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**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Education

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 30 October 2019

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

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Mercredi 30 octobre 2019

Chair: Peter Tabuns
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Peter Tabuns
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 30 October 2019

Mercredi 30 octobre 2019

The committee met at 1559 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Good afternoon, everyone. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Education for a total of seven hours and 30 minutes.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of services intended. I'd also like to remind everyone that the estimates process has always worked well with a give-and-take approach. On one hand, members of the committee take care to keep their questions relevant to the estimates of the ministry, and the ministry, for its part, demonstrates openness in providing information requested by the committee. As Chair, I tend to allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure they're confident that the ministry will spend those dollars wisely.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or to service delivery or about the competence of the ministry to spend the time wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the member asking the question to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer.

Are there any questions before we start? Okay.

I'm now required to call vote 1001 of the estimates, which sets the review process in motion. We'll begin with a statement of not more than 30 minutes by the Minister of Education, followed by a statement or questions of up to 30 minutes by the official opposition. Then the Minister of Education will have 30 minutes for a reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally amongst the recognized parties.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much, Chair. It's good to be here. It's good to be back at estimates. I'm quite proud to be joined by Deputy Minister Nancy Naylor, as well as Shannon Chace, the director of legal services, as well as some senior leadership members of the Ministry of Education.

I just want to express my gratitude to the parliamentary assistant as well for his leadership on this file that predates my appointment to the ministry, and express my gratitude to the critic, whom I met with over the summer. I very much valued your perspective and your insights. It is a privilege to work with these talented individuals and with all of our ministry staff, who are quite dedicated to the cause of education.

I also want to express my support and gratitude to all caring teachers, education workers and support staff for their commitment to helping students achieve success throughout their educational journey.

Ontario is indeed, Chair, a global leader in education, and at the heart of our education system is a shared responsibility to ensure success for all students.

Au coeur de notre système d'éducation se trouve une responsabilité partagée pour assurer la réussite de tous les élèves.

But while we do have a great education system in this province, one thing is certain: We can and we must do better. We can do so by developing dynamic and resilient students across Ontario who are prepared for life after high school.

As part of our commitment to success, the number one priority for the Ministry of Education has been to listen to parents, students and organizations about how best to improve the education system and the success of our kids.

Last fall, the government launched a consultation to provide all Ontarians with an opportunity to be heard on how we can better prepare students for the future. The response was overwhelming, and what started as a platform to provide a voice for parents became the largest consultation on education in our province's history.

We heard throughout the consultation that we are not providing our students with the necessary skills to succeed after they have left school. We heard that they need to get back to basics, to empower students to solve everyday problems, increase their employability and be productive and resilient citizens in the best country in the world.

We heard that we need to provide students with more opportunities and exposure to the skilled trades and to

STEM disciplines that are of consequence to so many communities in the province. We also heard that we're not providing our students with critical life skills, such as financial literacy and the ability to cope with stress.

Ontario's financial situation requires that we modernize our publicly funded education system with the goal of protecting the system for the long term, making it sustainable for the next generation of students. This will mean making the decisions to ensure our tax dollars are having the greatest impact in the classroom. In fact, this is a great opportunity to be innovative in how we improve and evolve the system, which is why our plan is to modernize key aspects of the education system and empower educators to prepare students for the realities of today's modern world. Together with our partners, we're building on a system that creates the best talents, that builds careers, that promotes well-being and helps all students to better be prepared for the jobs of the future.

Education happens to be one of the biggest expenses for Ontario taxpayers. We must continue to invest more into our education system every single year. But we must ensure that every dollar helps to deliver the results that parents and students expect.

Investments in Ontario's publicly funded education system, through the Grants for Student Needs—the GSNs, as they will henceforth be known—that funding to school boards is projected to be just over \$24.5 billion in 2019-20, or \$12,246 on a per-pupil funding basis. That represents funding for approximately two million students, from kindergarten to grade 12, in approximately 4,800 publicly funded schools. That includes the English- and French-language public school systems and the English- and French-language Catholic school systems.

In addition, our government has established a new \$330-million Priorities and Partnerships Fund, the PPF, that will support the ministry's vision with time-limited investment. The PPF funding focuses on high-impact initiatives that directly support students in the classroom. Plus, over the next 10 years, we're investing \$13 billion into building new schools as well as child spaces in Ontario.

Every dollar we spend must be focused on increasing success for our students. It is why our government undertook a vision about modernizing every aspect of our system. Take, for example, class size. We're proposing a measure that changes class size. Our proposed plan would maintain class sizes from kindergarten to grade 3. It would establish a consistent approach of class sizes from grades 4 to 8, and align secondary classes more closely with that jurisdiction.

Our government is committed to discussing the key elements of the proposed plan, including hiring practices and class sizes. We've been doing so through a consultation process that has allowed partners to provide the benefits of their experience and their ideas. The consultation will allow us and our partners to ensure that our proposed plan is designed to serve the best interests of Ontario's students in a way that works for their families and school boards, and is fair to our educators.

As we have said from the beginning, not a single teacher will lose their job because of the changes in class sizes. That remains true today, because we're providing a \$1.6-billion teacher protection fund to help ensure school boards manage these challenges. It is typical for school boards to issue surplus notices while they work through their annual budget process. That has happened, as you will know, Chair, over successive governments over a generation. It is also important to note that on-the-ground staffing is based on local board decisions. Now, consistent with prior years, there may be some layoffs in school boards with declining enrolment and/or school board decisions unrelated to class size funding changes.

As part of our new vision for education, we're modernizing our curriculum reform as well. That's why our government announced a new four-year math strategy. The goal is to provide students with opportunities to develop a strong understanding of the fundamentals of math, and how to apply them in life. The math strategy will empower students to apply their learning to everyday problems and increase their preparation for the jobs of today and tomorrow. I should point that next year, the spring of 2020, our new teachers will be required to pass a math proficiency test before they enter a classroom in a professional capacity. This will ensure teachers are confident and capable in teaching math.

Also as part of modernizing the curriculum in July of 2019, we released a revised mandatory grade 10 career studies course. The goal is to better equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to make responsible economic and financial decisions, with a real emphasis on financial literacy.

We're delivering a modern and age-appropriate elementary health and physical education curriculum that will keep kids safe. There will be clear provisions for parents who wish to opt their child out of the elementary sex education curriculum. In the future, all nine modules will be available for parents who want to discuss concepts at home whenever they feel that their child is ready.

A few months ago, we announced a revised First Nations, Métis and Inuit studies curriculum for grades 9 through 12. It was developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners to increase learning about Indigenous histories, perspectives, cultures, contributions and contemporary realities. Our government will continue to work with Indigenous partners to develop an approach to strengthen Indigenous content and learning across subjects, grades and courses.

We're also developing a new STEM education strategy to enable Ontario to become a global leader in science, technology, engineering and math, and there is a renewed focus on the skilled trades. The ministry is working closely with partners to increase student and parent exposure to the skilled trades, technology and apprenticeship training. We'll continue to leverage many of our current programs, including the Specialist High Skills Major program, dual credits, experiential learning and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, to help promote the skilled trades.

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Much of what we're doing is to help bring our education system into the 21st century. That includes harnessing the power of technology to teach and learn in exciting new ways. This means embracing technology, because it will embrace students' learning and give them more access to a broader range of programming.

Students have used online learning since 2004 to earn high school credits toward their diploma. This year, roughly 60,000 students are taking online courses. Of course, we do know that school boards have their own unique challenges and needs, and we'll work with them to discuss planning and access to online learning.

We all know that students have unique challenges and needs. As such, students can be exempted from online learning requirements on an individualized basis.

We also know that, currently, there is inconsistency and duplication in delivering online learning across the province.

Building on the system already in place, students will be provided with new and exciting ways to learn online, find the courses they want, and develop the technological skills they need for successful jobs. By introducing a centralized approach, we can better meet the needs of our students and support teachers who will continue to facilitate online learning.

There are remarkable benefits to this approach. Given the virtual nature of online learning, these courses can be offered to anyone, anywhere, even if a student can't be in a physical classroom to learn.

Needless to say, broadband is essential—and we recognize that—to support modernized digital learning in the classroom. That's why Ontario's students and educators will have access to reliable, fast, secure and affordable Internet services at schools, at a speed of one megabyte per second per student in all regions of the province by 2021-22. This will give students access to technology that will better develop their digital skills and provide quality broadband services to students in rural and remote communities. To complete this project, the need of each school will be individually assessed, and then individual technical solutions will be developed to support implementation.

Broadband expansion is already under way at a majority of northern and rural schools; I want to make that clear. Some 32% of northern schools have completed their upgrades; 35% of rural schools have been completed. This strategy, envisioned and developed by the Ministry of Education, follows our broader government vision for broadband expansion right across Ontario.

In addition to making technology more readily available for all students, we're also providing targeted supports for students, especially in areas where it's needed most. For instance, through the Northern Supports Initiative, we're providing \$7 million to mitigate the challenges faced by northern school boards with respect to the lack of available services in their communities. We know that there are real difficulties in attracting and

retaining service professionals at the board level. We're assessing these services through community partners.

We also know that there are major costs of service provision. The NSI funding is utilized in a regional, collaborative model that serves all northern school boards and school authorities through three regional co-operatives. The co-operatives determine local special education priorities, and they deliver joint, innovative and cost-effective special ed programs and services.

Of course, we do provide a variety of supports for students all across this province. A key concern for the government is that too many students are struggling with mental health and well-being, which is why I'm proud to be a member of this government that is applying a compassionate eye to making mental health a priority for students in class by more than doubling the mental health supports in schools. On World Mental Health Day in October, I announced, along with the member from Burlington, nearly \$40 million—more than double the funding from 2017-18—to advance student mental health, in partnership with education groups.

We also announced that we will permanently fund approximately 180 front-line mental health workers in secondary schools—these could be psychologists, psychotherapists or social workers—to reduce wait times and improve access to critical care.

Much of what we're doing is to increase all students' ability to find successful paths within our education system. We are steadfast in providing the types of supports they need, to make sure they can flourish, whether they choose to attend post-secondary institutions or to enter the workforce.

We know that part of this support must focus on some of the challenges faced by students who are from equity-seeking groups, to provide a student population that is healthy and ready to learn. We must work on intentionally creating positive climates.

Among several initiatives, the ministry has supported the implementation of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. This is an approach that is used to change teacher practices and develop student responsibility, citizenship and community engagement that aims to provide students with fair, safe and respectful learning environments. The culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy is an evidence-based pedagogical approach that originates in the US. It has been tailored to meet the needs of Ontario students. The value and success of CRRP arises from its approach that does not place the blame for underachievement on students. Instead, it requires teachers to critically examine their thinking about student potential, their own views of their students, and how they can understand and interact with their student populations. To date, the ministry has provided funding to 36 district school boards to support equity-related projects that responded to their local needs. These projects support students experiencing generational poverty and students from particular religious backgrounds. They also support Indigenous students in transitioning from elementary to secondary and they assist teachers in developing anti-

racism strategies. The institutional challenges facing students are well documented, and we're committed to ensuring equity for all.

In addition to this, we are investing \$2.4 million to fund human rights and equity advisers at school boards. These advisers will work with the directors of boards and with boards' senior teams to foster a culture of human rights and equity and to increase the boards' compliance with human rights. We are convinced that these investments will bring the positive change that will ultimately benefit students, parents and our entire broader community.

I know that too many of our students and too many of our families have had little faith in our education system at times. Their children have been left to believe that their ability to succeed is intrinsically tied to their life circumstances, to what they were born into. Our government is working hard to reverse that lack of faith by making targeted changes to our education system that will help all of our students achieve their full potential. By investing in our schools to ensure that we're welcoming and supporting all students, we restore their belief in our system so that students understand that with hard work and dedication they can achieve their dreams and succeed in the global marketplace.

We will not have children left behind due to their life circumstances, because of their faith or their heritage, sexual orientation, gender, place of birth or because of their special education needs. This plan reflects our commitment to bringing all students in Ontario on a path that will provide them with the tools to succeed, a plan that is targeted and centred on the learner. It includes several initiatives such as the 2019 Focus on Youth Summer Program, to which our government allocated more than \$7.6 million. This program creates summer employment opportunities for high school students who may experience barriers to academic achievement and employment due to their life circumstance. The program is open to youth in select low-income neighbourhoods who may be disengaged from school because of their home or school environment. This may also include low academic achievement, family conflict or conflict with the law.

We'll also provide a \$6.1-million investment in funding through the After School Skills Development Program. The program provides funding to all boards in the province to support students with ASD in social, communication, self-regulation and life skills development. The ministry is also continuing funding to support the provision of dedicated space to schools for external applied behaviour analysts—the ABA practitioners—to provide direct service to students with autism spectrum disorder—with ASD—in 11 pilot school boards across the province.

Our government is also providing \$1.7 million to support students with severe learning disabilities in reading through LD pilots. This funding will be used to support an intensive reading LD pilot project in eight district school boards. These pilots were designed to enhance educators' knowledge and increase their ability with supports for students with learning disabilities in their local communities.

As you can see, our approach to education is wide-ranging and forward-thinking. It must be, because student achievement is one key to success in a competitive global economy. But we must be able to better gauge the success of our students in our system. We know students are still struggling to meet the provincial math standards, so we're focusing on a back-to-basics approach with a four-year math strategy with the objective of improving the knowledge, skills and confidence of students and educators. It is why we're working closely with the EQAO. We want to modernize that agency and their processes while using data to build better assessment and evaluation models that have a greater focus on equity. EQAO is a leading authority for measuring school system performance, and it's critical that their insights be maximized. EQAO can provide vital data and research to reinvigorate education in Ontario. It can help improve student learning at the provincial, board and school levels, and it can help identify achievement gaps to promote greater equity in the publicly funded education system.

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Assessment and evaluation are a natural and necessary part of learning. In fact, students, teachers and parents need feedback on how well students are doing. Used along with information on student outcomes such as credit accumulation and graduation rates, EQAO test results provide a more comprehensive picture of Ontario's education system outcomes for our students.

As you know, the ministry is not just responsible for our publicly funded education system. We oversee a full continuum of learning which begins in a child's earliest year. That's why we are equally committed to modernizing and building a better child care and early years system. That's why, for child care, we're committed to some fundamental changes in Ontario, such as increasing accessibility, increasing affordability and increasing parental choice.

As such, we're investing over \$2 billion to support the child care and early years sector this year alone. That includes \$390 million in our Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, also known as CARE, henceforth known as the child care tax credit, which leads to the \$2-billion figure. These represent historic investments in Ontario child care and early years programs.

As part of our overall early years strategy, we're investing in our child care spaces to provide families with more affordable child care. This includes up to \$1 billion over the next five years to create up to 30,000 child care spaces in schools, including 10,000 spaces in new schools in the province of Ontario. It's why we are making life more affordable for families. It's why we're increasing child care choice and access for parents, while making life for them more affordable.

These are just a few of the many initiatives, programs and investments that we have implemented as part of our new vision for education. Later I will highlight more of our work, but in closing, I would like to remind everyone that during our largest consultation, we heard that our system needed repair. Since then, our attention has been

focused on building a system that best supports student achievement—a system that provides choice to parents and puts the best teachers in the classroom, a system that respects the taxpayers of this province.

Our changes are many, but changes are necessary to help Ontario's education system reach new levels of success. I am confident that with the leadership, strength and experience of the people working within our publicly funded education system and the resources that we put into it, we can give our students the very best education system in the world. We can prepare them for a bright future and help this province reach new heights of excellence.

Thank you, and I will turn over for the remainder to my deputy minister.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you, Minister. If you would introduce yourself.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Certainly. My name is Nancy Naylor. I'm the Deputy Minister of Education. I am pleased to be here with Minister Lecce to discuss the 2019-20 estimates for the Ministry of Education.

As you know, our ministry is responsible for a large and important system of two million students, as well as our responsibilities for child care in the province of Ontario. As such, our ministry team looks forward to supporting the minister and looks forward to responding to your questions.

I do want to acknowledge that our ministry is currently engaged in bargaining, along with our school board partners, with teachers' federations and education worker unions. In the context of this bargaining, we are committed to continuing good-faith discussions and to respecting the ground rules that have been agreed to at each table. That means that there may be topics that are not settled matters; in that context, we have to reserve some of our commentary and responses. However, we look forward to continuing our work with all of our partners in education.

I would like to acknowledge, in response to the Chair's earlier comments, that we have a number of members of the ministry team with us. We have experts. We have members of the ministry team with expertise in the broad range of responsibilities for our ministry, and we all look forward to responding to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you. And with that, we'll turn to Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Minister. I know it has been a few months. We've had an opportunity to meet in person, as you mentioned, and I want to congratulate you again on your appointment.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Certainly this is a portfolio with very significant responsibility, as I know you know.

I also want to start by thanking the Ministry of Education staff, including Deputy Minister Naylor, today for being here and for all the work that you do. As we all acknowledge here, not only is public education really the foundation of our society, it's also a major employer. I think the saying that is a teacher's work environment is a child's learning environment. Certainly, I think it's fair to

say that for those who choose to work in education and in early childhood education, it's more than a job; it's really a passion. The decisions, therefore, that this government makes and carries out impact the daily lives of over two million students, their families, their communities and, of course, the custodians, the office administrators, the teachers and librarians and principals and ECEs and social workers—I could go on—that are the very heart of our system.

Over the last year, and as this government has created what I think it's fair to say is chaos and confusion through many cuts to our education system, I've had the really tremendous privilege of speaking up on behalf of those students and families and workers. I think it's fair to say that I and my colleagues who are sitting here with me today have heard from many thousands of those folks who have been affected, whether it was a student who called me in tears in the fall—I had many calls from students in tears who were worried about losing courses they would need to graduate—or the teachers who were without work or the student teachers, thousands and thousands of them, who are worried about a lack of future opportunities when they graduate, or the many, many parents and grandparents who have contacted me asking how they can get the government to reconsider their terrible decisions. Today I want to honour them by sharing some of the questions they have asked me to ask you.

The spending documents that we have before us, I feel, to some extent, are a bit of a shell game. I also want to mention the great work of the Financial Accountability Office in shedding some light in certain areas of these documents, and I will be referring to those.

I am going to go on to questions. Minister, last year the Premier and your entire government promised that not a single job would be lost on your watch, but we know by the Financial Accountability Office's independent research that you are going to be eliminating over 10,000 teaching positions in your first term in office. I know that your government likes to talk about math, so I thought maybe for this round of questions we could go back to basics with a few little math problems. Sound good?

As reported this week by the Toronto Star, 124 teachers at the TDSB have lost their jobs because of your budget cuts and class size changes. Is 124 jobs lost greater than or less than the Premier's promise of "not one teacher will lose their job"?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I will just say quite clearly the Premier made a commitment in the 2019 budget which was tabled in this Legislature to include a provision, a \$1.6-billion allocation—which is not an accounting error or a small amount of tax dollars. He made a decision point and the entire cabinet ratified it, where the \$1.6-billion allocation, the principle of which is to backstop any changes that could—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, Minister, if I may; I don't want to be rude, but if you could answer the question, though, about the 124 teachers at the TDSB who have lost their jobs.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that and I think it would be prudent just to permit me to provide the context

to this committee who has never heard it. As I was saying, member, the \$1.6-billion allocation that was tabled and introduced in the Legislature was there to backstop any potential losses due to e-learning, the online learning commitment that was announced some months ago, and/or related to class sizes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And the job freeze, I assume, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm just going to finish the thought, if I may. So the \$1.6-billion allocation has been in place. It is supporting boards in the province of Ontario. What we have seen in a variety of boards, including in boards like Windsor-Essex, where we both have representation from, where 100% of those boards that had large recall notices, and you will know because in the Legislature it's a matter of public record—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, I have a number of questions similar to these, so perhaps I'll put them out there. I do want to get into the \$1.6-billion—what is it you call it?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Teacher protection plan.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to call it the teacher elimination plan, but we'll get back to that in a minute, and I do have lots of questions about that, so we'll get to that. But you're not going to answer my question about the 124 jobs at the TDSB?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think, Chair, what I have indicated is that there is a fund—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to specifically understand those jobs.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Just one at a time.

1630

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think it is incumbent on us to appreciate that the government has made a decision to allocate front-end-load investment to help protect teachers. I think what is important in the discussion, Chair, is that—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So sorry, Minister.

Mr. Chair, if I'm not going to get an answer to my question about the 124 teachers at the TDSB, I'm going to move on to my next question.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): And your point of order is?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I would like to note that she has interrupted consecutively the minister before he had a chance to respond to that question, so I don't think that's a fair characterization.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What I would ask, then, is that the minister not wander off into other school boards when I'm specifically asking about one school board.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): It's not a point of order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, what I've attempted to communicate to the committee is that in instances in Toronto, in instances in communities across the province—York region, Oshawa, Durham, wherever that may

be—there is a fund, a large fund, that, by the FAO's admission in his report, is oversubscribed, to help ensure that teachers remain in class. In fact, if I may finish this thought—and I will turn it back to you, ma'am—there's a 105%—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm not a "ma'am," by the way.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thanks.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: A 105% top-up, an additional 5%, to the attrition protection fund, which was predicated on helping to incent specialized teachers to stay in the front of class.

It is not an abstraction to avoid that answer. I think what it shows is that the fund exists, it is large and it is working in communities across the province.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I'm going to move on. Let's look at the Peel region. And I just want it noted, I think, that the minister didn't actually respond to my question about the 124 teachers at the TDSB. He may need to be briefed, perhaps, about the actual loss of jobs at that school board.

Let's look at the Peel region. We know that each teaching position equals six courses, so if there are 417 fewer teachers, as there will be in Peel, that equals 2,502 courses lost, because it's six courses per teacher, just to make it clear; right? And 2,502 fewer classes means bigger class sizes and reduced options for students—something, we already know from past experience, that affects graduation rates. How many students, Minister, will have to delay their graduation until you do the right thing?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will submit that every student in the province of Ontario will have access to the requisite courses to graduate, as has been a practice, as I understand it, that has existed since the last—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But would it take more years, then, for them to graduate? Is that the plan?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No. The plan is to ensure that local principals and administration in schools—as I understand it, a phenomenon that has existed since the last time your party was in power, in the 1990s, where administration would work with other schools to ensure that those students who need specialized courses, or prerequisite courses to graduate, are able to access them. That is an expectation we have of principals: an expectation that they can access them in their schools—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister—sorry. If I may, Minister, I don't want to get too deep down that angle. For example, I had a student named Ryan who contacted me in the fall, and he still has not been able to access the course he's going to need—not to graduate, in this case, but to get into the program that he wants to go to in university. Many students like him have been left without these options, because of a decision your government has made.

Anyway, if an Ontario student needs 30 credits to graduate but, thanks to your budget cuts and class size changes, if there are, let's just say, two fewer credits available each year, thanks to the classes in their schools being full or outright cancelled, how much longer will it

take students to graduate, thanks to your government's cuts?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I may defer part of the question to the deputy minister. Yesterday, you asked the question to the member, and the assertion in the question was about the consequence on the students for graduation, in the context of classroom sizes and that some courses could be impacted. What I mentioned then remains true today: The chair of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic board, in a voluntary statement he made yesterday, a contemporary intervention he made on his own judgment—there are fewer classes today of over 30 students than there were last year.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm sorry, Minister. I'm not really sure how that relates to the courses that I'm talking about being cut.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The assertion is—

Ms. Marit Stiles: We're going to get to a discussion of class sizes, so if you don't mind that, we can talk about it. I recall that, and I'm interested in how you came to that. But I do have specific questions about class sizes that we can get to.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. Just to answer the question, if it's the relationship between the two: You've asserted that the classes, as they get more impacted, or more students in the class, that it's pushing kids out of certain classes who won't be able to access them. I'm suggesting, in a board that is close to home, Hamilton-Wentworth—not horribly far off for some of us—in that board, there actually are fewer classes over 30. I think that's an important point for the committee. I may defer—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I still don't understand how that relates, but we'll continue on.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has run the number of teachers who will be out of work thanks to your class size changes and cuts. I've got a lot of numbers, so I'm just going to go through this. Maybe the way we can deal with this, to keep it moving—because I have so many questions—is to just do a quick true or false.

Number one: 549 fewer teachers in York are 549 more teachers who will have lost their jobs than the “not a single teacher will lose their job” promise that your government made.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. The number, the data point that is compelling for the committee is the \$1.6-billion allocation to backstop students—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, no. Minister, I'm asking you just to say “true” or “false.” Perhaps, if you require more information, I'd be happy for you to come back with information so that you can feel comfortable in saying “true” or “false.”

Ms. Lindsey Park: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Point of order, Ms. Park.

Ms. Lindsey Park: The particular question doesn't seem relevant to the estimates documents we're evaluating. Would you be able to point to me where in the estimates document this relates to?

Ms. Marit Stiles: This relates to education spending in Ontario, which is spent on teaching positions. We have 549 fewer teachers in York today. That directly relates to education spending. I don't think I need to defend my question.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Again, which particular estimate does she have questions about?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll let the Chair—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Ms. Park, it's not a point of order. A member is asking about how the money is spent.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to continue. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Two hundred and sixty-two teachers in Waterloo are 262 more teachers who will have lost their jobs than the “not a single teacher will lose their job” that your government promised. True or false?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: To the member, I will affirm that in communities like Waterloo where we have ensured there are requisite investments in the front line and where the teacher protection fund exists, that we have examples, including in that region, where recall rates vis-à-vis the redundancy notices have risen dramatically high. In fact, in many boards in the province of Ontario, they're at 100%. The answer, in short, is to contextualize to folks back home, in whatever locality they may live, that there is a fund designed to backstop any offsets due to government policy.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Two hundred and sixty-two teachers, Minister, in Waterloo have lost their jobs. Your teacher protection fund is not saving those jobs, and you haven't really explained why.

I'm going to move on, because I could give more examples. I think we're not getting anywhere with this. I just sense that the minister maybe doesn't have that information at his fingertips, so you may want to come back at that. Two hundred and twenty-one teachers in Thames Valley; 355 teachers in Ottawa; 272 teachers in Durham—I'm just going to leave that there since I don't sense that we're really getting the responses that we were hoping for.

So that was a lot of numbers; I grant it. I understand. But at the heart of each and every one of those numbers represents real people who have been hurt by your policies. I know that yesterday in question period I shared the story of one of those people earlier, who was in the Legislature, actually, earlier this week: Lindsay from Chatham, who worked as an occasional teacher in long-term assignments for 12 years with no permanent work, which is a tragedy, I think, of our system, frankly. But this year, though, thanks to your changes, for the first time in 12 years, she has received no supply work, and was not even offered a long-term assignment this year as no jobs were available. She's a young mom. She is now struggling to get by, thanks to you. She's picking up waitressing jobs, which seems very unfortunate when we have young, excited, highly trained teachers who want to work in our system. Will you finally admit to teachers like Lindsay that your promise that “not one teacher will lose their job” was an empty one?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think context is important for all. For Lindsay, my message is, we put in a fund that is there, designed to backstop any losses. What is important for the committee to know—and I think this is an element that may provide some context. In boards that will realize declining enrolment, and you may have cited some that have, there can be losses.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm pretty sure Peel doesn't have declining enrolment.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think that the most recent one, you said it. But the point is, with respect, that that is an important context which I think has failed to be mentioned. In the interests of accuracy, that needs to be tabled.

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The second, if I may finish the thought, is related to the LPF, the Local Priorities Fund. As the member will know, in 2017, in a former iteration of a negotiated settlement, that one-time program ended, lapsed, on August 31, 2019. The government is currently under way in negotiations. Many losses associated in boards across the province are because that fund has yet or not been renewed. It is actively being negotiated right now at teachers' tables.

So, member, this is a very simple point. The Local Priorities Fund, which existed for two consecutive years and provided teacher positions for many, many folks across the province, has yet or not been renewed. It is before—

Ms. Marit Stiles: What you're saying to me is that money is not—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to finish the thought, Chair. Chair, I've been very comfortable with interjections. I think the context is necessary for the committee.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Go ahead.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Please proceed.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The fund lapsed on the 31st, and in each and every question, you have failed to note a matter of fact associated with the fund lapsing on the 31st. We are currently under way in negotiations. In CUPE, in the voluntary settlement we had, we restored that fund, at an allocation that will be disclosed once the tentative agreement has been ratified, and those jobs have been restored, and you have yet to mention that. I think that lack of disclosure is not in the interests of this chamber—

Interjections.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, I've yet to finish the thought, and I think that context is important. What it shows is that if we're going to speak about individuals, real lives and real people, who I know work hard and who I know want to continue working in schools, two things are important: (1) Does that individual work in a community with declining enrolment? Yes or no? And (2) has that fund been restored?

Member, this is a matter of fact, and you have yet to disclose that to the committee. I find that rather troubling, that you would not provide the full disclosure.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Really? Why would I disclose—this is your numbers. This is your ministry. You can't come up and explain to us why it is that 272 teachers in Durham lost their jobs?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You know that the LPF has lapsed, and you've yet to acknowledge that fact. For me, that is an unusual admission, when we know—anyone in the sector, including some of us, with great humility, who have only been doing this for 100-odd days, recognizes that the LPF lapsed on the 31st. That represents an overwhelming amount of teachers. Yet we're currently negotiating it, and you haven't acknowledged that. I find that bizarre, actually, member.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Wow. Well, I obviously hit a nerve. My apologies, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, the truth is—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to go on, because—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The truth is becoming of this Parliament.

Ms. Marit Stiles:—you know what, Minister? Actually, the number of students in Ontario schools is going to increase quite dramatically over the next few years, and if your government fails to invest now in ensuring that we have adequate positions—you're talking about eliminating 10,000 teaching positions in our schools. This is not my number, Minister. This is the Financial Accountability Office, and you have yet to explain that.

I'm going to move on. You held up a—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: May I respond to that, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): It wasn't a question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to actually move on to the job protection fund, which the minister has been very eager to talk about. You've held up the job protection fund as proof that you're not a completely heartless government, and I appreciate that. It's an attrition fund. And let's be clear: As I said earlier, I like to think of it more as the teacher elimination fund, because it is set up to make the elimination of teachers a little bit more gentle. I appreciate that, taking a little bit more time to do this. Because basically what you're doing is saying that we're going to cut in some areas, and we're going to not—and this is very important—when somebody retires, we're not going to replace that teacher.

That may not sound like a layoff, but that's a teaching position that disappears. It is directly linked, as well, to your ministry's decision around class size averages and increases. We know that even with this funding, the avalanche of job losses caused by those funding cuts and by those class size changes is going to continue.

I mention again those student teachers out there who have amassed enormous debt. I've talked to many of them. I was visited by some of them this week, in tears because they have no idea what they're going to do when they graduate.

Do you think, Minister, that 10,000 teachers out of work is a good return on investment for a fund that pretends to protect jobs?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you. I'm just going to refer to the Deputy Minister for additional context on the attrition protection fund.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm happy dealing with the minister—if that's okay, Deputy. I think if I want to get further

down a line and I don't feel like I'm getting it from you, I can turn to the deputy minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, I think it's the prerogative of the minister to utilize the talents of the ministry, who are on the front lines, individuals who precede me. It would be without precedence to not permit me to yield to those who have, I think, additional technical skills on this.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): The background on this is not clear. I gather that you can ask who you wish to ask. You can try to answer as best you can. If the questioner does not accept the person you have put forward, then you may not answer the question.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, I choose to, with the technical support of the deputy minister.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, then maybe what I'll do is I'll give you more of my questions on that, and then maybe we can turn to the deputy minister. How much has the teacher elimination fund spent this year paying to cover those positions that you've eliminated? That's my first question. Do you have a breakdown of how the money is being allocated by school board?

If your cuts have eliminated someone's full-time job, but your teacher elimination fund means that they can't find another job at another school—and let's be clear; it's not like a teacher can easily move between boards. That means, in many cases, moving your whole family somewhere, unless you're in the same region. And many teachers do travel to get work, but anyway, if they've moved and they can find another job at another school, but it's only a temporary and part-time contract, do you think that the fund has done its job?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Perhaps I'll just answer succinctly about some of the technical aspects of the teacher protection fund, and the member can return to her questions.

The fund was set up within the GSN and the mechanics of the GSN to ensure that school boards could move to the revised class size standards over time without the need to lay off teachers unless and to support teacher complement numbers and respect the pace of retirements in an individual board. It is a little early in the year to know what the board-by-board take-up of those funds would be, and that would rely on the actual retirement profile of the teachers board by board. So we have some preliminary anecdotal information, but later in the year, through some of our in-year submissions, we would be able to look at the exact take-up.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Would you be able to bring us any interim findings or anything that you could table here during this process?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We would likely know later in November through submissions from the ministry. It might be a little late for the scheduled time of this committee, but we could take that request away for responses later in the year.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It would be wonderful if it could in some way be tabled here, or at a later date, perhaps.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We'd be happy to be responsive to the request from the committee.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I wonder if research could take a note of that. I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We have been relatively conservative in our estimates in order to ensure that we have sufficient funds to support every board in attrition protection against the two major changes that are being introduced in the GSN this year. One is class size and the other is e-learning, which does not begin until next year, but we've accommodated that in our projections as well.

As you mentioned, the Financial Accountability Officer also reviewed our projections. He did acknowledge that he thought we had sufficient funds. As a matter of fact, some of his assumptions and forecasts are slightly more aggressive than ours and well within the bounds of feasibility.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

If I may, though, because I really feel like it's important for people to understand what this fund is, I'm just going to explain it again the way I see it. And you can tell me if I'm wrong.

The point of this is, we're not replacing retired teachers for the most part—which I appreciate. We're saying we want to get to these much larger class sizes. They're going to play out up to 28 students over the next four years. In the process of that, plus the introduction of e-learning, we anticipate—and this was confirmed by the FAO—the loss of 10,000-plus teaching positions. This fund is intended to allow that to happen slowly, but at the end of the day, we are losing 10,000 teaching positions.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: If I could, I think that figure comes from the FAO's report. There is a difference, in a sense, between our forecast and his. It has to do with the design and what he's describing when he uses that figure. He is using that figure to refer to his estimate of, in a sense, forgone hiring—so teachers who aren't present in the system, but if he projected out with his estimate of enrolment growth would have been—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Based on what enrolment we understand is going to be.

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Ms. Nancy Naylor: That's correct, right. So we are preparing for a smaller number because we are using a base of 2018-19 teachers, teachers who are employed. And if we look out to five years out, when we expect that the fund would no longer be needed, that is—our 1.6 number does account for the years in between and what would be needed to support the teacher complement without school boards having to do layoffs.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I understand, to some extent. The minister keeps mentioning the enrolment issues, and there are going to be differences of opinion about that. But what we know and what we see from all of the various projections is that there is going to be an increase in enrolment. In some areas it will be higher than others, and I know that is, of course, a reality, but that does to some extent account for that difference.

I want to move on to e-learning, because the minister also talked about that and that is obviously, as the deputy minister just noted, one of the reasons why we are going to see not only a decrease in teaching positions of some

significance but also in terms—and I think this is where we really have our concerns—of the quality of education that our children receive.

I know that when the ministry first announced this back in, I believe, March of last year, I attended a briefing with the deputy minister—I appreciate that—and I asked at the time, “Can you tell me where there is any jurisdiction that has implemented mandatory online courses?” There wasn’t a lot of information at the time, so I want to revisit this because it’s important to point out that this is supposed to be implemented in September of this coming year. I’m already getting questions from students and families who are very worried about how this is going to work.

I am the parent of a daughter who is in high school. She’s going to be registering—it’s not that many months to go before they start thinking about what courses they’re taking the following September. Some students will really be nervous about that because they’re going into grade 12, say. It’s really important that they understand what courses they have to take. We haven’t heard anything yet about the implementation of e-learning. I’ve looked at what studies exist out there, and there’s virtually nothing, or certainly nothing that is positive, in terms of the impact of e-learning on outcomes for students. What I have found is that e-learning benefits students who can already succeed. The research is pretty clear on that, that it hurts those who struggle, that we see increased dropout rates, students who fail to complete those courses, and we see generally poor attendance and engagement in those courses.

So I have a number of questions. As I said, I’ve heard from a lot of parents and students about this plan to push ahead with mandatory e-learning next year. A lot of people are looking at the class size changes and the layoffs and wondering if this plan is just another way—and I think research kind of shows this. It is often used just simply for cost savings. Are we just firing teachers and then replacing them with YouTube videos and chatrooms?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): One minute left.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start with what evidence informed the decision to make this very drastic and significant change in the way our students will learn. By this I mean not just online learning but mandatory online courses.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Thank you very much.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was hoping—if you don’t mind, Deputy Minister, I’d love to hear from the minister first on this.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. I think there are a few points that you’ve mentioned, to the member. I think the first is, as I expressed to you in confidence when we met, and I will provide it in public—should this have come up in the Legislature, I was prepared to answer it already. But the fact is, I made clear to you, because you raised, and I think many members of all parties have raised, the principle that not every single student in the province of Ontario should be in an e-learning program: I accept that premise. I recognize that individualized learning, notwithstanding the inherent merits of technological fluidity in the marketplace—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I’m sorry to say your time is up, Minister. It goes back to you. You have 30 minutes and then we go back to the opposition.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. We could return to this a bit later.

Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that and I obviously appreciate the presence of my deputy minister and other officials who are with us from the ministry. They are passionate about what they do, and they’re incredibly dedicated to education in the province.

During my opening, I spent time giving an overview of education in Ontario, and I explained some of what we’ve undertaken to modernize our education system. But as you know, when it comes to transforming our publicly funded education system, our work has just begun. We have a lot more to do when it comes to preparing students for their future and helping them succeed in school life and beyond. That’s because our world is changing rapidly, and to keep up, our education system needs to change. As a result, we have our sights set on a new vision for education, a plan that will make Ontario’s education system even better.

As the Minister of Education, as a proud citizen of this great province, I have a personal stake in this ambitious plan because I firmly believe that every student deserves the best education system in the world, that every student deserves real opportunities to reach their full potential and achieve lifelong success. I’m also a firm believer that students across Ontario, the next generation, will help make Ontario even stronger and more prosperous, and that’s good for economic growth in the coming years. It’s what we’re doing in our ministry—because our government believes strongly in the next generation, and we know they are key to our future prosperity, as was mentioned earlier by members of this committee. When our students succeed, our schools succeed; everyone in Ontario succeeds. That’s why the next generation is so important and their contributions are so consequential to the future.

However, while I am confident that they can accomplish great things, I also know they face real challenges in a rapidly changing world. That’s why they need our help and our support to prepare them for the future and the complex jobs that come with it. As minister, I can confidently say that school is the start of a lifelong journey that can take them anywhere. But our education system needs to evolve to reflect that journey, to prepare students for the real world and to give them the skills to rise to every challenge in school and in life. That’s why our government has been busy making significant changes to strengthen our publicly funded education system from both a learning and classroom perspective. These changes are comprehensive and varied, covering all aspects of education.

I’ll get into some more detail of what we’ve done since I’ve become Minister of Education, but I want to give a sense of changes we’re making and how it reflects our overall vision for the system. As I mentioned, our changes fall into two broad categories: learning and classroom.

It begins with our learning priorities, and what better way to start than with math? We know that our students

and education system need to improve our math outcomes. That's why, over the next four years, Ontario is rolling out a new math curriculum for all students, grades 1 to 12. This will get back to basics by focusing on the fundamentals of mathematics and how to apply them in life. I'm happy to say the revised math curriculum for grades 1 to 8 will be released in the spring of 2020 and implemented in the fall of 2020.

Similarly, our students will need a strong foundation in STEM for future success. Our plan is that Ontario students will learn about STEM from kindergarten all the way to grade 12. They will also do this by studying and applying science, technology, engineering and math to solve real-world problems. Textbook learning is great, but students need to apply their knowledge in hands-on STEM learning experiences to ultimately succeed in the workplace and beyond. This will help them develop important transferable skills such as critical thinking and collaboration to better meet the needs and the demands of the global economy.

Speaking of real-life skills, financial literacy is also at the top of that list. How can we expect our children to grow into engaged, capable citizens if they aren't taught how to be financially responsible? That's why, as of this school year, students will have more opportunities to improve their financial literacy. Financial literacy is now integrated across many subjects from grades 4 to 12, such as social studies, business studies and others. It's also a major component of the revised grade 10 career studies course, which is a mandatory course for all secondary students, and the first announcement I made as minister.

Another important part of our vision is a renewed focus on the skilled trades. By 2021, as we know, one in five jobs will be in the skilled trades. We're already experiencing shortages in many of the sectors. That's why we're also investing in programs so that the skilled trades are recognized as aspirational career choices for many young people, parents, and educators, too. Again, it's about that journey I mentioned earlier. For many students, a great path to take on the journey would be a career in the skilled trades. That's why we're working to increase awareness and exposure of the skilled trades, technology and apprenticeship, in conjunction with Minister McNaughton and Associate Minister Dunlop and others, with underrepresented groups and more women.

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These career pathways are in demand, so we're promoting them through programs, as I noted, such as the Specialist High Skills Major, the dual credits, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program—which is also partially funded through Minister McNaughton's department—and experiential learning.

Another key component of our vision and the learning changes we're making are updates to various curricula. For Indigenous education, we implemented a revised First Nation, Métis and Inuit studies program for grades 9 to 12, beginning this school year, because the curriculum was developed in partnership with our Indigenous partners.

Another key update to our elementary health and physical education curriculum was making good on a

promise from our campaign. For this school year, we put in place an updated and inclusive health and physical education curriculum for grades 1 to 8. These changes will help students develop the skills and knowledge they need to lead safe, healthy and active lives. It will also make Ontario a leader in terms of helping students learn about mental health, concussions and cyber safety in modern and inclusive classrooms so that every child can see themselves within it.

Speaking of mental health, we know it's an essential component to overall health. That's why the updated HPE curriculum for grades 1 to 8 has a more comprehensive approach to mental health. In fact, it was mentioned for the first time substantively in this curriculum. Curriculum changes include new learning expectations to focus on developing social and emotional learning skills in building understanding about mental health.

In addition to this, there is so much more that we are doing, and plan on doing, for our education system from a learning perspective, and I'll get to that a tad later. But first, I also want to touch on changes that fall into the category of classroom updates.

To better prepare students for the demands of the future, our plan modernizes classrooms in a variety of innovative ways. One way is ensuring sustainability when it comes to funding of the education system. I'm happy to say that funding for public education through the Grants for Student Needs, or the GSN, is at the highest level ever in Ontario's history. That's why we consulted with our education partners for our 2019-20 education funding model. As a result of that review and feedback we received from stakeholders, this year's GSN reflects modest changes, because we're focused on providing the necessary resources to support positive outcomes for students and a sustainable funding model that can deliver for years to come.

Another key part of our vision for classrooms is how we assess our education system. Without assessment, it's hard to know how well we're doing for our students and their overall success. That's why we're working with the EQAO to modernize the agency in how it works. We're also looking at its processes, while using data to better build assessment and evaluation models that will have a greater focus on equity.

In the context of modernization and our vision for the future, it would not be complete without recognizing the pace of our digitally connected world. In fact, there is almost no life or career path that will not involve the use of technology to some degree. That's where online learning comes in. Starting in 2020, Ontario will modernize the delivery of online learning. This will give students greater access to programming and educational opportunities no matter where they live in Ontario.

We're harnessing the power of technology to teach and learn in new and exciting ways. This digital reach includes how we distribute and present a curriculum. We're phasing in the new digital platform to modernize access to Ontario's curriculum. This new digital space will help educators, parents and students better assess curriculum

and learning resources. It will be user- and mobile-friendly and become increasingly interactive over time. The first phase of the platform will be available later this year and will grow steadily with more content and features in line with user feedback.

However, even though technology is very useful for learning, sometimes technology can move too fast and needs to be reined in, and that includes cellphones in schools, which can be a distraction. That's why our classroom changes include restrictions on personal mobile devices. Beginning in November of this year, effective in a few days, using devices during instructional time will only be permitted for explicit educational purposes, in other words, as directed by an educator for health and medical purposes or to support special education learning needs. We think this makes sense, and it bodes well for the future of our classrooms and the meaningful learning associated.

As you can see, our vision for the system is broad, it's comprehensive, and it's designed to better prepare students with the skills, knowledge and confidence to succeed in school and beyond. That's because we are a government that is putting students first, and that's what they deserve.

The feedback we received through the consultation I mentioned earlier informed our new vision and the many things we've already done to transform our education system. As minister, I can assure you that our ministry has been committed to helping students meet the needs of the global economy, so they can succeed after high school in the workforce and in life. And our record demonstrates this.

That's why I'd like to say more about some of the specific announcements we've made recently as we work to update our education system.

Earlier, I mentioned that success in math is a top priority for us. In August of this year, I announced details of our four-year math strategy to get back to basics. The \$200-million investment will ensure students and educators have the math skills and resources to succeed in the classroom and beyond. That's because EQAO results confirm students are still struggling to meet provincial math standards. As we've indicated, we're raising the bar with our new vision. We're a new government that won't accept the status quo, and I think this landmark multi-year strategy will help our students and educators build the confidence and knowledge to excel in math in this province, with an additional investment of \$55 million in this year alone. This investment will support critical programming and resources by focusing on teaching fundamentals.

Another important announcement I made as minister relates to mental health funding. Mental health is one of the most serious and pressing issues of our time, and we want to help students who are struggling in this area in terms of their mental health and their well-being. As noted on World Mental Health Day, two weeks ago, I announced an investment of \$40 million, more than doubling the funding envelope from 2017-18, to advance student

mental health, in partnership with a variety of education groups. We also announced that we will permanently fund 180 front-line mental health workers in secondary schools. These include social workers, as I mentioned, psychologists and psychotherapists, with the mission of reducing the wait times to access those critical services.

Many students in this province need help, and I'm proud to be a member of the government that is working to ensure they receive that support when they need it. That includes for students with special education needs. In September, I announced one of the many things we're doing to help students with special education needs and their families. I'm referring to our new policy to improve access to service animals in schools. School boards are responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures for service animals in schools; however, we made this change. Just over half of Ontario school boards had service animal policies. With our announcement, we set a unique, uniform standard by requiring all school boards and local authorities in the province to have a policy on service animals in their schools—and I want to acknowledge the parliamentary assistant for his leadership on that file. We did this because we want every child, irrespective of their needs, to have opportunities to achieve their highest potential. We believe that every child has inherent human dignity, and our new service animal policy is a positive step forward for children with special-ed needs.

Another positive step for students, as I mentioned, was the campaign promise we made on updating the health and physical education curriculum. I would like to elaborate a bit more on the HPE. In August, we released the updated elementary curriculum online, along with a parent-friendly resource, so that children can learn in each grade. We did this to keep kids safe. We also did this because, as I said, we're a government that is listening. Following that consultation, the health and physical education curriculum was updated to reflect public feedback, the research and advice from experts. Not only does it reflect what we heard, but it provides students with the skills and knowledge they need to lead safe, healthy and active lives. The updated curriculum also makes Ontario a leader in teaching students about mental health, including social-emotional learning skills; concussion; the effects and consequences of vaping and cannabis; cyber safety, including bullying prevention and digital privacy; healthy eating and body image; and healthy relationships, including consent. We made these changes because we want to keep kids safe in and outside of the class. We also show that Ontario is committed to building an education system that prioritizes inclusion, safety and respect for every single child.

Another priority for the government, as I mentioned earlier, is our commitment to Indigenous students. I want to say more about this, because earlier in the year I am proud that we released in the ministry the revised First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies from the grades 9 to 12 curriculum. To implement this revised curriculum and other Indigenous-focused curriculum, we have committed

\$3.25 million to support school boards and to work with Indigenous partners on continued revisions. The 10 secondary courses in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies curriculum provides up-to-date learning about Indigenous perspectives and culture, as well as contemporary realities in the areas of art, literature, law, humanities, politics and history. It also enhances the ability for educators to support students in their learning, and it ensures Indigenous perspectives are present in Ontario's curriculum. It gives students a greater understanding of our shared history, and it brings to life more holistic narratives and representation of Indigenous people that will support Indigenous students, as well as students in their exploration and their learning. The keywords here are "all students," because I've said as minister that every student deserves the opportunity to succeed and every student should have the skills they need to reach that potential.

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That brings me to another announcement that I think represents how we're going to help all students succeed in the province. That's in the context of the skilled trades and STEM. This is very important to our government and for me personally as minister, because this is how we're going to prepare students for tomorrow, to reach a new frontier of learning and knowledge.

In pursuit of this, we announced the revised grade 10 career studies course in July. It was implemented for this current school year, with a focus on jobs of the future. The updated careers course is a mandatory requirement for achieving an Ontario secondary school diploma. It includes learning on financial literacy and an enhanced focus on post-secondary education pathways such as apprenticeships in the skilled trades, but it also takes a deeper look at financial management and budgeting—for example, paying bills on time, the value of using a credit card responsibly, options to pay for post-secondary education—careers in high-growth sectors such as STEM disciplines; social media usage and its implications for students; and cross-curricula transferrable skills such as creativity, collaboration and critical thinking.

With this new course and with everything that is driving our new vision for education, our mission is to ensure that young people are better prepared to transition from school to the workforce. They need to be able to succeed in life and get good-paying jobs. That's why we're emphasizing STEM, financial literacy and transferrable skills to align our curriculum with the labour market and with the real world. In fact, this is all about the future. It's all about supporting our young people for the jobs of tomorrow in a competitive global marketplace. That's what the ambitious changes we've made are going to do for the students of this province.

We're building an education system that prepares students for success, both professionally and in life. That is the driving force behind our new vision for education. It is a bold plan to harness the potential and the power of STEM, using the advanced knowledge that we've acquired in our modern world to teach and learn in new

and exciting ways and to give students and the next gen the power to accomplish anything in our modern global world.

This is how we're going to bring our education system into the 21st century: with innovation and forward thinking. But this means embracing technology responsibly, not denying it; it means embracing modernization in a thoughtful way, not running from it; and it means embracing state-of-the-art learning and looking to the future instead of looking to the past.

I can honestly tell you that I got into politics because I believe in the next generation, and I think that is the case for many parliamentarians in the Legislature. I believe our students, the next gen, face significant challenges in a fast-paced world. It's why we have a shared responsibility to ensure that they can be successful after school, to put them on a path to prosperity. It's why today, I've outlined many of the changes we've made and continue to make to modernize our classroom with a more innovative and sustainable approach and to lead our students and education system into the future.

With all of that in mind, I'm confident that we'll prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow and make them innovators and leaders of change in the 21st-century workforce.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you. Opposition? Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to pick up where we left off. We were talking about e-learning. I was listening to the minister's comments and his closing just now, and I would just like to reflect for a moment on the fact that the Ford government continues to spin online learning as 21st-century learning. I have to say that everything we've seen from this government when it comes to education, and plans and policy around education and how you're spending your money and where you're cutting, has nothing to do with 21st-century learning. In fact, it takes us in the exact opposite direction: growing class sizes and a lack of course options for students that we know they need.

I worry—and I think I do reflect the worries of a lot of parents—about a move away from collaborative learning and the kind of learning and pedagogy that we know. It's also away from the research and expertise in education that should be informing our education system and the path we take if we're going to be ready for those jobs of the future. What I worry about is that what this government is preparing our children for is to be cogs in a wheel. That is very concerning. It's like 18th-century learning, not 21st-century learning.

Anyway, when we broke I was asking the minister about what evidence informed the decision to make these drastic changes in introducing mandatory online learning to Ontario, a practice that I honestly have not found—I think somebody mentioned West Virginia. I don't know of any other jurisdiction and I have yet to hear of any jurisdictions that have successfully introduced mandatory online learning courses. While I appreciate the minister's concession that there will be exceptions, I think what

we're talking about here is a system that is untested and unprecedented—this kind of introduction of mandatory online learning courses. That is why everybody is so concerned. Saying that some children—and we don't know how we're going to define those kids who can be excluded or who won't have to take the online courses. I have got to tell you, I think it's going to have to be a lot of kids because most of our kids do not manage well with these courses.

I want to go back again to what jurisdictions are doing this. I would welcome the opportunity for you to explain—and I want to be clear: mandatory online courses.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will answer the question, specifically—I heard it. I will also just finish the thought from earlier. What I think had not been communicated when we announced the plan vis-à-vis online learning—at the time, we committed to returning to the parents of this province, and to teachers and students alike, to announce effectively what the framework would be and the implementation, particularly when it comes to the concern that has been cited in the discourse vis-à-vis if every child ought to be in an online course. What I have said to you—and, just for the disclosure of this table, I have said now today that I can assure members that, for any concerns, particularly for children with individualized learning plans or children with exceptionality or otherwise, we will ensure that there is a prudent level of exceptionality built in so that not all children are lumped in, because I appreciate that some children ought not to be learning through this forum. There will be exceptions.

With respect to the jurisdictions with mandatory online learning, I would point the member to Alabama, to Arkansas, to Florida, Michigan and Virginia. You cited West Virginia as one. I just wanted to build upon it—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Four online courses? One a year? Can you confirm that for each of those locations? Four online mandatory courses a year?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: To be fair, member, you asked which jurisdictions have mandatory online learning, and I've cited five jurisdictions that have it.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Can you tell us about each of those?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm in no position to talk about the state of Alabama's education system. I'm just demonstrating to you that there's more than one; there are five others you missed.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So then—thank you. Can you explain to me what the experience has been? Maybe you could explain a little bit more about, say, Alabama or Florida, which is what we're basing our education system and our kids' future on now—this system, their experience. Can you explain to us a little bit more about how they have implemented mandatory online courses for all their students, how they are delivering it, what the impact has been on at-risk children, who's delivering the curriculum—that would be useful—and what the technological impact has been? If you could inform us about that, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just let me, respectfully, member, reject the premise. I'm not looking to those states as a standard that I seek to emulate. I want to build a world-

class made-in-Ontario system and platform that works for the children of this province. You asked a question: which states or jurisdictions? You mentioned a single example and excluded the other five. I mentioned them. By no means am I—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think I did mention Florida—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, you did not; you mentioned West Virginia.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Whatever you want to talk about—Michigan.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Anyway, your question, in short, was, "Will those examples inform Ontario?" I can say that my mission in my capacity as minister—and I've come into this sort of midway, but the objective of the ministry is to build a made-in-Ontario system, technology and platform that works for the children of this province. And, if I may—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. So perhaps a way I could approach this, Minister, is: What studies and research are you looking to when you introduce this? Are there success stories that you could refer to, that this idea came from? Because I have to admit, and I remember when I met with the ministry officials in the days after this was originally announced, that it seemed like nobody knew where this was coming from. Obviously, it came from somewhere. So if I may please ask you if you could explain or maybe table with this committee what success stories, evidence and research exist to support this as a model going forward.

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Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I'll just briefly answer; then I may return to the deputy for some additional context. When I speak to students who are not from urbanized centres, although some are from urbanized centres, particularly northern, remote, French school boards—English and French across the province, in northern Ontario, rural Ontario—they would express to someone who lives in a urban setting that this is actually not an abnormal experience to leverage online learning to offset the courses that are not existing in the class—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, with respect—sorry, if I may just interrupt for a second.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well—

Ms. Marit Stiles: With respect, because I don't want you wandering off into something that's not relevant. Minister, with respect, those students are taking courses online because they simply can't access them at all in their communities, right?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: That has existed since 2004, member—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, that's right, because they can't access it—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right, 60,000 students this year.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Certainly, we also know that some online courses—and this is where we find, in my experience, because I have looked at some of this research, Minister—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: But you make the case for it, member. They can't access the requisite courses. So now

they have an optionality they didn't have before. By your own admission, by your own intellectual thought pattern, they didn't have access to offerings that could've existed in their community, be it because there's not economies of scale or there aren't enough classes. So continue the thought: They didn't have the access before. They have an online technology that will enrich the optionality before them—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But minister, if I may—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: So how is that not in itself a proof point that expanding course selection—

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's not a proof point, and if I may take you on my intellectual journey here, I have actually looked at some of the research that has been done in Ontario on the success and failures of online learning courses and what the experience has been. So the examples that the minister provides—and perhaps he needs a briefing on this—is that in northern and rural communities, when they cannot access courses, they choose online courses. When students who are looking for very specialized courses that they can't get in their schools—even in Toronto, or wherever—they will access them online. But those are kids, generally, who are headed to university, who are looking for very specialized things.

What I'm asking you, Minister, again, is: Have you looked at any research from any jurisdiction—because I'm telling you, in Ontario, the research seems to suggest that there are high dropout rates. I also just want to add, I think a lot of the communities you're talking about, most of the northern and rural communities and students I've talked to, and teachers and everyone, do not have adequate broadband access. We're talking about a few communities, maybe. But Minister, if you could point, again, to examples of success and research that this plan is based on—because it's going to impact our kids.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed. My intention before—respectfully, I was interrupted—was just to refer to the deputy, so I'd like to do so now.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I will say that the commitment to the online learning initiative did predate Minister Lecce. I will say that a lot of it came from something we were noticing in our own data, which was that students were, in a sense, voting with their course selections. We were seeing a very significant growth in students electing to take some of their credits online. We're seeing about a 300% increase over a period of six years in the public system, and an even more dramatic increase in the private system.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So this is—sorry.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: So that was what had first drawn our attention to the—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You're basing this on the private system?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: No, but this is what had first drawn our attention to the opportunity.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: And so, we had seen, without any particular push or particular requirements or promotion of it, students themselves were electing to take more and

more of their credits online. So it did suggest to us that we should look at our credits. We do have a very good bank of credits that are available online. We also know that our take-up of online learning in our French board system had a lot of success. Their students are taking a lot of online credits, and our northern boards, as the minister said, some of our smaller high schools—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Because they can't access those courses any other way.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: One of the opportunities is that we do support a very high proportion of our high schools being under 200 students, so the breadth of course selections—they have been working with their colleagues and developing online courses and sharing them amongst boards. So, we did a deep dive on the data, and your question is about, "What are student outcomes? What types of courses are students taking and what kind of outcomes are they having?" I'm pleasantly surprised at the success that students are having in taking their credits on online courses—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, where are you getting the data for that? Because I know that there are not that many boards that are tracking this.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We're getting it from OnSIS, which is our student information data collection that we have from—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So have you conducted interviews with students about student experience?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We have, over the past few months and working with—

Ms. Marit Stiles: How many students have been interviewed in the process?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We've been working in the initial stages of this with school board partners, as well as the Student Trustees' Association. As you know, they have—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Who have been very opposed to this.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: You know what? In fairness to them, they did a good job of surveying students.

Perhaps what was the most valuable for us is that they shared with us the complete responses, including the text responses that students had, their commentary about what worked for them in online courses—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So sorry, Deputy Minister, if I may, are you saying that the research that you conducted with students amounts to the survey the student trustees conducted?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: No. I would describe that as our consultation, but—

Ms. Marit Stiles: That was your consultation?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We have done research. We have surveyed the research on online learning. It's complex; it's voluminous. It does deal with other jurisdictions in some cases. I think I would summarize it by saying a well-designed online learning experience is a good learning experience.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would ask, then, that if there is research, as such that you've got some kind of studies or consultations—I wasn't really clear on whether that was your consultation. It sounds like it was the student

trustees' consultation. If you could please share with us the details of that here by tabling it perhaps with the committee.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We'll take that back with us, thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Is that an undertaking?

Ms. Doly Begum: They already have it.

Ms. Marit Stiles: They have it, so—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Sorry, was that an undertaking?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We will take that request back with us, thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to continue on because I have a few more questions related to online learning. I mentioned this in my meeting with the minister this summer: We still don't have a lot of information about who is going to be developing the courses and running the courses. Is this being developed by the government of Ontario? How are you contracting this out?

More specifically, how much has the ministry spent so far on the development of these new mandatory online courses? Because it's going to be introduced in September of next year, so I'm assuming you're pretty close to done.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Yes. If it's all right, Mr. Chair, we'll ask one of our assistant deputy ministers to join us at the table.

Martyn, do you want to join us?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Is this Martyn Beckett?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Martyn Beckett, yes. Martyn Beckett is the assistant deputy minister—let me make sure I have his title right—of the student achievement division.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Beckett, if I can ask—I don't have very long, so if you wouldn't mind, I really want to know what money is being spent. I appreciate that this is your area and so I appreciate you coming here, and I thank you. I want to know how much has been spent so far in this undertaking.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): If you could introduce yourself for Hansard, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Martyn Beckett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. I'm Martyn Beckett, assistant deputy minister, student achievement division, with the Ministry of Education.

The course that I would probably point to as an example right now is the course that we've been working on for the online version of the careers course that you heard about earlier today. I think our expenditure on that one, to develop the course, is about \$47,000 for that course.

For the online learning overall, all of our work to this point has been within house. We've conducted conversations and consultations. They've all been done, to the best of my knowledge, at absolutely zero cost.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Can I ask you, then: Who is going to be delivering these—is it going to be government? I'm not really clear on that. Are we contracting out? Who are we contracting out to?

Mr. Martyn Beckett: If I understand the question correctly, Chair, it's who is delivering the courses?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes.

Mr. Martyn Beckett: I think I was asked that question back in March, and I said I'm not aware of anybody other than Ontario teachers delivering those courses.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So at this point, we don't know of any—okay.

I'm going to ask the minister a question now. Have you or your staff met with any lobbyists for, or the direct staff of, any private online learning companies during this process so far?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I have not.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. What about department ministry staff?

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Ms. Nancy Naylor: I was just going to say, I do want to acknowledge that we meet regularly with private sector technology partners in the education space—that includes companies you will have heard of, like Apple and Google—to understand how they are supporting educators with digital products and technologies. But our doors are open whenever anyone approaches us to say, "I have an innovative product. I'm either working with a school board or I'd like to work with a school board"—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So have you met with them specifically about online mentoring, online learning?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Usually when they come and meet with us, they are describing the product that they have. Sometimes it's very specific to a subject matter or sometimes it has to do with supporting parents and children with homework—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Can we get a list of who the ministry officials have met with? Because I think that's significant.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We could go through our—

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's certainly the kind of questions I'm getting from parents and families. Okay. I think that was—

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I do want to say that we consider it part of our job, when entrepreneurs, whether they're for-profit or non-profit—and we see a mix of both—feel they have a product that's relevant to our goals—we do want to make sure that they have access to the ministry.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to go back; I think what really needs to be said here is, what we're talking about doing is replacing people jobs potentially, right? The reason the ministry is—let's not fool ourselves. The reason the minister and this Ford government want to bring in online courses, mandatory online courses, is to save money. I wish they would just say it. Let's not talk about 21st-century learning.

My own kid did the careers in civics class last summer. Let me tell you what hell that was. It was really unpleasant. Now I'm not saying—she struggles sometimes—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Member, sorry to interrupt you. In fact, you do have to refer to the Premier as the Premier.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, I'm sorry. The Premier keeps referring to this as 21st century; I don't even know what I said.

But my own daughter did that. As you said, some kids are choosing to do that because they want to have a spare

or they want to do an extra art class or something like that. They're choosing that, but this is different. This is mandatory. This is imposed. This is without choice. And this is about eradicating jobs to save money; I think we all know that's the truth.

I want to move on to a specific question. The explanation for removing the secondary programming grant found in the ministry's documents was that the mandatory e-learning courses would provide more course selection. This is something the minister kind of alluded to. However, that, again, unstudied and unprecedented experience with our students won't be until next year.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): One minute left.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, what do you say to students who've had their classes cancelled this year and have no way to make them up? Say they're in grade 12. They have no way to make them up. Why should they have to wait until next year and why should they be guinea pigs for what is ultimately an untested educational experiment that seems to have just been made up on the fly?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think my message to the students of this province is twofold. One is that the government is investing more than any government in the history of the province, which is proof positive that we believe in them and we're investing in the front lines.

Ms. Marit Stiles: We will return to that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The second concept, to the member, is that by pursuing optionality, by enhancing the course offerings for students online, where we've realized since 2011 a 17% year-over-year increase in uptake, where we're seeing more students voluntarily—perhaps like your own child, by your admission—participate in these programs—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But this is compulsory. You're making this compulsory—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say you're all out of time.

We go to the government. Mr. Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Welcome, Minister, to the committee. It's an honour to be able to speak on behalf of the government this afternoon and also to be able to say that having worked with you now for some time as the parliamentary assistant, I have a great deal of respect for both yourself and the team. I have to just commend your team for the amount of hard work they've put in over the last months. I know you make sure the team in education is putting in a lot of hours for the benefit of students across the province.

I also think it was a very beneficial overview of your driving reasons for being involved in the education system and why you serve, not only as a parliamentarian but as a community activist, and have been engaged for quite some time in your local community and more broadly across the province promoting opportunities for the next generation. That was something that was very clearly a motivating factor for you for quite some time, and in this role as Minister of Education it's clearly an area that you take very, very seriously to ensure that we have great outcomes for students in the 4,000 schools across this province, the

2.1 million students from every corner of this great province. It's something that I know motivates you also: to make sure that we're always updating and modernizing our education system and creating those linkages between the classroom and careers. That's something you've spoken about. I know you've also announced a lot of significant, important and beneficial changes to our education system, ones that will ensure we're truly world-class, ones that make sure that as we increase investments, we're supporting in targeted ways the areas that need to be improved.

So, Minister, I have to say it's been disappointing to me personally to hear some of the rhetoric that we've heard from members of the opposition, and I think some misinformation that perhaps has been brought forward at different times, whether within the committee or also being purveyed in the media. Something that I think is so important and that I want you to elaborate on, if you would be so kind, is when it comes to the budget overall—we've seen the opposition try to say that we're reducing our investments in education when the reality is to the contrary. I'm wondering if you would be able to speak about some of these investments and what they mean to people on the ground. I know an area that you've spoken about very passionately in the past, and an area that young people who I interact with, whether it's the students' associations or local trustees or just students that I speak with in schools in this province, is mental health. Mental health is an area of grave concern for many of us. We see its impact on lives across this province and we see the future of students being challenged by mental illness with inadequate supports.

For 15 years, there was a government in place that failed to adequately address these challenges that were being faced by students. I'm wondering if you would be able to speak to, first of all, the increased investment that the government has made in education more broadly, and specifically to the mental health allocations, these increases, and what that will mean for the millions of young people who rely on these supports to ensure that they have a strong, healthy future, both within and outside of the classroom.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I think it is fair to say that mental health is a priority for all of us. It's prudent to realize and just acknowledge what is happening in classrooms, which is, there are increasing complexities and challenges and adversity faced by many children. We, I think, have a duty—a moral obligation—to these kids to make sure that they have the requisite resources in place so that they can get ahead.

I think that applies certainly for children with special education needs, who may, as well, have mental health challenges, and/or for students with mental health challenges. But no matter what the reality is for the child, there needs to be a system that's there for them. I must acknowledge that I find it unacceptable that wait times have been at times rather high, and that kids had to endure red tape in order to access critical health services. No longer should that be the reality.

It's why, in the early days of the ministry, there was an announcement—what I know we both, among many others, share a commitment to is making sure that those dollars flow where it actually counts. In the area of mental health, as a matter of fact, in 2017-18, in the last year of the former government, factually they were expending in and around \$16 million. That number has now risen to \$40 million. So we've more than doubled that funding envelope.

Some will say—and I said this in the media availability that followed that announcement at CAMH some weeks ago: It is not the end of the journey; it is an admission that we're starting to really ramp up and put those resources and supports in place.

If I could just contextualize where that money is going, because I think it is topical, given that it's flowing in the current period—today—that those resources are being spent and allocated. Of that aggregate total of \$40 million, \$25 million is to support those 180 permanent mental health workers. I made a decision to move those workers into the GSN, effectively making them permanent so that next year, the minister of the day, whoever he or she may be, or in the next government, there's a permanent allocation that endures the test of time. Obviously a minister, should they choose to, can make an alteration, but it becomes a permanent allocation, not an annualized Treasury Board exercise. I think that's the continuity parents need to have: that there are going to be resources there in 2018-19, 2019-20 and beyond.

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So those 180 mental health workers, essentially, are psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers. They're being deployed in high schools, principally. That's obviously augmented by additional supports that exist institutionally in communities across the province, but we're moving those supports with specialized training in student mental health into secondary schools. That includes mental health promotion, prevention and intervention for both the child and their family.

About \$6.5 million of that \$40 million is supporting School Mental Health Ontario, or SMHO. It's part of the broader comprehensive connected mental health and addictions system that Minister Elliott and Minister Tibollo have spoken about, as well as their parliamentary secretaries. They have spoken at length about the importance of creating that continuum of supports. That funding for School Mental Health Ontario is going to continue. They're receiving that \$6.5 million—it supports every board in the province, all 72 boards. The district school boards now have clinical expertise, evidence-based resources and practical tools for educators. We think that those new mental health supports will help demonstrably, particularly in the secondary schools.

Three million dollars is being allocated for the well-being and mental health bundle, which in short is monies to promote mental health as well as training for educators and support staff—and I hear this often—particularly in the context of violence in schools and challenges that manifest in a variety of different ways. But just having the

requisite supports, the de-escalation training, those proactive intervention policies and working with the OCT and stakeholders and other partners in education, I think, is really critical to make sure that we have got the right people in place to deal with complex situations.

Just to finish the thought: We are going to continue to make mental health a priority in the funding envelope, but I also think part of it is a cultural element. I think we live in a world where the political, civil and media discourse etc. has a role to play too. The doubling of the mental health envelope, in itself, is insufficient. It is a start intra-school, but when you leave the school, in a connected social media reality, I think it's important that we create a health and physical education curriculum that transforms how people think, where stigmatization is eliminated, where we are more proactive and, I think, more courageous as people in roles of leadership—administrations, students, teachers, student leaders and, of course, government etc. We all play a role in promoting positive mental health and in destigmatizing those who seek to access it.

The health and physical education curriculum, for me, was very important. It was done in the early period of my mandate. One of the big changes we made in it, for the first time, when you benchmark it against the 2014 curriculum, the former government's curriculum—it didn't have a mental health section. We included it from grades 1 to 8, including notations and progressive interventions in kindergarten. That's an amazing step forward when it comes to positive mental health promotion in education. There are also elements that deal with victimization—obviously, cyberbullying, online victimization, peer-to-peer, adult-to-child etc.—and making sure that they know that there are steps they can take to raise it in a confidential setting that retains their anonymity but, more importantly, that protects them and gives them a pathway to recovery.

So there's a lot we need to do. We're not in a vacuum. But in conjunction with our partners, I think we're really making a positive step forward on mental health. I think is a critical area where there's unanimity of purpose. I know on this issue, perhaps, in this chamber there can be differences of opinion. That's okay, but I think this issue is probably an issue that is consequential to the lives of all students and one that I take seriously.

I know there are others—Holly Moran, who is executive director of student support and field services, who has a major role in the context of special education, which I know is very topical today and always on the minds of legislators, as well as mental health, may have additional concepts, should she be inclined. I've put her on the spot; she wasn't expecting this. If there isn't anything, so be it. But if there are some additional points, Holly, I'd love for you to make them.

Ms. Holly Moran: Good afternoon. My name is Holly Moran. I'm the executive director for the student support and field services division at the ministry.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you.

Ms. Holly Moran: As the minister mentioned, there is a large investment in mental health. It's backed up as well with the investment in School Mental Health Ontario,

which is the core of clinical services that supports both the professional learning as well as the evidence-based materials that can support students in schools.

We have mental health leaders in every single school board now, and that's permanent funding as well. There are 72 of those out there in the program that support and backstop that strategic planning in mental health and addictions.

The \$3 million in funding is about implementation support for those local plans that address local needs and mental health and addictions.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much. Another area that obviously is of great passion—I think everyone in this room would share this—is, ultimately, student success is the thing that drives you as well as your whole team. I've seen that and I appreciate that. What I want to ask about is math. It's an area where we've seen, unfortunately, declining EQAO scores over the years. I know there's a move toward EQAO modernization as well. I know that's a significant undertaking, but I think it's important that as we look at those numbers, we realize we can't just look at numbers that say that half of grade 6 students in the province of Ontario are failing math or their EQAO scores. That is what it is. We're just going to have to deal with it and move on. We obviously need to address this.

This is an area that I know you've taken very seriously because we see that as we move into a more advanced economy every year, there are more of these value-added jobs, and many of them are in sectors that require STEAM or STEM—science, technology, engineering, arts and math—and proficiencies at levels that weren't, perhaps, necessary in the past but are becoming increasingly necessary. So I know it's something that you take very seriously.

I'm wondering if you could speak to the investments that have been made with regard to our government's math strategy, what your thought process was behind that and what that will look like moving forward.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. Thank you for the question. I think it is fair to say that numeracy is a foundational competence, period, and particularly in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. The requirement to understand financial literacy in life is abundantly clear, and it's very clear in the marketplace. I think there's an admission by the government that we have to do more to strengthen that capacity and that competency, and I think how I'd delineate that area or the imperative for improvement, on one side, is the performance of our students; and the other side is the training and the professional development of our educators. Let me answer the first.

Both constituencies benefit from the \$200-million investment, the four-year cogent, a thoughtful long-term or medium-term strategy to improve math scores because, as you rightfully mention, we've seen for a decade successively, systematically without exception, either declines in math scores or stagnation, either of which this government opposes in the sense that we expect better of our kids and of the system.

We're not going to defend the status quo when it comes to stagnating math scores that are not meeting the provincial average. You have now just over 50% of students not doing so in grade 6 math. Because we're able to standardize tests and have data that informs this opinion—which I think builds the basis for EQAO as an agency—what it signals is that there's a need for changing how we do business from a pedagogical perspective of how we're teaching and then, of course, what we're teaching.

We are adjusting the processes. We are undertaking a math curriculum review that is under way that precedes my appointment, but under our government, and that is important. It will be done by the spring of 2020. It will be implemented in schools in September 2020. We're moving rather quickly and as expeditiously as possible. That is under way.

For the first time in Ontario's history, as a compulsory requirement to graduate, you now need to have financial literacy to pass in the grade 10 career studies course. That did not exist before.

Again, when you look at some of the challenges maybe societally—household indebtedness rising etc.—you start to think, “What is underpinning,” or sort of the root cause of it. It's a lack of financial literacy. Perhaps one would make that assertion; I would—and that's why we're strengthening it. You cannot graduate high school in the province of Ontario this year without completing a personal budget for the first year after high school. That is practical hands-on learning that I think is important, and I hope would unify members of this House in the sense of what we need to be doing more of when it comes to hands-on learning that's relevant in life and in the workplace, including through academic and scholastic achievement.

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In the context of what we're doing to stem that trajectory that is moving south and that very much and exclusively precedes us, because the introduction—when we started to realize that that decline was in and around the period that discovery math was effectively introduced, a method of teaching that was introduced by the former government. We have said, respectfully, that the data points don't corroborate the need for its continuation. We think we have to transform how we're educating; hence, the curriculum update and the \$200-million investment.

On the day we had the EQAO results announced, we didn't just opine on the results, saying, “Jeez, that's unfortunate”; we announced a \$55-million investment in the first year to improve math scores. That's, I think, the action parents want from their government.

With respect to the teachers' side of it, part of those monies—overwhelmingly, it's supporting the kids, but part of that \$55 million or the \$200 million, the macro number, is to help improve the professional development of our educators. I don't think the EQAO tests have to do with our educators—I've said this before: They work hard, they care, and I know that they want their kids to succeed. There's no doubt in my mind and in my heart that that's the reality. But for any person who cares about the

outcomes and being able to measure outcomes—I think, for the educators, perhaps more than anyone else. Many of them that I’ve spoken to—and I’ve spoken to a lot over the past months—they themselves admit that there need to be more supports for educators to professionally develop, and I think they have a high expectation themselves. So working with them in good faith, with so many partners in education, including at the bachelor of education level, among others, is to strengthen that competency, strengthen that capacity over time, and that’s why we’re doing that.

Just to contextualize where the money is going for this year and thereafter:

We’re hiring additional math learning leads, as was mentioned by Holly.

We’re expanding the Summer Learning Program. That’s the program that ensures a continuum of learning. We have this phenomenon in the province and, I guess, globally, where you have learning loss—if you don’t use it, you lose it. So we’re trying to say to kids—let’s incent them to get into the system and learn math 12 months a year effectively, for a continuum of learning.

We’re expanding the math tutoring and Homework Help programs. That’s a great resource for a lot of parents in the province, especially for parents from under-represented groups. New Canadians may have some difficulty themselves, be it in literacy skills or otherwise—whatever the challenge is that may manifest at home. We’re providing more supports for kids in the class, but also at home, and I think that’s important.

We’re subsidizing the additional qualification in math vis-à-vis teachers, getting them to take on more of those courses, strengthen their capacities.

So I think this is an important step forward, it’s a bold step forward—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have one minute left.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Martyn, if you’d be so kind, if there’s anything I’ve left in that rather long intervention, you’re welcome to conclude.

Mr. Martyn Beckett: Thank you, Minister.

I think the minister has covered it pretty exhaustively.

If I were to try to put a staff picture on it and perhaps a teacher picture on some of the comments, if we hit the mark on what we’re trying to do with mathematics and we have the students develop their strong mathematical number facts, their order of operations, we can help the students develop what’s termed “automaticity,” so students can do their mental math. If I say, “What’s five times seven?” in this room, hopefully most people know that answer. If I say, “What’s seven times five?” people quickly come up with the same answer. That’s built in. That’s what we’re trying to work hard with our students—to develop that automaticity so that as they get older, the students have the brain capacity available to work on the problem-solving as the basic number facts, order of operations, are built in.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I’m sorry to say you’re out of time.

With that, we’ll go back to the official opposition. Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was lulled there by the gentle nature of those questions.

I just want to return very briefly to e-learning, with one more question, which is: What is the plan in terms of where students will be expected to take these e-learning courses?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If I may, I made certain—for further context to the deputy. As I mentioned to you when we had met, that the fulsome details related to e-learning—there are two things. One is that I think it’s not unreasonable to say that there’s additional context required for families and students. We have announced the intention to proceed with this. We haven’t announced the framework—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So we don’t know where they’re going to be taking the courses yet since that hasn’t been laid out?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What I’m asserting to the member is that—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Or you’re not ready to announce it yet?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What I’m asserting to you, in short, is that there is a plan being developed, and it has not been announced yet. It will be announced—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’ll tell you what I just want to flag is that what comes back to me is, what is the plan in terms of a grade 9 student, who could be 13 years old, being given a spare because they’re doing that class online at home? Many schools don’t allow a spare for a student of that age because they’re unsupervised. There’s also nobody at home to help them; right? That’s another consideration.

Ms. Doly Begum: Or have Internet.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Or have Internet, yes.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay. I appreciate that there’s a variety of details. I’m committing to you and I’m committing to all members to announce as soon as possible—and I’m not deferring this seven months; I’m talking a matter of weeks—to provide the clarity that I think families of the province—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you don’t feel prepared to just make that assurance right now?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I’m prepared to commit to families that they will have an answer in short order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. All right.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think the expectation is that we would thoughtfully develop a plan after consulting.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So the answer is, you don’t know right now; you can’t share. Okay.

Moving on, then, there was a lot of talk about mental health. I’m going to return to that in coming days. But I did want to ask the minister what the minister expects the impact of class sizes of 40 or 45 is going to have on the mental health of secondary students in our schools.

I’ll tell you—and I won’t name the school, because of privacy, but I know that suicide is epidemic in some of our high schools, let alone anxiety and depression. I am very concerned, and we know that this is having an impact on

students. What are your thoughts about the mental health of students, and how those class sizes are impacting them?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that. I think—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So you would agree that that has an impact on their mental health?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, I appreciate the concern you've cited in the context that mental health is a priority, in fact.

What I would assert to you is two things: One is, last week, vis-à-vis a specific union, OSSTF, I announced that the number for classroom sizes—because the assumption in the question is 28, no doubt—is that we've actually tabled—

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, because that's a class-size average, Minister—sorry. If I may, we're talking 40, 45—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry. To the Chair: I just want to—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Yes. Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you. I think what's important is, yes, the provincialized funded average indeed—that's what I announced then, and it remains true today, and it's what I confirmed in the House yesterday. What I said is that that number could come down, or would come down, from 28 to 25. That is an important notation for this—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, Minister—what you're indicating here—that is a discussion that's happening at the bargaining table, as I understand it.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, no—

Ms. Marit Stiles: That's actually another question I have, which I wasn't going to get to until another day. Are you saying that the number is now changed to 25? What is the impact on the spending papers that we have here? Are we moving to a 25 average? Is that what's happening? Is this now going to be based on a 25 average?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. The deputy minister, I think, mentioned in her remarks that—and in part, why Shannon is present with us is that we are before bargaining right now—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You're talking about the 25 like it's a fact.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, if you could be so kind, just permit me one thought, and then I'm happy to take any follow-ups.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The reason why I cite that to the member is because it is material to your assumption on 28. As an example, I cited last week that we would bring that number down from 28 to 25 in the context of the OSSTF. You asked me why that's happening at the bargaining table. Yes, my preference would be for that all to happen

at the bargaining table. One union in specific has decided to publicize those materials, and that is why I feel that I have social licence and a duty to commit to you that that number will reduce. That's, I think, important context.

In the context of mental—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Chair, if I may, I only have a few minutes left.

Minister, this is a very important point you're making. Are you saying that the policy of the government has changed now to 25 as the class size average in the next four years?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm saying that we have tabled a proposal with OSSTF—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Then it's just a proposal and it's not policy. We are dealing right now with current policy of this government, with respect, and the current policy is 28. I'm not going to deal with fiction; I want to deal with facts. The number right now is 28. It is not 25.

When you have a bargaining agreement, please, by all means, bring it to us. Until then, if you want to change the policy, Minister, we would very much appreciate it; 25 will still be a massive increase in class sizes for most schools in this province.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: But, Chair, the reason why I mention that is because we are actively negotiating with teacher unions. It would be absolutely imprudent—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you've released a policy—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Just a second, Excuse me, please—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It would be absolutely imprudent for me to comment and/or negotiate—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you're commenting right now.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No. Sorry, Chair—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You don't see that that's absurdness, with respect—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: With respect to the member—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): He has to finish the sentence.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you.

With respect, to the member, I have never commented in substance on a negotiation before bargaining, with the exception of a union that has made a decision on their own authority to publicize, via online, every proposal bargained. So—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Minister and member, I'm sorry to say to both of you that we're out of time. It concludes time for today.

The committee is adjourned until 9 a.m. next Tuesday, when we'll continue to meet to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Education. Thank you all.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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