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Estimates**

Ministry of Education

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42nd Parliament

Tuesday 5 November 2019

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

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Mardi 5 novembre 2019

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 5 November 2019

Mardi 5 novembre 2019

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Good morning, everyone. The estimates committee is now in session. We're going to resume consideration of vote 1001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. There is a total of five hours and 32 minutes remaining.

Before we resume consideration of the estimates, if there are any inquiries from the previous meeting that the minister has responses to, perhaps the information can be distributed by the Clerk. Are there any items, Minister?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, thank you and good morning. We continue to compile that information and we'll provide it to the committee in due course.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Okay. So, when the committee last adjourned, the official opposition had 14 minutes and three seconds remaining in their rotation. You may begin. Ms. Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Minister. Good morning, everyone.

First, I want to thank the minister and all of the staff for your hard work and for answering our questions. Education, especially early learning, is critical for the well-being of everybody, for our children, for families, communities and our province. And the earliest years of learning for children is so critical that it can influence the life of the children, their growth, our economy, so you can understand how important these questions are.

Minister, despite the objections and concerns of parents and municipalities, cuts to child care are going ahead next year. Parents all across the province are struggling to find affordable child care. Some families are spending upwards of about \$20,000 a year on child care, yet in the 2019 budget you have cut \$156 million in child care funding. Would you care to explain why you're making these cuts and making it harder for parents to find affordable child care?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I appreciate your comments. Shannon, who has joined us, may provide some additional context.

But I will just say to the committee that I, respectfully, just reject the premise in the context of cuts. What I will say is that the government is investing more in child care than any government in the history of the province—an over \$2-billion allocation.

We're doing this in two ways. The first is institutional support for those who have the benefit of living near schools in the province of Ontario or EarlyON centres. There is a significant investment, about \$1 billion of which is for the expansion of 30,000 child care spaces, 10,000 in new schools in the province—

Ms. Doly Begum: I'm sorry to interrupt. I just wanted to ask about the \$156 million that's pointed out in the budget, which is a negative number. Would you be able to explain just about that number itself?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. I think it's important to look at the big picture, actually. It would be imprudent to look at one component in isolation to the rest.

The \$1 billion is for 30,000 spaces, 10,000 of which are in new schools; 20,000 are in existing schools. We've allocated nearly \$400 million in a mobile child tax credit, CARE, which is helping many families—we estimate upwards of 300,000 families in the province. We've listened to our municipal partners. Some \$1.7 billion is being allocated to support them in their initiatives.

I recognize, as I think you do—and we both come from a GTA riding—that the cost of living is rising in Ontario. Incomes are stagnating broadly, and perhaps one thing we may agree on is the outcome of the former government. I think we have high child care costs that are unacceptable for people in the province, particularly low-income families, but increasingly even for middle-income families, it's becoming aspirational to afford child care.

So we are doing two things, as I mentioned: an institutional child care program that works for families who want it, but also a mobile tax credit that helps them.

We listened at AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario—

Ms. Doly Begum: Sorry, I'm going to cut you off there just because I do have some understanding, and correct me if I'm mistaken—so as I understand, the \$156 million includes cuts to municipalities for operating costs. You recently announced—after recognizing the difficulties municipalities face with their budgets, as you mentioned—that cuts will start in January 2020. This also includes cuts to Wage Enhancement Grant costs, which is an administrative cost. You will recall we had about 15,000 signatures to keep it just for this year—by ECEs, family members and many people across the province.

But the cuts in the \$156 million also include reductions to funding for child care programming. Let's talk about quality of learning: Programming is very important.

Would you explain why you are making cuts to municipalities as well as programming, and what is the justification behind that?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. Let me just correct the record for the committee. In fact, the wage enhancement has not seen any reduction. That would be categorically false. In the context of capital—

Ms. Doly Begum: So that Wage Enhancement Grant will continue from November?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. It is within the fiscal framework. It's budgeted.

Ms. Doly Begum: But the 50-50 share will continue? That reduction will happen?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think you're speaking to the administrative costs associated—

Ms. Doly Begum: Yes.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —which was, as you know, what it always was up until the final years of the former government leading into a writ period in 2017, but the fact is that that number has existed for many years of bipartisan reality, until the former government made a decision to change that number. We've reverted back to what it was.

But those are different things. The 50-50 you're talking about is the administrative costs of child care, which we delayed an additional year, for implementation by the second year, another year to begin the phase, because that's what AMO wanted. I met with AMO a variety of times, including rural and urban municipalities in the province. I was joined by Shannon as well for those meetings. The fact is that we made that clear. I think we heard an overwhelming level of an expression of realization that the government has listened to their request to proceed with a timeline that works better for them, giving them the time to ramp up.

Just in the context of child care projects, every existing child care project that was approved by the former government is continuing, so that's an important point of context—

Ms. Doly Begum: But you are making cuts to municipalities. Starting in January, there will be a cut made.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to turn to Shannon because she'll have some additional context, but just so we're clear, I think it's important for the committee to realize where we came from and where we are. For many, many years—

Ms. Doly Begum: We recently had the city of Toronto tell us that they're not able to carry on, and it will be very difficult for them. Peterborough: same thing. A lot of the other municipalities are coming forward and saying how difficult it is, and we know that the only source of municipal revenue comes from property taxes. Are you suggesting that they go ahead and push people to pay more property taxes, or how are they supposed to go ahead and find more revenue?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, there are thousands of child care spaces that opened in the province of Ontario last year under our government, more than 19,000 in Toronto—

Ms. Doly Begum: And the 19,000, if I'm not mistaken—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's public and private.

Ms. Doly Begum: —that's the Liberal promise from the past.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's the number of child care spaces that opened under our government—

Ms. Doly Begum: Which was a Liberal commitment that people already knew, so you just kind of continued on their track record.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We've taken a different approach than the former government, I think quite demonstrably, particularly when it comes to the—

Ms. Doly Begum: Just because I'm not a fan of the Liberal track record—I don't think any of us are, so that's why I wanted to make sure. I don't think you want to be on their bandwagon either. I think you want to do a much better job.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, and I accept that, member. You're right; I do think that we have to raise the bar. My point, simply, is to say that if the assertion is that projects that were approved are no longer proceeding, I'm indicating to you that all existing projects that were—

Ms. Doly Begum: But that was going to proceed.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to finish the thought. All existing projects that were approved are on track to approve and will continue. We have not made any change to that.

I do, I think, want to yield to Shannon if I may, just because I know you will have the technical expertise on this, particularly in the context of the implementation. If you would be so kind.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Absolutely. Good morning. My name is Shannon Fuller. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the early years and child care division at the ministry. Thank you for the question. Just to respond to your specific question around the \$156 million that would be in the estimates book that you have, just building on what the minister has said, that was the total of the funding changes that were announced in the budget last year. As the minister has said, there have been a number of different conversations with our municipal partners, who we have a very close working relationship with, since the time with the budget was announced.

The funding changes that are going to be rolled in are now going to happen over a three-year period of time. That was announced in August to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference after lots of consultation and engagement with our partners.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you so much. Because I have a very limited amount of time, and you mentioned that you have consulted and the amount, I just want to add that there is also a \$94-million negative showing in the budget as well, if you would be able to explain, and maybe the minister can.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, as I mentioned earlier—

Ms. Doly Begum: The capital funding cut.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry?

Ms. Doly Begum: The capital funding cut, I believe. Go ahead.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. In the context of capital, for expansion plans, for the first time in the government's history, we're committing 80% of capital that's not contingent on the municipal allocation. That's an important first realization.

Many municipalities have come to this government and came to me in the early time of my ministry—and to be fair, including my predecessor, Minister Thompson—saying, “Look, we want those funds. We may not be able to put in our 20% but you should unrestrict the capital allocation.” So we did that, for the first time and the first government amongst the parties that have been doing this since the 1990s—having institutional child care. We're the first to say to municipalities, “Your 20% is not contingent on our 80%.” We've given that unrestricted access to capital, which I thought was a prudent step to allow them more latitude to expand child care.

0910

The fact is, we've seen child care expand in Ontario by 19,000. That is in part, to your point, a realization of some projects that continued through the school expansions, but to be fair, I would argue that the independent daycare expansion is not because of the former Liberal government; I would submit that giving families money in their pockets to use in a mobile manner for whatever child care they want incents private sector growth.

We've seen independent child care expansion in the province, and we're proud to see that. We want to see more of that. I agree, we want to see those numbers rise year over year.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Minister. Because you mentioned that you consulted with AMO—I think there is an advisory board, if I'm not mistaken. Would you be able to give me a list of who was included on the advisory board and who has been removed in the past year, just after the Conservative government was on board?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to turn to Shannon, but I'll just say that in my own capacity I met with both the AMO ministers table, which is a confidential table of the AMO leadership as well as government officials. I've met with them, where I committed to this updated plan, the phase-in implementation, which was received well, and I've met with literally dozens and dozens and dozens of small and large municipalities, from folks in Mississauga to Toronto, to small towns in the province—

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Minister. Those are two different things. I just wanted to get an understanding of the advisory board and people who have been removed from the board.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. Shannon, if you have any context?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Thank you. We have two ministry-level, staff-level advisory tables. The first one is a Cross-Sectoral Early Years and Child Care Advisory Group. That was recently established, about two months ago. In terms of the membership there, we do look at engaging with a broad range of our partners across the system. We have a variety of different members from our service system managers with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. We also have school boards, Parks and

Recreation Ontario, the Child Care Providers Resource Network also participates, the College of Early Childhood Educators, Chiefs of Ontario, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, the Ontario Native Women's Association, the Early Childhood Resource Teacher Network of Ontario, the Ontario network of special needs resourcing programs, as well as a number of different operator groups: the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, and a variety of our provider partners like the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs also are participating in that table.

That group comes together to discuss—

Ms. Doly Begum: Do they influence in terms of the discussion on the financial spending of child care as well?

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Certainly we do talk about a very wide range of issues associated there, basically all of the key policy priorities associated with child care and early years. That would range from things like legislative and regulatory pieces, programmatic, and certainly the discussion will inevitably go into financial as well.

There is also, though, a separate table that we have, which is a technical advisory—

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

Ms. Shannon Fuller: —that focuses heavily on the technical side and the funding side specifically. That group—we've worked closely with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, NOSDA, to get the northern Ontario experience, as well as OMSA, to identify representatives within our service system management group.

That table actually just met yesterday, and they are focused on things like the child care funding formula and other financial areas from that partnership perspective.

Ms. Doly Begum: Would you be able to give us a list for both of the groups.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Absolutely, yes, happy to do that.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you. We'll go to the government. Mrs. Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Minister, thank you for being here today. I'd like to thank you and the Ministry of Education for providing funding to build a new elementary school in my community of Oakville North–Burlington. This school was desperately needed for a very fast-growing part of Oakville, and was actually delayed by the previous government. It is our government that is going to be building it in 2020.

My community is thankful for the new school. As you know, there are 776 students who will be there, along with 88 daycare spaces.

We also know that what is important is what is actually going to be taught in the curriculum in the school. I often hear from my constituents in Oakville North–Burlington that the old curriculum was not doing enough to prepare our students for the real world. Our students were falling behind in math—in fact, math scores have continued to decline over the past 10 years—and the health and physical education curriculum did not meet the needs of a modern and inclusive Ontario. So, Minister, can you please explain to us how our government's revised

curriculum is going to give students in Ontario the tools they need to succeed?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, and I will just acknowledge the member for doing a little self-promotion about her riding there.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I tucked that in.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's very good.

I will just say that obviously—and this is a bipartisan fact. Many members—and I know you've been a strong advocate for the high growth of your community, so that obviously pays a dividend in the context of getting projects approved. So I'm grateful for the leadership that you provide for the residents in Burlington and Oakville.

But in the context of math scores, I think we agree that there's a problem. To contextualize, some years ago—let's just discuss where we started and where we need to go to improve math scores. I think the first is: About a decade ago, roughly—just over a decade ago, in fact—there was a change from a pedagogical perspective in how math is being taught in schools. Let the results, I think, inform public policy decisions. There was a decision to change how we taught math, colloquially known as a discovery math approach. When that was introduced, in the year it was introduced, in fact, we started to see, year over year, either at best stagnation, and at worst a real decline in young students, particularly in grade 6 math, reaching the provincial average of 70%. We're now at a point of critical mass, with just over 50% not passing. So let's define the problem and acknowledge that there is a problem.

You, among others, have made clear that numeracy has to be a core competency that every young person needs to know. I agree with that, and that's why we've undertaken, to help to remediate the problem, three big initiatives. The first is, we have committed to reverting to a back-to-basics approach when it comes to math and teaching numeracy. The second is an update to our math curriculum that is under way. It will be done in the spring. It will be implemented in September 2020, which we think will be a real driver of improving performance in schools. The third is, for the first time, providing a four-year, cogent, well-thought-out math strategy, contrasted against the former government, which largely was doing one-off iterative spending that didn't have any continuity of thought. Throwing money at the problem clearly didn't work. So what we've done is we've taken a four-year, more long-term approach. We've introduced benchmarks to make sure that young people see those numbers rise over time—\$55 million was delivered this year, currently flowing now, in 2019-20, which is going to help.

I think a fourth point that I should recognize off the top is financial literacy. For the first time in Ontario secondary schools, you cannot graduate, you cannot get a secondary diploma anymore, unless you pass the grade 10 careers course, which now has compulsory, mandatory, financial literacy embedded in our curriculum, which is a life skill that we think is critical. I think it's critical. When you just look at data points of household indebtedness and the fact that some young people and some people in general face increasing levels of fiscal challenges, we think that type of

knowledge could really help them in their lives, obviously in their careers, and through their journeys of learning. We're doing all of that to help improve math scores. We think it will. We think that the defence of the status quo that some have advocated for is unacceptable.

We also believe that our teachers, who play a critical role in the class, who work hard and who I think are very committed to seeing those math scores rise—part of it, as well, is the government's obligation to invest in professional development. Part of that \$55 million does that, to help support them better to support our kids.

Do you want to add any additional context, maybe, for—

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I think we could ask Martyn Beckett to add a few words.

0920

Mr. Martyn Beckett: Thank you, and through you, Mr. Chair, a couple of additional details, perhaps, just in terms of how we're approaching the work with school boards this year. The main allocation is \$55 million, but I break that down into a couple of smaller pieces. About \$10.5 million is being spent on board-level math leads who have a responsibility in every board in the province, all 72, for implementing math curriculum and being in charge of the professional growth opportunities for teachers.

In addition to that, there's a \$15-million investment for math facilitators that are at the school level. The term that is usually bandied about is that it is coaching or facilitating at schools. These are people who are identified as math experts within their school. Their job is to go into a classroom, work directly with the teacher in coaching the teacher on how to use effective pedagogy to teach their students, and then they're a little bit of the guide on the side for the teacher to help the teacher with support for the students. They work directly within the schools. Just-in-time PD is the way some people might refer to it.

The remaining \$15 million there is supporting release time for teachers to attend professional development opportunities to get the training that they need, to be taken back into their classroom for their students.

If I could add just a touch more on the financial literacy. I think one of the things that I found particularly interesting on the financial literacy, particularly in the context of the careers course in grade 10, has been that it is directly related to a student who is starting to consider what they're doing after high school. Of the multiple pathways available—it could be the world of work, apprenticeship, university, college, supportive living, any of those—the goal with the financial literacy strand in the careers course is to support that student in developing a budget, which for many students may be the first budget they're developing, to think about, “What do I need to support me in that first year when I finish high school, no matter what course I take, and then how do I find a way to get there?” So it's really helping the students to develop that at a very much real-life level for looking at their own future and how they want to financially support themselves.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you. I'd also like to move to a related topic, which is our government's

priorities in helping Ontario students succeed, including in skills that they would need for STEM learning, specifically science, technology, engineering and mathematics. I was really struck by some data that I was reading that, in the year 2017-18, there was data that showed that in grade 11 physics, 41.3% of the students were in fact girls, but when you looked at the grade 12 enrolment for the same physics class, only 20.6% were girls. So, Minister, I wonder if you could let us know what the ministry will be doing not only to improve and promote the STEM subjects, but also specifically focusing on girls that are underrepresented, going forward.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, thank you. I appreciate that question. I was excited to join Minister Dunlop and Minister McNaughton last Thursday, as well as the parliamentary assistant. The four of us announced a historic investment, the largest in our province's history, in the skilled trades to support and send young people to pursue them. The focus of that announcement was very much on two constituencies: getting more young women in the trades as well as underrepresented groups—new Canadians, among others. They represent less than 6% of the skilled trades overall, notwithstanding that they're roughly half of the population. There's clearly a gender imbalance and that is unacceptable.

We need people. We know that one in five jobs will be in the skilled trades. We know that the baby boomers are exiting, which is going to exacerbate the shortage of that critical supply of work. I'm very much with you in supporting more people in the skilled trades, full stop, but including more women, who should see themselves in that role, part of it is championing the cause. Last Thursday's theme, very much so, was really empowering women to see themselves in these critical jobs, high-paying jobs, and increasingly entrepreneurial jobs. The Minister of Labour would want me to remind me the committee that it is National Skilled Trades and Technology Week, and so it's a thematic question. We're announcing a variety of initiatives to help encourage more participation.

In the context of the overall focus on STEM, in the PPF—the Priorities and Partnerships Fund—we've got about a \$330-million allocation that's helping boards across the province to work on STEM. We've included a greater emphasis on STEM-related careers, particularly in the disruptive economy, in automation, in AI. For the first time ever in our curriculum, we now emphasize those elements—the new economy, if you will.

Obviously, we're trying to prepare young people for skills that are relevant today, in 2019, but we're also looking ahead 10 to 20 years, to where the puck is going, and making sure that we have a nimble curricula development program that actually reflects the labour market needs of the country. If you speak to employers, small and large, including in the non-profit sector, they will say that there needs to be greater alignment of those skills, and I agree. I think it's not a criticism—it's just a reality—that we have to better align the core competencies as well as the soft competencies. We often speak about numeracy and literacy and the things that excite many of us, but I

think if you talk to many employers—and I know all parties have—they will say that an increasing area of focus has to be on soft skills as well: collaboration, discourse, debate, individual leadership etc. So we're trying to emphasize both, and I think that will provide positive dividends for young people as they aspire to get careers, for those who can. We feel fairly strongly about empowering more women in the skilled trades and STEM, and so we're going to continue to do that. We're going to continue to work with partners across the province, including through a variety of our agencies and stakeholders, to work to help support that end.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to ask you a little bit more about the consultations on the curriculum last year. I know that the largest number of people participated in the consultations than ever had before. I want you to share with us how this consultation helped shape the revised curriculum to meet the needs of students and parents. And could you also talk to us a little bit about the consultation around cellphone use in the classroom?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: On the first point, about 47% of parents in the province encouraged the government to include STEM-related disciplines in elementary school, and we have, so we're grateful for their advocacy on that. We thought that should have been front-end-loaded earlier on anyway, so we've done that.

In the context of the cellphone ban, 97% of families, educators, parents and even the students who participated made it clear that they wanted to see some form of restriction. It existed in some boards; it didn't in others. It was dispatched—it wasn't enforced. There wasn't a provincial framework. There's a variety of reasons why I think this approach should not be dismissed. I think it should be embraced as an incremental step to change the culture of learning in class. I can't conceive of why anyone would oppose that, notwithstanding that there has been opposition in the narrative, in the public discourse. Having said that, parents overwhelmingly have said to the government, "Focus on learning. Remove impediments. But embrace technology where it can add value in the classroom." It would be a bit bizarre, as a generational public servant, for me to denounce the merits of technology. I embrace them—I think all of us do, irrespective of our experience—but it has to be for academic purposes. It has to be instruction-based. If it's not, our hope is that educators will create that culture in their classroom, where they don't have to consider disciplinary steps.

I've spoken to just a few educators who reached out to me on social media telling me about their first day and their experience. It's going to take time, they said, to change that culture, but they think that having that November 4 implementation date helped, having those first two months to start to condition young people to that change. So we'll benchmark performance over time. One educator told me that she's a bit annoyed with it. But she found out that her class was on Instagram Live one day—probably not the most focused student was choosing to do that.

The point is, it's a distraction in itself. So we want to embrace technology and the merits of technological

fluidity, which are very much emphasized for the first time in our grade 10 careers course, but we're not going to provide a level of latitude for students to use it when we're in a core class like math, where we know they need to focus.

So both of them have been overwhelmingly embraced, and we're going to continue listening to families on how we can strengthen those protocols and expectations going forward.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Mr. Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Minister, for coming back before the committee today. I appreciate all the words that you've been sharing with us. We know, of course, that your hard work has been paying off and we've seen a lot of people that are coming out and grateful to see the change in direction in our education system towards linking education to the careers of not just today but tomorrow, and making sure that we have that emphasis on a technological focus as well.

0930

But one of the areas that I know, when I have conversations with my friends—we talk about where financial literacy is as a society and what can be done at the governmental level, also, to make changes that will help support young people who often have not been given the skills or knowledge that they need to flourish in a competitive environment. We're in a unique position. I think we're seeing a lot of change in our economy, and that change, obviously, has opportunities, exciting opportunities, but also there are risks associated with that. Of course, there needs to be a better awareness, I think, about those risks, and also what those opportunities can look like. So could you share a little bit about what our government and your ministry are doing to address these challenges and prepare students for the financial realities of the 21st century?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Absolutely. I think there's a need to—I'll explain what we have done, but I think there's a realization that we can continue to go further, particularly when it comes to strengthening financial literacy in a variety of courses and subject matter.

But one thing we have done through the financial literacy strand is emphasized, to your point: personal budgeting, which I think is an important life skill, and many parents have said that it's about time it's in the classroom. You cannot graduate from the province of Ontario, under our government and under this initiative, starting this September, if you do not successfully build a budget for the first year after high school. That is practical learning that perhaps should have been there many years ago, but it's now there. And I think parents could have some sense of confidence that we're applying that hands-on learning, experiential learning and the life skills that I think are necessary for young people to go through their journey with confidence—that they can balance their budgets, because we know that they don't balance themselves, to the member. As well as—

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: That's not what I was told.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm allowed one joke.

But it's also about using credit responsibly. We're aware that young people and others could have challenges

in the context of credit. Knowing their responsibility, knowing their rights as consumers and the obligations they have when they take on those credit cards and the long-term implications for credit scores and impacts for access to a variety of things, including housing—that knowledge is front-end-loaded for the first time, and that's a good thing.

I emphasize the grade 10 curriculum, but in our math curriculum, we actually have placed a strong emphasis on financial literacy in the four-year math strategy. As well, we are subsidizing the accredited courses. We're providing some subsidy to incent teachers to take more math courses, because we actually believe it is in the province's public interest—student interest, economic interest, individual interest—for these teachers to continue to professionally develop, as they already do. So if we can provide that small incentive or motivate them to do more of that, we think it will be good for teachers, but most importantly, good for our students in the class.

I recognize that there are a lot of good things we are doing in that respect, but the revisions—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Chair.

The revisions we made ensure that financial literacy, as I understand it, for the first time will be embedded and is embedded in every single year. It's obviously age-appropriate and reflective on where that stands, but it's in all grades, and I think that's a really powerful, positive step.

Do you have anything you'd like to build upon that, given that this is your work?

Mr. Martyn Beckett: I think anything that I'd put emphasis on would be that financial literacy will be embedded throughout all years of the mathematics curriculum, grades 1 through 12. That's a fairly significant rethink of what we've been doing in developing the new mathematics curriculum, because we're looking at the entire curriculum and we're working towards releasing 1 to 8 for the 2020 school year. But I think, as part of that, we are paying very close attention to financial literacy and building that into all the grades. So you will see that in—

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

We go back to the opposition. Ms. Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Minister, I would just like to, I guess, carry on from the question that I had asked prior. Recently, we were contacted by a few researchers who have been doing research in child care, as well as advocacy groups who have been removed from the advisory—hence my question. So I look forward to seeing the list, but also ask you why advocacy groups that are advocating for quality child care were removed from an advisory panel that is helping us make decisions for better child care.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I would defer to Shannon Fuller in the context of the composition of that group. I can tell you, as I think she intimated to the committee that we are listening to a wide range of stakeholders, people who have

expertise on the front line of the delivery, both in independent and institutional child care.

Ms. Doly Begum: But you have removed the not-for-profit advocates as well as people who are doing unbiased research.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to defer to Shannon, but what I will say is, if the assertion is that the voices of non-profits are not being heard by the government, if I heard correctly from Ms. Fuller, I think I heard that an overwhelming majority of the list she provided were non-profits of people we consult, both at my level as minister—and I met with many of the organizations personally in the first 60 days in my ministry, and Shannon makes a lifetime of doing this every day.

To be fair, both at the public service side and the political side, we are listening. We are meeting with them. I'm quite transparent about those meetings. I often post about them because I think it's important that people know that we're listening to those on the front line of providing affordable and quality child care in the province.

I'll let Shannon deal with more context on this.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Absolutely, yes. Thank you for the question. I'm just wanting to be clear that no groups were removed from any committees. At a variety of different points, we strike new committees to tackle things. Both of the groups that I mentioned to you in the last question are both newly established tables. We have had tables in the past that have had different members on them, absolutely, and as I mentioned, we do have a very broad range of stakeholders in the sector and we always want to ensure that we are hearing from all of the voices. I think it's also really important to note that we ensure within our division that we are not only using those two groups as the voice of all of the pieces that we're looking at.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would hope so, too.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Of course.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Ms. Fuller. Just because of time, thank you, and I look forward to that list.

I just want to ask—specifically, there have been recent cuts made to the city of Toronto's funding for child care, and they have announced that because of the cuts from the provincial budget, which will be devastating for a lot of parents, 760 families will lose their spots. Would you be able to explain why you're walking away from your responsibility as a minister but handing it over to the city?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the partnership we have with the city of Toronto. I look forward to discussing this further with His Worship the Mayor. I value the work they do in providing affordable child care for working people in this province.

In the city of Toronto we have committed to roughly 3,000 capital child care spaces for Torontonians. Obviously there's a massive shortage that we inherited, to be quite frank, but I think that's a positive step in the right direction of liberalizing access or expanding choice for families that just don't have it. Even if you have the means, which many do not, but even if you do, you still can't find it. We're

trying to increase supply, but we're also trying to make it a bit more affordable along the way through the child care tax credit, and I think—

Ms. Doly Begum: Actually, since you have mentioned the child care tax credit, can you tell me the estimated spending for the CARE credit?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: For the current fiscal year?

Ms. Doly Begum: Yes.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will defer to Shannon, but the allocation that we have put is roughly \$390 million, which will help roughly 300,000 people. Obviously we'll benchmark that at the end of the fiscal year to see what the uptake is in utilization, because if there are ways we can further help families enroll or participate in that—as you know, up to 75% of eligible expenses will be picked up through that tax credit. It's the most expansive child credit in the province's history, and I—

Ms. Doly Begum: I see that. I'm sorry to interrupt.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes.

0940

Ms. Doly Begum: So from the FAO report, which I'm sure you have looked at as well, you're spending \$390 million. Over the span of four years, you'll be spending about \$2.3 billion, I believe. I think the estimate by the government was \$2.2 billion, and the FAO report states it'll be \$2.3 billion. However, when we look at that total amount of credit, the maximum benefit that anyone will receive, according to the FAO report, is about 300 families in the entire province, which is about 0.1%. Don't you think that that's a really small number when you're spending such a significant amount of money from tax dollars?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: As I understood it, the FAO did not dispute the fact that we think that hundreds of thousands of families will benefit. Obviously, it's predicated on income and predicated on need. Their request up to the 75% threshold means that testing, really, is normative in many respects. So it's on an individualized basis of how that experience benefits families, but I can tell you with confidence that putting, on estimate, roughly \$1,000 per child into the pockets of middle-class working people is a good step.

I acknowledge that it's not in itself going to pay for child care for a year. But I think if the government culturally signals that we are not the only entity that should be delivering child care and we're not the only entity that's best prepared to spend tax dollars, that is, I think, a first step. I don't think that all parties in the Legislature actually accept that premise, respectfully. I think we are the only one, the only government, that is saying, "Look, we have a responsibility for institutional daycare." But do you accept the premise, for example, that families deserve choice? Do you think they should—

Ms. Doly Begum: I think we have to be very careful of the way that we spend people's tax dollars, people's hard-earned money that they're giving in taxes and really trusting us to spend wisely. That's why I'm asking, because it is a significant amount of money that we're spending.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I trust individuals over government every single day.

Ms. Doly Begum: I trust people too. So when I looked at the FAO report and I'm looking at the requirements, it looks like there will be a lot of families who are not actually qualifying for the tax credit.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We estimate in and around 300,000 people—a sizable uptake—helping families who need it most. It's important, but keep in mind that there are other taxable benefits and initiatives we've done in the broader affordability agenda that we think will help working middle-class people save more of their money so that they're able to spend more of their money, save more of their money or do whatever they like with it in the context of their children's future.

Ms. Doly Begum: Can I ask how you would define middle-class families?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think that's a question for the Ministry of Finance. I think for working people, for families right across Ontario, who work hard, they want to see more of their money staying in their pockets.

Ms. Doly Begum: And I would hope that those are the people whom we're helping, as well.

When I looked at the report and when I looked at the estimates—and I have a lot of working people in my riding, as well. So when I'm looking at the threshold in terms of their qualifications—if the second spouse's income is the two-thirds requirement that you have for that CARE tax credit, it seems that if the expenses exceed two thirds of the spouse's income, the lower income amount, then they don't qualify. Doesn't that eliminate a whole bunch of people, as well as any mother who wants to go back to school and has her husband or her wife working? Why are we eliminating all of those families from receiving the credit?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to turn to Shannon. I may add a point afterwards, but please.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: As you've said, the formula that's used for the tax credit is consistent with the federal government's formula for the existing child care tax credit as well, so that consistency—

Ms. Doly Begum: So we're just following the Liberal government's Liberal agenda, basically.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: The idea was to ensure that it was easy for families to access as part of their taxes and that it didn't require an additional application.

Ms. Doly Begum: Respectfully, Ms. Fuller, it just—let me give you an example. I have a constituent who came in. She has twins. She works at Tim Hortons. She is in one of those families who might not qualify for the credit. But to me, that's somebody we should be helping. If we're spending billions of dollars, why aren't we opening up to families who are struggling?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry, I'm going to just jump in, and I'm going to turn it right over to you, because you've got the technical.

I just want to be clear, though, just to the point about following the federal government. Look, this should not be a partisan exercise, respectfully. This is about the parents who want the seamless experience of accessing

services at all levels of government. So I would respectfully caution members—

Ms. Doly Begum: With all due respect, Minister, I appreciate the sentiment. I'm just saying that I have seen, and I have fought against, a lot of failed Liberal agendas, hence my comment.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed. I've spent a young life doing the same. But I think the point is that it isn't about you or me, actually; it's about families who want to have interoperability in access to child care—

Ms. Doly Begum: And that's exactly what I'm asking about, as well.

Hon. Stephen Lecce:—and that's why we've adopted a similar approach to create that seamless transition, so they can utilize services at all levels. That actually helps them get the services they deserve, not going through red tape and, respectfully, bureaucracy that creates massive impediments to accessing child care benefits.

I'll turn it back to Ms. Fuller—

Ms. Doly Begum: So, then, just on that thought, if we have two partners, for example, and one makes minimum wage and their child care expenses exceed the two thirds limitation, then they don't qualify for this credit. To me, that's a very flawed system.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: It really depends on the family situation, to your point, and the examples vary depending on the number of children that people have, depending on the amount of their out-of-pocket expenses for child care. It varies very significantly within that formula, for sure.

From our perspective, when we look at child care funding, we do look at it holistically. The child care tax credit is certainly one area of the affordability approach that we have, but we are continuing to spend over \$1 billion a year on child care fee subsidies, on providing general operating grants to support child care operations across the province as well. The mother with twins who you described, depending on her income level and depending on her situation, very well may be also eligible for a child care fee subsidy. Those two things could also operate for her in concert, so that she might not be receiving the full tax credit but she might be receiving a partial tax credit as well as a fee subsidy. Those could work in concert with each other to support her.

Ms. Doly Begum: I appreciate the sentiment. I'm just afraid that us thinking that maybe those people will qualify does not guarantee those people. She has already gotten admitted to school and decided three times—because she could not find a space for both of them; she only would find one. So—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry, pardon me. I'll be very brief. I understand that for lower-income families, particularly single parents, among others, however the composition of their individual family may be, there are real stresses and pressure points placed on families from a fiscal perspective. I don't want to draw conclusions, but using your example, should that individual be making minimum wage in the province of Ontario, they will benefit from the LIFT tax credit, which, respectfully, was opposed by the other parties in the Legislature, which

would provide the largest tax relief for low-income families in a generation.

I think there are ways we can support affordability, and I caution members from looking in isolation to one tax policy to the exclusion of everything else we're doing when it comes to affordability in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Doly Begum: I'm just going to go back to child care. I think we all know that Ontario has the second-highest child care, and this tax credit is based on an expense model. So my question is, if people are not able to afford the space, how are they going to put their children in those spaces and get the expense receipts and then submit that? I would like the minister to answer, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sorry, could you just repeat the latter part of the question?

Ms. Doly Begum: So basically, the model is an expense model. So you have to put your children in the spaces, then get that submitted with your tax, and then you get that credit.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right.

Ms. Doly Begum: But for families who are not able to afford, how are you supposed to put your children in those spaces if you don't have the money to afford it?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question. There are technical elements of that, to be fair, that are probably best answered by Ms. Fuller. But what I will just say is that in the context, what we're trying to do is provide more money in people's pockets. With respect, it's not that there's opposition to the timing of the expenditure or the release of the capital; respectfully, you will oppose the member in its entirety—

Ms. Doly Begum: But they are required to put this through their income tax, so if they don't have any expenses, they won't be able to qualify for the next year, for example.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If they don't have any expenses—as I understand it, all parents, even single parents, will have expenses related to child care. There is an inherent expense for child care, and up to 75% is a rather liberal—

Ms. Doly Begum: Respectfully, Minister, the problem here that we have with child care is that a lot of families, especially women, end up taking time off work and taking care of their children. For those women, we're basically telling them, "Because you're not able to show us"—unless you borrow or take out a loan to put your children in those care spaces and then take out the expense—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right. But your opposition is more profound than just the timing of the expenditure. I just want to be clear—I will defer to Shannon, but—

Ms. Doly Begum: No, I'm just saying that we're—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to finish the thought, if I may, and I will defer back to you.

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You oppose any—it's not like you're suggesting, member, that we should be front-end-loading the expense, not back-end-loading it. You actually oppose this measure in its totality—

Ms. Doly Begum: Respectfully, Minister, I'm not opposing anything. I am for providing quality care spaces that are affordable—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: But your voting record actually speaks volumes on this matter—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Excuse me, Minister and member. One at a time.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Chair.

What I'm saying is, why are we creating these bureaucracies that don't help people like my constituent whom I described, people who are low-income, people who are already struggling—mothers who are taking time off to care for their children?

If I may continue—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure.

Ms. Doly Begum: —there are about 273,000 people who currently use child care who won't qualify for this. We're spending a lot of money, but not a lot of people will qualify for the CARE tax credit, if I understand correctly. To me, that's a little disappointing, don't you think?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think helping 300,000 families in the province is a good thing. I think providing almost \$400 million in tax relief is a good thing. I think, amongst the choices before us, there is no counterproposal by any party in this Legislature to put more money in families' pockets directly. I think we need to just realize that. For families listening, I hear your point—

Ms. Doly Begum: No, I appreciate the amount you're spending, Minister; I really do. I want us to provide better child care. My disappointment with this is that the system asks families—for example, a family with low income has to find low-income child care. To me, a child care space doesn't really see what the income of a family is.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to confirm to you that the Ministry of Finance is working on in-year payments to give greater consideration to the concern you've raised. I hear your point. I'm not disputing it in the context of when the money is expended; I'm just making a broader principle that there is opposition to any monies flowing into an individual's pockets. That's the first step here in the debate. Then we can talk about the tactics by which we implement, execute or expend the dollars.

I just think, Ms. Fuller, you may have more on particularly the finance part of this—how we're trying to at least consider tweaking it to better reflect those families that the member has rightfully raised.

Ms. Doly Begum: As I understand it, only about 21% of the people in the province who actually use child care will benefit from the credit. I appreciate the thought in terms of what you're attempting to do, but I don't think that a lot of families who really require child care will benefit from it.

The other question that I want to ask is: When it comes to the FAO report talking about the workforce, are we really encouraging women to go back to the workforce when it comes to providing better child care, which is a model that is laid out in Quebec? We could be doing a lot better, yet we're the lowest when it comes to those numbers.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I would just say that I am very committed to supporting the economic empowerment of women in this province and country and ensuring that they

have access to affordable child care to incent them, for those who want to, to return to the labour market. It's a critical priority to my ministry. We're trying to remove the barriers that existed institutionally within the ministry—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —in the context of providing pathways for women and/or single parents, whatever their gender, to re-enter the workforce. We're doing that through skills-training incentives. We're doing this through tax relief for low-income people. Some of the lowest-income families will benefit, of course, from a variety of the tax credits, including LIFT, but as well, they'll be a higher beneficiary of some of the child care benefit tax credit. That's going to help them, I think, make life a bit more affordable for people.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Minister. From what I see, it will be about a 0.4% increase in terms of putting more women in the workforce with this plan. We could have done better, but I appreciate the attempt.

The last question I want to ask is, when it comes to—I personally believe that if we provide more universal, better-quality child care, we would actually have a better chance in terms of sending more women to work—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm afraid you're out of time. Hold that thought.

We go to the government. Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Chair. It's great to be here and listen to the minister explain our policies in education.

Minister, I think you know that I come from an agricultural background.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Agriculture is arguably probably the single biggest industry that we have in this province. The amount it supplies to our GDP is actually quite overwhelming and remarkable, considering the nature of the business. It's dependent on weather and whatever else.

I first want to start with a reaction I had from a high school student in Stratford. I spoke to a grade 12 class there. This was at the time when we were in opposition. We were trying to make changes to government policy—one being getting rid of the Green Energy Act, because high hydro rates were coming in and forcing families to pay more for their utilities, especially hydro. Every time that we tried to change this policy, unfortunately, the NDP kept supporting the government on this. So they are very responsible for the high hydro rates, as well as the Liberals, that we have in this province.

Anyway, we got to talking about household expenses. I asked these students if they had any idea what it took to run their household. One girl put her hand up out of the whole class. It just shot up like a rocket. It was quite incredible the way that she put her hand up. She came from a family that, financially—every dollar counted to this family. She wanted to continue on with her education, and she was worried that she wasn't going to be able to afford that. Her mother sat her down one day and said, "You

could help us out here. Our hydro rates are really going up. It's causing us some strain on our budgets." She asked the daughter how long she took in the shower every day. The girl figured out that it was about 20 minutes to do a shower—and I think we all can relate to this story a little bit. The mother had figured out what it cost for the hydro to do this shower, and she told this girl, and she thought about it. So this girl said, "I've cut my shower time down to five minutes now." Really, it's quite a story. She said, "I want to go to school. I want to continue my education." So she has taken it upon herself. This is a little bit of financial literacy that hadn't been shown to a lot of students, but this mother had taken the time to show it to her daughter, and it made a lot of sense. So this daughter took it upon herself: "I'm not going to shower so long. I'm going to try to help my family so that I can reap the benefits, to go to school." It's a neat story.

Every once in a while, we have a story like that that we hear from young folks. It's very interesting. At my age, there are a lot of young people around, so I do listen to them.

There's a farmer out our way—there are many farmers out our way, but this one farmer in particular has embraced technology. He has put up a new barn. They milk about 80 cows—actually, robots milk the 80 cows. It's quite interesting to see this operation. The cows love it. The cows actually go to get milked by themselves. They're not chased into the stall where the robot is; they go in there and they get feed—what the farmer calls candy. It's a very good-tasting feed that helps to entice them in there. Some cows will go in five or six times a day because they like getting milked by the robot. They also have two robots cleaning the manure away from where the cows deposit their waste. They go up and down the alleys. They look like a Shop-Vac. They actually suck this up and wash the concrete where the cows are walking. They buzz along—and it's neat watching them—and then they go into a little stall, and there's a hole there. Then they back up to this hole and there's a sensor there that stops them. They deposit what they've collected into this hole, and then it goes out to a holding tank. And then it fills itself back up with water and does it all over again.

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The other robot they have—it looks like R2-D2. This thing stands about this high and it has got a brush on the bottom of it. It brushes the feed to where the cows can reach the feed, so they always have fresh feed for them. Every hour or so, this robot unplugs itself and goes and sweeps its feed in to the cows—there are two valleys—and it goes up here and it goes up there. Then it goes and plugs itself back in and recharges itself. It's quite impressive to watch this thing.

If something goes wrong with one of the robotic milkers or one of these other robots, the farmers have their devices on them, and an alarm goes off. The alarm goes to the one farmer first—there are two brothers, and their sons are involved. If that farmer isn't around, it goes to the second guy. It just keeps going down the line, so that they can go in and fix the problem.

They can call the service company and say, “We can’t get this thing to work,” so they go through a number of steps in order to get things working. Sometimes they have to have somebody come out to the farm because they just can’t get the system to work.

I guess where I’m going here is we are facing a problem in the agriculture industry of not enough people to work. We need people out there to fix these robots. We need people to feed the cows and make the feed rations up for the cows—nutritionists. Right now, there are three jobs for every graduate out of the University of Guelph—three jobs for every graduate. That’s incredible, and we don’t have the people to do it.

Even though our government has helped to create some 270,000 jobs this last little while, we still have jobs out there that aren’t being filled. This is what farmers are facing out our way.

Some of the reasons that this has happened is that our school system hasn’t been opening up the vast number of job opportunities that there are in this province over the past number of years, and one certainly is in agriculture.

I had a round table with the farming industry with Minister Thompson in the summertime. We had three machinery dealers there that couldn’t find people to fix their tractors or they couldn’t get young folks interested in being a diesel mechanic, these types of things. A lot of it had to do with the school not showing them the opportunities that were there.

I think this is something that we have to address. I wonder if the minister would comment on how we’re working on showing students the job opportunities that we have out there.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. I’m going to definitely speak about this, but the member opposite asked us some questions with respect to the implementation of expenditures. I know it’s not my role to ask this, but is it your intention to return to this after for your rotation? Otherwise, I’ll just get to the answer now.

Ms. Doly Begum: Well, I had 1,000 goats growing up, but—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, I’m referring to the last question; sorry about that. If there are further child care questions, I’ll answer them.

Ms. Doly Begum: Yes.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It’s your intention to return to it? Okay, then I’ll save that for later. Pardon me.

Thank you for the question. I accept that agriculture is a great sector of the economy that underscores that we have a phenomenon of “jobs without people and people without jobs.” We have another shortage in this sector, and that’s going to become increasingly more true over time.

There are a few things we’ve done. With the grade 3 physical health curriculum, we’ve included elements that include healthy food, including promoting Canada’s Food Guide and Canadian produce—the best and safest produce products ever in the world when it comes to our agricultural sector, which we’re very proud of. There are 18 green industry-related courses, some of which we’ll touch on, specifically agriculture and agri-foods, and the sectors that

employ over a million people across the supply chain. We know it’s so critical, particularly in the food processing sector that is so connected to Ontario produce.

In grades 1 to 8, there’s agricultural content in every single grade.

The old home ec course that existed maybe a little bit before my time is now called family studies. A lot of those elements, when it comes to knowledge about nutrition, etc., are now built into it.

But I think you speak in the context of getting more young people considering agriculture. In the careers guide, there’s an emphasis on agriculture, natural resources and a variety of other sectors that we and our government value critically for the future prosperity of the country. We want to encourage more produce made in this province, grown in this province and sold in this province but also sold to the world.

We’re going to support industry, but we’re also going to help young people understand food literacy, if you will, about how they could be better prepared to take personal responsibility for their selves, their bodies and their minds.

We’re going to continue to support this sector, as well as, in the career side, helping to give young people a credible pathway into the agriculture sector. No longer will it be avoided as subject matter—or even a bias against it. We’re embracing it as a very credible and, in many cases, a high-wage option for young people to consider as they go through the journey of learning.

We want to help retain the talent of the workforce in rural parts of the province; they deserve to have a government that considers their well-being, not just in urban centres. We think we’ve taken a much more balanced approach of ensuring that families in rural Ontario and students in rural Ontario have a voice at the table.

I’m obviously very proud to serve the variety of ministers who proudly hail from those communities, who are voices for rural Ontario.

I’ll continue to meet at ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, and I’ll continue to be present, as I was in my capacity as a PA. I’ll do so as minister in January, to meet with more municipal partners in small towns and hamlets and villages in the province, and to let them know that they have a minister who is going to support them, including as we look at the school closure policy, that has decimated many small towns, by the former government. Six hundred schools closed is a legacy failure, I think.

I think we need to better emphasize the power process that reflects the needs of rural towns.

I hear you clearly, and we’re going to continue to support agriculture and the agri-food sector in the curriculum.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I appreciate that answer, and I appreciate your support of the agriculture industry. You’re welcome and I would love to see you come to Perth–Wellington. We could certainly show you some of the things that I’ve been talking about, and also let you talk to some of the folks who are facing these issues with the labour shortage that we have out there.

One of the reasons that these people went to the all-robotic barn, if I can tell you, is because of labour. They

can't find people to help them work, so they've decided to go this route. It's very expensive. One of these robotic milkers is a quarter of a million dollars, and they've got two of them. So they've put a lot of money into this barn to look after their animals, because of labour issues.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And it speaks, from a disruptive perspective, to how AI could displace jobs. I think we just have to be, as a government, broadly, with economic development and finance and a variety of ministries—labour, skills training—we all have a role to play to ensure that we're not rejecting the trajectory of the future economy, but embracing it and making sure that those young people in small towns have access to good jobs.

We can embrace that automation, but we obviously appreciate the displaced jobs in the marketplace. So how do we create new ones, new value-added jobs? The agri-food sector, I think, doesn't get enough credit for the massive amount of jobs, and, from a GDP perspective, the critical, massive input it has to the economy. We get it.

I think all of us have processors in our ridings, agriculture in our ridings, and we know that young people need to understand and appreciate that they should see themselves in that sector.

Particularly when we see other levels of government, including the federal government, create difficulty from a tax perspective for intergenerational transfer of farms, that is very concerning to me, because we're disincentivizing. It's now easier to sell to a foreign national than it is to your daughter or son. That's a problem, and one that I think we should advocate against. I know it's not particularly germane to the curriculum, but it's something that I know is relevant for you in a small town in the province.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. The transfer of farms is very difficult and very expensive these days. It's a lot more expensive than it used to be.

Certainly, in my area, we've had an influx of Europeans coming in and buying farms—from Switzerland, Holland, whatever—mostly because they have the dollars to do it. It's very difficult to turn down millions of dollars if it's going to be difficult for your son or daughter to take over a farm. We've seen this a couple of times.

I spoke to Wallenstein Feed and Supply. They are the largest feed mill in Canada. They're huge, and they're putting up another mill, too, for their company. The last time I spoke with them, they had 11 nutritionists working there. They have also embarked on a program that, if you join the company, you start at the customer service desk and work your way up. One of my constituents, actually—they paid for her master's degree because they wanted to keep her. So companies are doing things like that because they need good folks to work for them. Because it benefits their business, it also benefits their worker and these types of things.

One of the issues that they brought up, and this goes back a few years now, again, was with the direction that some school systems had in that they were not pointing students to these different careers—not just to agriculture, but to different careers. They would take a person who started to work for them at the bottom end, and if they saw

something in that person that would help their company, they would actually help direct that person to a certain path within their company. This is something that companies have done. I'm glad to see that your ministry is starting to do this, because it has been so neglected over the years.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: There's an interesting initiative at the Wellington Catholic District School Board, an area that you represent—a really neat initiative that's being funded by the province where we essentially have worked with schools, in partnership with the University of Guelph, on creating more experiential learning about encouraging young people to grow their own foods. It's a really neat initiative through the international bachelor of ed program that is really synergizing the amazing work being done in agri-food at U of Guelph and helping get that into the classroom. So there are a lot of neat initiatives, including from your own locality, that I'm sure are worthy of emulation and consideration across the province, not just in communities that have a large agri-sector. These are competencies we want everyone to have better training on.

To the overarching part of the skilled trades—it's thematically a focus of the government to encourage more participation of people entering the skilled trades, looking at them, destigmatizing them as anything but dignified high-wage good jobs and often, increasingly now, entrepreneurial jobs. We see a future for young people, we see a future for young women, and we want to see more people in all those sectors. Obviously agriculture, I think, has taken a back seat for many years in the provincial discourse when it comes to a public policy priority. That ended, I think, last June, where there has been a real emphasis—no longer is the Minister of Education from Toronto; it's a good start.

With that said, we're going to continue to encourage more emphasis on agriculture in schools. In the health curriculum, it's a major emphasis. In the grade 10 curriculum, we started to include agriculture as a critical path. If there are any more ideas to support those sectors and those critical jobs in your communities, our ministry is obviously open to any idea that can strengthen our support for agriculture and rural families in the province.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister. I have two sons in the trades. One is an electrician and the other one is a welder. I'm very thankful for that because they're raising their own families now and they're not on my couch, which is a bonus.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: The younger lad graduated as a welder this year. The day after he graduated, he started getting phone calls from different industries. So he had no problem getting work.

You don't have to come from an agricultural background to be a welder, certainly. People who have their tickets and have their trades can come to our area and find work—as in a lot of areas, I think. That they can come and find work in this province is very encouraging. I think your ministry is on the right path, and I thank you for that, but we need to get that good news out there that we are open

for business and jobs are there. I thank you for that message.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed. Yes, I met a young welder, Kaia—who's not from a skilled-trades family—just last week with Ministers Dunlop and McNaughton. I'll tell you, she serves as an inspiration, I think, to other young women to consider seeing themselves in welding, specifically, but in any sector of the economy, and—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you, Minister. We are now out of time for this session.

We are recessed until 3:45 this afternoon. See you then.
The committee recessed from 1014 to 1546.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Committee is back in session. We're going to resume consideration of vote 1001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. There is now a total of four hours and 18 minutes remaining.

When the committee recessed this morning, the government had finished their round of questions. We will now move to the official opposition. Mr. Gates, the floor is yours.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, how are you this afternoon?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm well, thank you. Nice to see you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's always a pleasure.

One of the major issues in education that we are aware of, when I speak to teachers, is the ongoing problem of violence in our schools.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The latest survey from ETFO members found—and I'd really like all the committee to hear this, just to get an idea of what's going on: More than half—54%—have experienced physical violence such as punching, kicking and biting; 72%, verbal insults or obscene gestures from a student; 41% said they had experienced the same at the hands of their parents. About 70% said workplace violence and harassment had increased in the last decade. Female educators and those who identify as racialized, disabled, or LGBTQ reported higher rates of harassment and violence. Violence and harassment were associated with poor levels of physical and mental health among educators, as well as a diminishing learning experience.

Minister, my question to you is: What percentage of funding has the minister provided to deal with violence in our schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Mr. Gates. I agree: I think we have a significant issue—an issue we must contend with—in the context of violence. I think it all gets a number, but I think it speaks to both peer-to-peer violence as well as student-to-educator-worker and/or -teacher violence. That's an issue that is real. I think it's an increasing phenomenon in schools, and I'm very concerned about it.

One thing that the ministry had done in 2016—to be fair, the government before us started a working group that deals specifically on violence prevention. That work continues. It is important.

Also, every school board is being provided with upwards of \$10,000 for a data reporting system, because as you can appreciate, we have to actually understand the problem and track the problem.

There are monies being put forth with respect to de-escalation training, broadly speaking, as well as new monies that were just announced two weeks ago at CAMH more specifically in the context of bullying, but that also can manifest in violence.

The point is, there obviously is more to do, but we have increased investments. We've maintained some from the former government and enhanced new ones, I'm really very open to ideas that may be brought forth by all members in the context of how we can maintain the safety of schools for both the workers and the kids.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that update, but I just want to say that I've asked a really fair question and I think it deserves an answer, whether that's right now or certainly as we go through this process: What percentage of funding has the minister provided to deal with the violence in schools? I'd like to get a percentage, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay. I'm going to defer to the deputy minister and/or her leadership team in the context of speaking to that detail.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Thank you. I'm Nancy Naylor. I'm the Deputy Minister of Education. I'm here with Doreen Lamarche, who is the executive director of our education labour and finance division.

I will say, we completely agree with your premise that violence is unacceptable, whether you're in a school as a learning environment or as a workplace.

The ministry has been involved with its labour partners, the teacher federations and representatives of education workers on issues of workplace safety.

As the minister mentioned, we have had the Provincial Working Group on Health and Safety since 2016, which has included representatives from our labour partners. One of the first outcomes of that has been to establish the online reporting system so we can respond—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I hate to interrupt. I would like a commitment today that you will give me a percentage of what's being spent on the budget in schools. I want to know the percentage of it.

It is at crisis levels. I think you know that. I think teachers are telling you; I think education workers are telling you. I'd just like to know the percentage. If you don't have it right now, I understand that, but I would like a commitment from the government that you will provide that to us.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're comfortable to take that back, and we can look at the data points on that. I'm happy to return to the committee, sir.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you. It's good to be back. I'm going to pick up, Mr. Chair, kind of on the heels of what my colleague MPP Doly Begum asked this morning around early childhood and child care.

I want to ask a few questions related to full-day kindergarten. Your predecessor, Minister, floated the idea of

making changes to Ontario's full-day kindergarten program. The backlash from parents, educators and experts was swift and decisive, to say the least. The previous minister, Minister Thompson, subsequently confirmed that full-day kindergarten would remain untouched for this year.

Can you confirm that full-day kindergarten will be maintained in the years ahead?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I can speak rather categorically: I have no intention—certainly, there's no plan before my desk in any way, member, or within the ministry, within the public service, on my parliamentary assistant's desk or my political staff's, to make any amendments to that.

The fact is, we provided a commitment to maintain it, and we have. My interest is in strengthening it. I think there's clear evidence that suggests that the changes made in early years and early intervention education have led to strong outcomes.

As you know, to the member, from kindergarten to grade 3, there are no changes—I know it's not specific, but just in the context of the core sizes—no changes at all. I think that underscores why: because we see that there has been evidence that it is working. I understand that there are some discussions in the broader narrative about this.

I also appreciate that this is advanced in the broader context of labour negotiations, so I hope that that answer stands.

I also appreciate, member—if I may, just in 20 seconds—I know that there will be subject matters that could be related to the labour negotiations. I just want to provide an element of caution to the committee, through you, Chair, that I will do my best to answer, but I also have an obligation on behalf of the crown to retain a level of discretion while we're actively negotiating.

I don't want you to infer that that means that item is on the table. I just want to be clear, if we're going to go into a discussion that deals with labour, that I'm going to have to maintain an element of prudence—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think you explained that the last time we met, as well.

When asked about this, though, in February—which wasn't that long ago—the Premier said, "I can tell you that there's going to be all-day kindergarten next year, and we'll sit down and you'll hear from us in the future."

You seem to be saying that there aren't going to be changes in the near future. Are you going to be announcing any further plans regarding full-day kindergarten?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I have no plans before me, member, to make any announcements. Obviously, there could be areas we could enhance, I suppose. We're always looking at, for mental health supports, some early intervention.

But I think if your question is if I am going to be, in the short or medium term, making any substantive changes to how that program is delivered for families, I just don't have anything before me that would lead me to conclude the answer is yes. The answer is no.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Respectfully, the government's education consultation—some time ago now—included a question specifically about removing class size caps for kindergarten, which I think is currently at 29. I will just add that I think for most families and workers I've spoken to, that's high. That's barely manageable in the current model.

I want to be very specific here. Will the government be removing the kindergarten class size cap? And do you have any intention, let's just say in the next year, of changing the staffing ratios—and by that I mean the full-time DECE and the full-time teacher.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, one teacher, one ECE, as the kindergarten programs require.

As I've made clear, I have no intention, I have no plan before me—there is no policy discussion happening that's kept at arm's length of me, member. The answer, in short, is no. I just have no policy discussion happening actively—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So you don't foresee that happening this year or—let's just go beyond that; let's say in 2020-21.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I would interpret that liberally. I don't see any change happening. There has been no—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Can you commit now to ensuring that that model remains at least till the next election, in 2022? Can you confirm now that that model will remain in place?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: That is a matter before labour, before the bargaining table.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So that is something that is being negotiated?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: No, not by us. But it's—

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's a negotiable point for your government?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is not for me, member, but it is an item that the other union—one union, particularly—has raised in the public discourse. I don't think it would be prudent to comment substantively on an item that is literally being discussed largely by one entity, not the crown.

But I think my commitment to you and to members and to families is that there is no plan, certainly on my desk, at all to change the formulation of that program.

I understand that you're looking for a long—beyond the time that is before—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think that's what families are looking for.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think that they will be able to have that certainty in short order, particularly once the labour deals are done.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciate that you're in this position of negotiations right now, but what you seem to be saying to me is that the class size cap and the staffing ratio is something your government may be pursuing in a conversation at the bargaining table, which, to me, says that that is potentially going to be changed. That is concerning.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I've not commented on the classroom cap, to be fair. What I'm saying is that, broadly speaking, I have no plan or intention to change it.

I do appreciate that you recognize the very difficult position I'm in. I understand, from a policy perspective, why you're asking. I don't dispute the question or the merits of it. We are literally in an act of negotiation with elementary teachers right now. They've raised this issue and—

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, elementary teachers—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It would be imprudent—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, respectfully—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It would be imprudent for me, Chair—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Excuse me.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to finish the thought, if I may, Chair.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think he has already said what he wants to say.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Let the minister finish his statement, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to be clear that I will do my very best to answer as clearly as I can, but I am a spokesperson and essentially a minister of the crown representing this government in the context of our negotiations at the table. I have a fiduciary obligation to maintain that level of discretion.

I hope it could be a matter of days, member, that we could have clarity with voluntary agreements, as we do with CUPE, so you can have that certainty that I know parents deserve. I assure those families that they will get that clarity in short order, but please permit me a smidgen of time to get those negotiated settlements.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, honestly, everything in this spending—everything that we're talking about today pretty much could be impacted by the negotiations that are under way. Maybe we should be postponing the conversation until after negotiations are done if we can't have a simple commitment on a minimum, which is what I'm asking for.

Just so I'm clear, did you say that you are confirming the class size cap at 29 will remain at that level until the end of your term in government?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: As we've indicated through the proposed changes to classroom sizes, there have been no changes proposed both in the cap or the number of students from kindergarten to grade 3. That remains true today, and I'd envisage that remains true for the remainder of this mandate. There has been no commentary publicly from the crown to change that. In the context of any alterations beyond that, I think I would just provide a level of caution on asking the government to comment on an issue that is being discussed at the table. And this is in the public record because the union itself has suggested; they've raised it—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you see—I won't return to this point. I hear what you're saying. I know that the teachers—I'm just going to presume—aren't looking for a watered-down version of the staffing model.

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Hon. Stephen Lecce: I've committed to strengthening it.

Ms. Marit Stiles: In fact, they've been quite public about their opinions around that. If it's a negotiating point, then that to me says that the government is using that—

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles:—piece as a potential piece in bargaining.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Excuse me, one second.

And your point of order is, Mr. Oosterhoff?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I would acknowledge that as we are in negotiations, and the minister keeps referring to this, when the member opposite keeps referring back to that—

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I would respectfully disagree, but I'll accept your—

Ms. Lindsey Park: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have a point of order? And that is?

Ms. Lindsey Park: The opposite member keeps repeating the same question and getting the same answer. That's offside when it comes to the rules of procedure.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Repetition can be a point of order, but I have been listening to both the questions and the answers, and there are variations in both, so I will not accept that as a point of order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, if I could just respond now to the point of order.

ETFO, one of the unions, is on the record suggesting that this matter is being discussed at the table. I am only saying this, member, because they have said so. I have licence because they're on the record, so I'm pointing to that record. By their own admission, it's a discussion point.

Having said that, the crown's position, as I've mentioned, notwithstanding we are negotiating actively—my aim is to look at how we can strengthen it and how we can improve outcomes in the early years. When it comes to the one-teacher-and-one-ECE model, that seems to be working.

There are no proposals on my desk, and I would not want any person, by any means, to have an elevated level of insecurity at the basis of the question. I want to provide that certainty. I hope, in short order—it may take some days; it could take weeks, but hopefully not more—that we will be able to get voluntary settlements that could assure you, member, and, to be fair, the families you represent and all of the families of this province that what I said today stands true.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I hope you're right, Minister, but I've got to say that in the context of this conversation, I'm not comforted, really, by the fact that this is something that you can't just solidly commit to. Anyway, I'm going to move on, because we have many important issues to discuss.

I want to talk a bit about special education and special needs. Almost every board in this province is spending more than they're allocated, I think it's fair to say, on services for children with special needs. It has been like

this for some time, to be fair; that didn't just start under your government. But with the cuts that your government is making, what has been lost is any flexibility. That flexibility has been lost, and we're seeing that in the calls.

I'm just going to say, this morning in question period, I asked you a question—it wasn't even related to this. Actually, you didn't say anything particularly related to it, but you did mention, I think, autism funding. Again, there was a parent in tears in the gallery. This is an extremely difficult issue, and I appreciate that. But we have parents whose kids are getting kicked out of school or not getting the supports they need in school, because they don't have those assistants there anymore. This is directly related to your government's cuts.

So I want to ask you a few questions around special-education funding. We know that a significant portion of special education funding is based on a statistical predictive model. What measures has the government put in place to compare the funding provided through this model to the actual needs of students accessing special education supports? In other words, what data is the government using to ensure the model is working and what are the results so far?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, member. If I could, just with a brief comment—I may defer to my team—I want to respectfully reject the premise of a reduction in expenditure. Member, in 2018-19, the government of Ontario expended \$3 billion; this year we're expending \$3.1 billion. There's a \$90-million increase. It's a 3% net year-over-year increase in expenditure in special education. That's a matter of the estimates that are before you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Respectfully, that's not what I was saying, though. I was saying that the special education funding has not met the needs, Minister.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, no, I want to make sure he gets the question, because it's a very important distinction.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You asserted a cut. You said "a cut." The transcript is clear.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I said that because of cuts in education funding, those boards don't have the flexibility anymore to use other funds. It has never been enough. Special education funding right now is still not enough.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: So you'll acknowledge that funding has gone up by three points?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm not going to agree that it has actually gone up based on need.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I see. Notwithstanding—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But I was very specific in my question, Minister. I do appreciate you may not have the answers, and if there's somebody else on your team who does, I appreciate it.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will defer. I just thought it was important that folks, especially—

Ms. Marit Stiles: I don't think you didn't understand the question. But I'm glad. I'd like to get the answer, please.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's important, I think, just for folks at home—for the few folks who may be listening, I

want them to know that this government is investing over 3% more in special ed. We care deeply about their children and the dignity that they deserve.

I care about them. I mentioned special education funding because, while it's mildly tangential, it's often correlated with mental health funding, which was the basis of your question during question period.

With that, I'll defer to my team for further context for the question you seek.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Let me start out, and then I'll ask Holly Moran, who is our executive director in that area, to speak.

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

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Okay. We have not made any reductions in special education funding. On the contrary, we have augmented special education funding for the 2019-20 school year, specifically around strengthening school boards' ability to respond to students with autism, and their families.

There was a specific reference to a significant portion of the special education grant that is based on a sophisticated regression model.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, could you speak up a little?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Sure. You had made a reference to the portion of the special education grant. That is based on a regression model that does use a number of data sources. That is intended to give us the best fit and the best prediction, really, of the incidence of students who might have a higher need for special education funding. We do produce—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry. Your time is up. With that, we go to the government. Mr. Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: It's great to see you here, Minister. If the Chair and the members of committee would indulge me for a minute, I'd like to provide a little context for my question and talk about the best riding in the world for a second—of course, Willowdale.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Excuse me?

Mr. Stan Cho: Yes. I'm sorry, it is the best riding in the world.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Please do not cause a stir in the committee.

Mr. Stan Cho: I will not.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: When I knock on the doors, education is something that comes up frequently in Willowdale. I keep hearing the same things again and again. I think I do because, to provide some context, Willowdale is one of those urban-suburban neighbourhoods that has seen incredible growth. We've actually hit our growth plan targets for 2041 without the necessary investments in education.

So now we have a situation up and down the Yonge Street corridor where we have up to 150% overcapacity. Kids are literally being bused out of the neighbourhood to attend other schools. That's not a childhood. That is no band practice; that is no athletic activities before or after

school. That is on the bus as soon as the bell rings, and back home.

That's not the only issue we have in Willowdale. We have students learning in environments with missing ceiling tiles. I have been to visit these schools, and the learning conditions are deplorable.

We also have the issue of child care spaces in an urban-suburban setting such as Willowdale, where there simply isn't enough.

I'm really proud that our government has brought in additional funding to address these infrastructure needs. But, Minister, we are well behind when it comes to certain growth areas, and Willowdale is leading the charge on being behind in infrastructure investment.

I would like to know, for the constituents of Willowdale, and for everybody else in Ontario—the parents—who are suffering through these conditions for their students, what is our government going to do? What is your ministry going to do to address those infrastructure needs, after a government previously, for 15 years, did not make those necessary investments in infrastructure and child care spaces?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much. I just want to express my gratitude to the member from Willowdale for his advocacy. We have chatted, actually, about this very issue before, and I think it's a real issue.

It's interesting. When you look at the funding formula, which predates me and perhaps even some of our births, the system has an unusual inequality where, often, the formula historically, in my estimation, had a bias against rural communities. Now, as urbanization and intensification happens—which is, not ironically, mandated by the government, so we're implicated in this—we see more vertical growth and vertical communities being realized in Ontario in urban centres and suburban centres. We now have a challenge where the funding formula is not meeting the needs of urban communities.

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I actually mentioned this to the critic, as well, in our meeting; I understand that the funding formula needs to be modernized so that communities in urban centres—including Willowdale, for example—are not penalized as a consequence of an outdated funding formula. I have committed and asked my team, and they are doing this in real time, to look at how we can further strengthen it, to equalize that, particularly for vertical-growth communities. Increasingly, families, for a variety of reasons—perhaps affordability, among others—are moving into condos and apartments, and I want to make sure that they too have access to education.

Your advocacy on this matter, I think, is telling, because it has further elevated to me that there is a problem. I know that in schools in Willowdale, in North York, certainly in Eglinton–Lawrence and a variety of others in Toronto proper, among other communities, there is a need for additional expenditure. The funding formula doesn't really give consideration to proactive early investment. You can't buy the floor in the condo. The way the funding formula works is done at the end of the process, which

means you're now buying at a rate that is at a multiple much higher than land value could have been if we got into the condo during its early development or inception phase. So we need to review that.

I've raised this with the chairs of the Catholic and public schools. I met them personally in Toronto, among other boards, but particularly Toronto. I've assured them that I will review this and take action in short order to make sure that the funding formula better equalizes the experience of urban families, rural families and suburban families, so that all citizens have access to education, access to good schools, so they don't have to be bused or be in schools that are clearly overpopulated, as is the case in Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you for that, Minister. Incidentally, the Toronto Catholic and Toronto school board headquarters are in Willowdale—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed.

Mr. Stan Cho: So we look forward to you visiting.

Can you talk a little bit more about how the \$13-billion investment over 10 years into capital improvements and into new schools might be spent?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. I acknowledge to all members that there is a deferred maintenance backlog that exists in the province. It predates our election, but nonetheless we now have to contend with it, and I accept that responsibility in my capacity as the minister.

I'm quite pleased that the government made a decision in our first budget to expend \$13 billion over the next decade, as you mentioned. Why that's relevant, I think, is because one of the concerns I hear from board chairs, both urban and rural and in English and French—all of them—is that the lack of predictability in long-term commitment for expenditure creates a problem. It creates bad business behaviour, because you're looking at a short-sighted business cycle, and it's hard to plan out long-term investments if you don't know what your funding commitments are.

That informed the minister of the day, Minister Thompson, and informed the government to provide a 10-year predictable funding framework of \$13 billion this year. We've opened that intake; the intake concluded on October 31. I have respectfully tasked my team to expedite those reviews because I want to start getting, to the extent possible, shovels in the ground as soon as humanly possible, and they're on it.

That commitment, for this year alone, is about \$550 million for 2019-20, and that's a pretty significant expenditure for this year. That's in addition to the \$1.2 billion, just roughly—over a billion dollars in renewal funding that goes into common repairs every single year on an annualized basis. We're doing both, and we think that that's going to really help reduce the backlog and improve the quality of schools.

I agree with you. I find it unacceptable that kids are studying in schools that are derelict or are certainly not at a standard that I think we expect in this prosperous country, so we're going to be continuing to make those capital investments.

We're also, through the Ministry of Infrastructure—and I say this proudly as a former parliamentary assistant to

that ministry—there are new funds flowing in recreation, about a quarter-billion-dollar allocation. There could be joint projects between the education sector and municipalities, as some schools are doing, including in my riding. We've got some brilliant synergies happening between municipal and educational partners. There's a quarter-billion dollars for recreation, and several billion dollars—about \$7 billion—in the green infrastructure fund in the context of improving energy efficiency that could actually save operating dollars. So there are a few things that we are doing that all could benefit students, but I know that there is more to do in this respect.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate that, Minister.

My better half being a special education teacher, I appreciate your comments on the investments in special education. If there's any context or additional information you can provide there on the increased funding, I'd appreciate a little bit more detail in terms of that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just given the timing of the autism task force that came out last week—it's early days, and we're reviewing it. But one thing that was made in the last fiscal year that's benefiting students this year is what I mentioned in question period for ASD, for autism specifically—I didn't mean, to be clear, the broader funding under Minister Smith; I actually meant intra-ministry, in the education ministry. Minister Thompson, and the government broadly, more than doubled the ASD funding envelope, specifically for kids with autism, on the spectrum. Obviously, it's broader at the highest level of expenditure for special ed for any child with developmental or intellectual disabilities. But we've doubled that funding envelope for ASD in schools alone. We've more than doubled the mental health envelope. As you know, many children may also have mental health challenges, that adversity, in addition to exceptionalities that can manifest, like ASD.

There's the Special Education Grant, which is part of the \$3.1-billion figure. That has risen by about 3% this year since last year. We recognize that institutional supports are important, but there are obviously auxiliary supports that could happen when it comes to access to speech pathologists or psychologists or other supports that exist within communities for institutional access to those services.

We think that all of this is critical to improving student success.

Just on a personal level, an element that gets lost in the discourse is—when it comes to the opportunity for many children who have exceptionalities in the context of employment, I think many of their families would like us all to include them as part of the discourse about giving them the dignity of work, because for many, they can. You'll talk to employers and they'll say that they're amazing at what they do in specific roles. I've already started a discussion with a variety of stakeholders in this respect to let them know that I'd like to further champion working with the private sector and non-profits, among others—the public sector—to incent and support them in hiring more kids with that exceptionality, because they

will prove in short order that they can do amazing things in the workforce. Obviously, that doesn't apply for everyone.

In schools, we're investing more. Obviously, we'll be reviewing the task force, as we already are, to look at any additional elements that could be integrated to support these kids, because as all members have recognized, I think reasonably, there is a changing profile of kids in class—more violence and difficulty. I think we, as a government, have a responsibility to arm our teachers with better de-escalation training, which we're doing—support for principals in their capacities, and support in the classroom with more EAs and EWs.

Given the ratification of the CUPE deal yesterday, which obviously we're pleased with—and I extend my gratitude to both CUPE and the trustees' association for their professionalism through that process. About 1,000 staff, many of which are EAs, have been restored, 300 of whom will provide critical supports for kids with exceptionalities. We think adding more capacity also is going to play an important role. That was a win-win scenario that the government felt was important and obviously the union felt was important as well.

Mr. Stan Cho: There's some good news there.

I want to switch gears a little bit and talk about ECE. One of the few people watching this is my mother, who was an ECE for many decades, and she worked very hard at that.

Child care in Willowdale, as I mentioned, is a huge issue—more specifically, the lack of spaces. I'm wondering how the investments that are made into the infrastructure, or providing more child care spaces—can we get some more details on that? When can we expect some relief for the residents of Willowdale?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the context of child care?

Mr. Stan Cho: Yes, in the context of child care. What are we doing to create those spaces?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm pleased that, in Toronto, if I recall correctly, 3,000 child care spaces were created, and 19,000 broadly. I think that is an important first step in recognizing that the plan to incent independent child care operators to grow, improving the competitiveness—maintaining the wage enhancement, among others, has done that—in addition to institutional daycare for those families who choose, for example, in-school or EarlyON programs, many of which help low-income and new Canadians, vulnerable people. So we think it's really important that we maintain that and perhaps even liberalize access to those programs for many low-income folks in the province.

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But I will say this: When it comes to Toronto specifically, we're working with our municipal partners. We've maintained a commitment to put 80% of capital on the table irrespective of if they match the 20%. We think that's going to really help encourage them to utilize those dollars. I have every confidence, member, that the city and all municipalities will utilize 100% of the dollars available, as they should, to put it to work, to help expand child care in places like Willowdale.

I think in Willowdale, perhaps more than others, you could make the argument that the cost of living is rather high, and it's rising. That's a phenomenon that was inherited, but it is what it is. It's a challenge we have to contend with. That's why I feel that the child care tax credit is really critical to give those families some mobility, some additional fiscal flexibility—put a few more bucks in their pockets. I think that could help them choose the child care that works best for their child.

Deputy, do you have anything you'd like to add on this?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I would defer to Paul Bloye, who is our director of capital program branch, to perhaps add a few details.

Mr. Paul Bloye: Hi. I'm Paul Bloye, the director of capital program branch. I just wanted to further say that within the city of Toronto, they had the opportunity to identify previously approved capital child care projects that they were willing to continue using their operating funding for. Of the 51 projects that had been approved, the city had agreed to support 49 of those 51, with the remaining two being withdrawn by the school board as they determined that they didn't have enough space within the existing facility for the child care centres.

In addition to that, the four Toronto-area boards have also submitted additional child care projects as part of the latest round of capital priorities projects.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you for that, Mr. Bloye.

Minister—time check, Chair, by the way? Do I have—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): The time check is: You have five minutes.

Mr. Stan Cho: I don't think we often deep-dive enough into the CARE tax credit program, because there are a lot of things in there that are really going to help child care service providers at the ground level. You mentioned the wage enhancement. The wage enhancement is something I know that my mother, when she ran a daycare—she has since retired—would have really put to good use. But I'm wondering, Minister, if you or maybe the deputy can shed some light on how you expect that wage enhancement—well, first of all, maybe we could, for the committee members' sake, explain what that wage enhancement is and how that is intended to help parents get back into the workforce.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Sure. I will definitely defer to the deputy, or rather to Ms. Fuller, in the context of specifics on the wage enhancement, which has been maintained. But I'll just say that the child care tax credit—why I really fundamentally support it, both in its application and in principle, is because I think the government is signalling that we believe parents are best positioned to spend their money. It's a cultural change in the government, and that's a contrast amongst the parties. It also recognizes that it's what is best suited for children, that many want to look at child care in centres, in home care, as well as camps and any other service that you can envisage. So it provides that flexibility that, really, institutional daycare does not.

I think for many families, with the changing profile of families, they can best determine how to utilize those supports. This up to 75% of eligible expenses provides a

critical mass of people with additional support that they otherwise wouldn't have. We're quite committed to seeing that program succeed, and obviously we will measure its success at the end of the fiscal year.

Ms. Fuller may have some additional perspectives.

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Absolutely. Thank you, Minister. My name is Shannon Fuller. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the early years and child care division.

To your question about the Wage Enhancement Grant, just to confirm, we are allocating \$208 million this year and next year, as the 2020 allocations have been released for the Wage Enhancement Grant and the Home Child Care Enhancement Grant funding.

Essentially, the way that it works in terms of the Wage Enhancement Grant is that eligible staff working in licensed child care, or within an agency if they are providing home child care, will see their wages increased by up to \$2 an hour. If they're working in the home-child-care context, they can receive a grant of up to \$20 per day.

A few of the steps that we've been taking in recent years to make this more accessible is to ensure that we've removed our requirement to submit a separate application associated with this, so we're really looking to streamline that and are hopeful that that is going to reach even more people.

In 2018, which is the most recent year that we have data for, 37,500 full-time equivalents—and that's important in this context because in many cases you may have two child care educators serving in a full-time equivalent position. That could be even more people who are benefiting. But also, 4,000 home child care providers have benefited from the Wage Enhancement Grant for 2018.

We look forward to continuing that, and we've heard very positive feedback from our child care educators from that perspective.

In terms of how it works from a permanent eligibility perspective, centre-based program staff and home child care visitors who work within the agencies are eligible for the grant if they have an associated base wage, excluding the prior year's wage enhancement, of less than \$27.47. That's the current—

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

Ms. Shannon Fuller: Really, we are looking here to target these two positions. A child care supervisor would be an example, and a registered early childhood educator, to your point, a home child care visitor or otherwise counted within that adult-to-child ratio are really the focus here from that perspective.

In terms of the home child care context, as I mentioned, that \$20 a day is available for home child care providers who provide an average of a full-time service—we look at that as six hours per day—and receive base daily fees of less than \$254.70.

That really provides a bit of an overview in terms of who is able to access it and how the eligibility piece works.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): And with that, I'm sorry to say you are out of time. We go to the official opposition. Ms. Stiles?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to continue on just for a moment along the lines that I was pursuing before we broke to the government side. Just to be clear, the amount that the government is providing for special education—what we are hearing from boards is that—and I saw this as a trustee for years too—the amount they’re getting, even now, even this amount you’re talking about, is not meeting the needs. What I was asking very specifically about was the predictive model—the data that the government is using—and what the government is doing—I look to the deputy minister; maybe she can help me here—to ensure that that data model is working and what the results have been. There seems to be, I would say, a disconnect between what we’re seeing on the ground and what the funding is actually covering.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: In the time in between, let us find some of our actual material. We appreciate that opportunity.

I think the grant that we’re speaking about is the component of the special education grant that we describe as the differentiated special education needs amount allocation. That is an important component. It’s a \$1.14-billion component in 2019-20; that is an increase of 0.8% over 2018-19. It’s an important component of the grant because it goes specifically to boards for the purpose of supporting students with higher special education needs.

The first foundational level of the special education grant is what the system calls SEPPA, the special education per pupil amount. That provides differentiated levels by grade: \$1,000 for children in kindergarten to grade 3; grades 4 to 8 is \$780 per pupil; and grades 9 to 12 is \$515. That is provided for the entire enrolment of a school board, and school boards are expected to use that for the students who need some form of spec ed support, which can vary anywhere from 10% to almost 20% of enrolment based on the boards’ identification processes.

What is known as the differentiated special education needs amount replaced an earlier version, which relied a little bit too much for this sector on identifying individual students’ profiles and needs, a format that proved quite onerous for students and families and school boards. So a number of years ago, what the ministry did was work with experts and develop an allocation model, based on a number of data points, that was meant to simulate and predict the presence of high-needs students in a school board’s enrolment.

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We don’t have the modelling experts with us today. I will say that the outline for that grant is available on our website in the special education paper. It’s in the funding section of our website. It’s quite a detailed paper, so it does describe the exact modelling parameters and the data sources that go into that grant.

We can bring staff in the future.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Is it being reviewed every year? How do you match that up to what the reality is each year?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: There are parts of the grant that we do review every year, and there are parts that are static. I think we would probably need some different staff expertise here to speak to the exact—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. Would you mind maybe providing something to the committee which explains that a little bit further? That’s kind of the level of depth I’m trying to get at: How does that mesh up against what we see the money being spent on every year?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Sure. We would be pleased to provide the committee with a copy of the technical paper from our website that does outline the modelling parameters.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But could we also get that information? I can go on the website, but what I’m interested in, again, is how you actually measure it each year against that year’s experience.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Right.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And then kind of related to this, I guess, is that we know that the incidence of students that are accessing special education programs and services has been increasing for a few years now. The last data released by the ministry—I think it was 2017-18—puts us at 17.6%. Can you tell me the projected incidence of students accessing special education programs and services for 2018-19?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I think we would have to check on that. Sorry.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. Can you provide that to us, please?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Do you mind just explaining the question? I might have misheard it. I may be able to—

Ms. Marit Stiles: What is the projected incidence of students accessing special education programs and/or services for 2018-19? So we’re talking about last—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right. Pardon me. I just didn’t hear it. Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. Sorry, I have a cough, so I’m going to have to suck on some lozenges here.

In the guide to the special education grant for 2019-20, the ministry included the data on students receiving special education programs and services for 2017-18, and the guide for 2018-19 included the data for 2015-16. So can you also provide the data for 2016-17 as well, which seems to be missing?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If I may, to the member—I may be, pardon me, not understanding the question. Is it the amount of students that have special education needs in the system? When you say “incidence,” I just want to make sure—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, that’s what I mean.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: There are 355,000 students with special education, which represents 17% of the population of students in the province of Ontario. Is that what you’re looking for, member?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right, but what I’m trying to get at is for those actual years, broken down each year, exactly.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay. So that was for 2017-18. It’s 355,000 for 2017-18. I couldn’t speak to the year preceding that—

Ms. Marit Stiles: That was 2017 and what?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: That was 2017-18.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, what was the number?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It was 355,000.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What per cent is that?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's 17.1%.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's 17.1%. Okay. So maybe what you could do is provide us with it year by year, going back to 2015-16.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm so sorry; it's 17.6%.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, it was 17.6% in 2017-18? You're saying it didn't change at all? It's exactly the same?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: For 2017-18, it was 17.6%. I said 17.1%; I meant to say 17.6%.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, but I'm looking for 2018-19.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that. I just wanted to provide the information I have available at my fingertips now, but we'll circle back with the other numbers.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. So I think you understand. I'm hoping you'll be able to provide that to us and to the committee. Can I get an undertaking that you'll be able to?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Sure, we'll take that back. What we do after each session is review the Hansard. We review our own notes, and we review the Hansard.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It seems like it's important. It should be pretty easily accessible, I would think. We would have that, right?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I suspect.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. Another question related to special education: The minister's advisory council on special education is a 20-member, as I understand it, advisory body that advises the minister on any matter related to the establishment and provision of special education programs and services for students with special needs. Has the advisory council reviewed your government's plans for special education? Have they met to review this?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I will defer to the deputy on the context of what has happened before. But I can assure the member that most recently—it was a week and a half ago—I discussed with my team about both setting a meeting with that group in short order and replenishing the vacancies that may exist on it. I think that's an important—

Ms. Marit Stiles: How many vacancies exist?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The details that relate to what was inherited. I'll defer to my team.

But another recommendation, specifically on the autism task force, while it is specific to ASD, relates broadly, given the discussion on special ed. It is a task force related to the implementation of in-school elements. Right now we're contending with that recommendation, the task force, with the existing framework that it lies in. It could be both; it could be one or the other. I just want you to know that we're considering both options, and there's a recommendation that has come to the ministry in the context of the creation of that. We're looking very seriously at that recommendation from the task force.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry; just to be clear: Has this advisory council met with the current minister or the previous minister since this government came to office?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: The Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education meets four times a year, twice in person. They have not met since Minister Lecce was

appointed. They have met last spring. Sam Oosterhoff joined that meeting. We have a meeting with them coming up later this month. Our staff work with the chair and the senior members of that council on an ongoing basis. We attend some of their events and that, but their formal meetings do take place at scheduled intervals and the minister is scheduled to attend their next meeting, which is toward the end of this month.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But you just said—did they only meet once in the last year already?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: They met in person last spring. I'm just trying to recall—I think it was about May.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And before that, they didn't meet?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: They haven't met in person since Minister Lecce was appointed.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But in that period, from June 2018 to the spring, they haven't met. They've only met once.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: They definitely met at least once in person. I would have to check on their meetings, when they did that virtually. But I am aware from briefings that our staff meet with them regularly. I speak with the chair and some of the members of it regularly on issues of special education. Because they do represent different constituencies in the special education community, our staff do go out to their events and meet with them in their home boards or their home organizations as well.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And I'll be meeting with them in short order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I may return another time to some questions about special education. I have some specific examples that I want to share.

But I'm going to move on to talk a little bit about an issue that I've raised previously with the minister in question period a few times, around class sizes. I think it's fair to say that the decision to increase class sizes wasn't something that your government campaigned on, and wasn't something that I remember anyone asking for. You've claimed that the government's education plans came directly from consultations, but when it comes to the class size consultations, you have refused to release the results. In fact, members of the public have actually had to go to court to try to see those submissions. Can you tell me, Minister, why you're denying Ontarians access to this information?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I think the question is dealing with one of perhaps two or three major disagreements and challenges at the labour table. Given that that is directly germane to classroom sizes—it's a discussion that's happening at all tables, if I'm not mistaken—it would be imprudent to comment further on the details which are used at that discussion.

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Ms. Marit Stiles: But I'm actually asking you from the perspective of a member of the public who has requested this information. You conduct a consultation that results in significant class size increases across this province, and members of the public, parents—I'm not talking about people at the bargaining table—are saying, "Can you please share with us the results of those consultations on

class sizes?" And you're telling me now that you can't share that because it's subject to negotiation? That doesn't make any sense to me. It's information that the public arguably paid for. How much did they pay, by the way, for those consultations, for all of the meetings—or if any meetings took place?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If I'm not mistaken, member, I will just return to the earlier comment, but it was just shy of \$1 million. That included the cellphone ban, that included STEM, that included skilled trades, it included mental health—there was a variety of subject matter in that consultation. That was one of perhaps half a dozen or more items that were consulted—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So \$1 million that the people of Ontario paid for a consultation on an issue that, to be fair, you never even ran on, right? There was no discussion during the election of, "We're thinking about increasing class sizes." And then you end up with these consultation results, but you don't want to share the information. Why not? I think that's a pretty reasonable question to ask. Why don't you want to share? Where's the transparency? Where's the accountability to the taxpayers that your government purports to care so much about?

You spent almost—I think you said just shy of—\$1 million on this consultation. This isn't the only consultation that you've spent that kind of money on, to be fair. But why deny Ontarians that information? What are you trying to hide?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're trying to protect the interests of the crown at the negotiating table, member. I appreciate that there are questions about that. However, we have an obligation to maintain a level of discretion at the table so that it doesn't impinge on our negotiating position at the table. Your question directly relates to an item that is before bargaining. I think it would be imprudent for me to comment, to be quite frank.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The comments of—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And on the consultation—

Ms. Marit Stiles: —Ontarians about the class size increases, Minister, can't be shared because it might negatively impact negotiations? That raises a lot of flags for us, and for my constituents, it would be fair to say. What is it that's so inflammatory or so dangerous? It sounds so mysterious; you know, you wonder.

To be honest, when I first heard, parents kept coming to me and saying, "Why can't we get copies of this consultation? Why won't they share this? I don't understand." I actually thought, "Maybe this is really not such a big deal." Why would it be? But the fact that you're trying so hard to prevent people from accessing it leads us to have a lot of questions.

Anyway, I'm going to move on. It's clear we're not going to get that here. It's very disappointing.

Many of us in the opposition have heard a lot, I think that's fair to say, about the impact of these class size changes. We've heard them from parents. We've heard them from students. We've heard them from teachers and education workers who have lost their jobs as a result.

I have to say, what really moves me the most are the students who are worried about missing the courses they

so desperately need to actually graduate or to get into the programs that they need to or who are in classrooms that are so full they can barely move.

I've received so many messages, I just thought I would bring a few. I will actually share these with the minister. I don't have copies with me—but I will share them with the minister—because there are so many. I just asked somebody to help me compile some. I'm going to give you a few examples.

The first one relates to special needs. Leilah is a parent who reached out to my office. Her child happens to have autism. Her in-class support has been completely eliminated thanks to your class size changes and your funding cuts. The school lost 2.5 EAs, so it's not just Leilah's child who is going to suffer; it's the other students with autism in the school as well.

Here's one that's more related: Sheila is a high school drama teacher who has had her classes gutted thanks to your changes. She is now being forced to teach a grade 10, 11 and 12—stacked, I guess—combined class with way too many kids in it. What do you say to teachers like Sheila? I'm just going to plant that there, because I've got a few more.

Elise also contacted my office. Her child has a learning disability and needs smaller classes with lots of quiet time to focus, but unfortunately, your changes mean that that's impossible now. Last year, she was on an honour roll because she had the support of teachers she liked and classrooms that worked for her—this is in her mother's words—and this year she is struggling to keep up. I want to know what you have to say to Elise's child, whom you have made life worse for.

Janis is a parent whose child goes to a rural school in northern Ontario. At their school, her child wants to take music and an extra science class to help her get into university, but because of your class size changes, the classes they need to graduate are only offered once a year, and that means no changes to timetables.

These are all examples specifically of changes that have happened because of the class size averages, the impact of that. Again, I just want to remind you and anybody who is listening or watching that that's just year one. That's just year one of four years of cuts.

What her mother said to me was, "Do you not think they're worth investing in?"

There are a number of other ones. I recently heard from Kim. She's in grade 11 right now. Kim's brother lost his grade 10 French immersion science class. That was a class that she, because she's just a year ahead of him, was able to take just a few months ago. How can you say that these class size changes aren't making life worse for Kim and her brother?

This is why the students all walked out, and they've walked out a couple of times from school, because—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: They really want to know. They're concerned about not just themselves, but about future generations.

Minister, I'd just like to ask you to maybe start to respond to that. Maybe we can return to it again later.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: For Sheila, for Kim, for Elise, for Janis—I think that for all of them, one of the questions from the parents was, “Is my child worth investing in?” and the answer is yes.

In the context of the CUPE deal, I think one thing that should provide some sense of confidence for those families, for those students and their families, is that 1,300 additional EAs, clerical workers and support staff are being restored in the province of Ontario, potentially in those boards. That will benefit front-line services for the child with exceptionalities—the special education child. The fact that hundreds, literally, perhaps, hundreds and hundreds of EAs are being brought back into the front line—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But that's not going to teach those courses that they've missed, either. I just listed to you, Minister, a number of courses that have been lost.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say time is up. We go now to the government. Ms. Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Hi, Minister, and welcome back to committee. I'm glad to have you here.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: As you know, my riding is Barrie-Innisfil. We're part of the many ridings across this province that do have a skills shortage. But when I talk to a lot of former students and constituents in my riding, they disclose to me what types of things they're going through.

When I talk to a lot of parents, they say their children have racked up debt to a degree that they were not passionate about.

When I asked their children about why you would pursue a career that you were not maybe as mentally invested in—and now they're working to pay off that degree that they were not really as mentally invested in. When I asked them about this, they said, “Back in school, if I knew that there were other avenues and if there wasn't such a stigma with the skilled trades, I may have pursued that.” Instead, now they're stuck with half a degree in a profession they're not as stimulated in, don't feel so passionate for, and now are looking to change their career.

I was wondering if you can speak to what in the government is being done, both at the elementary level and at the secondary level, to allow more students the options to pursue these types of avenues, and also in terms of second career development as well. If it doesn't turn out for a student and they have to go back, what are some of the second career options for them?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you. I know you are strong advocate especially for more women in the trades. I stand with you in that aim, to try to better equalize that experience, given that the differential is dramatic and unacceptable.

What's interesting in Ontario vis-à-vis the national landscape is that the STEM-related careers have just over 10% of a higher level of need in the economy—18% for job openings above the national average in the context of STEM-related occupations or jobs that exist or will exist.

I think what that shows to you and to all of us is that STEM-related industries in the new economy are critical, full stop.

But in Ontario it actually is an elevated level, probably because we benefit from the tech triangle hailing proudly from Cambridge all the way to Kitchener-Waterloo and into York region, where there is incredible ingenuity happening, and everything in between and beyond, I'm sure—Niagara, no doubt. But particularly in that triangle, I think there is a lot of innovation happening and an opportunity to capitalize on that when it comes to that market shift.

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We want to make sure that there are more people advancing in STEM-related sectors. The first part of it is from the curriculum perspective, making sure that STEM is embedded as much as possible, and we're doing that, especially through the math revamp that's happening currently that will be done in the spring and implemented in September of 2020.

So there are curriculum components, but I think that the second aspect is creating critical career paths. That happens with our guidance counsellors, in partnership with them. It happens with our careers course, the grade 10 mandatory careers course, that's now, for the first time really, in a demonstrable way, providing road maps and journeys for young people to consider themselves, both in the skilled trades and the high-wage tech industries as well as STEM-related sectors.

I think your point is well taken, and more must be done. I think we've moved the yardstick forward a lot in the last 14- or 15-odd months, but I know there's more to do in this respect because we have a skilled trades shortage, and then we have an acute shortage of other skilled workers in the economy. When I have met with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—I had a really insightful round table with them about two weeks ago with a variety of employers, job creators, people on the front lines, and non-profit—largely private sector, but both—and I'll even be meeting with private sector unions, among others, just to hear their perspective about how we can grow the talent, the knowledge economy in this country as we see a shift in the type of industries that are happening.

Automation, as I mentioned, can and will displace jobs. The question is: How do we, in the early years, really encourage young people to consider jobs that exist today and in the future, and I'd use the expression that I have not coined, but we want to go where the puck is going, in this respect. So we're going to continue to do that, and obviously initiatives you've brought forth to the ministry help empower us to do our job better and to give young people critical paths to successful, high-wage jobs.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for that, Minister. If I could just ask you one last question before I pass it on to my colleague: It's sort of a two-part question. One is that I had another former student that walked up to me. He said that the only reason they got into the auto sector was because they had an elective in their last year of high school. They were streamed along—you know, university

stream—and then in the last year they happened to have an elective. They chose to go into the automotive shop that they had in their school and as a result are now in a career that way. For that individual, great success, but if they'd known earlier—they wished that there was something like that. Can you speak to some of the pathways and programming that would allow educating students at a younger age on those types of avenues?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. Just last week we made the skilled-major announcement, a program that we expanded by just over \$10 million over the former Liberal government. The money is essentially to encourage more young people to pursue skilled trades jobs and pathways in high school and beyond. It works. We met two really inspiring young women who expressed to us—welders, certainly a minority in that sector, and they said that, first off, it takes government and leadership, people within some level of political authority, among others, to champion the cause for them. People want to see themselves reflected in those industries, so the better we can do, even from an advertising perspective, just subconsciously making sure that there is a greater level of diversity in how we profile the trades is critical, and how we market them—that's part of it.

The second thing is how we work with guidance counsellors and educators, particularly in those STEM sectors, to say that there may be some great pathways there. Martyn Beckett, I think, will certainly have perspectives on this, given his work on this file, so if you'd permit me, I'd like to turn it over to him.

Mr. Martyn Beckett: Thank you, Minister. I think one of the things that I would comment on to start that we've changed this year is the funding that we've put in place for the leaders of experiential learning. We fund one of those for every school board in the province. We've asked them this year to focus their efforts on grades 7 through 12. We want students at the elementary level to become aware of opportunities in the skilled trades and apprenticeship and be aware of STEM fields.

By way of example of how that funding is used to support experiential learning, I was at one of the local colleges a couple of weeks ago. The five local school boards had all come together, and the college was offering training in skilled trades and apprenticeship to a group of 600 girls from grades 6, 7 and 8. That is all about getting students at the elementary level aware of and exposed to the skilled trades and apprenticeship. They had a truly motivational speaker that I had the opportunity to listen to—she's 22 years old, and she is an inventor and she has done very well for herself financially—to give the students some idea of the kind of motivation they can develop and move forward.

As we look at the other opportunities, we provide support to Skills Ontario. Skills Ontario has been a fantastic partner. They provide opportunities for students for exposure in elementary. I think they're probably best known for their boat challenge, where students are required to build a boat out of cardboard, and then they race these boats in a swimming pool. These competitions are offered by Skills Ontario around the province during

the course of the school year. It's very well received. It gets kids thinking at a very young age about what the things are that they could do with their minds and their hands as they move forward.

Skills Ontario is also well known for their Ontario skills challenge that they have held at the Toronto Congress Centre.

I do want to comment that while the students who are there in the Skills Ontario challenge are actively engaged in the challenges—which are great to watch; they are open to the general public and they are open to other students. Schools take students by the busload to see what their colleague students are doing with a lathe, with food science, with brickwork, with aviation—you name the area. They also hold, as a part of that particular Skills Ontario challenge, a one-day conference devoted entirely to young women, exposing them to the trades in an all-females-only format.

They try on several different formats, to make sure that they're getting information to students at a young age, that they're exposing students to a variety of opportunities and high-wage, high-skill positions that are available in the skilled trades, and they pay special attention to the young women, to make sure that they're aware of those opportunities as well.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you. I just wanted to thank you for the work you've been doing on this. It has a direct impact on my riding.

I also wanted to pass it on to my colleague to ask some questions.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Sorry about that.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: That's okay.

I wanted to thank the minister for his time today, as well as your ministry colleagues. You're doing a great job.

Minister, I know this is a very complex file. I think you're doing very well. I'm grateful to be sitting on this committee today. If one were to only listen to what members of the opposition are saying, or to the media, people wouldn't realize the huge investments that are being made. I can speak to Waterloo Catholic District School Board, which is overall getting more money this year than it did last year. This has been a really great opportunity, I think, for those watching at home, or wherever they are, to actually hear about the huge investments that are being made this year versus last year. So thank you to the four of you for that.

Minister, you touched on STEM when my colleague asked about skilled trades. If I may go further into that, specifically mathematics—I know, Minister, you're familiar with the fact that my father is an immigrant from Trinidad. He had schooling through the British school system there. He would remark at times on how our math here, the way it's taught, the level may not be equivalent to that of other countries.

In speaking with parents in my new role as an MPP, I've heard the same, especially from parents who are immigrants. Seeing the age of their child, and the level at

which they can perform math and their understanding of math, it's quite drastically different, sometimes, when you're comparing Ontario to other places in the world.

Minister, if you could elaborate on some of the changes that I understand we're making when it comes to our math curriculum, and how we're strengthening math in the province, so that we can see our children succeed in the future—because math really does play such a huge role in so many different jobs and careers.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you. I know you wear many hats as a parent as well, and as an advocate.

It's interesting. The framing of your question was making sure that the facts permeate the debate. You mentioned that the Catholic board in Waterloo's funding is up. In the Waterloo district school board, there are no redundancies at all. That's something that I wish was more of a front-page, top-of-the-fold story as well, but thank you for mentioning that to the committee.

What I will say is, the overall critical mass, I think, if I'm not mistaken—a significant amount of the Catholic board—but anyway, the point is, I accept that point.

1700

In the context of math, I think there are a few things that need to be said. The first is the rationale for a long-term four-year investment. Obviously math scores have effectively stagnated, if I could be generous. They're unacceptable. I hear this from Canadians of all experiences, but it's interesting because I would add—it's anecdotal; it's not scientific—that a lot of immigrant families are saying to me, "I find it subpar from the nation I left, to come to a country that is ostensibly more prosperous, more free and more democratic." I often hear that, and it's curious to hear. It doesn't make sense in some respects, so obviously we have to up our game in the context of how we teach it from a pedagogical perspective, and then what we teach. We're doing both.

We think that teachers play a critical role. I think an overwhelming amount of them care—I think they all care deeply—about their kids, but I think a lot of them are very committed to professional development. The ones I know in my family, among others, will say to me, "I do PD all the time. We're constantly committed to that." I think the fact that the accredited courses were subsidized for mathematics—we provided a bit of an incentive, to be quite frank, because we're trying to encourage more uptake of that course—is important. We're supporting investing in them, with more professional development as well as more accreditation of courses.

The second aspect is the kids themselves. There are a few things that I think go down in the context of broader math and STEM. You look at the skill sets in computing, coding and computational thinking. These are so important in the current economy, the modern economy, so there's a real emphasis on strengthening those elements, as well, that are absolutely related to math and numeracy.

When I met at round tables, at the most critical one with the Ontario chamber, the overwhelming consensus is to integrate numeracy and financial literacy and make math a priority earlier. Don't wait for grade 10, for example, to

mandate the financial literacy. I think that was a fair point. How could we front-end-load that knowledge? We are, in some respects; I accept that there needs to be more done to integrate and strengthen math. The four-year math strategy, the \$200-million investment, we think, is going to do that, because it's really touching upon all the pillars that are necessary to strengthen and improve math scores.

For me, it's not even just the abstraction of the math score; it's about the application in life. It's about making mathematics and financial literacy relevant to people every day. We talked about it earlier. One of the members spoke about credit card responsibility and credit and personal budgeting, and I think it's amazing that for the first time in the grade 10 careers curriculum, it's mandated—you can't get a secondary diploma if you do not do, as I mentioned, a budget for the year after school. Those types of initiatives are things that really excite me, because I think they're working. It's what families overwhelmingly want. It's what kids need.

I'll return to you, but if you want any further clarity, I know Mr. Beckett would probably be well positioned to comment further on it.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Sure.

Mr. Martyn Beckett: Thank you, Minister. I'm happy to make a couple of additional comments. Part of this year's funding is supporting up to 8,000 additional qualifications courses for teachers who are currently in practice in the classroom. That's a \$4-million investment. We'll be working with school boards. The way that works is that the teacher completes the additional qualification in mathematics, and then we support the school board with the funding after the fact to ensure that the accountability is there and they've completed the course and they can carry the learning into their classroom.

We also this year invested in the Summer Learning Program. That was a \$6-million investment that we do for school boards to help mitigate summer learning loss in both literacy and numeracy. The way boards implement that around the province is to run things like summer math camp. They could be running a robotics camp over the course of the summer, or literacy camps, and the students will do a combination of school-based literacy or mathematics activities and then, along with that, be involved in some outside fitness activities as well, so it's a combination.

The other thing I would want to comment on in math which I think has had a very high success rate has been TVO's involvement in a tool called Mathify. It used to be called Homework Help; it was rebranded to be called Mathify, and it's in place this year. Funding for Mathify is in the range of about \$4 million. The French version of the tool, on the French side, is called Eurêka!, and that supports students in the French language with mathematics support.

What that provides, interestingly, is a real live tutor at the end of a computer who tutors the student in real time and whom the student can actually engage with and speak with while they are online with that tutor. So they can bring their mathematics problems that they're struggling

with or something they're curious about to a tutor, the tutor will support them, and then they can move on with their homework.

One thing we have seen in talking with TVO is that students find that they will have certain degree of success with a given tutor and they'll ask for the same tutor when they go back on the site, and that is possible. If the tutor is logged in for that period of time, the student can log in with that tutor and get support for their homework.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: That's really wonderful to hear that. It's interesting because, with that discovery math that we saw in the curriculum before and knowing other parents who struggled to understand that math to help their child with his or her homework—and then you found the situation where parents who could afford to send their child to Kumon or other type of tutoring, they then had the advantage. So we talk about equity in the school boards. When you have this discovery math that parents can't help their children with at home, we don't see equity anymore. We see parents who can afford to put their kids in tutoring, and now their children are succeeding, and those who can't afford that aren't.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see this as really levelling the playing field when it comes to that. Minister, you mentioned great teachers; I'm going to echo that. I had great teachers. Our class sizes were bigger when I was in school, but I had great, fantastic teachers. So whoever is watching, if you taught me, thank you for that.

The financial literacy aspect is so key, because we are seeing students leaving school not knowing how to balance a chequebook. I understand that I have 20 seconds at this point; I may not leave with a question, but I do want to say that it is wonderful to see financial literacy. I have heard feedback from parents in Cambridge, which I do share with you, Minister. These are things that are much needed and much appreciated by parents across Cambridge and across the province, I'm sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): We'll go to the official opposition. Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Before I continue with my questions, I just want to reflect a little on some of the things the minister said before we went to the government side, because the minister was talking a lot about these people that I mentioned—Leilah, Sheila, Elise, Janis—who are really a random sample of the many, many people who we've heard from, whose kids have been impacted by this government's cuts. Then to have the minister say, "Well, it's okay, because we're going to bring a couple of EAs back into the classroom because we settled with CUPE. We backed off on a few of our cuts"—I feel like we and Elise and Leilah and Sheila and Janis are expected to be grateful for that. They didn't ask for this to start at all, Minister. They did not ask for this. These students, these parents, are not going to be grateful because you were forced to back away from a few little cuts when they are

still going to see 10,000 teaching positions removed from their schools as a result of your class-size-average increases, and the fact that you're not replacing people who retire. Your plan cost these students many courses—and I'm going to talk to you a little about that. Also, where the courses haven't been cut, many students are now experiencing larger class sizes, less access to resources and many, many stacked courses, which I know has always been a reality in some smaller schools but is now just completely out of control.

I want to go to some specifics, if I may. I do have one question I want to ask you, though: Can you tell us the estimated annual savings? Because ultimately, this is about the government saving money, right? Increasing class sizes and reducing the number of teachers in Ontario by 10,000, which is the Financial Accountability Officer's own numbers, is about cutting costs. We know that. You keep saying that this is about balancing your budget.

I want to know what the estimated annual savings for this government are for changes in grades 4 to 8—elementary—overall, with the average class size funding from previous 23.84:1, increasing it to 24.5:1. Because we know that it is not just high school students—I'm going to get to the high schools, but I want to talk about grades 4 to 8 first.

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Hon. Stephen Lecce: Understood. If I may, there are roughly 25,000 EAs in the classroom in Ontario, of which I would submit that 1,300, which includes EAs, among other critical supports, is a small number; it's roughly just over a 5% increase in capacity. I wouldn't minimize that, actually. I think many families will benefit from those critical supports.

With respect to the question: As you're aware, the budget document will present the fiscal framework. I'd refer you to that. Tomorrow we have the fall economic statement, as I understand. There will be further updates in that, so I'd refer you to that document tomorrow, not a month from now.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You'll be able to provide us with that information tomorrow?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It will be self-evident tomorrow—

Ms. Marit Stiles: The savings? No, but I want it specifically with regard to that piece.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Right, and I would refer you to the budget document and to tomorrow's fall economic statement. That could provide at least a quarterly update on where we're at in the context of our expenditure in the ministry.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Just to make sure you understand, I'm asking specifically about the class size changes from grades 4 to 8 and what the savings are as a result of that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I understand the question, and I will refer you to the budget document. As you're aware, for public knowledge, the increase from grades 4 to 8 in classrooms is roughly 0.8%—up to 0.8%. There's no change from kindergarten to grade 3.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And that's not insignificant.

I do also just want to say, with reference to your initial comment there, again, I don't really think that you should be asking me or the people of this province to be grateful for putting back the positions that you cut. Okay? Just to be clear.

You made a good point. You like to play out these averages. We know that averages in class sizes are applied in a funny way, so when people hear—and it's convenient to spin that: "It's only ever going to be 28 to 1." But the reality is that what we end up seeing, across boards, class sizes that get much, much higher—in the 40s. That is what we are consistently seeing and hearing now.

I want to ask the minister a few questions. One is: What class size average would you consider too big? Let's just say high school, generally. Thirty? Is 30 too big?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Member, I think what informs me is the experience on the ground. I recall commentary made by the chair of the Hamilton Catholic board, who, in fact, said—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You mentioned that yesterday.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, and—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You mentioned that yesterday. I don't have a lot of time here.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I know, but, Chair, if I could just respond.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. So 30—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: He said that there are fewer classes this year over 30 than there were last year. I think his commentary should be noted in the public record.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right. So again—that's great, I guess, but 30 is still actually really large in some courses.

Minister, if you won't answer me on 30, maybe we could try 40. Is 40 students in a class in high school too large?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Where we land on classroom sizes, provincial averages and/or caps, is a matter of public negotiation. As I mentioned earlier, because the question you're asking—while I appreciate the question, it is a question that is material to the negotiations. I understand what you're doing in the sense of, I appreciate the question, but I am also asking the committee to appreciate the unique challenge I'm in while trying to answer political questions while also having responsibility to my legal counsel not to impinge on their ability to do their job as representatives of the crown. That would be my response to that question and to every question that deals with the labour negotiations that are active today with all teacher tables.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, I'm sorry this is difficult for you. I'm sorry that bargaining is difficult for you. Do you have any concept of how many high school students in our province right now are in classes of 40, 42 or 45? It's not very pleasant for them, let me tell you. If I may—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to answer the question—

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, no, please. Let me just finish my point. You're in a class, let's just say, of 42, in your English class, and you're in grade 11 and you're at Rosedale Heights School—just the latest from one of the people who recently contacted me. If you're a student in

that class, you're hearing right now from this minister that that issue of whether or not your class is going to increase again next year—because right now, it is planned to increase next year and the year after that and the year after that. They are expected now to just be okay with the fact that they're putting up with this because they are being used as pawns in bargaining by your government. I wonder how you think they feel right now, hearing that.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just with respect to your comments, I don't think that bargaining with labour impacts are particularly difficult on me. I think they're difficult on families who are in a cyclical reality of having to go through scrambling for child care on the Sundays before deadline bargaining, which is why I've encouraged the parties to stay at the table so that we can get a deal. I think—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You have a responsibility to the table too, Minister. From what I hear, you have not actually personally been at the table.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: My negotiators are acting in good faith with their lawyers with one mission, which is to keep kids in class—one I hope we would all have unity of purpose to achieve.

With respect to classroom sizes, we have tabled, for OSSTF, an offering that I think is reasonable: to go from 20 years of a provincialized funded average to 25. The discussions about the implementation of where that could land at the end of the discussion—

Ms. Marit Stiles: You're using our children as your bargaining chips. It's outrageous.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Ms. Stiles, sorry. If he could finish.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. I've tabled a proposal that I think is reasonable, one that moves the yardstick forward to incent them to stay at the table, to demonstrate a seriousness and a constructiveness.

With respect to my practice to date, we have got a now-ratified, negotiated settlement with CUPE—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, I'm not asking about anything related to CUPE. We're speaking right now about class sizes.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You don't want to speak about the successes of our labour negotiations to date?

Ms. Marit Stiles: No. I would like to continue on, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think it's important to highlight the fact that we were able to get a negotiated settlement, working in good faith with CUPE. That was an important proof positive that our government can get—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, the federal election didn't hurt.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Pardon?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I said that the federal election didn't hurt that one, I suppose.

Anyway, Minister, I just want to go on, because honestly, I know you keep saying that, but let's just be clear too: As I understand it, since you're throwing it out there, you actually also proposed to OSSTF that you would remove the class size cap, which means that classes

could be, what—and I already asked you; you won't tell me what's too big, but they could be 45 or they could be 50 students. Where does it end? To be fair, you're not telling the whole story there.

I want to share some stuff with you—and I can make copies of these for you, if that's helpful. I have some examples of classes that have been increased really dramatically, which we've just been talking about; but I also want to talk about the impact of those class size averages on courses. I mentioned it a few times, but we are losing courses.

I thought it was interesting when the member opposite—you've been talking all week about SHSMs and about focusing on trades. I have to say: Yes, we all agree, right? My riding has a very high number of people who work in the skilled trades. We know that we need to increase those numbers and we know that we need to replenish and that we need more of our students moving into the trades. But the impact of your cuts is that those courses are being lost. I can't understand how we end up in a place where students can meet the requirements of those specialist high skills major programs when they're losing the electives they need.

For example, if you need a construction engineering technology course to be part of a SHSM, and that course is gone, how are you going—it's just at complete odds with the reality of what we're seeing in the communities.

I'm going to give you some examples of courses that have been cut. For example, at Lorne Park, they lost the technological design course. They lost the construction engineering technology course. They lost a lot of courses. They lost advanced functions in grade 12, they lost enhanced math in grade 10 and they lost computer programming in grade 12—I could go on and on, and I will. I will share that.

Brampton Centennial Secondary School: They lost courses like college preparation physics, grade 12 essential English, environment and resource management, and computer tech. They lost a lot of courses. They also lost technological design at the college and university level.

I have here a very big list from the TDSB—which is the fourth-largest board in North America. So it's not surprising it's hefty. This actually includes not just courses that were cancelled this year but also all the courses that have increased in size or been combined. And it's publicly available to anyone who wants to check it out. It's very lengthy—but I'm just going through and thinking about some of the issues that were raised by the members opposite.

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Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute: They lost grade 12 construction technology. That's not being offered there anymore.

Birchmount Park Collegiate Institute lost grade 10 technology manufacturing. That was—

Ms. Doly Begum: They came to me for that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, did they? Yes, there you go. See? We're hearing from the students about this.

Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute lost grade 11 mathematics. Workplace mathematics is a course that seems to have been lost in most of the schools.

Central Tech, which is a school not too far from here, had a cancellation of the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Programs, which is going to result in fewer experiential learning and apprenticeship opportunities for students. I'm just flipping through. It's so extensive.

Danforth technical lost grade 11 construction technology, and electrical and network cabling. Danforth tech also lost grade 9 construction technology, and business leadership: management fundamentals.

David and Mary Thomson Collegiate Institute lost grade 12 mathematics—workplace mathematics again. They lost business leadership: management fundamentals. It goes on and on.

Norman Bethune lost transportation technology courses.

I'm only at the Ds, and I have been skipping over a lot of the courses that were cancelled. But also, so many of these courses are continuing with dramatically larger class sizes. This is the result of your cuts, and I don't think anybody wants to hear you say that this was just part of a bargaining tactic. Either you are going to back off of your increase to 28 because it's the right thing to do, or you're not, and it's policy. This is your one of four, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the comment. Just a few points: The first is, the specialist high skills major announcement that was announced last week, member, includes an additional 120 new programs in 710 schools—2,100 programs across the province. There are more offerings this year than there have ever been in the province when it comes to the high skills and the skilled trades. That's important.

The second is that when it comes to when we introduce STEM broadly in the elementary system, for the first time we're putting a great emphasis in both grades 7 and 8, in the early years, all the way to 12. I think the curriculum is the common denominator that ensures all young people are getting access to some of those core competencies. I would want to highlight that over 50,000 students this year—more students than ever before—will benefit from the specialist high skills major program that our government expanded investments for by roughly \$10 million more than at the peak of spending under the former government.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, 120 new offerings in SHSM—I heard the announcement—enhancements of curriculum: None of it means anything if there aren't teachers to teach it. A curriculum is just paper unless you have people in classrooms to teach it. To me, this is saying that you have just confirmed that this is not changing.

With regard to the SHSM offerings, I was a school board trustee; I think I know a little bit about how those programs are offered. They require access to courses that we're seeing cut, and not just in skilled trades, by the way, but in many other areas. We are seeing those courses cancelled. You can talk about it all you want to, but it means nothing unless you actually invest in the people

who are going to provide the education. Anyway, I'm going to move on. That's unfortunate.

I want to talk a bit about capital funding and school repairs. Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay, I'll start this, because the MPP for Willowdale did ask a few questions related to capital repairs, and I thought they were interesting. The Liberals allowed—it's clear. There was already an almost \$6-billion capital repair backlog, as I seem to recall, under the previous Conservative government years, but boy, it went bananas under the Liberals. We know that. It went up to almost \$16 billion, which is where it's at now.

It was a big part of the 2018 provincial election. I don't recall it coming up in your campaign, but I do remember a number of government MPPs who were then candidates—I don't know if you signed this—who signed the Fix Our Schools pledge to do something about that.

Despite that, one of the first things that your government did was to cut \$100 million—I think you know what I'm talking about here—that was earmarked to go to school repairs. Can you explain to me why?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Member, if you're referring to the green fund, you will know that 97% of those funds were expended. Are you aware of that fact?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, but you made a big deal about cancelling it, and then you found out that they spent some of it.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just so I'm clear, Chair, you were cognizant in your question that 97 cents on the dollar was expended, but you didn't acknowledge that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But I'm saying—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to be clear.

Ms. Marit Stiles: —going forward, that money is not there for capital repairs, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You didn't say that. You posed another question with a half-truth, and I think that's regrettable for the committee members.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You knew it was 97 cents that was expended.

Ms. Marit Stiles: As I recall it, that was announced and then we all had to dig to find out that some of the schools had already spent it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: You had to come up with the money.

But what I really want to know is, looking back on that decision, do you think it was the right thing to do, to roll back the clock not only on climate action, but by scrapping cap-and-trade, to forgo the revenue that was pretty small but badly needed for school repairs? Do you think it was worthwhile, and it's worthwhile today?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I believe that climate change is real. I also believe, member, that putting money back in the pockets of working families, the very constituents—middle-class residents—you represent, is very much in the public interest. I think taxing people well above their

means, taking money out of working people, increasing the price of groceries, electricity and home heating is absolutely incongruous with any responsible government that's trying to make life affordable while protecting the environment.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But just to be clear, my constituents would rather that money was going now into fixing schools so their children did not have to—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I apologize to both of you. Time is up.

We go to the government. Mr. Oosterhoff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you, again, Minister. It's a pleasure to be back here. I appreciate you taking the time to answer so many questions. I know we've been spending quite a few hours now here at estimates, and I look forward to the hours to come.

My question is with regard to an announcement that we made—and I had the great privilege of being alongside you at this announcement, as well as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, from northern Ontario—when we were at the plowing match.

I know that we were also able to participate in announcing a reciprocal funding agreement with the Indigenous partners that have worked so diligently with the ministry, and I want to commend the ministry on the excellent work that has been done bringing forward a reciprocal education approach. This is one of the most important relationships, as a ministry, that we can have, of course: building strong connections with Indigenous partners in education. I know it's something that you care about, that the former minister also cared about, and that our government recognizes as vital moving forward.

As we have committed to supporting Indigenous student achievement and well-being, we know that improving access to Indigenous education is key. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about the reciprocal education approach, and the agreement that was signed, and how this will help reduce barriers for First Nations students and their parents when they make the important choice about which school system best fits their child's needs.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you; I appreciate that. I am joined by Denise Dwyer, an ADM, who will have perspective, perhaps, on this. But I think it actually is a fairly transformative initiative of the government of Ontario.

Just to define the problem for folks: There was a lack of interoperability, or a seamless transition, for students who were on-reserve to go to a school off-reserve, and the opposite could be true—a student in a community who wanted access to culturally appropriate Indigenous education. We believe we have a responsibility to the First Nations, Inuit and Métis in this country. We obviously take that responsibility very seriously, which is why the reciprocal education approach was so important to get that announced, as I did with the Indigenous Affairs minister at the Nipissing First Nation a month or two ago. It's pretty transformative in what it does.

What it really effectively does is it breaks down the red tape and the true, legitimate, bona fide barriers that

literally impeded young people, young First Nation children, in this province, from accessing education. It seems inconceivable to someone at home—and maybe it isn't—that the system, from a systemic perspective, created those barriers. But we unlocked them, we've removed them, and what we've done is created a provincial framework with a funding model that works for these kids so that no longer will a First Nations community and/or a board of education have to spend weeks or months negotiating and debating the per-pupil cost. Now we've provided that framework.

1730

Every child, who we want to see—as you know, one of the fastest-growing youth demographics is First Nations, Inuit and Métis. I see tremendous opportunity for them. Yet there are vast levels of disparity when it comes to income and opportunity and unemployment. I think that's really a sad reflection that we all have to be committed to remediating. What we're doing in the first part of that is ensuring that education is accessible and removing any of the barriers that could exist that impede young people's ability to get access to education. So we've done that.

We've also announced the Indigenous Graduation Coach Program, which is part of our efforts to help young people through their journey of learning in life.

Culturally appropriate education is important. That's why there are new Indigenous courses—over 10 courses, if I recall correctly—that have been offered to students in the province. We've actually mandated elevated levels of awareness at the elementary levels of education in the context of our responsibility to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, of their role in history, and another course—social studies courses.

We're taking it seriously. I'm very proud of the work and of the team that has been working on this for many years. I know that for Ms. Dwyer and others it was a very important day.

When I went to meet with the various elders and Indigenous leaders with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs a month or two ago, I can assure you that the feedback from the various chiefs, the Grand Chief and many others, was an expression of a sense of peace, that we're finally in a place where young people now can advance their skills and get access to education. I think they're quite pleased to see that the crown, the government, has really taken that responsibility seriously as we try to unlock the economic potential of these young people and really give them a pathway that can ensure the dignity that I think they deserve, both in rural and remote and, of course, northern communities in the province.

Ms. Dwyer, do you have anything that you want to mention?

Ms. Denise Dwyer: Yes. Thank you for very much. I wanted to comment some more on the reciprocal education approach.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Could you please just introduce yourself for the record?

Ms. Denise Dwyer: Sorry; Denise Dwyer, assistant deputy minister of Indigenous education and well-being.

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

Ms. Denise Dwyer: The reciprocal education approach, as the minister has indicated, removed a long-standing systemic barrier that existed for some time and really prevented students from accessing public education if they were in a remote First Nation reserve. It came into force as legislation and regulations on September 1. What is very notable about it is that it is work that was done by a working table. That table included ministry representatives and First Nation and Indigenous representatives. It included boards. It included trustees. It was a very collaborative effort and very speedy work that was done to make these changes to legislation and to regulations.

As the minister has commented, it effectively removed a systemic barrier so that—before, what would have to happen if a First Nation student, particularly in a remote reserve, wanted to access a public school, their First Nation had to negotiate an agreement. In the same way, if a First Nation student, for example, in a public school area, who would be a pupil of the board, wished to attend a First Nation school, that First Nation school had to negotiate an agreement.

The most pivotal aspect of this approach is that it creates a consistent, fair and transparent formula for a base fee that will be paid, triggered by written notice, any time a student wants to access education in either one of those avenues that we've described. That is something that the community had asked for: a transparent and consistent way that they could have expectations and the parents would be able to choose which school their child would access and that First Nations communities could choose as well.

That's what this legislation effectively did. It allows them to not only to have that consistent formula for the base fee, but other aspects can be negotiated between the board and the First Nation. That may be things like transportation or additional spec ed supports. Spec ed is included in the base fee. There are only two parts of spec ed that aren't included, and they are claims-based spec ed supports for equipment and for staffing. So now those communities have a sense of fairness about this approach, and also they know what to expect—a predictability—when they're making their choices about where their children will be attending school.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you so very much for that explanation. For these types of initiatives—by the time the minister shows up to the announcement type of situation, there has been a lot of hard work that has gone into that. I know you have led so much of that, so I want to commend you for that.

If you would be willing to, speak a little bit more about what that consultation process looked like. One of the difficulties, of course, in the relationship with the education system and First Nations of this province, knowing the history going back, is making sure that there's consultation and a real chance to have voices heard and have those voices inform the actions of our ministry and of the government more broadly. Would you be willing to speak a little bit more in depth about what those consultations

looked like, how they were spearheaded, what the results of them were and how that informed the final policy decisions moving forward on this agreement?

Ms. Denise Dwyer: Yes. Thank you. That was a working table that was formed; it was called the reverse education services agreements working table, because that was the structure before, with negotiating agreements. At that table were those who had particular technical expertise in education. They came from rights holders—First Nations groups—and the board personnel as well as trustees were represented, and were facilitated by a team in the Indigenous education office in this ministry, who would arrange those meetings.

I talked about the speed and the ambition at that table, because it was a very ambitious agenda to be able to get everything into place for September 1—and it was a consensus agenda. We would work on whatever issue was required. In this case, it began with: What would the base fee be? How would that be calculated? Who would give the written notice? There were many issues that were taken to that table. Then each representative would have to go back to their decision makers to learn whether or not the consensus that was reached at the table would also be approved by their own decision makers. So there was a lot of communication that was done back and forth to facilitate that.

It was a number of meetings, and continued, in terms of the regulations, led by the Indigenous education office and that partnership. It culminated not only in the legislation—we also took feedback on the regulations that we worked on—but also in a number of guides and printed materials that support the implementation of this reciprocal education approach. The whole point of calling it “reciprocal”—I don’t think I mentioned this—is that now that it is this base formula, it is predictable and it is the same either way, whether the student is accessing a public education system or a First Nations school. That work was exemplary work done by that team and led to this outcome. It also meant that we didn’t have to socialize the outcome or the approach with any audience; we were keeping all of our parties in the know at the time when it was actually happening. It became a very positive announcement because of that collaboration.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: That’s wonderful.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If I could just build upon what Ms. Dwyer has mentioned, I also met with the OPSBA Indigenous Trustees’ Council a month or two ago, in addition to the seven youth inquest; that’s a separate discussion. But the OPSBA Indigenous Trustees’ Council meeting was a really profound opportunity for me to hear directly from them about the inequalities that exist—systemic and otherwise. Obviously, the reciprocal education approach, among others, was a topic of discussion. I made a commitment to them to continue a dialogue, and I know Ms. Dwyer is aware of that. We’re collaborating to make sure that there’s a greater level of awareness and action in the context of First Nations, Métis and Inuit education within the ministry and, even in the context of my stakeholder engagements, really making sure that they know in

action, word and deed that I care deeply about the success of their kids.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. If you could speak a little more about the Indigenous Graduation Coach Program: I’m very interested in seeing how that looks on the ground; what that means to these youth and to these communities; what sort of impact it has had, frankly; how we value the metric of success; and a little bit more about why we feel it’s so important, as a ministry, to support that moving forward, and why the government has decided to continue investing in this important program.

1740

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The Indigenous graduation program is a pilot. We have maintained that funding commitment, as you will know. The objective is to close the education gap that exists by providing culturally appropriate mentorship for high school students, providing them with a credible pathway to graduate, and then some additional supports thereafter.

We think that that transition, for any student, can be at times nerve-racking. Some of us can reflect on that experience ourselves—or perhaps even our children can, as they go through it now.

The bottom line is, having that culturally appropriate level of a community part of the process is going to help these young people get through the journey of learning in a manner by which the people they’re associating with can inspire them, motivate them, set some reasonable expectations with them—an element of healthy accountability—and help them succeed. I think that’s why the pilot is under way, and why we’ve maintained funding.

Ms. Dwyer, you may have additional context on this. If you may?

Ms. Denise Dwyer: Yes. The pilots are continuing, and it’s that continued commitment that will give us the results. It began as an adaptation that was done by the Keewatin Patricia school board; it was their initiative, known as Four Directions. They’re in their fourth year. The schools that we’re piloting are in their first year, or will be entering their second year of this pilot.

What they found at Keewatin Patricia District School Board is that the program, on the ground, looks like—there is a graduation coach, someone who is skilled in interacting with students, knows the Indigenous community and has that relationship, works on the student success team that includes the teachers, that would include the guidance counsellor, that would include other staff and social workers in the school, so it’s connected to the leadership and the principal as well. There would be a dedicated space, an actual room. Often, the room itself would reflect the culture of the local First Nation community.

Those students could now come into that room and connect with the coach, who can speak to them from a perspective of having that experience, knowing about Indigenous culture and tradition and history, and can support that student academically, but also can offer support for that student in feeling safe and included in their school. Often, those coaches will meet with students even

after school and connect on the weekend. It is a very dedicated role that we have seen that the coaches occupy.

Probably Keewatin Patricia is our best example, because it has been going for so long and we can know what to expect in terms of some really positive outcomes.

That particular school had had a very low graduation rate for its Indigenous students. What it saw over the course of that time period was that the dropout rate for Indigenous students who were self-identifying in that school—we're crossing the self-identification with the Ontario education number. There had been a 16% dropout rate, and that reduced to 2% over that course of time, so it's highly, highly significant. You were seeing students engaged in school, and they saw their grad rate, which was at 39% when they began in 2014, move all the way up into the eighties percentage for grad rate.

It told us that that safe and inclusive environment created by the grad coach, and that dedicated space and the conviction of the leadership—because this comes right from the top with the director of education, as well as the leadership in that particular school—really enabled the student, by addressing their well-being and supporting their well-being, to be able to move academic achievement.

So, it is tried and true. These pilots will see the same thing happening in the boards that are now doing the pilots. There are about 19 boards that are doing the pilots. We are looking forward to monitoring that and seeing what the success is like.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Pardon me. Just very briefly: I benefited a little while ago from visiting Six Nations Polytechnic. I can't speak to the utilization of this program—that is a college, whereas this is for high school—but even in the community, absent any government support, just the experience organically within First Nation, Indigenous and Métis communities, how many of the older students are providing really incredible mentorship and leadership for younger students, and of course, First Nation to First Nation. That really helps them through that lens.

I just want to express gratitude to those who maybe don't receive the funding or have an official brand associated, but people who, every day—many young leaders—are trying to mentor the next generation, those five, 10, 20 years younger or however, to inspire them to continue in school and ultimately get into the labour market, for those who seek that pathway. It's really amazing to see that happen organically. The utilization of the outdoors, the experiential elements of the land, even the way they formulate the class is very different than what maybe many of us will recall from some of our experiences. It was very insightful for me and I think it could be a very empowering exercise to see incredibly effective models that are happening in communities across the province that are being driven and initiated and led by young First Nation leaders in this province.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much. I recently—a couple of weeks ago, actually—had the chance to be at the Niagara native centre and a pow-wow

held in St. Catharines, which was a really amazing experience as well. Indigenous leaders from across Ontario—

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you—gathered at that pow-wow. One of the things that came up there was conversations about not just the funding piece but really around the cultural shift that needs to happen. I know there was a lot of excitement about the First Nations, Metis and Inuit studies curriculum for high school that has been brought forward and the revised curriculum and, of course, the importance of it. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit, Minister or DM or ADM, about these courses, what they look like and why this is so important to be rolled out.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm going to turn to Ms. Dwyer. I'll just say that there are 10 new course offerings; some of them can be used as mandatory course offerings in order to graduate. We've strengthened the curriculum in elementary school when it comes to greater awareness of the historical significance of our First Peoples. We've started that process. We're not at the end of it, but we're certainly building upon the successes.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say, you're out of time. We'll go to the official opposition. Ms. Stiles?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to continue on capital funding and school repairs after a few more minutes.

I just wanted to confirm—because the minister kind of accused me of not being right about the \$100 million that was cut because of the greenhouse gas reduction. Anyway, I just went back because I know I saw that in the estimates and I just wanted to refer the minister to page 68, vote 1002-03, greenhouse gas reduction fund. This program is being eliminated going forward and, in fact, the Financial Accountability Office in their report—and I'll read it to the minister—page 36 of their report: “Finally, one program has been cancelled for 2019-20, the greenhouse gas reduction account—schools, which was allocated \$100 million in 2018-19.”

My understanding is that what happened was that the money had already been spent by boards for the previous year and so that already was spent. I'm glad you didn't go and ask for your money back. But I just want to confirm: It is cut going forward?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The money has been re-profiled, to the member—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Re-profiled? What does that mean?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Member, you'll notice in the estimates documents that the renewal funding is \$1.4 billion for last year; that remains true today. So walk me through the reduction expenditure year over year.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What does “re-profiled” mean? I don't understand. Do you mean it's got a new name on it?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It means it's retained. The purpose of the fund is for renewal. We're committing those monies that would otherwise—

Ms. Marit Stiles: But that fund has been cut. It actually explicitly says that this program has been eliminated.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Our funding for renewal was \$1.4 billion last year. That remains true today, this year. To assert anything but the maintenance of funding would be inaccurate.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But there's \$100 million that's not happening; we know that. That could be another \$100 million. I'm just saying, you could keep increasing it but that's \$100 million we're not going to have for capital school repairs.

Anyway, right now, as temperatures are starting to go down across the province—they're already pretty low in many parts of the province—it is not far-fetched, I think, to say that in the coming months, some of our schools—I have to say, in my riding most any of the schools—kids will be wearing their winter coats and their hats in class because of this repair backlog. I just want you to tell me if you think that's acceptable in any way.

1750

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm aware that the many institutional centres—hospitals, schools, colleges, universities—are paying a disproportionate amount of the price for carbon taxation, which is an issue you raised earlier—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, that's not the issue, Minister.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, you introduced it into the committee, so I think it's merited to talk about it.

The fact is, institutional organizations are paying a significant amount of monies now to the federal government for carbon taxation, monies that otherwise could be used for critical purposes.

When it comes to our objective, it's to maintain the safety of kids, obviously, in a positive and healthy school condition.

With respect to any regulation that mandates temperatures, and the highs and lows, I would refer to my officials for further context.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: I would just say that, overall, in terms of our funding to school boards, we have 15 grants in the GSN, and 11 of them are increasing. That does include the school operations grant, which would be keeping up with the costs of energy prices that we know school boards are experiencing.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I might go back to that the next day, because I do have some more specific questions on that piece. I think there are lots of different ways to look at the way the funding is being distributed.

But what I want to know is what the total cost of the deferred school maintenance is right now in the province, as you see it, according to your accounts.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: In terms of the repair backlog?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, the deferred school maintenance capital repair backlog.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I've heard numbers between \$13 billion and \$16 billion. I'm not sure if—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Can you confirm that for us here? It's really important, when we're talking about what the spending will mean in terms of even beginning to make a dent in it.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that. I also appreciated the acknowledgement of the inherited backlog that was exacerbated in the former Liberal government.

We have a role to play in this, which is why we've maintained the \$1.4 billion in renewal, and why we've added \$550 million this year, part of the \$13-billion, 10-year allocation to remediate that backlog. I've expedited the approvals of those projects, which were due on the 31st of October. I will do my part. We will do our part.

The recreation infrastructure agreement—and I know this from my former capacity as a parliamentary assistant in infrastructure—signed by the federal government, adds a quarter of a billion dollars in recreation, and \$7 billion in green infrastructure for a variety of issues that, perhaps, we both agree are important when it comes to reducing our impacts on climate and our GHG emissions.

There are a variety of funding streams. We're leveraging public, provincial and federal—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Sorry, I think the minister is kind of wandering there. I specifically want to know your numbers. Surely the government has a number here specifically on the deferred school maintenance. As I understand it, it's still \$15.9 billion, but I'd be happy to hear differently.

Mr. Paul Bloye: Paul Bloye, director of the capital program branch.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Bloye: Each year, the ministry does a school condition assessment of approximately 20% of the school inventory. There are about 4,500 facilities across the province, so we do about 900 facilities each year.

The total value of the assessment needs is an accumulation of the last five years of assessment. The current value of those assessments is at \$16.3 billion.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's \$16.3 billion?

Mr. Paul Bloye: Correct.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Please note that. That \$16.3 billion is a lot higher than what we've seen previously, I have to say.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Perhaps we could just contextualize that a little bit further. That, in a sense, is what drives the investment level in school condition and school renewal, the \$1.4 billion that the minister has identified.

We are keeping to the Auditor General's recommendation that we address 2.5% of the replacement value of school facilities annually, and that is based on the replacement value of \$55 billion for the real estate holdings of the school boards entirely.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I just want to be very clear here. What you're telling me is that, in the last year and a half—as I understand it, the last numbers we had, going into the last provincial election, were \$15.9 billion. The number now for the capital repair backlog in the province of Ontario is at \$16.3 billion.

Minister, in 2017, I believe—fall 2017 was the last time that we saw an updated facilities condition index—2017. I know that many people across this province fought to have that posted so that we had some transparency and accountability. It has not been posted or, that I'm aware of, updated. I'm wondering if you can tell me when that will be released and why it hasn't been released to date.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, I believe—I will refer to Paul, maybe, for additional clarity, but I believe that that

information is disclosed. The FCI, I believe, for this year is in at around 27%.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, it is. If I may, it's available—for example, the Toronto District School Board—they post it, but it is not posted provincially, province-wide.

Mr. Paul Bloye: The Toronto District School Board recently released the facility condition indexes for their facilities. As a ministry, we continue to review the latest round of assessments across the province of the 900 schools that have been assessed this year. Once we're comfortable with those assessments and we can confirm them, then we will release them.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Do you know when we will feel comfortable enough to share them publicly? Can you get an estimate of when that's going to be available? It hasn't been available since fall 2017. Parents and communities, I think, want to know.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We can work with Infrastructure, which I believe houses much of this information, and take that back to return to the committee—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Is that correct, that it's Infrastructure that has that information?

Mr. Paul Bloye: No, it's collected internally within the ministry, but we work with Infrastructure—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Right, so the minister should be able to provide this.

Mr. Paul Bloye: —on a number of assessments.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I'm going to move on. How many minutes do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): By that clock, you've got four minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Four minutes. Okay; I'll start on this. I've heard from quite a few people in the sector who are concerned about some reviews that are taking place by this government. I know that your government has promised not to close any more schools in the immediate, but you also promised that not a single teacher would lose their job, and we know how that promise turned out. I think you can understand why everyone is feeling a little on edge.

The Premier questioned the school closure moratorium during the PC leadership race. He actually said that he did not support the PC platform's plank calling for a moratorium on rural school closures. He said, "Yeah, I think that if there's a school and it doesn't have full capacity, we have to visit it. It doesn't make sense if you have certain rural schools that have 40 students in it." And he said, "You know, it's reality."

I just want to give you the opportunity, Minister, to get it on the record that as a minister, you will not be lifting the moratorium on school closures, and let's just start within the next six months.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What our government has committed to do is maintain the moratorium until we review the PARG process, member. We have committed—both my successor and I believe that the PARG process, as redesigned by the former Liberal government, does not reasonably and equitably ensure that the voices of rural communities—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, if you could explain what the PARG acronym is, as somebody who—I myself often go, "PARG? PARG? What is it?"—if you wouldn't mind.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're referring to the review process when it comes to school closures, and the—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Pupil accommodation.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes. The review process, in the former iteration that was revised by the former minister under the Liberals, really did not consider in any way, in my estimation and that of our government, the economic consequence of school closures in rural communities. My commitment, as I made clear at AMO and as I will make clear today, is to continue that review and to only lift the moratorium, which—and no one has suggested we won't—but lift it when we have suitably consulted—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —and ensured the voices of rural Ontario—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Minister, I only have one minute left.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —but I would like to—

Ms. Marit Stiles: So you will not commit—I appreciate your reviewing the PARG process. You are saying that you're not going to commit to not lifting the moratorium. So you are saying to me that, as a result of this review, there could be school closures in this province.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What I'm saying is, the PARG process will be reviewed to strengthen the voices and the economic interests of rural families that were not in the former government, and only at that point can the moratorium be lifted. Until then, it will remain as it is to date.

Ms. Marit Stiles: But the Treasury Board president's announcement just last week, that they are looking at selling off public assets like school buildings—I have to tell you, when you won't tell me that you're going to commit to keeping the moratorium, and then we hear about that, I'm a little concerned, and I think a lot of Ontarians will be, about how much savings you're looking for in selling off our schools.

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

Colleagues, that's all the time we have available today. The committee is now adjourned until following routine proceedings tomorrow. Thank you all.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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