

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

SP-9

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

SP-9

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Safe and Supportive
Classrooms Act, 2019

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 26 February 2019

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2019 pour des écoles
sûres et axées
sur le soutien

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mardi 26 février 2019

Chair: Nina Tangri
Clerk: Eric Rennie

Présidente : Nina Tangri
Greffier : Eric Rennie

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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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

ISSN 1710-9477

CONTENTS

Tuesday 26 February 2019

Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act, 2019, Bill 48, Ms. Thompson / Loi de 2019 pour des écoles sûres et axées sur le soutien, projet de loi 48, Mme Thompson	SP-199
Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association	SP-199
Mr. Nick Milanetti	
Mr. Steve Andrews	
Faculty of Education, Brock University	SP-203
Mr. Michael Owen	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Tuesday 26 February 2019

Mardi 26 février 2019

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE
CLASSROOMS ACT, 2019

LOI DE 2019 POUR DES ÉCOLES SÛRES
ET AXÉES SUR LE SOUTIEN

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 48, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to education and child care / Projet de loi 48, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Good morning, everyone. We are meeting here today for public hearings on Bill 48, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to education and child care.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated February 21, 2019, each witness will receive up to six minutes for their presentation, followed by up to 14 minutes of questioning from the committee, divided equally amongst the recognized parties.

Are there any questions before we begin?

ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL
TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Seeing none, I would like to call upon the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. If you can please introduce yourselves. Thank you.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Nick Milanetti and I'm the executive director of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. I'm joined by Stephen Andrews, who is our director of legislative and political affairs.

I want to thank the committee for extending the invitation to share some of our concerns and recommendations on the Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act, or Bill 48.

For our detailed recommendations, I would refer you to our written submission that was handed to you ahead of time.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association was founded in 1930. It represents 237 elected trustees who collectively represent 29 English-language Catholic district school boards. Together, our school boards educate approximately 545,000 students from junior kindergarten

to grade 12 and adults in our continuing education programs province-wide.

Inspired by the gospel, the mission of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association is to provide leadership, service and a provincial voice for the elected Catholic school trustees who seek to promote and protect publicly funded Catholic education in Ontario.

Overall, our assessment of Bill 48: OCSTA fully supports Bill 48's overall objective of keeping Ontario's publicly funded schools safe, supportive and accommodating for all students. We support the various amendments outlined in schedules 1, 3 and 4 that clarify definitions of professional misconduct, as well as the new requirement that revokes a member's teaching certificate if the college of teachers finds them guilty of an act of professional misconduct involving the sexual abuse of a child or student.

Our Catholic school boards are fully committed to ensuring all staff meet the highest professional and ethical standards consistent with gospel values. Our member boards have zero tolerance for anyone who harms children or students and have policies and procedures in place to address professional misconduct.

Catholic education is an integral and distinctive part of Ontario's excellent education system. Our schools promote caring communities, the dignity of all persons and social justice. Catholic publicly funded schools are known for their tradition of academic and co-curricular excellence and their commitment to the marginalized and disadvantaged. They have a rich history of educating students with special needs and are committed to the physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of every child.

In this context, OCSTA supports students who require the use of service animals, subject to the conditions of local school board policies. We believe that local school boards must retain the autonomy and flexibility to develop and modify service animal policies to meet the needs of their learning community.

OCSTA's concerns and recommendations: As you know, Bill 48 amends the Education Act to give the Minister of Education authority to establish policies and guidelines for service animals in schools. Catholic school boards in Ontario have service animal policies that reflect their local circumstances and the needs of their students, with compliance to the Ontario Human Rights Code guidelines.

Recently, however, the demand for the use of service animals by students has increased. This presents various challenges for boards, such as competing rights claims of other students and staff who may have fears, cultural sensitivities and medical conditions or allergies to service animals.

Catholic school boards receive and manage student accommodation requests in a timely manner. This involves collaboration with students, staff, parents and, depending on the accommodation being considered, outside medical and social service agencies. The process is designed to ensure that students' needs are properly identified, and appropriate supports or resources are available to remove barriers that allow for access and inclusion in school activities. In this context, service animal requests may or may not form part of the accommodation plan for the student. The standard for accommodation in schools is what is the most reasonable, which allows school boards to consider the available resources and the needs of all students they serve.

Further, school boards can only accommodate those needs demonstrated in the classroom. In the development of any policy, primacy must be given to how the accommodation will meet the learning needs of the student in the classroom. That accommodation must also be weighed against accommodation options available to meet the student's learning needs. The use of service animals may have implementation challenges for boards. For example, if the student is incapable of managing the animal, additional staff may be required in the classroom and school. Also, if the student needs bus transportation, they may require additional staff to manage the animal to ensure student safety.

In this spirit, if other accommodations are available to successfully meet the child's demonstrated learning needs, a service animal may not be the most prudent choice.

OCSTA is also concerned that the term "service animal" is too broad and could lead to inappropriate accommodation requests for animals not trained or certified by reputable agencies. More appropriate legal definitions are contained in regulation 191/11: accessibility standards—

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): One minute. You have one minute left.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: Okay. Thank you.

These service animals must also be prescribed by a regulated health professional related to the student's disability.

Based on these recommendations, OCSTA wants to ensure that any regulation developed under the resulting legislation is consistent with boards' procedures to investigate and assess a student's need for a service animal.

I'll move on to schedule 3 of the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996. Schedule 3 of Bill 48 amends the Ontario College of Teachers Act. OCSTA's concerns relate to the proposed amendments with respect to the composition of elected and appointed members of the college and the requirement that teachers satisfy requirements that relate to proficiency in mathematics.

OCSTA supports a balanced approach between appointed and elected representatives in the composition of the council.

OCSTA also believes that in addition to proposed testing requirements in the bill, the government should mandate additional qualification programs for teacher applicants. For example, the college could require that they be part of a pre-service program for teachers who will be teaching mathematics. This would enhance the capacities of teachers in delivering math instruction to our students.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you very much. I'd like to take it to the opposition. Mrs. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much for being here bright and early this morning. We really appreciate it. It's so important to hear from the folks who represent so many boards and trustees across this province. Thank you very much for your recommendations.

I'll just give you a couple of more minutes, if there's anything else that you didn't touch on that you wanted to add.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: Well, we were just talking about the pieces and procedures, and we kind of glossed over quickly some of the issues with respect to mathematics. Certainly, we support further mathematics instruction for those teachers who are at the faculty. If they are going to be teaching mathematics at the elementary level, they should have some training in mathematics to enhance their abilities.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You mentioned the additional qualification programs. It was my understanding that the government, in the fall, actually cancelled the support for teachers who were going to participate in additional qualification programs. Is that your understanding, as well? Obviously, this requires support from the government.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: My understanding is that those funded programs are cancelled, but AQ, additional qualification, programs are still available for those teachers who were going to pay out of pocket.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right. But the incentive perhaps is gone now.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: Correct.

Ms. Marit Stiles: We've been talking a lot over the last few days about what it means to have a safe and supportive school. Are there things that you don't see represented in this legislation that would speak to some of what you feel makes for a more safe and supportive school and what the government could be doing to ensure that our schools are in fact safe and supportive?

Mr. Nick Milanetti: I believe that the Ontario Catholic schools in the province really have been doing a lot of great work over the last number of years with respect to supportive and safe environments. I think we've come a long way. I believe that most of those procedures are still in place. This legislation touches on specific pieces that will enhance that support and that safety, but I believe our schools are safe places for students.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would certainly not disagree, except that my sense, certainly from hearing from teachers and families, is that there's a lot of pressure on our schools and

a lot of stress experienced by our staff, our families and our children, in part because of a systemically, perhaps chronically, underfunded system.

One of the things that has come up over the last few days here in this room, in these very limited hearings, is the potential impact of changes to the Ontario Autism Program. We know that already our students with special needs—I believe I can speak as a former trustee; we struggle a lot with providing adequate support. The government has pretty systematically underfunded supports for children with special needs.

Have you received any communication from the minister or the ministry about what is coming in terms of additional children who may be entering the school system or who may be losing their services, their programs that they depend on, on April 1? Have you received any kind of communication?

Mr. Nick Milanetti: Nothing specific as of yet.

Ms. Marit Stiles: That's quite surprising, I would say, given that we have just mere weeks before this hits. Of course, we're all very worried about the safety of those children without adequate supports.

I'm just going to turn it over and see if my colleagues have any questions.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Mr. Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: How much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): You have about three and a half minutes.

Mr. Joel Harden: Okay. Thank you again, as my colleague said, for coming here this morning.

One of the things that we have been hearing about a lot from teachers, and I certainly have heard it from parents, is the degree of violence in our classrooms—not necessarily that people are predisposed to violence, but violence because we put children into classroom environments without the adequate supports.

0910

I have had pictures sent to me by educators and educational assistants with bruises on their faces, with injuries sustained in the line of work. We have one school board of which I'm aware in Durham where the member from Whitby, in the last sitting of this Parliament, noted that teachers have been issued Kevlar-grade clothing to withstand assaults in the classroom.

So I am very concerned at the degree of violence that exists in our public school system, and a little surprised, to be honest, with your comment this morning that the status quo seems to be adequate.

We heard from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association earlier that they released a study two years ago that found that 87% of their membership had experienced violence in the classroom first-hand or had witnessed it first-hand.

I guess I'm curious, given this moment we're in where there has been a major change in the Ontario Autism Program. I, personally, as the critic for disabilities, feel that we're not doing enough to support families, educators and educational assistants in the classroom. I'm wondering if you might want to revisit that thought, to give us a sense of what it looks like from the trustees' perspective.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: Thank you for that question and an opportunity to clarify. I think the status quo—and you say “status quo,” but I'm not sure I used that exact phraseology. But certainly, we serve all students that we have under our care, and that would be one of the issues. Twenty-eight of our 29 Catholic school boards have been chronically overspent on special education funding.

Mr. Joel Harden: Right.

Mr. Nick Milanetti: That has been historical. That's in all of our finance briefs. That's in any pre-budget submissions. So special education is obviously a concern.

Violence in the classroom has increased—I would not think to the extent that our teacher federations are leading this to tell us; I think our classes are still very safe. In certain situations, safety plans have to be set up for certain students. Protective equipment does have to be issued to those EAs or teachers who work with dangerous students in the classroom. So certainly, we try and have a safety plan that goes on.

As a former educator, a former principal, a former superintendent—my wife is a principal—I understand that there are situations that happen. Some of the kids we have in our classrooms are difficult to serve, but we are serving them to the best of our abilities in our schools.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Joel Harden: Certainly, I can tell you that Immaculata High School, back home in my neighbourhood, does that.

I just want to invite us to consider that this issue of violence in our classrooms is not about certain kids with special needs. It's about creating a supportive environment.

For me, everybody comes into a classroom with different gifts and different challenges, and I am concerned that we aren't doing our best to support all those gifts and challenges. In 10 seconds, do you have a reaction?

Mr. Nick Milanetti: I think what you're touching upon, too, is mental health and mental health issues, and that's a big concern for all of us in education. Mental health is on the rise. A number of our students who are coming to us need a lot of that support. I think if we can address those issues, that would assist us in the classrooms.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you very much. Mr. Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Nick and Stephen, for coming before the committee. It's nice to see you again. Thank you for your presentation on behalf of the membership that you represent, and for the work they do across the province of Ontario.

On behalf of our students, as you can tell already from the questions from the opposition, this is a committee of people who are very passionate about serving the best interests of our students across Ontario.

I just wanted to touch base—and also share my time with the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler—with regard to some of your recommendations around the service animal piece. I have a few questions about this.

Of course, part of this legislation and some of the impetus, I know, for myself personally, from an awareness

perspective, has come about because of the challenges that families have faced in getting the supports they needed for a service animal, in school boards, including Catholic school boards. Waterloo Catholic comes to mind.

When I hear stories such as from my colleague—today, her son had his very first day in class with his service animal. When we hear about the story of Jack, who recently moved from Waterloo Catholic to Huron—Bruce—his family moved him from that school board. They actually moved their entire family, and he's now, for the first time ever, able to learn at a grade level through the aid of a service animal, a service dog. That's really powerful and compelling to me, and that's one of the reasons why I think this piece of legislation is so important.

Would you say that your recommendation number 3, ensuring that you have the autonomy and flexibility to develop your own policy—one of the reasons that I think it's so important that we have a fairly prescriptive policy is because of the fact that, to this point, there have been these exclusions based around the service animal piece. What it seems to me you're saying is, let's water it down so much that it doesn't have any teeth and it doesn't really mean anything. In fact, with recommendation number 5, you would say, "Okay, consider the documentation from regulated health professionals," but then have a million other exceptions and qualifiers to that.

Yesterday, we had some people who thought that this might not have gone far enough. What would you say to those people with regard to your recommendations?

Mr. Nick Milanetti: First of all, I would say I'm not sure that we're advocating for watering it down. Our association, on a consistent basis, talks about local autonomy and flexibility. We don't want to be mandating everything to our 29 Catholic school boards.

But with respect to local policies, we would like some consistency across the province with respect to service dogs. Maybe I'll let Steve continue on with the answer, because Steve has done a lot of work on dealing with this with our 29 Catholic school boards.

Mr. Steve Andrews: The objective of service dog policies in our boards is to provide the best educational resources and accommodations that meet the individual learning needs of a particular student. As we've said, those learning needs and accommodation requests have to be factored into a broad identification process, so that the appropriate accommodations that are reasonable, given the board's resources, are made. As we've said, from time to time, service dog or animal requests may not meet that threshold.

As Nick mentioned, I think consistency is important, and I think, generally speaking, our board policies are consistent with human rights guidelines. There is flexibility to make accommodations to train service dogs in the classroom experience, so that some of the potential challenges can be addressed, like handling, where the dog is going to sit in the classroom, and so on.

I think the challenges—individual boards have individual resources and needs and circumstances that are hard to prescribe in a detailed, very prescriptive type of regulation

or set of guidelines that can anticipate every service animal request. In that sense, I think it's important to have autonomy and a degree of flexibility for boards, so that they can make those judgments.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Could I also ask this: You speak about the need to accommodate those needs that are demonstrated in the classroom. We hear about how a lot of these needs are invisible needs—anxiety-based. If those can't always be demonstrated very clearly, what does that look like for your burden of proof?

Mr. Steve Andrews: If it's a particular, for example, mental health issue, then we note that we would be in compliance with the regulations, under the accessibility legislation, that would require medical records and prescriptions from relevant medical and other health professionals, to show that the service animal request serves an important mental health function, let's say.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Okay, thanks. I just want to make sure that I let my colleagues speak as well.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Mrs. Fee.

Mrs. Amy Fee: I just want to follow up, actually, on that question. Something I have been advocating for personally is for school boards not to be able to determine the need for a service animal. Once you look at all the competing rights—you make sure that there are no allergies in the classroom, and phobias and that sort of thing—and that's already done and checked off and they're good to go, I'm confused as to why school boards think that they should be able to step in and overrule, in some cases, a medical professional, which I know has happened, especially in the case of Jack Baldwin, which my colleague spoke about. I would like to understand, from your perspective, why you think a school board should be able to determine the medical need for a service animal.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): You have one minute.

Mr. Steve Andrews: I'm not sure that the board would determine the medical need. The basic question is, what are the best accommodations to enable the student to meet various learning objectives? If there is a demonstrated need because of a mental health concern, and that is documented by the relevant medical professionals, and they request a trained service animal—

Mrs. Amy Fee: So if a medical professional does recommend the use of a service dog for a student in the classroom, and everything else is checked off with competing rights, do you think a school board should be able to overrule that child's medical professional who has said that the child needs that dog in the classroom?

Mr. Steve Andrews: I don't know if the board should be able to overrule that. I think they have to take that and make various accommodation requests and perhaps modify the environment and then experiment and do some training so that the accommodation can be made.

0920

I don't think that the boards intentionally want to overrule, but I think from time to time there may be circumstances where the best accommodation requests, given the other competing issues in the classroom and needs and so on, make it difficult. But I don't think that the boards would, generally speaking, want to overrule

legitimate medical documentation and advice from a student's medical practitioners.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you very much for presenting to us today. We appreciate you coming out.

Mr. Steve Andrews: Thank you.

FACULTY OF EDUCATION,
BROCK UNIVERSITY

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): I'd like to call upon the faculty of education, Brock University. Please introduce yourself. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Owen: Good morning. My name is Michael Owen. I'm the dean of the faculty of education at Brock University.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to speak about the provisions in Bill 48 with respect to examinations related to proficiency in mathematics. Just to let you know, I am not a math expert nor am I an expert in math curriculum nor am I an expert on EQAO or PISA assessments. The last time I formally took a math course was many, many years ago.

That said, I use the mathematics that I learned in high school and university in my day-to-day life, in much the same way as we seek to have our schoolchildren learn to use the mathematics to which they are exposed and which they learn in classrooms today.

Since becoming a dean of a faculty of education, I've been most impressed by the dedication and professionalism of our faculty members and our teacher candidates. They are all committed to providing the very best learning environment for future generations of Ontario students and citizens.

As a dean of a faculty of education, how we teach our teachers in the knowledge of child and youth development, how children and adolescents learn, and how teachers apply both the theories of learning and pedagogy to the day-to-day practice of teaching have been foremost in my mind. I want to ensure that our teacher candidates, when they leave our university, are knowledgeable in the content of the curriculum they are teaching and are skilled as practitioners in the classroom—that they are able to engage every child at the child's learning level with what the child brings to the classroom each and every day.

Since 2015, as you are aware, Ontario's faculties of education have transitioned our teacher education programs from an eight-month program to a 16-month, or four-semester, post-baccalaureate program. Through these enhanced programs, Ontario's faculties of education focus on educating highly qualified professional educators for Ontario's schools. These individuals will be knowledgeable, highly competent and caring teachers who put the needs of students first.

The bill under consideration today proposes the implementation of a math test for prospective teachers. The deans of education across Ontario share the concerns of many about low math scores amongst Ontario students as measured by EQAO scores. But we also acknowledge that the assessment of math proficiency as measured by

OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA, suggests that our students receive a strong foundation or a strong education in mathematics, but, as always, there is room for improvement.

We all believe that Ontario students need strong math skills in order to be competitive in the future job market. Our teacher education program strives to ensure that our teacher candidates possess the knowledge and the skills to teach math appropriately to the level of the child and the requirements of the curriculum. To do this, at Brock University we require that all incoming teacher candidates for primary/junior and junior/intermediate levels take an online refresher course in mathematics in the summer prior to their September start date. This refresher course also uses an app that highlights the areas in which the teacher candidates may require assistance—that is, areas in which they may be a bit weak—and offers opportunities for them to learn and refresh and improve their skills and knowledge of mathematics.

In our 16-month, four-semester program, PJI—primary, junior, intermediate—teacher candidates take math curriculum courses in both years. That's for a total of 72 hours of instruction, or one full course equivalent, so one course in each of the two years.

At the intermediate/senior level, students who have math as a teachable—that is, they have taken math at the undergraduate level and probably have a BSc with math as either a major or a minor—are required to take two courses for a total of 108 credit hours, or 1.5 full course equivalents.

In addition, math and math thinking, or computational thinking, is integrated across the curriculum that we teach in our program.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): You have one minute.

Mr. Michael Owen: I'll skip the piece on AQs. I'm happy to answer questions about AQs.

The faculties of education in Ontario have talked an awful lot about the most effective and efficient ways to implement a math test or assessment for new teachers. We believe the best way to do that is through the Ontario College of Teachers accreditation structure. There are six reasons for this, which I outline in the document that you have: efficiency, support from stakeholders, cost-effectiveness, a local solution that is within the various faculties of education, strong accountability to government, and better structures for the students—that is, that it allows us to really focus our assessment program around what it is that we're teaching within our program and really focus on formative assessment of teacher candidates rather than a one-time, high-stakes test.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you very much. I'd like to begin with Mr. Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Dr. Owen, thank you very much for coming before the committee this morning and taking the time to present your perspective as well as the perspective from your position as dean of education at, I might add, a very good school.

Mr. Michael Owen: Absolutely.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I know some good graduates from there.

I wanted to just give you the opportunity, because I felt like you might have been a little rushed. If there were any parts that you had to skip, do you want to present those now?

Mr. Michael Owen: Thank you very much. Very briefly, the piece around additional qualifications—you had talked about that to our school trustee representatives. The faculty of education at Brock University partners with a number of school districts to provide additional qualification courses to teach in-service teachers. We have found over the last number of years through that partnership, particularly with the two Niagara boards, that there has been considerable uptake in the number of teachers who have taken the math AQ courses. Anecdotally, at least as represented by the EQAO scores with those two districts, we have found that the scores have actually increased substantially over the last number of years. So there is a positive impact about teachers taking additional qualifications.

In addition, I think that the AQs also help teachers who might have a little bit of math phobia to overcome that phobia, to become really comfortable with the curriculum and with teaching to all students, particularly at the PJI levels.

Thank you.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Could you talk to me a little more about the online refresher course in math that candidates have to take?

Mr. Michael Owen: The online refresher course that we request students to take is offered by Vretta. It's an interactive course. It has a number of different levels in it, appropriate to the levels that the students would be teaching. It gives a really good opportunity to evaluate where they are at, and then shows them where they might have weaknesses.

0930

We also ask that if they don't have a good score, they go back and redo the tests at least once so that they all come through that self-assessment with a really good understanding of where they are. We are looking at whether or not we make that a requirement as an exit requirement for the program. We aren't there yet, but we are considering that.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. Lastly, you mentioned the perspective that you feel the most effective and efficient way to implement any math assessment requirement for new teachers is through the existing OCT accreditation structure; then you give six reasons for that. We had Michael Salvatori in yesterday and, other than being able to say that it was one of the criteria you need to have, they didn't really want to administer it. I was wondering if you could speak to that.

Mr. Michael Owen: It wasn't that we were asking the OCT to actually administer the test, but using the OCT's requirements for evaluation and accreditation of programs in the universities—OCT can use its public interest mandate and regulatory powers to require faculties of education to have these formative assessments in mathematics and, in their regular accreditation process, actually

evaluate how we are doing it and whether or not we are doing it satisfactorily. So it's not that they would administer it, but they would set the standard for it, and what we would be expected to do is to meet or exceed that standard.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: That's about all the questions I had. Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Owen: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Mrs. Fee, questions?

Mrs. Amy Fee: No, I'm good.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Anyone else for questions? We'll go to the opposition side. Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you so much, Dr. Owen, for being here today with us. It's wonderful to see so many representatives. We've had very, very limited time, unfortunately, to hear from folks like yourselves—the experts, really, in the field—about many components of this legislation.

This bill is an omnibus bill, as you know. I appreciate that you're really only commenting on the one piece of it, so I'll keep my questions to that piece. Don't worry. But it has been difficult to—because this is a huge change, potentially. What we've learned from the government in terms of the math test is very little about what their intentions are in terms of who is going to administer it, how it will be administered, who's going to write this test.

I picked up a bit of this in your presentation—and I will also allow you, if you want, to expand a bit on anything you may have missed. What we heard yesterday from representatives of faculties at OISE and at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology was very consistently the sense that a test at the end of a two-year program was not really the best approach, in their opinion; that the programs that are offered—as you pointed out, some of the refresher courses and things like that that faculties of education are already embarking on—are far more effective ways to improve teacher knowledge and comfort in mathematics.

I wondered if you could expand a little bit on your thoughts about whether or not—I mean, I appreciate you're basically saying here that the faculties of education need to be a party to this and, "We have lots to offer." I don't know if the minister—I heard that the ministry had a meeting with all the faculties of education, maybe last week, some kind of conference call? But I'm curious if you could speak a little bit more about whether this test is really necessary or the best approach.

Mr. Michael Owen: Interesting question. Let me try to address it in a couple of parts.

Certainly some of the experts that you had around the table from OISE and UOIT are also the experts in mathematics education, and I'm not. They have a much better understanding of the content that teacher candidates are expected to learn while they are in our programs, the content not just of the curriculum, but also the contents of how to teach the curriculum effectively.

Also, as I noted in my written submission, every teacher candidate does at least 80 days of structured experience in the classroom. That's under the supervision of a qualified teacher, and in that process the teacher candidates learn

how to teach much more effectively, because they're learning from people who already do that.

The notion of an exit test—I'm of two minds on it. It depends on how well you do on high-pressure tests. If you don't do well—if you, as I do, have a little bit of difficulty with high-pressure tests—then you may not do very well on it. What we were—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry. If I may: Could that be, then, a disincentive for teachers, especially maybe some of our international teachers or teachers where English is a second language?

Mr. Michael Owen: It could be. In our assessments of what are some of the disincentives for people to come into the teacher education program, some people have suggested that a math test may very well be a disincentive for those underrepresented groups.

The point that I was trying to make, though, however poorly, was that we are looking more for formative assessment rather than summative assessment: How can we actually look at where students start in the program and where they need to be, and actually build on their capacity throughout the program, so that we build on their knowledge, we build on their skills, we build on their competencies as instructors and teachers?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm just going to pass it over to my colleague, who I know has a question as well. Thank you. That was useful.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Ms. Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Michael, for being here today. I know you mentioned the idea of expertise in math. I am not an expert in math either, but we did have a few experts yesterday who talked about the bill overall and some of the issues in terms of consultation.

I know people who have worked in terms of teaching pedagogies. You can do tests well, but not teach that well. You mentioned that EQAO, for example, is not the best method of testing how well a student is doing in the classroom, if I'm not mistaken. To me, this math test after the two-year term seems very similar to that, because what we're doing is trying to test if someone does tests well rather than if someone has actually understood the material or if someone is able to teach that material well in a classroom.

It was very surprising to me that this bill was put together without the consultation of the experts necessary. I'm not sure if you were consulted prior to this, or any sort of consultation with your university or as an expert—or the fact that we have a lot of different stakeholders in the province who will be impacted by this.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): You have 45 seconds to wrap up, please.

Mr. Michael Owen: There are indeed many stakeholders across the province that will be impacted by this. The students will be impacted. The parents will be impacted. The teachers and school boards will be impacted.

My approach is very much looking at what it is that our teacher candidates need to be successful when they graduate and when they go into the classroom, but also to look at where they come into the program. If they have a deficiency at the start, what we want to do is to try to make sure that we're actually able to change that, to overcome that deficiency.

We do have strict requirements. To get into a teacher education program is very difficult in Ontario, so we have some of the very brightest students who want to be teachers going into the programs. We see formative assessment as a way to actually move these students through the program, and then having some form of evaluation all the way through, so that when they do leave the program, they are able to teach what it is that we say that they can teach.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): Thank you very much for presenting today. We appreciate you coming out.

Mr. Michael Owen: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): So just a reminder—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, Madam Chair, I'd like to move a motion. I noticed today that, in the committee meeting notice, our hours have been revised. My understanding is that that's because at 3 o'clock today, we've run out of people to come and speak at these consultations. We have such limited time, and I want to add that the public received only four hours of notice online before the deadline to appear.

We've heard over the last 24 hours some significant concerns—and some support, certainly, but some consistent issues around this legislation. I think we are really doing a disservice to the people of this province and the students and the educators if we don't give this more careful consideration.

I'm wondering if there is a way for us—I don't know if I should move a motion, perhaps—to see if we could extend the consultations by another week, so that we have an opportunity to hear from everybody who has contacted me, for example, to say that they missed the deadline, because it was online for four hours.

The Chair (Mrs. Nina Tangri): The committee is unable to accept a motion. It was the House that made the decision. All of those who requested to present to us were allowed to present to us, so we won't be accepting any motions today.

But I'd just like to put a reminder that the deadline to send a written submission to the Clerk of the Committee is 6 p.m. today, and the deadline to file amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee is 12 p.m. noon on Thursday, February 28. Amendments must be filed in hard copy.

We will adjourn until Monday, March 4, at 9 a.m. when the committee will meet for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 0943.

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