who wanted to have a mental health symposium. We were fortunate to have Dr. Bruce Ferguson come and speak. We had about 120 parents and students who wanted to have a conversation around some of the core conditions, and we spoke about some of the core conditions. But what was impressive was, at the end of the conversation in our cafeteria we had about 10 partners who were there, from public health, the John Howard Society, Contact Hamilton and Wesley Urban Ministries, who understood that they're part of this solution. In terms of Hamilton, we see the same schools—mental health, equity, inclusion, administration, physical activity—all supporting that well-being piece. That's just a concrete example of what we experienced last night.

Mr. Larry Hope: I mentioned earlier that we've established a healthy schools advisory committee which looks after the entire district. That committee is composed of the two health units that work within our jurisdiction—because we're fairly spread out. It also involves nutrition coordinators, our mental health lead and all the folks that are tied to all of these things that—I would say to you, historically, we're very much siloed. People did their thing by themselves with their little groups and so on. In addition to having a healthy schools lead in every one of our schools, we also have a mental health lead in every school.

I think what's really important about this is that we are really breaking new ground when it comes to schools and our work around mental health and addictions. This is not something that we have typically trained school staff to be able to support. We're making huge inroads into the capacity of our staff to be able to not only identify mental health issues and needs but also inform those partnerships with outside agencies because, frankly, we cannot do this by ourselves in education. We know that it takes a variety of supporters within our communities. I would say to you that the linkages that have been created are stronger than, certainly, I've ever seen in 26 years of this work.

Ms. Patricia Preston: This year we had symposiums on mental health or wellness for our high school students as well as our elementary students—very well received. I was a little concerned at first that maybe it would be a bit challenging for our elementary schools, but they were able to respond beautifully and were asking for more. The feedback was excellent.

In previous years, our parent involvement committee have put on one conference. In the last couple of years, it has been around digital literacy: teaching your children about texting and safety on the Internet. This year, they were requesting and did actually host a mental health and wellness one in the fall, and it was so well received that another one was done in April. So the interest is building for parents. They're wanting to gain more information in those areas.

We've developed lessons at the school level. As a result, we gave children an opportunity to put together a video on wellness and mental health—elementary and secondary. They were profound. Years ago, we didn't have those conversations, and this is really going to help this generation to understand, to be self-reflective and to know what a healthy life is and to avoid the stigma too.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes. I think that's excellent. I'll just impart two recent examples: I'm engaging with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board in my constituency, and I do Girls in Government. I take the whole day of curriculum. We work with the teachers and we bring in community leaders to teach the kids about activism. We bring in an Ottawa police officer or a firefighter to teach them about non-traditional roles for girls.

Last week, I met this beautiful girl; she was in grade 6 or grade 5, and she was probably one of the smartest little kids I've ever seen. Her communication skills were incredible. Over the lunch hour, I asked the teachers about this girl. They were quite surprised because they said that her emotional health is very fragile. I was really struck by that.

When I got home that day—it was Friday—my 11-year-old came home, and she told me that, in the school ground, one of the children was so emotionally fragile he was actually talking openly about suicide. I don't remember that as a kid that age. I think the pressures today are important, which is why I asked the question. I was very public this week about my own struggle with depression. I don't view your health as just eating well and going out to exercise anymore. I've had to come and confront that myself. When I saw this Healthy Schools Strategy, I thought that perhaps I should raise that, that it should be more integrated. It does sound like, at the board level, it is much more integrated but I think that's certainly something I would say, after having read the auditor's report and gone through the briefings and sitting here with you, that that piece does seem to be missing in that set of recommendations. Any comments on that?

1400

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes. All I would say is that this policy is dated now. The renewed vision talks about well-being incorporating the mental health, the addictions and the emotional part of this. I think you'll see, in the coming weeks and months, that we have integrated the emotional part of this.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Oh, good.

The other point I just wanted to make, and I don't know—you're all from different parts of the province. I

come from the city of Ottawa, as you know. A few years ago, we had a rash of student suicides. Myself and the government House leader, Yasir Naqvi, partnered together in our city to bring school boards together with mental health professionals and our hospitals in Ottawa. We have four school boards in the city. We were able to put forward, I think, a very good plan. The mental health partners were leading it; Yasir and I brought folks together.

At your level, do you have that integration with all your boards? I guess maybe you could speak to it at a deeper level across the rest of the province, but do you have collaboration like that with the mental health hospitals, as we do with the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa? If I could extend it to one more piece, because I'm very much aware of what's happening in Attawapiskat, and I think everybody here is as well. I know that there was a provincial aboriginal suicide prevention strategy, and obviously it didn't work there. I'm wondering how you integrate all of that. I know this has nothing to do with nutrition but, to me, the emotional health of our children is something that literally could kill them if we're not thinking about this. You guys are the ones who work with them in the schools.

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes. Maybe I'll touch on it briefly. I'm happy to have bilaterals at some point. We are supposed to be talking about nutrition and physical activity, but I will say that we do work with our school boards, looking at collaborative—I have to say it's easier, quite frankly, in some of those partnerships if you're in large urban centres where you have a hospital—it is a little more challenging.

Actually, when I was Deputy Minister of Children and Youth Services, I was leading some of the mental health and addictions activity. Queen's University went through the same thing. They had a number of suicides occurring, so they put a commission together. We worked, quite frankly, with the post-secondary side to share that information with our elementary and secondary panels, as well, to say: What can we learn from each other in this because we're all struggling with this? So the answer is yes, and I'd be happy to share more details in the future.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Did anybody else have anything else they want to add?

Mr. Larry Hope: Could I also just say that one of the things that I think the various ministries have done a pretty good job of coming together on is helping us know what's available within school districts? It's not just around the mental health piece but it's around all of the other aspects that we're talking about as well.

Most recently, we had an opportunity for a number of staff and elected officials from our school boards to come together. There's an annual mental health summit that takes place through the public school boards' association, and we get the very, very best experts there. We get the very, very best practices being shared there. While we can't send every single teacher or every single administrator, we do get to send key people who are the doers in our system, who are the best at disseminating the best

practices and the things that they learned. I think that is becoming more and more common, where there's an integrated approach to that.

While it might be on mental health, you would clearly come into workshops and opportunities to learn about physical literacy, about the importance of feeding all four, as I've talked about already. That's supported on a variety of levels, not just through the ministry and school boards.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think the circle here, too, when you talk about emotional well-being and you have children with eating disorders, whether it's bulimia or anorexia, that makes this circle—so that I don't get ruled out of order by the Chair with my line of questioning—

Mr. Larry Hope: We're trying to help.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You're doing a good job; thank you. That's another very real part of this in terms of your strategy and healthy schools and in terms of kids' eating. Is there a component of this from your strategy that does deal with eating disorders and the root causes?

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: If I could just speak and combine both your questions, in Hamilton we call it our positive climate strategy. We know that with the School Mental Health ASSIST strategy, with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services working together, there are lead agencies. In Hamilton, the Lynwood Charlton Centre is our lead agency. Having these partners come to the table to talk about pathways to care is very important so that we don't duplicate services. One of the things we do talk about is: What are all the factors that impact the emotional well-being of students? Our role in education is having mental health awareness. Having that mental health literacy is a key part of what we do, and as students require more intense supports, how do we bridge those conversations to make sure that those pathways are developed?

So those lead agencies—in Hamilton, Lynwood Charlton is the agency bringing people around the table to have those difficult conversations around resources and pathways to care, which is vital.

Ms. Patricia Preston: We do have a partnership with our coterminous board, the York region board, with the hospitals and with the York Regional Police. That has been a good combination.

Just to get back to the eating disorders: At the symposium, when we were offering it for our grade 7 and 8 students, one of the topics was anorexia. The children had an opportunity respond to a video and the talk by Dr. Joel Goldberg. It was very interesting—when they could comment without us knowing who they were—the questions and concerns that they raised. We really need to continue working in that area.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It strikes me that when you're looking—let's go to the secondary schools part of it first. One of the reasons I wanted to do a Girls in Government is to empower girls, because I think they get to a point, when they get out of elementary school, that their personality and their body changes and all of that sort of stuff. When you're talking about nutrition and you're

talking about physical activity, that also becomes more of a challenge, probably, for girls than boys at that age. Does the Healthy Schools Strategy deal with those components as well, or would you consider that more around the mental health strategy?

Mr. George Zegarac: Just a little bit of background: Dr. Gail McVey is a leader in this area, and in particular working with eating disorders for girls. She actually worked with us in the policy development around this. We're going to continue to work with those partners, as the boards have identified some of their partners. So the answer is yes, we are working on that and we're using expertise around that area.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Excellent.

Do you have any questions, Julia?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Just one quick one. I'm assuming it wasn't asked in my absence, but one of the general themes of the auditor's report I think reflects the difficulty of measurement and the fact that all of these things can be anecdotal, as you mentioned in your presentation. Obviously, from the point of view of the Auditor General and a committee such as ours, we need to have some concrete evidence and some numbers and things like that. Recognizing how difficult it is, even, to measure outcomes when they're individual, when they vary, when is a success a success and things like that, have you grappled with that issue? Do you see directions that you can go in that would give the general public, say, a better handle on the success of what you're doing? Have you got some benchmarks in mind? Have you got some measurements that would say, "Here's where we were; here's where we've come"?

Mr. George Zegarac: Maybe I'll speak to that at the provincial level. Lots of research, and particularly around the 60 minutes—we know that 60 minutes of activity a day makes a huge difference. The way the 20 minutes, quite frankly, was determined at the time of the policy was that the 60 minutes was supposed to be before, during and after, so it was just divided by three.

I think the important thing is that we're all trying to use research-based, evidence-based activities that we know are going to work. We may not be able to measure at the individual level. We'll be able to show some collective engagement around this. Eventually, StatsCan and others will have the obesity measures and others to be able to show longer-term impact.

I think the key is to take what we know—and this is why we're relying so much on experts in our fields—and to use what they've identified as effective practices and to engage our school boards, in particular at the school level and the classroom level, to address—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. It was your turn and now it's Ms. Gretzky's turn.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: We'll have to work on getting someone else cut off. One of you two are going to be the last word this time.

My first question is to the deputy minister. In the beginning of your presentation, you had mentioned what your ministry is doing around this initiative. You talked

about the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and their healthy kids initiative. You talked about the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the breakfast program. I'm just wondering how the three ministries work all together to support the Healthy Schools Strategy. I know it was touched on by one of the directors, but I'd like to hear from you how that actually works with the three ministries pulling it all together.

1410

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll even say it's more than three. We have our Fresh from the Farm program as well, where we get fresh vegetables and fruits into our schools.

The deputy ministers meet—for example, deputy policy and social policy ministries meet—on an ongoing basis, but I meet regularly with various deputies who have an overlap. Alex Bezzina, the deputy for children and youth services, whom we work closely with—we meet every two weeks, on top of other briefings. We go through the list to say, “How are we doing on these activities?” Quite frankly, we do it because we know the Premier is going to ask us how we are doing on these activities as well.

On mental health and addictions, I'm going to use that as an example, not directly related to the activity we're speaking to now, but as Larry and others mentioned, that is the closest I have ever seen three ministries go out. Every time they spoke, they spoke together. We have changed the culture, I would say, over the last five or six years, where we are integrating our policies, integrating our activities and integrating our reporting back.

But, as people have mentioned, some of these are going to be harder to report back. The issue is, what do we know and how can we show progress? We've been working with our school boards at the local level to say, “How are you measuring?” and “How are you showing progress?” That's the most important. They're going to be closest to the school and closest to the youth.

Maybe I'll turn it over to the boards at this point.

Mr. Larry Hope: One of the really exciting things that has happened that has been supported—enabled, I would even say, because sometimes when you want to do these things, somebody has to give permission for these things to happen. It's not the way we've always done business. I'm sorry to say that the schools have done their thing in their communities, and it's really only in the last 10 or 15 years that we've really opened our doors.

We have another really exciting initiative under way between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Education, where the deputy ministers have brought together seven directors of education and seven medical officers of health to work through strategies which we can all use in school districts to strengthen the relationships between health units—public health, if you will—and school boards, not just when it comes to the files we're talking about here but a myriad of other things that have already been raised.

We're seeing some terrific progress being made, even in terms of formal agreements and working relationships that school boards and public health would have in our

communities. We never saw that before. Again, I would say that has been enabled from the top, yes, but also at the ground level.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: To that, I'm wondering: How involved are trustees? Although the trustees can't necessarily enforce and can't be in every school making sure that this is getting done, ultimately—having been a trustee, I know—it falls back on trustees. Whether they have the power to enforce or not, the communities and the families come to the trustees and say, “This isn't being done right,” or, “It is being done right.”

How involved are the trustees? How often are they updated on what's going on around the Healthy Schools Strategy? How much input do the trustees have into this? As I said, they're usually the ones on the other end of the phone with a parent who is concerned about something that's going on in a school.

Mr. Larry Hope: I can speak from our perspective. Our trustees in Trillium Lakelands would be very proud of saying that we had a healthy schools policy, or a nutrition policy, long before anything came from the Ministry of Education. There was dedicated funding long before we received specific earmarked funding for nutrition programs in schools.

Our healthy schools advisory committee that I shared with you earlier does have three trustees who sit on it as participants and who engage in the process with us on a regular basis.

The updates, I would say, we all bring to our trustees with regard to specific actions and strategic plans over the course of a school year. For example, much of the committee work that happens, certainly in my district, involves trustees who are then responsible for reporting back to their colleagues in a very public way at board meetings.

I would say that we're seeing a tremendous amount of involvement.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Is there anything in the policy that actually compels boards or the ministry, for that matter, to report to trustees how the strategy is working?

Mr. Larry Hope: The Auditor General's report specifically said that we should be reporting our results publicly. I would say, in our case, that is typically done through social media, obviously, where we continue to communicate, but through regular updates on very specific topics at board meetings throughout the school year.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: And I have a question around students with intellectual disabilities, those who have some special education needs. You will find, especially in some specialized classrooms, students who are in wheelchairs or they have devices. How do the teachers, the support staff, the boards and the ministry support those students? How does this work for them? What would that look like? Because, clearly, it would not be the same as a student who doesn't have mobility issues or students who don't need special devices. I'm just wondering how the boards adjust for them to fit into this policy to the best that they can and how the ministry supports that.

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: I can begin by saying that we always want to start with an inclusive approach, but we know we need to modify and accommodate based on student needs. We work closely with our partners, especially our occupational therapists and our physiotherapists, who provide those kinds of suggestions and accommodations of what that daily physical activity would look like for a student with this type of physical disability or a different learning need. We want them to be participating and to be inclusive, but we also want to accommodate, and bring in sometimes the experts, because our teachers plan to the best of their ability, but then we do bring in our special ed consultants and our partners to provide that accommodation.

Ms. Patricia Preston: It's really a human rights issue for these students. They deserve the best education we can give them and they have every right to participate as fully as they can. We have just been working on an accessibility policy, as well, at the board level to ensure that we have everything in place physically for them.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Fantastic. This might actually be a better question for the trustees, not the senior admin: Do you find that you have the resources that you need in order to be able to include the students who have the special needs in order to be able to take the policy and adapt it to meet their very specialized and individualized needs? It's not a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to any student, but especially when it comes to those students. You may find you have to adapt on the ground, so to speak, day to day, minute by minute.

I know there are some financial supports that come from the ministry, but I'm just wondering: Is there enough support, especially when it comes to the students with specialized needs? It's a better question for trustees, isn't it?

Ms. Patricia Preston: We're always asking for more support, but certainly we look at each child and each child's situation individually and make sure that we have everything in place that the child needs.

I just want to go back to the first part of the question around trustees. Our trustees are very involved. They ask for regular reports. One of our trustees serves on the mental health committee. When our students did the videos, the trustees wanted to see them right away. They're very, very interested and very supportive.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Very good. So to the ministry—to put you back on the hot seat—was that a consideration? The students who might have very specialized needs, that when things have to be adjusted on a regular basis—was that something that the ministry considered, or is that something that's going to be considered in potential changes?

Mr. George Zegarac: No, it was considered right at the beginning. In fact, it was very explicit. That included all students, including those with special educational needs. That was up front when the policy came out, and it was very explicit.

Quite frankly, we have a substantive amount on top of our GSN funding for special ed. The financial supports are

there, but a few years back we had frozen our financial supports. What we learned is what was most effective was actually helping at the classroom level on the pedagogical support. I think it's the same thing here. The most important thing is to find: What are the practices that work in the classroom for those students in those situations, and how do we share it among our teachers so that they can actually benefit from that experience? I think that's what we're all trying to do: share that information with the teachers at the ground level.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Because you opened that door for me to the special education funding: You say there's a substantial amount of money. As I said earlier, if you were to ask any trustee or any board, they will tell you that there isn't enough money for special education. They often pull from other areas, and it's still not enough.

1420

I'm wondering if, when bringing policies such as this forward or looking to make changes to that policy, you actually consult with the boards, with the trustees, with the senior administrators and the staff that are working directly with these students and see what the individualized needs are from board to board, because they're not all going to be the same—some will have more students with special education needs than others—and look at adjusting funding appropriately to support each individual board and the needs of those students with special education.

Mr. George Zegarac: Right. I'm not going to jump to what the solution is. I think what we've committed to the Auditor General is that we're going to review that policy now—both policies: both on the healthy eating and the physical activity. We're going to look at what policy adjustments we need to make: whether it's programmatic, whether it's funding. That will be part of the consultation that we engage in.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: So it will be consideration as to get—

Mr. George Zegarac: It will be a full scope of what's working, what's not, what are the barriers and what do we need to move our agenda forward.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Will that include discussion with trustees of the board, senior administration and the staff that work with the students?

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes, I would anticipate that the boards—it will be a fulsome discussion. Most of our consultations right now are fulsome with boards as well as trustees.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You still have a little more time if you want, but if you've said it all?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I've said it all.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. Mr. Milczyn?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to continue on with the line of questioning that Mrs. Munro started, because we are the public accounts committee and we do have the Auditor General's report in front of us.

I want to start at the school board level before we move on to the ministry level. As you're implementing the various programs, let's talk about the healthy foods and healthy eating first. As an example, you bring in caterers; you bring in vendors. I assume at this stage you're building into their contracts the requirements of the policy. What kind of contract compliance measures are you putting in place? If you're doing more of the volunteer-based programs, like some of the healthy breakfast programs and so on, are you applying the same rigour to those? How are you tracking that? How are you reporting that to your trustees? Are your trustees in the loop on understanding how you're doing? How does that loop back into the ministry and having the ministry provide you with some kind of common framework so that everybody is feeding similar data back into the system?

Mr. Manny Figueiredo: I'll begin, because it was part of my initial summary.

One thing in the Auditor General's report in Hamilton is that we needed to do a better job in terms of the measurement of compliance in terms of our cafeterias and the food in our schools.

Yes, we build that into our procurement process with our purchasing department. What we didn't do a good job in was ensuring the follow-up piece. As indicated, we are now developing that tool, and our goal is to get secondary schools this year, and, by June 2017, have done a complete review of our secondary schools and any follow-up, and then begin our elementary. So that's one thing where we do need to do a better job.

In terms of reporting to trustees, in our reporting structure we do have reports that we do report back based on the high-level strategic directions that our trustees choose and their priorities. One thing I will say: In Hamilton, as they're reviewing now, one of five priorities that the trustees have put down is positive culture and well-being as one of their key priorities.

Mr. Larry Hope: And certainly in our case we definitely have this built into our procurement process. We have each of our secondary schools' cafeterias audited once per semester. The 80-20 rule must apply. The audits are conducted in conjunction with the vendor. There is a dietitian and nutritionist who is part of the audit process. There is a full report that each cafeteria manager receives. If they are found not to be in compliance, it's corrected immediately or there is a follow-up visit within two weeks. In other words, if they can't make the changes right on the spot to be compliant, then there's a follow-up visit in two weeks.

With regard to our elementary schools and the 10 days that they're required every year to be a little bit outside of the PPM, we have tightened up our reporting. We do expect compliance and we do expect those reports to be completed by June 15 every year.

As far as the reporting back goes, our healthy schools advisory committee would be made aware of the progress that we're making. They'd be made aware if there were any issues or hot spots that we need to be paying

attention to. Certainly, if there was an issue it would be reported back to trustees through the trustee that makes that report about the healthy schools advisory committee.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: You have the same kind of rigour in place for any volunteer-based programs, whether it's parents or service clubs that are coming in to do programs?

Mr. Larry Hope: Yes. In fact, our school councils also must adhere to the PPM and the days and so on. Our nutrition programs, where we feed students through our nutrition coordinators and various providers—MCYS supports that initiative. They have a very, very rigorous set of guidelines that help them identify the products that will be made available within our schools. In all three areas of Trillium Lakelands, there is a certified dietitian and nutritionist who is a part of establishing what those meals look like. I mentioned earlier that we've already served over 900,000 meals this year. They would all be fully compliant with the PPM and the expectations.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Now, the ministry part of it: Is there a common language, definition, or set of metrics that the various school boards are aware of so that they can provide information back to you so you can judge how well they're doing relative to each other as well as relative to the policy?

Mr. George Zegarac: I'll let Eileen speak to this, but here's what I would say: We started the program by giving them a framework and all the evidence which would support moving forward on both of these initiatives. We left it to the local level to actually start to measure this, partly because we wanted them to own, quite frankly, the programming and be sensitive to the local needs. What was most important? What did they have available to them in terms of evidence to be able to show progress?

Eileen will talk to you a bit about our next steps, both in evaluation that we're talking about going forward with, but also the research that we're conducting on those pilot projects, which are helping us inform setting up a more, probably—I don't want to get overly prescriptive, but I want to find the right balance so that we can actually show progress across the province as opposed to just locally. But if we get overly prescriptive, I think we're going to lose, quite frankly, some of the benefits we've had by giving latitude at the local level. Eileen?

Ms. Eileen Silver: As the deputy mentioned, we had a process that we established for support and monitoring of all of our healthy schools initiatives, in particular school food and beverage and daily physical activity. We saw a need to reach out to the boards and for them to talk about not only their challenges, but their exemplary practices. We took the 72 boards and we decided on a five-year basis that we would go out to specific numbers each year. We have 25 boards left that will cycle through the entire process. We've learned a lot from the boards, and we've assisted the boards who are having challenges.

That's on a macro level. At a micro level, we have regional offices throughout the province, and in each of the regions of the ministry, we have dedicated staff in the

regions who, on a daily basis, are in touch with school boards. They then feed back into us about the challenges and the opportunities that are happening vis-à-vis these specific two policies. That's going on each and every day with all of the healthy schools initiatives.

Specifically, the money that we've provided for the healthy eating grants and the physical activity in secondary school projects, we've seen some outstanding initiatives and opportunities based on a small amount of seed money in the schools. What we intend to do is build on the wonderful work in those areas and decide how we can leverage it across the province.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Also relating to this: The purpose why we're here is monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of the policy. What mechanism do you have in place to, if there is any school board or school boards that really are lagging far behind, help them catch up? Is that a problem? Is everybody doing their own thing and everybody's doing their best to doing okay, or are their instances where there is a problem? And then what are you doing to assist with that?

1430

Mr. George Zegarac: Our experience working with school boards, whether it was on academic or emotional well-being, is that blaming and shaming doesn't work.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: No, I'm not asking about blaming. I don't want to know the name of a school board.

Mr. George Zegarac: No, but I think what we want to do is to encourage them. What we do is we have bilateral conversations. Many of the directors have bilaterals with me on various occasions on certain topics.

What we have looked at, though, is: How do we want to report publicly more on the non-academic part of this agenda? I think that's the conversation we're having now as we've added the fourth goal, the well-being goal. We're engaged right now in that conversation. I think it's to your point. It is a good question. It is: What's the right balance where we can have local ownership of this, where we're not overly prescriptive but prescriptive enough to know that we're actually showing progress? We're in that conversation right now with the school boards because we're trying to roll all of these initiatives together under a broader well-being goal.

I think we need to look at that goal as a holistic approach as opposed to individual programs. That'll be the conversation we're having as we consult on these programs, because we'll look at it with a broader perspective of how this fits into the overall well-being measures and how we want to engage in that conversation so that we can show progress collectively. I don't know if the boards want to say anything, but—that question was for the provincial level.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I can't help myself but do the anecdotal thing that everybody else has done today. One of my local Toronto District School Board high schools has a terrific culinary arts program. I was amazed by the quality of food that the students produce every day.

They had the same issue: that in the transition from a fully catered, traditional, greasy-spoon type of cafeteria

to a new menu, kids weren't going there. Now they're coming back in droves, and every day it's soups and salads. I don't know if that's re-creatable in every single high school, but certainly the ability to share best practices and that whole aspect of youth engagement—those are the older kids. Now, my six-year-old almost every day brings back her veggies and fruits that she's given, but she also often comes back with her pockets stuffed with chives that she harvests from the school's herb garden. She munches on those chives. She's really happy about that because she helped plant them and she helps look after them.

Figuring out the right ways, without being prescriptive, of finding those ways to engage kids—because if they're engaged and they have ownership and they want to do it, then it's not a lecture about what to eat; it's a conversation about what to eat.

Mr. George Zegarac: The only thing I would say—and it goes back not just to students, but the societal shift. As you look at the 100-mile diet or the local foods, that is becoming much more prevalent. The youth are looking at that with regard to—and we talked about the farm-fresh program with vegetables and fruits. I think they are coming and they're going to be, quite frankly, the leaders on this issue. My hope is that five years from now, we'll have students talking about how this has changed. They're really going to be the advocates for this. It'll probably be parents who we're going to have to try to bring along on this issue.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm okay.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Go ahead, Ms. Hoggarth.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Good afternoon. I'm late on the uptake on this; however, I do have a little experience in regard to the education system as I, as late as May 2014, was teaching kindergarten. So I can tell you that things will get better, because in the kindergartens, the kids actually are better at knowing what they should eat and what they shouldn't eat. There's no pressure on them, but each day, we would sort of do a graph of: Do you have a fruit? Do you have a vegetable? And the kids would go home and they'd say to mom, "I didn't have a vegetable yesterday. Is there a vegetable I could take?" They want to take part in that graph. As they grow, they will become the secondary students, and that will help.

In the phys ed area—and I think this question may have been asked earlier—it's not too hard to—well, it still is hard to get an hour of physical activity for the little ones, but it is really hard when the curriculum gets fuller, when the kids are in the junior and senior grades, to find an hour of activity for those kids. Quite frankly, they are not encouraged at home to do a lot of physical activity, and that is part of the problem. Teachers in the intermediate grades have difficulty getting (a) gym time if it's really bad weather outside to do this, and (b) the kids involved, because a lot of them have become very sedentary.

As I said, the younger ones, as they move up it'll be more important to them and they will start to go back—I

love the ad about there not being anyone on the playground anymore, because if you do look at the parks you quite often go by and there are no kids there on a Saturday or a Sunday.

I would like to note that teachers ask, “What do I leave out of the curriculum in order to get that hour of physical activity in for my students?”

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes, so we did touch on this, and the problem is that everybody wants everything in their curriculum and it becomes even more challenging. We do have, in high school, the mandatory one health and phys ed credit, and many of our students take more than one year of health and phys ed, so that addresses part of the issue. We have a lot of sports teams and intramural activities, and those are ways to engage before and after, and even during their breaks.

You hit on a key point: Many of us in this room would have been from the generation where you came out of school, you came home, you ate, you ran to the park, and you had 10 or 11 friends and you engaged. Nobody had to organize; you organized yourselves. That doesn't happen anymore.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: You had to be home when the streetlights came on.

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes, absolutely. That's when homework got done.

It is a challenge and I don't think any of us have the sole solution to this, because it is behavioural. Parents, for whatever reason, aren't comfortable letting their kids out unsupervised sometimes. It has also become a culture where all of these activities have to be in clubs as opposed to unorganized activities—

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

Mr. George Zegarac: It's me again, I know.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We now have a race: Who gets cut off the most? But that does conclude the time.

The third party did leave me a moment, so I'm going to take the Chair's prerogative and maybe ask a simple question to the ministry: As we move forward, do you see any time in the future, with what you're doing today, that you could come back to this committee and have the documentation to show that the program that was instituted in 2011 works?

Mr. George Zegarac: Yes. I think it's going to be over time and I think we'll have to have certain milestones of progress. I don't think there's a certain day that you say—as I think my colleagues pointed out, this is not an event; it's a marathon. But, yes, I think we will be working collectively as we do the evaluation to say, “What are some interim milestones that we can actually show, evidence-based, that are showing progress?” We may not be able to show scientifically that it's exactly this reduction in obesity, but we can show additional activity occurring and certainly enhanced activities in terms of the examples. The question is: How do we roll it all up?

Some of this is also outside of the school, so that's the other challenge: How do we measure the activities that occur before and after school? But we'll have more measures than we've had historically, so I would say that every time I come back I'll have more than I did the time before, for sure.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That's why we were here today. We thank you very much for coming to help us with the deliberations on this. We look forward to a future time when you can say, “You don't have to do any more; the problem is solved.” Thank you very much.

Mr. George Zegarac: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): For the committee's purposes, as soon as the room is cleared we will have an in camera meeting to discuss where we go from here.

The committee continued in closed session at 1442.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 4 May 2016

2015 Annual Report, Auditor General.....	P-329
Ministry of Education; Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board; Trillium Lakelands District School Board; York Catholic District School Board.....	P-329
Mr. George Zegarac	
Mr. Manny Figueiredo	
Mr. Larry Hope	
Ms. Patricia Preston	
Ms. Eileen Silver	
Ms. Denise Dwyer	

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