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(Hansard)**

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(Hansard)**

SP-16

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Better Schools and Student
Outcomes Act, 2023

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Tuesday 9 May 2023

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2023 sur l'amélioration
des écoles et du rendement
des élèves

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mardi 9 mai 2023

Chair: Brian Riddell
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : Brian Riddell
Greffière : Lesley Flores

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Tuesday 9 May 2023

Mardi 9 mai 2023

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.

**BETTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT
OUTCOMES ACT, 2023
LOI DE 2023 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION
DES ÉCOLES ET DU RENDEMENT
DES ÉLÈVES**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order. We are here to resume public hearings on Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is tonight, Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 7 p.m. eastern daylight savings time. Legislative research has been requested to provide the committee members with a summary of oral presentations and written submissions as soon as possible following the written submission deadline. The deadline for filing amendments to this bill is 5 o'clock Eastern Daylight Time on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed today's meeting documents with you via SharePoint. Witnesses have been scheduled into groups of three for each one-hour slot. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. Following the three presentations, there will be 39 minutes of questioning for three witnesses divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for official opposition members and two rounds of four and a half minutes for independent members.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard, please understand that it's important that all participants speak slowly and clearly and to please speak into the mike. We had problems with that yesterday. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak.

For virtual participants on Zoom, after I have recognized you, there may be a brief delay before your audio and video are ready. Please take a brief pause before beginning to speak. In order to ensure optimum sound quality, virtual participants are encouraged to use headphones or microphones if possible. As always, all

comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

**ACCESSIBILITY FOR ONTARIANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT ALLIANCE
ASSOCIATION DES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES
DES ÉCOLES PUBLIQUES DE L'ONTARIO
INTERNATIONAL DYSLEXIA
ASSOCIATION ONTARIO**

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I will now call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: the association—I apologize for my horrible French, so I'll say it in short form—ACÉPO; the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance; and International Dyslexia Association Ontario.

We'll start with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. You have the floor.

Mr. David Lepofsky: Thank you very much. Can you let me know if you can hear me clearly?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Yes.

Mr. David Lepofsky: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is David Lepofsky. I'm the volunteer chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance.

There are two million students in Ontario-funded schools. Of them, at least one in every six has a disability: a physical disability, a sensory disability, a mental disability, a mental health condition, an intellectual disability, a learning disability, a neurological disability—any kind of disability. Even though we should be treating all students on a footing of equality, even though every student has the right to full participation in, and the full benefit of, our education system, the reality, even in 2023, is that students with disabilities chronically face unfair, protracted, recurring barriers in the education system. Nobody likes it. The parents don't, the students don't, the teachers, the principals—all the educators don't. This is bad for everyone.

These barriers include school buildings with physical barriers that impede students with disabilities from being able to get around independently. This includes digital equipment in the classroom, gym equipment or playground equipment which is not designed for students of all kinds of needs. This includes a curriculum which does not build in, on a consistent basis, principles of universal design and learning. This includes teacher training that

does not equip all teachers to teach all kinds of learners, and this includes an administrative or bureaucratic process that makes it harder and harder for students with disabilities to achieve the kind of assistance they need to fully participate in and fully benefit from all that our wonderful education system has to offer.

Now, all of this may sound like it's just the opinion of an advocate for a disability community organization, but there's much more in support of it. Not only is this consistently recognized across the disability community, but these were the findings of government-appointed, broad-based expert committee, half of whose members were drawn from the disability community and half of whose members were drawn from educators. That's the government-appointed Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Standards Development Committee, appointed under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. I had the privilege of not only leading the fight to get that committee established, but I was also appointed by the government to serve on it.

We rendered a report with detailed recommendations on what needs to be done to solve the problem. This bill could be an effective tool, but it needs amendments to get there. The consistent theme in the recommendations of the K to 12 standards development committee is that it is long [*inaudible*] that the 72 school boards to each have to reinvent the accessibility wheel. They each have to figure out what barriers are out there. They each have to figure out how to fix or remove or prevent them. Instead, we need strong standards set by the province. That should be done by regulations enacted under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and we're still waiting for the government to do that.

But in the meantime, the power under Bill 98 of the Minister of Education to issue binding directives to school boards could be effective as a tool to advance these goals at least partway, but the bill needs to be amended—and with this I will conclude—to achieve two things:

(1) It must require the minister to make directions to school boards on the core themes that are covered by the K to 12 standards development committee. It's not enough to just leave it to the minister to do it if he chooses; it should require him to do so. Otherwise, students with disabilities will again be left behind.

(2) It should require that whenever the minister makes policy directions under this bill or exercises the other powers under this bill for any area of education, it must include components to ensure that students with disabilities will be able to fully participate in and fully benefit from the subject matter of the directions from the minister.

I apologize that because I'm overseas and I'm only able to be on for seven minutes, I won't be able to take your questions now, but I and my coalition would welcome any opportunity to assist your committee and the government in implementing these ideas.

Please amend this bill so that it ensures that action is taken on the recurring barriers that face students with disabilities. Take the handcuffs off the teachers and the educators, who want to do a great job for these kids, that

are created by bureaucratic barriers that no one wants, no one needs and no one benefits from. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, sir. We'll now move to the ACÉPO. You have the floor.

M^{me} Anne-Marie Gélinault: Oui. Est-ce que vous m'entendez bien? OK.

Monsieur le Président, membres du comité, bonjour. Je vous remercie d'avoir invité l'Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario, l'ACÉPO, dont je suis la présidente, à comparaître devant vous aujourd'hui au sujet du projet de loi 98. Je suis accompagnée de notre directrice générale, Isabelle Girard.

L'ACÉPO représente les conseils scolaires publics de langue française et le Consortium Centre Jules-Léger. Ses membres gèrent 148 écoles partout dans la province et dispensent des programmes éducatifs de qualité en français.

0910

Depuis 1998, les conseils de langue française ont un droit de gestion et de contrôle exclusif en matière d'éducation, par et pour la communauté francophone de l'Ontario. Pour cette raison, l'ACÉPO rappelle au ministre que dans le développement et la mise en œuvre de nouvelles législations, celui-ci a le devoir de tenir compte de nos conseils, et du droit de gestion de ceux-ci, par et pour les francophones.

Dans cette perspective, l'ACÉPO a des inquiétudes par rapport au projet de loi 98, qui a des impacts directs sur l'éducation francophone. En effet, cette nouvelle législation prévoit donner au ministre beaucoup plus de pouvoir à mettre en œuvre différentes politiques et à créer toutes sortes de nouvelles exigences. Cela met en danger l'autonomie locale pour nos conseils, autonomie qui est protégée par la constitution. C'est pourquoi il est crucial que l'ACÉPO, partenaire jouant un rôle essentiel dans la réussite et le bien-être des élèves, soit consultée lors de l'élaboration des règlements et lignes directrices envisagées dans le projet de loi 98.

Dans la mise en œuvre de toutes nouvelles législations, le gouvernement se doit de tenir compte de la charge de travail des conseils et de son personnel, et de ne pas l'alourdir indûment, sans l'ajout de ressources additionnelles. Le ministre doit se rappeler que la moyenne de la taille des conseils publics francophones est 10 fois plus élevée que celle des conseils de langue anglaise, leur territoire couvrant des centaines de municipalités.

Par exemple, bien que nous soyons plutôt d'accord avec le principe d'une collaboration accrue avec les municipalités pour la planification des nouvelles écoles et des garderies, le ministre doit se rappeler que la mise en œuvre de ces deux modifications ne peut se faire de la même façon dans les conseils francophones. Établir des relations solides de collaboration avec 200 municipalités, comme c'est le cas pour un de nos conseils, constitue un travail à temps plein pour plusieurs personnes.

Donc, si ces modifications sont mises en œuvre sans tenir compte de nos besoins uniques, cela place les

conseils francophones dans une situation inéquitable, et ne répond plus aux exigences constitutionnelles du ministre.

Avant de conclure, j'aimerais passer la parole à Isabelle Girard, qui fera le point sur les propositions de nature immobilière du projet de loi 98.

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: Merci, Anne-Marie. Le dossier des immobilisations est au coeur de l'évolution stratégique de l'éducation publique de langue française. En effet, notre système est de loin celui qui connaît la plus forte croissance parmi les quatre systèmes, avec 106 % croissance depuis sa création en 1998.

Pour que partout en Ontario, les élèves aient un accès équitable à une éducation publique de grande qualité en français, nous devons leur offrir des installations scolaires offrant une expérience éducative réellement équivalente à celle des enfants de la majorité.

Le projet de loi 98 vise à maximiser l'utilisation des immobilisations scolaires disponibles afin de mieux répondre aux besoins de la population ontarienne. Cependant, l'ACÉPO est d'avis que, fort de la décision de la Cour suprême de la Colombie-Britannique, il est essentiel de positionner avantageusement l'éducation publique de langue française pour les générations à venir.

Pour ce faire, l'ACÉPO, dans son mémoire écrit, qui inclura beaucoup plus de détails, soumettra cinq amendements au projet de loi 98 qui auront pour effet d'aider les membres de l'ACÉPO à obtenir des emplacements scolaires non ou sous-utilisés par les conseils de la majorité afin d'aider à la mise en oeuvre de l'article 23 de la Charte d'une façon moins coûteuse pour le gouvernement provincial.

Premièrement, l'aliénation d'emplacements scolaires doit se faire à la faveur d'un autre conseil scolaire ou d'un organisme public.

Deuxièmement, le morcellement de parcelle scolaire doit être interdit, sauf par approbation du ministre.

Troisièmement, les informations relatives à l'état des emplacements scolaires ainsi que des transactions projetées doivent être disponibles à l'ensemble des conseils, et ce, par le biais d'un site Web ouvert aux acteurs publics principaux.

Quatrièmement, lorsqu'ordonné par le ministre, un projet d'école conjointe visant un conseil de langue française doit obligatoirement contribuer à la mise en oeuvre de l'article 23.

Cinquièmement, lorsqu'ordonné par le ministre, une aliénation visant un conseil francophone doit obligatoirement contribuer à la mise en oeuvre de l'article 23.

Je repasse la parole à Anne-Marie pour la conclusion.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

M^{me} Anne-Marie Gélinault: [*Inaudible*] mérite de fréquenter une école qui prend à coeur ses besoins, ses ambitions, ses intérêts et ses forces. L'ACÉPO reconnaît que la standardisation des approches peut sembler offrir une certaine stabilité, mais demeure convaincue que les ajustements fins doivent demeurer la responsabilité des conseils pour tenir compte des particularités de leur territoire.

Je m'en voudrais de conclure sans vous rappeler que sans actions concrètes, rapides et structurantes pour contrer la pénurie du personnel enseignant qui fragilise dangereusement la structure même de l'éducation de langue française, cette éducation n'aura pas la capacité d'absorber tous les changements proposés dans le projet de loi 98.

Je vous remercie.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): That was perfect timing.

We'll now move to the International Dyslexia Association Ontario. Please state your name for the Hansard.

Ms. Una Malcolm: Good morning. My name is Una Malcolm. I'm a member of the Ontario College of Teachers, a doctoral student in reading science and the incoming president of the Ontario branch of the International Dyslexia Association, IDA Ontario. I want to thank the committee today for their time, and today I plan to highlight the positive impacts this bill can have on literacy outcomes in Ontario, particularly through changes to teacher education and licensure.

IDA Ontario is proud of our close relationship with the province's teachers. Most of our membership and half of our board of directors is made up of teachers. We have the utmost respect and appreciation for all educators, recognizing they are universally committed to having a transformative impact on students' lives. While we are tireless advocates for student literacy outcomes, we also advocate that teachers are better prepared and better supported in literacy instruction, recognizing the positive impact this can have for our educators in their job satisfaction, their self-efficacy and their mental health.

I graduated from an Ontario teacher education program in 2013. I was fortunate that I was able to receive training that was aligned with reading research: I was effectively prepared to teach a child to read and write using an evidence-based approach. The experience that I had, though, is very much the exception and not the rule. In evaluating the 13 Ontario faculties of education in the Right to Read inquiry, the Ontario Human Rights Commission found that Ontario teacher candidates are not being trained to teach reading in ways that are supported by research. Instead, teacher candidates are trained based on an outdated, faulty ideology. These findings are echoed in peer-reviewed research, as well. For example, a recent study highlighted the low scores Canadian pre-service teachers showed on measures of basic language and literacy, including identifying the syllables in a word, identifying the individual sounds in a word, or explaining the rule that governs choosing a "c," "k" or "ck" to spell the /k/ sound in a word. This type of understanding of how our language and writing system works is foundational and educators cannot provide effective, strong reading instruction without it.

The root cause of this preparation gap can be traced back to the content that accredited Ontario universities must provide to pre-service teachers in their coursework and their practica. This content is determined by the Ontario College of Teachers. In examining the Accreditation Resource Guide from the college, which clarifies

content that should be included in teacher education programs, IDA Ontario has significant concerns. Instead of seeing rigorous, specific foundational reading and writing content, this guide is vague and it is non-specific.

We also have become recently deeply concerned that the newest draft of this guide, revised in 2023, continues to be largely out of sync with the OHRC's recommendations. Despite being written after the Right to Read report, this new draft guide includes little to no focus on evidence-based word reading instruction, screening and early intervention in reading, or dyslexia. IDA Ontario contends that this document largely ignores the evidence-based recommendations put forward by the OHRC. This is a critical concern, as Ontario faculties of education will base their coursework and their programs on this guide. Without immediate correction, a very serious problem will continue to be perpetuated.

0920

In Ontario, we are graduating teachers who are not prepared to teach all our children to learn to read. As a result, one of our main mandates at IDA Ontario is teacher training. We are a volunteer-run, non-partisan charitable organization, and we prioritize offering evidence-aligned learning opportunities for teachers, recognizing that this is one of the most direct ways that we as an organization can best support all students, including those with dyslexia. This year, we have 480 Ontario teachers participating in a year-long "introduction to structured literacy" course that focuses on research-aligned instruction. This is the third year we have offered this course, and we have run a wait-list every year.

Feedback is consistent: Teachers are frustrated and they are disappointed that this content was not taught in their pre-service training. They are heartbroken about struggling students who they have taught in the past, often expressing that they now know how they could have taught those students differently. These statements are powerful and, to me, highlight the direct impacts of our failure to train teachers effectively. This has deep consequences for our hard-working front-line educators, as well as consequences for our children.

Most educators self-fund their courses with us, and while I commend these thoughtful, determined and dedicated teachers, willing to commit their own time and money to best meeting their students' needs, I recognize that this further contributes to the patchwork, uneven knowledge base of teachers across the province. A child should not have to win the teacher lottery to have a fair shot at learning to read in a publicly funded Ontario school.

IDA Ontario recognizes that one of the most powerful factors to change outcomes for struggling readers is access to a teacher trained in evidence-based reading instruction. We appreciate the government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Right to Read report. We welcome that this proposed legislation allows for a closer alignment of teacher training to the priority we all share: research-based reading instruction in Ontario schools.

It is our strong contention that the Ontario College of Teachers is the main driver of teacher literacy preparation, and we appreciate the government's commitment to taking steps in this proposed legislation to allow for strengthened regulations. We hope to see specific research-driven competencies for teachers of reading in the near future.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute remaining.

Ms. Una Malcolm: Thank you.

To close, I would like to highlight the significance of reading, both individually and societally. Skilled reading is linked to numerous benefits: health, economic, social and emotional. Broadly, a more literate community is a happier, healthier and more prosperous one. IDA Ontario looks forward to continuing to work with both sector partners and policy-makers to ensure that all Ontario students are able to realize their right to learn to read. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your presentation.

We will now go to round one. We'll start with the government. The government has seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Bonjour. Mes questions seront adressées à l'ACÉPO. Merci beaucoup d'être venue ce matin présenter à nous, et merci aussi d'avoir participé à la consultation du ministre Lecce au sujet de ce projet de loi.

Je voudrais parler un peu des écoles francophones. Ce que fait ce projet de loi, c'est qu'il permet la colocation d'étudiants français dans les écoles anglophones. Parfois, il n'est pas pratique de construire une école pour 25 étudiants ou 50 étudiants. Alors, c'est quoi la position de l'ACÉPO au sujet de cette colocation des étudiants francophones dans les écoles anglophones?

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: La position de l'ACÉPO est que toute action qui aide à mettre en oeuvre l'article 23 de la Charte est positive pour l'éducation publique de langue française. De façon générale, quand c'est optimal pour notre système, pour notre personnel, pour nos élèves et leurs familles, on est toujours prêt à accepter de collaborer. Ceci étant dit, il faut que la collaboration vienne des deux côtés.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Bien sûr. Merci. Alors, le gouvernement a financé en 2021 la construction d'une école élémentaire dans la région de Whitby-Ajax, un financement de 10 millions de dollars. Alors, ça, c'est une autre addition. C'est très important qu'on bâtisse les écoles francophones dans les régions où on a ce besoin. Je sais aussi qu'il y a la construction d'une école—secondaire catholique, cette fois-ci—dans la région de Vaughan.

Alors, qu'est-ce que le gouvernement peut faire de supplémentaire pour soutenir la construction des écoles? Et généralement, l'ACÉPO, soutient-elle les mesures visant à accélérer la construction des écoles? Car on sait que parfois ça prend 10 ans à construire une école, et ça, ce n'est pas acceptable, même si c'est une école anglophone. Dix ans d'attente à construire une nouvelle

école, ce n'est pas acceptable. Alors, c'est quoi la position d'ACÉPO généralement sur l'accélération de la construction des écoles?

M^{me} Anne-Marie Gélinault: Je crois qu'on est parfaitement en accord qu'on diminue le temps—10 ans, définitivement, ce n'est pas acceptable. Par exemple, si on regarde juste avec ce qui s'est passé avec la pandémie, ça a arrêté beaucoup de choses. Par contre, souvent, les délais qu'on a vus en général sont—par exemple, ils vont accepter de faire une école, mais par contre, on n'a pas le terrain. Il y a eu beaucoup de situations comme ça. Ça devrait être tout l'ensemble au complet qui devrait se faire, mais le terrain, ça vient d'un autre parti. Ce n'est pas le ministère qui s'occupe de ça; c'est le Trésor qui s'occupe de ça. Alors dans cette partie-là, on est vraiment d'accord à ce que ça avance.

Par contre, on ne voudrait pas non plus ce qu'on appelle en anglais « cookie-cutter », que toutes les écoles soient faites exactement de la même façon. Ça, c'est une chose que—parce que chaque place a des particularités différentes d'un endroit à un autre.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Oui, bien sûr. C'est pourquoi il y a des mesures dans cette loi pour vraiment pousser la vente ou la mise à disposition de terrains et de bâtiments qui ne sont pas utilisés, si ce sont des bâtiments du ministère de l'Éducation ou si ce sont des bâtiments d'autres ministères, ou des terrains. Alors, vraiment, les mesures qu'on prend dans cette loi vont accélérer ce processus-là.

Mais je voudrais aussi demander, au sujet des parents : j'ai eu l'opportunité d'assister au congrès annuel de l'organisme Parents partenaires en éducation, et vraiment, ce projet de loi—ce qu'on vise ici, c'est de donner une voix aux parents et de donner le respect aux parents. Alors, je voudrais savoir si l'ACÉPO soutient l'affirmation que les conseils scolaires devraient améliorer la transparence pour les parents, en particulier en montrant comment l'argent des contribuables est lié à l'amélioration des résultats des élèves.

Vraiment, je veux aussi féliciter les conseils scolaires francophones, car on voit le taux de scolarité, le taux de mathématiques élevé. Alors, continuez le bon travail.

C'est quoi votre position sur la transparence pour les parents?

M^{me} Anne-Marie Gélinault: Ce que je trouve difficile à voir, c'est qu'on a déjà un rapport qu'on donne qui est ouvert à tout le monde. Chaque fois que des choses sont faites pour aider nos élèves, pour leur amélioration, pour leur bien-être, c'est déjà tout inscrit. C'est obligatoire.

Ce que nous autres, on voit, surtout sur l'ACÉPO, c'est que si vous décidez que, bon, ce n'est pas la bonne façon ou le bon fonctionnement—ce n'est pas comment vous voulez que ça soit fait—ne rajoutez-en pas; ou, si vous en rajoutez, rajoutez avec du financement puis du personnel. En ce moment, les francophones, on marche comme—là, nous autres, on est quatre conseils scolaires. On fonctionne vraiment, vraiment serré pour être capable de rendre tous les rapports, toutes les demandes que le gouvernement

demande. Si vous décidez que vous voulez changer le modèle, changez-le, mais n'en rajoutez pas. D'après moi, vous avez déjà toute l'information. C'est ça que je ne comprends pas.

On fait des demandes. Quand on prépare nos budgets, on demande à la population—les parents sont impliqués là-dedans. Quand on a les résultats, l'OQRE, on leur donne l'information. Quand il y a des situations, on donne pour tout l'ensemble. C'est obligatoire. Ça fait partie du rapport du directeur de l'éducation—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

0930

M^{me} Anne-Marie Gélinault: Alors, pour moi, on le fait déjà. Les dépenses, on n'a pas le choix. Le gouvernement nous dit que tel argent doit être utilisé pour telle chose. Il faut que ça soit—si, admettons, le budget ou les choses ne fonctionnent pas, là, ça sera des sanctions à faire au conseil qui ne va pas d'après son budget ou qui ne rencontre pas ce que le gouvernement nous a demandé. Pour moi, on fait l'ouvrage. C'est comme ça que je le vois.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Bien sûr, et quand il s'agit de pénurie des enseignants et enseignantes, ce projet de loi a des mesures pour embaucher 2 000 enseignants et enseignantes supplémentaires dans notre système d'éducation scolaire. Mais aussi, on travaille sur des mesures et des stratégies pour embaucher et retenir des enseignants francophones spécifiquement—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): That concludes the government's time.

We'll now go to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Gretzky.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Chair. I just want to verify, before we start our round of questions and we get further into this—reminding everyone of the motion yesterday that if the independents are not here to ask questions, that means their time gets split between the government. So I just want to—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll be continuing that.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you. I might give it to my colleague, then.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Bourgouin.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour l'ACÉPO, et Isabelle en particulier, puisque j'ai écouté ton allocution, ta présentation, puis je veux te donner un petit peu plus de temps, parce que t'es passée à travers très vite, de tes cinq recommandations. J'aimerais te donner l'opportunité d'élaborer ou de nous donner plus d'information sur ces cinq points-là.

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: Merci, monsieur Bourgouin. Oui, effectivement. Donc on nous a demandé de fait plus tôt comment est-ce que ce projet de loi pouvait répondre à nos besoins. Je pense que le projet de loi fait un pas en avant vers plus d'ouverture au niveau des immobilisations. Mais ce que nous, on dit, c'est que ces cinq amendements permettraient vraiment au projet d'aller beaucoup plus loin et assureraient la mise en oeuvre de l'article 23 pour le gouvernement.

Donc, c'est-à-dire que nous, ce qu'on dit, c'est que premièrement, les emplacements qui sont disponibles doivent absolument aller à un autre conseil scolaire ou un organisme public—jamais de considération pour le privé.

Deuxièmement, le morcellement des terrains : on sait que ça, c'est un réel problème. Ce sont des stratégies qui sont utilisées par certains conseils pour empêcher d'autres conseils scolaires qui ont besoin de ces emplacements-là, de pouvoir les acheter. Parce qu'une fois qu'on l'a morcelé, on a une école sans cour d'école. Donc, il y a toutes sortes de choses qui se font. Alors ça, ça doit absolument arrêter et ça doit se faire en faveur des conseils scolaires publics de langue française.

Troisièmement, les informations relatives à ce qui va se passer : donc, les emplacements scolaires qui sont libres, qui sont projetés à être vendus ou à être mis en disponibilité, toute l'information doit être transparente, doit être partagée avec l'ensemble des conseils scolaires pour qu'on puisse prévoir, planifier. On parle de plus d'efficacité au niveau de l'utilisation de nos fonds publics, mais ça, c'en est une façon de le faire, plutôt que tout se fasse en secret et que, finalement, quand les choses arrivent, il est trop tard souvent pour nous de réagir.

L'autre élément aussi qui est un réel problème pour les conseils scolaires de langue française, c'est que c'est très difficile pour nous de collaborer efficacement avec les municipalités. Parce que comme j'ai dit dans mon discours, il y a certains de nos conseils—presque tous nos conseils, on couvre plus d'une centaine de municipalités. Il y en a qui en couvrent jusqu'à 200. Alors imaginez-vous comment on peut collaborer et être un acteur actif auprès des municipalités et de tous les terrains qu'elles doivent bâtir etc. et les écoles qu'elles doivent bâtir. Donc, ça aussi, c'est un réel problème.

Le projet de loi dit qu'il peut y avoir une obligation d'écoles conjointes. Sauf que, ce que nous, on dit, c'est qu'il faut absolument que—pour qu'un conseil scolaire de langue française soit obligé de partager avec un autre système ou un autre conseil, ça doit nécessairement être pour la mise en oeuvre de l'article 23. Donc, il faut que ça soit à l'avantage des conseils scolaires de langue française.

Et ensuite, cinquièmement, même chose pour l'aliénation : lorsqu'il y a une ordonnance d'aliénation par le ministre, ça doit absolument également être obligatoirement à l'avantage des conseils scolaires de langue française pour mettre en oeuvre l'article 23, qui nous protège dans la Constitution.

Je vais vous donner un exemple : en 1998, nous autres, on a hérité de toutes les vieilles écoles des anglophones quand on est arrivé. Ensuite, donc, il y a certaines écoles, par exemple dans le Nord, qui sont très grandes—trop grandes pour nos besoins. Mais c'est ce dont on a hérité. Donc, théoriquement, selon la nouvelle législation, si elle reste comme elle est, ça veut dire qu'on pourrait être forcé, par exemple, de partager cette école-là avec un autre conseil ou même de la laisser disponible à un autre conseil anglophone, ou on pourrait devoir la partager avec un centre de soins de longue durée etc., ce qui n'est pas acceptable pour nous à ce point-ci.

Donc, c'est pour ça qu'on voulait mettre en avance ces amendements qui, pour nous, vont vraiment amener cette législation-là à un autre niveau et vont être très, très efficaces pour vraiment commencer à améliorer la situation de nos membres, des établissements scolaires partout en Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): The Chair recognizes MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est complètement en lien avec ce que tu viens de dire, dans le sens que j'étais là quand on n'avait pas de conseils scolaires francophones. Je me souviens très bien des écoles conjointes, anglophones-francophones ensemble, où ça servait à l'assimilation des francophones. Tous les francophones apprenaient l'anglais parce que tu étais dans une école anglophone, mais il n'y avait pas d'anglophones qui apprenaient le français, par exemple. Donc, le projet de loi va forcer la colocation.

Là, tu as mis des exemples d'amendements qui doivent être en place pour respecter la francophonie, mais qu'est-ce qui arrive si les amendements ne passent pas? Parce que je ne veux pas te donner de faux espoir, là, mais dans le passé, c'est zéro amendements qui passent à leurs projets de loi. Le gouvernement met son projet de loi puis il n'a pas l'intention de faire aucun changement, peu importe comment important.

Ma question à toi, si tu pouvais éduquer un petit peu : quelles sont les problèmes pour les enfants francophones quand on les met dans des écoles—quand on force les écoles francophones à être sous le même toit qu'une école anglophone?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: MPP Gélinas, je pense que vous l'avez bien dit. Pour nous, c'est toujours une question d'assimilation, parce que vous savez, l'éducation, c'est le seul secteur qui est protégé par la Constitution. Les autres ne le sont pas. Alors, si l'éducation—l'éducation, c'est la base de la survie de la communauté francophone en Ontario. Et on ne veut pas juste qu'elle survive; on veut qu'elle performe au maximum, qu'elle soit vraiment une contributrice à l'ensemble de l'Ontario, et c'est ce qu'elle est présentement.

Mais ce qu'on craint—parce que ceci, ce que vous venez de dire, conjointement avec la pénurie des enseignants et du personnel scolaire et des professionnels en santé mentale—je pourrais continuer longtemps—ça nous place vraiment dans une situation extrêmement fragile. On est fragilisé, et c'est ça qui nous fait craindre. Donc, si en plus de ça—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much. We'll now switch back over to the government for seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Jordan.

Mr. John Jordan: My question is for Una Malcolm with IDA Ontario. One of the key recommendations from the Ontario Human Rights Commission is early reading screening for senior kindergarten to grade 2 students. Can you describe the role of the reading screener and what types of services the individual is able to offer that aren't currently being offered?

Ms. Una Malcolm: Thank you for that question. We at IDA Ontario are very much looking forward to the implementation of the new universal screening policy starting in September. It has been a point that we have been strongly advocating for. We really see the role of screening in primary risk reduction for reading difficulties.

In a nutshell, screenings are very brief, very reliable and valid quick checks of essential early literacy skills. These are early literacy skills that we can often assess even before we've begun to formally teach a child to read. The value of that means we are able to get quick, reliable, valid indicators of which students are at risk and which systems are at risk. This allows us, at the student level, to be able to shape the instructional context to best meet their needs, primarily, but it also allows us at a system-need level, even at a classroom level or a division level or a school level or rolling all the way up to the board, to be able to effectively make decisions for that system, to decide what types of professional development might be necessary for a system or to shape which instructional resources are made.

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This does differ from what is currently happening with respect to reading assessment in the province. Teachers are assessing reading, absolutely. That is absolutely happening in today's classrooms. However, the tools that are being used are not evidence-based, and that prompts several problems. Our decisions are only as strong as the data that support them. So really, when we don't have strong, reliable data to make decisions about whether we need to intensify services for a student or even something as simple as how we're making small groups for instruction within the classroom, if we don't have strong measures, we're not able to make the best decisions for students.

One of the most commonly used reading assessments that is used in Ontario schools right now is the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. When that tool has been evaluated in peer-reviewed research, there are startlingly disastrous findings. That particular tool was found to be 54% predictive of student reading skill; that idea being, if we're offering this assessment for an entire class, we're basically flipping a coin in terms of whether we're able to actually recognize whether a child is on track and whether they're not.

To me and to IDA Ontario, shifting to these evidence-based tools that have been developed by researchers, standardized—they're much more reliable options for how we're screening early reading. I think, for me, I position screening in terms of thinking about it as akin to building a fence at the top of a cliff instead of lining up ambulances at the bottom. It really plays such a key role in terms of a preventive piece of being able to capture those students quite early on.

We know from research that intervention is much more effective when it is done early. It's more effective in terms of student outcomes and it uses human and financial resources more effectively, not to skip the fact that it prevents a student who is struggling from going through the terrible, terrible social-emotional consequences of having a reading difficulty through many years of school.

For us, we are strong proponents of the universal screening piece. We strongly believe that it is a more equitable approach to reading assessment, recognizing that universal screening gives every child a voice and allows us to do best by our students.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: This question is for Una as well. One element of this legislation is to certify new teachers faster. Can you provide some insight into why it's important that we certify teachers, especially reading-focused teachers, so that students can be in front of qualified educators?

Ms. Una Malcolm: Absolutely. I appreciate that focus on certifying faster, recognizing that the college right now is relatively slow-moving. I recognize that teacher shortages are significant problems, not only for Ontario but for other Canadian provinces and then certainly into other countries as well. It's quite a significant problem. I recognize that teacher shortages differentially impact students with dyslexia because with difficulty arranging coverage within schools, it is often the resource or special education teacher who is pulled off of that role to cover a classroom teacher absence.

We are very mindful of the role that certifying additional teachers plays, and we welcome that piece not only to support classroom instruction but also to allow that reading intervention done by special education resource teachers to happen.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: This question is for Una as well. With the screening portion, we know that we'll get the pushback that it's an additional stress on students, it's an additional stress on teachers, there are no resources, no additional funding that's necessarily in the bill to speak to the piece around screening and assessment. I know that this is being done already in some schools rather successfully. Those are some of the conversations we've had about having these pockets of excellence in just places but actually having that where you can mandate that across all 72 boards. For the French as well, to see the best practices that are being done in the French board that are getting such great results, to be able to roll that out across the system as well. I wonder if you would be able to speak to that, that piece around getting that across all school boards and what that would look like and what testing would look like for students.

Ms. Una Malcolm: I appreciate that question. And if I can, I'd like to address the first part of your question, recognizing the comments about additional stress for teachers and for students. I'd like to unpack that, recognizing that for students—I would not contend it to be a stressful process for them. It's quite brief. It's often shorter than what is currently—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Una Malcolm: Thank you—than what is currently being done in schools at this point. It's very brief. It's

positive. Teachers, when they have been trained on these types of approaches, often comment that it is much easier for them, they appreciate it, and that they would never go back. So I would gently push back on that idea that it's additional stress for students or teachers.

You are absolutely correct in that there are pockets of excellence that are currently in place in Ontario. There are several boards that have innovative and really exciting screening projects that are currently in place. We are thrilled to see the hard work that is at play and we look forward to seeing that rolled out across the province.

I would think too, in terms of a scaling piece, recognizing the importance of training teachers to make sure that our data are collected with fidelity, again knowing we can make great decisions based on great data, but I would think about also capitalizing on the existing excellence within boards. Speech-language pathologists are often underused within the literacy field, but they have a tremendous—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Pasma.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: Merci beaucoup à tous nos témoins d'être avec nous ce matin. Thanks so much to our witnesses for joining us this morning.

It's really too bad that David Lepofsky wasn't able to stay because I think it would have been really important for us to be able to explore more some of the impacts of the bill on students with disabilities. We heard a lot of testimony yesterday about the lack of supports and the need to remove barriers.

But Una, thank you so much for being here this morning and sharing more about your experience. We really have a lot of work to do still in Ontario to make sure that every child has the right to read.

One thing I was really struck by was when you said a child shouldn't have to win the lottery in order to have a teacher who can help them learn to read and that teachers are currently paying out of pocket to receive that training. Yesterday, we heard from the teachers and education workers' unions a concern about the lack of resources to support teacher training. To provide better training in teachers' college is one thing, but we have many teachers who are already working in our system who need to have that training provided and support provided for professional development. That was one of the requests of OSSTF. Karen Littlewood, the president, in particular raised that concern, that we need to provide support for teachers who are currently in the system. We're not seeing that support right now with this bill. Is that something you think we need to see in order to actually allow children in Ontario to successfully learn to read?

Ms. Una Malcolm: I appreciate the question. It is something where that is a key consideration. I will preface it by saying that we come at it as a teacher training point, recognizing that we continue—the same problem is cyclical in terms of if we keep pushing through teachers where we're not preparing them effectively. But we do

recognize that there's a considerable need within the existing teaching force of recognizing that very few of these teachers—I consider myself to be, unfortunately, quite lucky that I was able to receive this training—recognizing that, yes, teachers who are currently in the board, in classrooms, in resource programs, they do need that type of training as well. But we also are mindful of the fact that we wouldn't want to just focus on that because that would not be correcting the root cause of the problem.

I would also say that additional qualification courses, to me, are a huge avenue for thinking about making that shift. These are courses that licensed teachers take to add additional credentials to their teaching certifications, and very much like the initial teacher pre-service training, the guidelines are developed by the Ontario College of Teachers and are, again, very vague and not aligned with OHRC recommendations or best practices.

So the challenge for this is, again, these are courses that teachers are paying for out of pocket. They are, I believe, about 125 hours per course, so it's a significant investment of time as well. The challenge with these courses is that they're often required to advance within the salary placement grid, recognizing that it's a teacher's university education and the additional qualification courses they've taken that determine where they fall in that salary category. Even for accessing or applying for a central position or a reading coach job, I'm quite concerned that the coursework we have in Ontario that is designed to create literacy leaders is still based on faulty science.

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Ms. Chandra Pasma: All right. Thank you. I'm going to turn my time over to MPP Gélinas.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: À l'ACÉPO encore : nous avons un projet de loi en ce moment qui pourrait obliger la colocation d'étudiants francophones dans des écoles anglophones. Vous avez mis de l'avant un amendement pour vous assurer que l'article 23 de la Charte est protégé.

Comme je vous ai dit, je ne donne pas de faux espoir : les chances que les amendements soient acceptés sont très, très minimes avec ce gouvernement-là. Donc, qu'est-ce qui arrive à l'ACÉPO? On sait que vous avez besoin d'expansion. Je peux parler pour le Nord-Est. Les étudiants veulent aller dans vos écoles. Les parents veulent les inscrire. On a besoin de plus d'écoles. On a besoin d'expansion.

Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire quand le gouvernement vous dit : « Bien, on a maintenant un droit législatif »—parce qu'une fois que la loi va passer—« de vous dire que vous devez aller avec une école anglophone »? Lorsque vous faites votre propre analyse, ce n'est pas pour le bien des francophones qu'on s'en va là. Comment est-ce que vous allez réagir à ça?

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: C'est sûr que ça va nous placer dans une situation difficile. On ose espérer que, par l'entremise des règlements qui devront être rédigés une fois que le projet de loi sera approuvé, nos considérations vont être prises en compte. Mais ceci étant dit, bien sûr, un

règlement est un règlement. Il peut toujours être changé. Donc, ça continue à nous placer dans une situation très difficile et dans une situation très précaire.

C'est la précarité aussi que je veux vraiment apporter ici ce matin. C'est sûr que—heureusement, on a la chance à être protégé par un droit constitutionnel. On a un droit de gestion sur nos conseils scolaires. Nos élèves ont droit à une éducation équivalente à celle de la majorité. Et bien sûr, on a l'intention de tout faire en notre pouvoir pour que ces éléments-là soient respectés.

Alors, bien sûr, on espère collaborer, on espère convaincre, et on espère continuer à travailler ensemble. Mais c'est sûr qu'en bout de ligne, nos droits doivent être respectés parce que c'est ce que la Constitution dit.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Bien, d'accord. Est-ce que ça—pour moi, en tout cas, ça a levé un drapeau rouge quand tu lis le projet de loi et il n'y a aucune distinction qui est faite entre les conseils scolaires anglophones et les conseils scolaires francophones. Dans la vraie vie, il y a une distinction à faire entre les deux. Est-ce que vous auriez préféré que cette distinction—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —soit reflétée dans le projet de loi?

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: Absolument. Puis d'ailleurs, ça fait partie des amendements qu'on va présenter dans notre mémoire qui sera remis plus tard aujourd'hui. Absolument.

Donc, ces amendements-là disent : « OK, vous avez fait ce pas, mais malheureusement, ce pas peut être positif mais il pourrait aussi être négatif. » Et en absence de sûreté et de sécurité que ça va toujours être fait à notre avantage, ce qu'on dit, c'est mettez-le dans la législation. Faites les amendements qu'on vous propose. Vous allez pouvoir continuer à travailler avec nous, avec les conseils anglophones, puis ça va aussi ouvrir des portes pour plus de collaboration au niveau anglophone. Ça n'empêche pas cela.

Mais ce qu'on dit, c'est que quand vient le temps des conseils scolaires de langue française et de nos écoles, il faut s'assurer que quand il y a une demande du ministre de collaboration, il faut que ça soit à l'avantage, il faut que ça permette la mise en oeuvre—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll stop there. Thank you for comments.

Now, we'll go over to the government side for four minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Juste pour finir le sujet de colocation des étudiants français dans les écoles anglophones, bien sûr, les élèves ne seraient pas entremêlés, et chaque école restera indépendante.

Alors, ma question est, est-ce que vous pensez qu'il est raisonnable de construire une école juste pour 25 élèves ou 50 élèves?

M^{me} Isabelle Girard: Moi, je crois qu'il est raisonnable de s'attendre à ce que les élèves de la minorité aient une éducation équivalente à celle de la majorité. Je

pense qu'il y a certainement des solutions à trouver. Comme je l'ai dit précédemment, on n'est pas du tout contre la collaboration et la colocation avec les francophones catholiques lorsque c'est à l'avantage des deux partis.

Je pense qu'on est très conscient des contraintes budgétaires. Mais c'est aussi pour ça qu'on vous dit, faites passer ces amendements-là parce que ça va vous permettre justement de répondre à nos besoins sans que ça soit aussi coûteux pour le gouvernement, parce que ce qu'on dit, c'est que quand il y a des écoles qui sont disponibles au niveau de la majorité, ils doivent être mises à la disposition des conseils scolaires de langue française qui ont des besoins. Il faut prouver notre besoin aussi, bien sûr. Mais lorsqu'on a le besoin, on devrait avoir accès à une école.

Et lorsqu'il y a des conseils scolaires qui s'assoient sur leurs écoles, pour toutes sortes de raisons, c'est là qu'on dit que, bien, ce n'est pas équitable et en plus de ça, ce n'est pas une bonne façon de respecter les payeurs de taxes, parce que, là, c'est vrai qu'une école qui a été payée par les payeurs des taxes et qui n'est pas utilisée par personne—reste inutilisée, alors que, nous, on a besoin à côté et qu'on pourrait très bien l'utiliser. Donc, de fait, ce qu'on propose est tout à fait dans le respect, justement, des payeurs de taxes et du fait qu'on doit utiliser chaque dollar public le plus efficacement possible.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Oui, mais c'est exactement ce que ce projet de loi fait. C'est pour outiller le ministre pour qu'il y ait une transparence pour que le ministre voie où il y a des écoles qui ne sont pas utilisées, pour qu'elles puissent être sur le marché. Car à ce moment, le ministre ne voit pas ces écoles supplémentaires qui ne sont pas utilisées. Alors c'est exactement le but de ce projet de loi, ce que vous avez dit.

Mais je donne le temps à mes collègues.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): The Chair recognizes MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the witnesses. I have a question for Una.

My favourite bookmark when I was a child—I think I had it since I was eight—said, “My books are friends that never fail me.” And I liked what you said about a more literate community being a more healthy and prosperous and happy community.

All the MPPs on this committee are fully aware that money is delivered in budgets and economic statements and not in bills—that wouldn't make any sense—but as you pointed out, it's not just about pouring money in; it's actually about getting it right.

You mentioned that teachers are being trained not based on the research as to how to teach children to read and that that obviously has consequences for the teachers themselves who are struggling to try to teach the children—and maybe failing, in some cases—and the students themselves. Could you elaborate a bit on that very important point, on why it's so important that we give teachers the right tools?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Una Malcolm: I see quite significant difficulties on the student end and on the teacher end, recognizing that for students—we know that instruction is one of the most powerful pieces to support reading outcomes, so that goes without being said.

The context that we're placing our teachers in right now is a very difficult one. The realities of being in a classroom are immense and being in a classroom with students with very diverse needs, without the proper evidence-based preparation to meet the needs of those students, is frustrating for teachers. They feel guilty—misplaced guilt—that they're not able to meet the needs of their students. What we're seeing from IDA is, even when teachers are receiving that training and when they're becoming more trained in evidence-based reading instruction, they often feel quite frustrated because their board might not be supporting them in that effort.

There are phenomenal, wonderful, dynamic educators who are skilled—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your comments.

The Chair recognizes MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mine is to IDA Ontario. You said that you had a positive relationship with the teachers and you're proud of that relationship.

We found out yesterday there isn't one union that represents teachers in the province of Ontario that supports Bill 98, and also that they weren't even consulted on the bill.

So my question is very easy—and I don't need a long answer, because my colleague wants to ask a question: Were you consulted, and did you consult with the teachers' unions prior to coming here to committee?

Ms. Una Malcolm: Thank you for that question. We have been engaging in purposeful and productive conversations with the government for the past year, and we have engaged with every federation and every political party around the Right to Read report. We are happy to be strong partners with anybody we can connect with.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Real quick: It's interesting they consulted with you, but they didn't talk to the unions that represent teachers, hundreds of thousands of workers in the province of Ontario. It makes no sense.

I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): The Chair recognizes MPP Pasma.

Mme Chandra Pasma: Ma question est pour Isabelle et Anne-Marie. Nous savons que les francophones, les Franco-Ontariens, ont un droit constitutionnel de gérer leur propre système d'éducation dans notre province. Est-ce que vous avez été consultées sur ce projet de loi?

Mme Isabelle Girard: On a été « briefées » sur le projet de loi.

Mme Chandra Pasma: Et est-ce que le briefing et le processus de consultation—est-ce que ça vous donne confiance que votre droit de gérer votre propre système d'éducation sera respecté si le projet de loi est mis en place et le ministre peut élaborer des priorités pour les systèmes d'éducation, surtout, comme France a dit, quand le projet

de loi ne mentionne même pas qu'il y a une distinction entre le système d'éducation anglophone et le système d'éducation francophone?

Mme Anne-Marie Gélinault: Je crois qu'on a une grosse inquiétude par rapport à ça—très grande. C'est d'ailleurs—vous allez le voir dans le mémoire qu'on va remettre—notre grosse peur que la gestion ne reste pas aux francophones. On a peur qu'on soit englobé dans la majorité, qui sont les anglophones. On comprend, on reconnaît tout ça. Mais ça ne rentre pas dans nos—dans la gestion elle-même, si on n'est pas reconnu, ça veut dire qu'on a encore une plus grande assimilation dans tous les sens.

Mme Chandra Pasma: Oui, et vous avez parlé un peu de votre besoin de ressources. Nous avons un projet de loi qui implique beaucoup de ressources. Il y a la formation pour les membres du conseil scolaire. Il y a la disposition des terrains, et les priorités du ministre sur l'éducation. Mais vous n'avez pas de ressources additionnelles pour mettre en place toutes ces obligations. Nous avons un niveau de financement, déjà, qui est beaucoup moins que le niveau de l'inflation en Ontario. Le gouvernement donne beaucoup moins de financement—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Mme Chandra Pasma: —par élève en Ontario. Si nous avons les priorités du ministre, mais vous ne recevez pas les ressources nécessaires pour mettre en place ces priorités, est-ce que ça met les conseils scolaires dans une place où vous pouvez réussir à aider nos enfants?

Mme Anne-Marie Gélinault: Difficilement. Déjà, là, on—comme on dit en anglais, we stretch already what we have on the administration, for all of what they ask for. So if you add more, definitely, it's not going to work out. And those things—par rapport aux enseignants, les 2 000 enseignants, je ne sais pas c'est quoi le pourcentage qui va être pour les francophones, puis ce n'est pas comme si on n'a pas essayé d'avoir des enseignants. On a une pénurie incroyable, et je ne sais pas—c'est bien beau de dire qu'on va mettre de l'argent, mais si on n'a pas—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank everyone for their involvement and comments today. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentations today, the deadline for written submissions is tonight, Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

The committee will now recess till 3 p.m. this afternoon, when we will resume public hearings on Bill 98.

The committee recessed from 1004 to 1501.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. This afternoon, we will resume our public hearings on Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care.

As a reminder, witnesses will have been scheduled into groups of three for each one-hour time slot. Each presenter

will have seven minutes for their presentation. Following all three presentations, there will be 39 minutes of questioning for the three witnesses divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for official opposition members and two rounds of four and a half minutes for independent members.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it's important that all participants speak slowly and clearly, so please speak into the mike. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak.

For virtual participants on Zoom, after I've recognized you, there may be a brief delay before your audio and video are ready. Please take a brief pause before you begin speaking. In order to ensure optimum sound quality, virtual participants are encouraged to use headphones or microphones if possible.

As always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION
SKILLS ONTARIO
TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I will now call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, Skills Ontario, Toronto District School Board.

Please state your name for the Hansard when you begin. That's the first thing you should do.

Welcome. We'll start with the Ontario Public School Boards' Association

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Hello. I'm Cathy Abraham, and I'm with the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, having proudly served as their president for the past five years and being on the executive for a total of seven. I've been a public school board trustee with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board for 20 years.

Joining me today virtually is our executive director, Stephanie Donaldson, who brings outstanding experience in public education and is also a former elected school board trustee with the Toronto District School Board.

We thank you for this opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Social Policy and to speak to Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

We represent 31 English public district school boards and 10 public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 70% of the elementary and secondary students in the province. We advocate on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. Part of that advocacy includes addressing provincial legislation that impacts our students and school communities.

Local school boards play the most direct role in supporting students' achievement and well-being. Strong local governance, with students at the forefront, has been a key part of our member boards' ongoing success for

decades. Local boards are always the best equipped to make sound, sustainable and fiscally responsible local decisions in service of students and the community.

This is why we are concerned about the areas of the bill that provide the minister with powers that more appropriately belong at the local level. These areas, which OPSBA is advocating to remove, include the power to set provincial priorities for students without input from school boards, the power of the minister to direct the sale of school board property and the power to intervene in the performance assessment of local directors of education.

Other areas of Bill 98 that modernize the legislation to reflect practices that are already in place within our member boards are welcome.

OPSBA is grateful to the minister for acknowledging the innovation in our school boards in areas such as joint use of schools, partnerships with municipalities in planning and protocols for communications with parents and students.

OPSBA is supportive of the value this government places on skilled trades and apprenticeships. We look forward to the government's promised consultation on this in the fall of 2023. We will be an active participant.

I will now pass it to Stephanie.

Ms. Stephanie Donaldson: Thank you, Cathy.

Our written submission provides greater detail, but today we want to provide comments regarding some important areas.

First, provincial priorities: We're supportive of education-related priorities that are focused on student achievement and well-being, and that are education-related. However, we believe that if provincial priorities are set without consulting with school boards, there is a risk of overlooking the local knowledge that school boards and trustees bring to understanding of important issues that make learning the most relevant for students and parents.

Second, ministerial direction over surplus property: The ministerial authority to direct the sale, lease or otherwise dispose of a school site that is "not needed" is an overreach, and we strongly oppose this provision. Locally elected trustees know their communities best and are uniquely placed to determine the surplus status of a property. School boards' program and accommodation strategies already reflect their schedules for reviewing non-operating school sites for potential disposition too.

Third, director of education performance appraisal: OPSBA really welcomes greater consistency in the form and process of director of education performance appraisals across the province. We do, however, have significant concerns about the minister's involvement in this really important human resource process between the board of trustees and their sole employee. This is an overreach, and we struggle to understand the rationale for such a complicating intervention, particularly since we know how critically important a productive two-way relationship is between a director and their board and, further, how impactful the health of this relationship is to the overall success of any school board.

Fourth, the integrity commissioner process: We support the requirement—we want to be clear—for all boards to adopt a code of conduct, and understand that the minister may make regulations governing these codes, and of course we would request to be part of any discussion around that. OPSBA, however, cannot support the proposed language regarding breach of code of conduct and the investigation process as outlined. There is simply too much left to the creation of an integrity-commissioner-led process and roster that has yet to be piloted or successfully tested in our system. We ask that this be deleted from the act and instead moved into regulation after consultation. School board members also really need a process that ensures procedural fairness.

Fifth, training for school board trustees: We're pleased to see a value placed on consistent professional development for system leaders across the province. However, we maintain that, like any other industry or sector, professional associations like OPSBA are best placed to provide the most meaningful and practical professional development for member trustees. We're concerned that the standard training requirements would be determined solely by the Minister of Education, and we strongly suggest that the ministry co-develop professional development requirements with school boards, trustees, directors of education and senior officials' associations.

Sixth, parental communications: The form and content of communications to parents should remain at the discretion of school boards to ensure the utmost consistency and minimize confusion among parents and students of the board. Above all, all communications to parents should be in the voice of the school board itself.

I'll now pass it back to you, Cathy.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Thank you.

School boards have a responsibility to promote student achievement and well-being. We all want safe and supportive classrooms for children. As local trustees who are on the ground, we hear first-hand about the needs of our students, their families—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Cathy Abraham:—and school communities.

Thank you for considering our recommendations for Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. As mentioned, we have a more comprehensive submission outlining our recommendations that has been shared with the Clerk. We are more than happy to answer your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now turn to Skills Ontario. Please state your name before you start.

Mr. Paul Clipsham: My name is Paul Clipsham. I'm director of stakeholder relations with Skills Ontario.

Good afternoon. First, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Ontario government for the support and partnership that has been developed with Skills Ontario. This support has been critical in helping us emerge even stronger through some very difficult times.

For over 30 years, Skills Ontario has grown into the most impactful organization empowering youth, parents

and others to consider a career in skilled trades and technologies. Notwithstanding the progress we are making, the skills challenge continues to be one of the most significant economic challenges of our time. In total, skills gaps in Ontario cost an estimated \$25 billion in foregone GDP. A Conference Board of Canada study highlighted that we would need over 500,000 new entrants to the skilled trades by 2030 to address skills shortages.

1510

Skills challenges have been made worse by the pandemic, with delays in training and certification coupled with growth in demand from key areas such as construction, health and safety, manufacturing, advanced IT and service hospitality sectors. For example, the construction sector projects a shortfall of over 100,000 skilled tradespeople over the next decade to keep pace with demand, while a recent study by Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters highlighted 80% of respondents saying they were experiencing immediate skills shortages. This figure is expected to continue to grow in the coming years with competition for skills intensifying.

Ontario's skilled professionals continue to be critical in keeping our economy, our health care system and our society operating. I am pleased to be here today in support of Bill 98, Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, which will enable greater accountability within the education system and lead to better alignment with industry needs. This will help to ensure both student and economic success in the future.

In particular, Skills Ontario wishes to highlight the following aspects of Bill 98 as worthy of focus and inclusion.

Curriculum guidelines: For many years, we have heard concerns from industry that students are coming to the workplace with insufficient knowledge and skills to be successful. These concerns cover a range, from STEM to soft skills like teamwork, problem-solving, time management etc. Requiring revisions to be informed by experts on teaching and labour markets needs ensures that our curriculum prepares students for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the real world. The changes enshrined in the bill will bring further accountability and foster better outcomes across a range of skills.

Training: Empowering the minister to establish policies and procedures for training of board members, directors of education, supervisory officers and superintendents is critical for maintaining a high standard of governance and leadership in our education system. By defining the content, timing and frequency of training, the minister can ensure that education professionals receive the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively carry out their roles. This will enhance their ability to make informed decisions and provide better support to students in schools.

Board reports: The provision in Bill 98 that allows the minister to require boards to make their reports available to the public in an appropriate manner is a commendable step toward promoting transparency and accountability. Public access to these reports enables parents, guardians and the broader community to stay informed about the

performance and activities of school boards. This fosters trust, encourages engagement and facilitates a more collaborative relationship between the education system and the public it serves.

Parent communications: Granting the minister the authority to establish policies and guidelines regarding school boards' communications with parents and guardians is an important aspect of Bill 98. Specifying the informational material school boards can provide to parents and guardians, including rights and responsibilities in areas such as special education, ensures that parents are well informed and empowered to support their children's educational journey. The frequency and manner of providing these materials and the requirements for a protocol for responding to inquiries demonstrate a commitment to effective communication and parental involvement.

Code of conduct: Adding a procedural requirement for implementing a code of conduct for trustees, including the involvement of integrity commissioners for resolution of the provision of appeals, enhances transparency and accountability in the governance of school boards. These measures provide a fair process for addressing alleged breaches of the code of conduct, promoting trust and confidence in the decision-making process of trustees. The directions regarding sanctions further emphasize the importance of maintaining high standards of conduct and integrity within the education system.

In conclusion, Skills Ontario supports Bill 98, which we believe will yield greater accountability in education and foster improved alignment with the labour market. Further consultation with stakeholders regarding the bill and its implementation will be important to ensuring maximum benefits and opportunities.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to any further discussion.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the Toronto District School Board.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Good afternoon. My name is Rachel Chernos Lin, and I'm chair of the Toronto District School Board. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon about Bill 98. I'm pleased to be able to provide you with the perspective of the Toronto District School Board on this legislation, given the significant potential impact on our board and on others across the province.

The TDSB currently has 235,000 students in 583 schools throughout Toronto, approximately 12% of all Ontario students.

Given time constraints, I will focus on key issues of concern. There will be more in our written submission.

Today I have brought with me, virtually, Daryl Sage, who is CEO of the Toronto Lands Corp., our real estate subsidiary; Andrew Gowdy, our senior manager of planning; and two trustees, Trustee Laskin and Trustee Aarts.

First off, leveraging surplus school board property: This is probably our biggest concern with this legislation.

With regard to the ministry's move to gain greater control over TDSB property through the ability to direct the sale, lease or disposal of school sites that are not needed, we are deeply concerned, as it would seem to remove the very important role of elected boards of trustees in determining the surplus sale of a property based on the unique needs of each community. As the TDSB's Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy—which is our 10-year plan and is revised every year—already reflects the board's schedule for reviewing non-operating school sites for potential disposition, it is critical that we better understand the process, criteria and factors that will be used by the province to determine if a site is not required.

It is important to note that the TDSB is prepared to make difficult decisions with regard to the closure of underutilized properties. In addition to our Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategy, for several years now, we have had a secondary review strategy with the goal of right-sizing our secondary schools to not only maximize programming options but to operate schools in a more cost-effective way.

In the last year and a half, we have also begun a full review of all of our administrative sites to determine the most efficient use of them and to adjust to the reality of new working conditions.

Regardless, the board should have the authority to make decisions regarding whether a school site is required now or in the years ahead. Toronto is constantly changing, and the board needs the flexibility to adjust to the changing urban structure and demographics of our city. And indeed, the TDSB has a long history of working with demographic change. I would cite two previously closed but now reopening schools: Castlebar in south Etobicoke that has recently reopened, and in September 2024, we will be reopening Bannockburn. Both sites were not needed for some time and so were leased out but now are coming back into use to address significant enrolment growth and accommodation challenges at existing nearby schools.

I think it's worth noting that it is common in many jurisdictions to empower locally elected school board trustees with powers related to school board properties. I would ask the standing committee to consider why it might be that trustees were given power over these matters in the first place. I would offer that schools are essentially community-level services, first and foremost. Elected people who serve communities directly are felt to be best placed to weigh the considerations and impacts for democratic decision-making regarding their schools. We would ask, what would the province want to accomplish in this area that cannot already be done by locally elected trustees? And, rather than take on powers currently provided to locally elected trustees, what other tools might already be available in the province to work collaboratively with and across school boards to achieve these provincial goals?

Finally, it is worth noting that the TDSB and many other local school boards have been asking for years to fix the moratorium on school closures. We would welcome the opportunity to see the moratorium lifted and to work

collaboratively with the government on our secondary plans that have been carefully thought out by trustees and staff together to ensure that our schools are efficient, modernized and right-sized to improve student programming and ensure student success. So we would ask that the government, rather than assuming potential control over our property, consider providing boards with clear timelines on when the moratorium will be lifted so that we may plan accordingly and efficiently.

1520

With respect to parent consultation by boards regarding multi-year plans, I have two comments in general. First off, we have 235,000 students, so we would like more clarity on how this communication should be working. It's not really clear from the bill. We do an awful lot of parent engagement, so we would welcome a little bit more clarity on that.

With regard to the multi-year plan: School boards play a vital role in making sure local priorities are reflected in public education. In fact, right now, we are in the midst of renewing our multi-year strategic plan. We have already begun a survey to parents, and we have in-person and virtual meetings going on with parents in communities. We feel this local engagement is important. We do believe the province should continue to provide significant space for this local input and avoid legislating priorities in the multi-year plans. Ontario is diverse. Communities in Timmins, North Bay, Windsor and Toronto may have local pieces that are very important.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute remaining.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Thank you.

And should the province determine that they have a role in setting these priorities, we would strongly suggest that boards be involved in consultation on this.

With respect to the Toronto Lands Corp. and business affairs of boards: The minister is being provided with broad powers to regulate the business affairs of school boards and specific powers relating to board-controlled entities. Consider the Toronto Lands Corp. It is one of a kind in Canada and was created in close co-operation with the province, and it has been a valuable asset to the TDSB in terms of the stewardship of our real estate portfolio. If the ministry intends to implement general or specific regulatory changes, these changes need to be clearly communicated well in advance.

Finally, with respect to integrity commissioners: I would say that we are very supportive of the idea of a code of conduct—we have one—as well as integrity commissioner—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I'm going to have to cut you off there. I apologize.

We will now go to questions. We will start with the official opposition, then go to the independent member, and then the government.

I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for being here with us this afternoon.

Rachel, if you want to finish your comments, I'm happy to give you a few moments to do so.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Thank you. Really, I just wanted to say, with respect to the integrity commissioner, we are supportive of the idea of an integrity commissioner process; we have one, we have used it, and it has been helpful to us. Our biggest concern with it is that we're not overly comfortable with the idea that, in this bill, there are changes that would see staff, and particularly directors of education, involved in the decision-making process. We feel that to pit trustees against staff is potentially problematic, and we would advise against that.

I would add one more thing: We are very supportive of the changes with respect to local collaboration with municipalities. We work regularly with the city; we have lots of shared spaces, especially green space, and we would welcome the province helping us out with some of that. We see this as a very positive change.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and to expand on my comments. I welcome any further questions.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I have a question for both Cathy and Rachel. Both of you mentioned the importance of local information and local input in making decisions over education in the multi-year strategic plans, but also in the disposition of lands. I'm wondering, especially given the experience that both of you have, if you could provide some examples to us of why it's so important to have that local input and that local accountability for the decisions that are being made, especially with the disposition of lands, but also with the development of priorities in multi-year plans.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Okay, I'll go.

When it comes to the property, Rachel was very clear about the experience in Toronto. I would add to that that, in Toronto, you might have had an older school where you've closed it and it's sitting there and you're leasing it somewhere else. In other parts of the province, the issue is you have a piece of property that might not have anything on it, but when you live in the GTHA, you can see the growth coming and, as a school board, you know that that piece of property is going to be needed in 10 years.

We need to be able to go to our local communities and say we're hanging on to this property because we don't want to have to buy a piece of property in however—I always say that we plan in JK to grade 12, so that's 14 years that we think about planning. So when we're looking at what's happening in our communities, if I need that land in 14 years and it's now gone, I have to find the land, then I have to pay for the land, and I'm pretty sure we can all agree that it's going to cost more. So that's a part of a local responsibility that we have to our local communities to make sure we're making these fiscally responsible decisions and that we're saying to them, "Yes, we recognize that, in this community, there's going to be growth, and we're going to try to provide you a school when it's there."

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: I would echo Cathy's comments. Before I was a trustee—and I am a trustee in a very high-growth area—one of the biggest concerns of constituents, for years, is, how do we accommodate the growth of education infrastructure in Toronto? Because it isn't part of the municipal process, per se.

When communities are growing—and certainly, we have areas of midtown Toronto and the downtown core that are just exploding—the idea that we would not have the local community play some part in that is so significant. I think this is just something that our communities feel so strongly about, how they use their cities. And we know them best, we hear from them on a day-to-day basis—and I mean it, on a day-to-day basis. So these are pieces that are really meant to have that local input, and I think if we take a step back and we don't have that, we lose the sense of how communities work and why they work. So it is of deep concern.

In a school board that has—we do have surplus properties that—we would really like to do some consolidations and to work on our secondary plan. We have been asking repeatedly for years now for the moratorium to be lifted so that we can be efficient with our space, so we can be cost-effective with our space. And in doing so, a really important piece of that is then we can maximize the programming for our students, because we have areas of the city where we have multiple schools that have 400-kid, 500-kid secondary schools, and we know that they would be best placed if they had 1,000 to 1,200 students. We know that's kind of the sweet spot for a secondary school.

So for us, it's not to not involve the province; we're happy to involve the province in this and work with the province on it. But it's losing that control in terms of the knowledge that the school board has and the local pieces about how communities work that's so integral to that that we do find deeply concerning.

I would just ask my colleagues—I do have several real estate—and in terms of planning, senior manager Gowdy, if he has any further comments on this.

Mr. Andrew Gowdy: Through the Chair, thank you, Trustee Chernos Lin.

Local knowledge is important in planning the future of school sites. The future of school sites needs to be planned in consideration of the city's official plan. The city has identified growth centres that are proposed for significant intensification, and the distribution of school sites in proximity to those growth centres is very important.

Another important piece of information to take into consideration, with the future of school sites, are current operational needs.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute remaining.

Mr. Andrew Gowdy: In many of our capital projects, we have to remove children and classes from school sites in order to proceed with them. So some surplus school sites are required as holding facilities to allow significant capital projects to proceed.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And just quickly, because we have only about 40 seconds left: Did either of you have any thoughts as well on the importance of local input into the multi-year strategic plans and the priorities for education locally?

Ms. Cathy Abraham: It would be shocking to me if a single school board in this province didn't already have, in their multi-year plan, student achievement and well-being.

That would be absolutely shocking. We share that priority. Nobody believes in anything other than the importance of student achievement and well-being, so we have no issue with having that in there. But we need to set our priorities for our local communities.

1530

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the independent member for four minutes and 30 seconds. We recognize Mr. Shamji.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): MPP. Sorry.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Of course, not at all a problem. Thank you very much, Chair.

First, I want to begin by acknowledging you, Paul, Rachel and Cathy, for bringing the valuable perspectives that you do and for your commitment to educating our future generations, which is really the future of our entire province. So thank you very much for that.

I actually wanted to ask the inverse of the question my colleague MPP Pasma asked, which was, is it helpful or is there any perceived benefit to inviting the province to direct school boards on their multi-year plans and to mandate priorities? That could be either to TDSB or the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: I see my colleague looking at me, so I think I'll take this. I don't actually see—there's nothing wrong with the government saying, "You might want to consider this." But it's the overlaying of authority of "Thou shalt do this" which takes away that local piece. I don't think there's—we're all very aware what the province's priorities are. We know they want better achievement for our kids, as do we all. That's not the issue. The issue for us is the directive part. The issue for us is it's without consultation, without us having a piece of that, because it does take away that local piece.

Mr. Adil Shamji: To follow up on that, a similarly themed question: Do you believe that school boards require provincial direction with regard to real estate and ensuring that these portfolios are handled with the best interests of students in mind?

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Do you want to take the real estate one?

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Sure. I'll start, and then I'll ask perhaps Daryl Sage and Andrew Gowdy to weigh in.

I would just say that there's already significant discussion on everything to do with our real estate in terms of dispositions of properties or capital projects we want to do. Even using our proceeds of disposition, we need to get permission from the province to do that. There's already considerable discussion and back and forth that we go through, so I don't think it is without oversight. It is the supreme disposition that we are concerned about.

I will just pass it over perhaps to Daryl and Andrew to add to this. Thanks.

Mr. Daryl Sage: Through the Chair, I think an important piece to maybe remind the committee of is the value which the real estate portfolio has. In terms of the disposition, we are now seeing sites in excess of \$100

million an acre. If we don't have access to those sites, it will be reliant on the province to assist the school board to find those sites and fund those sites. In terms of the manner in which TDSB is able to utilize the site, whether it has been surplus for a period of time and we have leased it on their behalf is, I think, quite important to the whole, evolving communities.

I think another aspect that I want to maybe emphasize—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute remaining.

Mr. Daryl Sage: —is the partnerships that we have been able to do amongst the locals, like in terms of the city, whereby we have partnered up in terms of allowing the city to come to the site in exchange for students getting free swimming four hours a day for the next 49 years. These are the unique aspects of the partnerships and the ability for a local school board to develop these partnerships and make sound community decisions.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Great. Thank you. I'll stop there.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to round one for the government for seven minutes and 30 seconds. We'll start with MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for being here. Thank you to all the presenters who presented. I just have a couple of questions. I just wanted to confirm that there are already ministerial directions that come down, and trustees localize those, right? So I just wanted to think that—and the other question I have is, we already have a process in place right now for surplus properties. If you have a surplus property, it's offered to each board presently before it goes out to the open market, so that's already in place. The concern that we have, which we hear consistently from the French board, is that they cannot attain property. So that is one of the concerns that we want to address in this, that the minister cannot then look and say, "These are the properties that are here," and then work with the French boards to necessarily negotiate to get a property to build a school that they might need now as opposed to one that might be sitting for 10 years. So I just wanted to get your feedback on that, because there is a concern and a complaint.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Understandably. I would say that if there's a school sitting on a piece of property that we need to get rid of, we also need to be able to make some of those decisions. Let's start with lifting the moratorium and move on from there.

I will tell you that that situation already exists in this province. I can actually drive you right to the school where the French board bought it from the English public because it was in my area, so it does happen. So rather than just say, "Give us no choice"—because sometimes, the reason why we don't want to give up that property is because we have a plan for it—let's work together and come up with some other kind of response. It's not about not wanting to work with our partner associations or boards; it's about wanting to be able to still do our priorities and still do our plans with the understanding that

we're planning for our students in the future. It's the taking away of choice.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I totally understand that. So each board is having to look at their priorities, and the ministry has to look at every board's priorities, so it comes down to sort of a balancing act at the minister's level, because—it's okay that Toronto is planning, but then we also have the French board that's trying to plan, and they can't get properties. So that was one of them.

The other piece is, we talked about communications and not really wanting to standardize that. I've been a trustee. I totally understand this. You've heard my spiel already about how we have pockets of excellence across our 72 boards, where we have students that are doing fantastic, and we have other students that are not. Oftentimes, they are the most vulnerable of our students. To be able to really address some of those issues is what the minister has talked about, and to be able to really look closely at what that is and see how we can pull those students up, to prioritize, because we know the long-term effect of not being educated in the system.

So we talk about the parental communication piece, and we hear it as trustees, and now we have seen it also in the ministry, where we have parents that are complaining that boards are not responsive to parents, they're not responding to parental needs, they're not responsive to parental concerns. There are parents that complain that they don't find out about their students doing badly until they get a report card. Those are some of the issues that are forward-facing for parents, so I just wanted to get a comment on that, because no matter if the minister does put in a standardized way that things are done, trustees are always able to localize the things that come down, to a point.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Well, first, that needs to be made clear in the legislation, that we're going to be able to localize everything that's in there, that we can localize it.

Secondly, I would say, listen, we're not saying we're perfect. There's no such thing as perfection. There will always be pockets of areas where, yes, communication could be better.

MPP Barnes, where I live, I get people complaining to me about way too much stuff coming home from their schools, so that's a challenge too. There's no reason why a parent shouldn't know what's going on with their schools before the report cards. I don't know of—and I'd be happy to work with a board or with colleagues who don't do that. I mean, that is the expectation currently. So I guess our concern is that, if you take away—and without being very clear about that localization piece—we can't make that communication suit our communities, whether it be cultural or language or any number of things. That's a real concern for us. We don't want standardized communications.

1540

There's nothing wrong with saying that there should be school newsletters. That is standard.

I would also say that sometimes—and my colleagues are probably going to cringe a bit when I say this—you

can write a newsletter but you can't get people to read it. There is communication out there, so the trick for us, then, is to find out why you're not reading it, why you're not accessing the information there. Where's the gap? Maybe that's going to be part of our issue.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: I would just add to that: Communication is a major focus for boards, but one of the things that we do face at TDSB is significant costs associated with interpretation. So I think there are places where we would look for communication funding, where it could help us reach communities that we don't necessarily reach the easiest. It's something that we have been trying—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin:—very hard to do. But there are still barriers in place that we're trying to work through.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for that response.

Just so you know for the next round, you can't add unless the question comes directly to you.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Oh, sorry.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): There's 41 seconds left. MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'll ask one quick question and then pick up again on the second round.

Thanks to everyone who has presented today.

My question is for Paul from Skills Ontario. You mentioned a couple of things a little bit earlier, but I was curious about what you think the impact will be of getting skilled trades professionals into the classrooms faster.

Mr. Paul Clipsham: Certainly, the hope would be that with greater transparency, greater engagement at the provincial level, this will help to facilitate curriculum and standards—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Apologies. That concludes our time for the first government round.

I'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to say that something that has been forgotten in this bill is that our trustees are elected by their communities. It seems to be forgotten altogether in Bill 98.

Skilled trades: You mentioned that you've got a shortage. I want to tell you that we have a shortage in nursing. We have a shortage in PSWs. We have a shortage in police. We have shortage in EAs in our education sector. We have doctor shortages. Every sector of the economy has shortages—so I just wanted to let you know that it's a lot bigger than just skilled trades. We hear a lot about trades; we don't hear about all the other shortages.

I've got two questions to Skills Ontario, and then I'm going to turn it back to my colleague who wants to ask more questions.

Why does Skills Ontario think that the completion rate for unionized skilled trade apprentices is so much higher than non-union? And because you talked about transparency and openness, do you believe that trade unions, which do a great job of dealing with apprenticeship training, should be consulted on legislation like this—and I can tell you the unions were not.

I'd appreciate you answering those.

Mr. Paul Clipsham: I don't have an informed perspective on why completion rates are higher amongst unions. I do think that broad consultation is really important, and hearing from all stakeholders that have a perspective on this is an important thing just fundamentally. We have stakeholders that are unionized and non-unionized. We have great relationships with our union partners, as well. But as far as why one is better than the other, I don't have a perspective.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll turn it to my colleague.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Another question for the school boards—and this is a question and a follow-up to the question that came from MPP Barnes.

One thing that we heard from the francophone school boards this morning is that they believe the bill would be stronger if the legislation only allowed the sale to another school board.

Do you think if this legislation was only or primarily about francophone school boards getting access to land and buildings, the legislation would allow the minister to compel school boards to sell the building to anyone at any price?

Ms. Cathy Abraham: I believe that forcing school boards to sell schools to anyone at any price would not be good for locally elected school boards. We need the flexibility to be able to sell that property to whom, sometimes, we'd like to sell it to. Oftentimes it becomes a very big part of our future planning.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: One of the concerns that I have about this piece of legislation is that it's going to impose new costs on school boards: the cost of the integrity commissioners, the cost of developing these multi-year plans in accordance with the priorities of the minister. We don't know what the priorities of the minister will be. We know that funding has fallen below the rate of inflation for the past five years. I know the Toronto District School Board is one of multiple school boards that have paid costs out of pocket for the past few years related to COVID and that that means that you are cutting teachers and education workers that are badly needed by your students right now. My concern is that setting priorities without actually providing resources to the school boards to deliver on them is setting up school boards to fail. I'm wondering if you share that concern and if you see any other risks in this legislation to actually delivering better student outcomes, which I think is what we want the end of the day.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: As a provincial organization, we believe the locally elected school board trustees best represent their local communities, and we believe that the decisions being made about the places we live should be made by school boards. There is always a risk of losing that piece of the local value of a school board. We would certainly hope that once there is true consultation on this legislation, that will become part of the conversation.

Should there be a piece of this legislation that is imposed upon us that comes with extra costs, we would certainly hope that extra funding comes with that. We cannot continue to add on to the things that we are doing without funding adding on as well.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Rachel?

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: One of the things that I would mention—and then I'll go to Shelley—is that sometimes in an effort to cut costs, we lose sight of the bigger picture. For example, in having three different types of school builds, we potentially lose opportunities in a city like Toronto where we have podium schools going in, innovative ways of putting buildings in place in busy infrastructure. I'll just go over to Shelley, because I think Trustee Laskin—I should really refer to you properly—may have more to add.

Ms. Shelley Laskin: No problem, thank you. Through the Chair: I don't think that this time it's so much about funding, because I think all school boards across the province would say that funding really no longer meets the needs of students nor community expectations. I think in this particular instance, it's about removing the democratic role of elected trustees to understand their communities, to be transparent and accountable to their communities.

And, again, with respect to some of the other questions: Schools are the hearts of our communities; they thrive because they are centres. In Toronto, we are fortunate enough to have a network of neighbourhood schools. That is not to say there's not demographic ebbs and flows, and we have to be prudent with the fiscal purse, and sometimes you have to consolidate—I get that. But if you're saying, "Well, public board, you shouldn't need to keep that school, even though you know you're going to need it in 10 years, because the French board needs it now," what are we doing, pitting us against each other?

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Shelley Laskin: That's not how we should work well together, and I'm sure executive officer Gowdy has examples of how we've worked with the French board.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Just in the interest of time, quickly: Cathy, you mentioned concerns about the integrity commissioner process being in the act, and I'm wondering if you could expand on that—why you would prefer it to be in regulations.

Ms. Cathy Abraham: The integrity commissioner being in the act—you know what? I'm totally blanking on that. I'm very sorry.

The piece with the integrity commissioner is that we need to be able to have some flexibility around that. We need to have conversations around that. It's not always just as clear as one side or the other, as everyone would like to think it is; it's not. It needs to be something that we have the opportunity to have conversations about, to work together on and to come to a good conclusion.

1550

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): I'm sorry; that's our time. We'll now turn to the independent member. MPP Shamji.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Perfect. Thank you very much. I wonder if we can change the tune just a little bit, because so far we've focused on the ministerial oversight and potentially directives and mandates, but there is a schedule of this bill that is directed towards reducing sexual violence against students by ECEs and teachers. Obviously

it's important that we get this right. I was just curious to know whether any of you have any reflections on that schedule and whether it requires any improvements.

Interjection.

Mr. Adil Shamji: That's fine. Okay. All right. I just wanted to check because it is obviously important that we get that right.

There have been many concerns that all of you have articulated in regard to the role of this legislation. Can you speak to the extent of your involvement in any sort of consultation before this bill was drafted?

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Prior to the drafting of this bill, there was no consultation.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Am I allowed to comment? I don't know—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, by all means.

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: Okay. There has been no comment. In fact from the calls that we've had—our chair calls with the minister—it was encouraged that we come here, that this was our opportunity to consult.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. All right. It doesn't bode very well for a collaborative relationship moving forward if this legislation goes through as written.

Paul?

Mr. Paul Clipsham: Sorry?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sorry. I mean if you'd like to share anything about the extent of your consultation.

Mr. Paul Clipsham: We have regular meetings. I mean, not super regular, but we do meet with the minister. But as far as this specific legislation, no.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I do agree on the importance of skilled trades and the need for us to expand the education around that. Are there opportunities for this bill to go further?

Mr. Paul Clipsham: I think what the bill is trying to do is say that this is a real, complex challenge in terms of—we've been trying at this for years to address these skill shortages. And Wayne is right; it's not just skilled trades and technologies. It's across the board.

I see this bill as trying to be additive, that there is sometimes a disconnect. The minister and the ministry are trying to effect change with respect to skilled trades and tech. Some school boards are taking up that mantle and doing great things, like my colleagues from Toronto District School Board, and others not so much. We hear of others that there's a disconnect there, that maybe a shop is closing or something, and we're saying, "But we need more skilled tradespeople in that area." And obviously there's issues of funding and other complex things.

We need more focus on this challenge. That's what I perceive the bill is trying to do. It's trying to say, okay, how do we connect the dots more effectively? And yes, I think it's going to need more consultation to get it perfect. But as far as the overall intent and direction, I think it's positive.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Rachel, perhaps you might be able to help with this one. Is it possible for the Toronto District

School Board to commit to the standardization of school design?

Ms. Rachel Chernos Lin: I think it would be impossible. We have sites that are 1.2 acres and we have sites that are 10 acres, so I don't think it makes sense to commit to one design. I think it also lacks innovation, and it might not even save money.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Cathy, was there anything you wanted to add to that?

Ms. Cathy Abraham: Your local school should reflect your local community.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Understood. Thank you very much. Recognizing the time, I have no further questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Eighteen seconds.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): We'll now turn to the government for the last round. MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'll pick up where I left off. I think our question got cut off there, Paul. I was asking you about the impact of getting skilled trades professionals into the classroom faster.

Mr. Paul Clipsham: Yes. So as I was saying, I think the hope would be that we can try to address some of the disconnects between what we see from a policy perspective or at the provincial level, that that filters down more effectively at the school board level. As I said, there are lots of school boards. We work very closely with all the school boards across. There are lots that are doing phenomenal things and really driving change and engaging their students and talking about skilled trades and tech and working with us. But there are also things where there seems to be a disconnect there, or maybe, like I said, there could be other issues like funding and so forth that come into play. But I think the hope would be that, if we can strengthen that connection through legislation, it will ultimately lead to more young people, more students pursuing rewarding careers in skilled trades and technologies where there are high demands, as I had described earlier.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Do you believe that getting more teachers into the classroom with skilled trades certifications leads to better education outcomes for students?

Mr. Paul Clipsham: Yes. Not only is there a skills shortage in skilled trades and technologies, there is also a shortage of tech teachers. My grandfather was a tech teacher who started as a tool-and-die maker. There's not enough of him going in to teach the next generation, so I think anything that we can do that is going to enable and recognize that industry knowledge and understanding is important, as well. I think more steps in that direction are a good thing.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Clipsham: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to all the presenters for giving us your evidence today. It's very helpful to hear from everybody. When the minister was here, he was talking about the point of the bill, which is the maximizing

of the capital assets. Taxpayers fund capital, buy properties, fund capital projects and these use significant amounts of tax dollars. School boards across the province, I believe the minister said, own properties that are now worth about \$64 billion, so it's a significant amount of property.

My understanding of the provisions is we are trying to get municipalities and school boards to work together—that's part of what's in this legislation—to make sure that properties are used properly. And we heard today some comments that we might need a school in 10 years, so we can't give it to the French board now. That seems kind of hard to justify to a bunch of parents, perhaps, who want their kids to be educated in French today when there is a school property available in the neighbourhood that could be used educate those kids today on the off-chance that, 10 years from now, there might be a need for that property for another school board, if you understand what I'm getting at.

I know that this is the way it has traditionally been done, that school boards would just hold on to their properties and not necessarily share those properties with other boards and/or sell them to other boards because they are planning in the distant future. But I would just like to say I'm not sure that that's the best way to go in the circumstances. More and more people are coming to this city. My trustee, Shelley Laskin, knows that Yonge and Eglinton has tons of people coming to that area and that most of the condo buildings going up there—and there have been several—post signs that say, "Your children will not go to school anywhere near here, so don't even think about it." And that's not really fair to the parents and the families that come to this city.

I think it's something that we need to address, so I'm excited that this bill is trying to make sure that we all work together to address those things. I think that's the intention of the bill, that it's a team sport; we're all here to provide a good education for Ontario's children and whichever school board they choose to get educated in, it's important that we do that and we use the assets that taxpayers pay for more meaningfully. So I think that's important, and I just wanted to add that to the discussion.

1600

My understanding is that there are currently 100 schools being built and 200 in the pipeline. That's a lot of schools, a lot of investments. We're excited to make sure that kids get the facilities they need to get the education that they and their parents are looking for. Anyway, that's just something I wanted to add.

I don't think it makes sense to hold a property for 10 years, waiting to see if the neighbourhood will change and the property will be needed in the future, when someone else would like to use it for educating kids today. That's why I like those provisions.

Sorry. I will now ask a question to Paul.

Have you found that—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Oh, sorry.

Teachers should only be certified—the teachers that we have right now are not really certified, in some ways, or

qualified to teach skilled trades. Have you found that they have the qualifications to teach those skills now, or do we need to do something to change that?

Mr. Paul Clipsham: The teachers I'm dealing with are very well qualified, for the most part; there are exceptions to that. In general, given the shortage that we've talked about in terms of skilled trades, but also in skilled trades tech teachers, it's really important that they have that industry background and that knowledge of the trades and experience in the trades, and then the academic qualifications on top of that. How do we streamline that in a way that's going to accelerate more people into—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): That concludes our time for questions. Thank you.

I'd like to thank you for your participation and attending today, both in person and virtually. If you'd like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentation, the deadline for written submissions is tonight, on Tuesday, May 9, at 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

In addition, for the committee: The Toronto Catholic District School Board has asked the committee if they could have two in-person speakers at 5 p.m. as an accessibility accommodation. Does the committee agree? Thank you.

OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL
BOARD
SHAD CANADA
ONTARIO LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION/ONTARIO SCHOOL
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): I will now call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, Shad Canada, Ontario Library Association/Ontario School Library Association.

Welcome. As a reminder, each of you will have seven minutes for your presentations, followed by questions from the committee members. I will provide reminders of the time remaining during the presentation and questions. Please state your name for Hansard, and then you may begin. We'll start with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

Ms. Lyra Evans: Good afternoon. I'm Lyra Evans, chair of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Following virtually with me is Michele Giroux, our director of education, who I do not see. In addition to my work as a trustee, I'm a chemist. I feel compelled to take time away from my work to come to Toronto because of the grave concerns that our board has for some of the profound changes in this legislation.

As a general statement, the OCDSB supports some aspects of the legislation, with concerns about others. I'm going to give a brief rundown of the changes that we support and those we have concerns with and expand upon them if I have time.

We support the focus on apprenticeship pathways, we support the changes to the code of conduct and we support the changes to the curriculum review cycle.

We have grave concerns about the removal of local autonomy around developing and communicating strategic priorities. We have grave concerns around the removal of local autonomy around funding envelopes. We have concerns about the changes to disposal of property, the implementation of design standards removing the ability of local boards to be innovative or collaborative. We have concerns about changing curriculum in response to labour market conditions.

Our other concerns are the ministerial involvement in the director of education performance appraisal process, concerns that the language about costs to get library books vetted may narrow the breadth of books available in school libraries and concerns about overly broad language about any regulation impacting the business activities of the board. We have concerns about the use of "parents" throughout the legislation, ignoring the many families that do not fit that traditional model. We have concerns about unfunded mandates, regulations that we are required to comply with that do not come with funding, and we have concerns about broad government overreach in the form of general centralization of responsibilities.

To elaborate on these points, first, the removal of local school boards to set and communicate our own strategic priorities undermines local voice. We do extensive consultations lasting months, taking particular care to hear from those who are often under-heard, such as English-as-a-second-language communities. These consultations inform the district of what our local community wants, and it would be disrespectful to that work and to the people we have heard from to be unable to meet those needs if the provincial priorities do not align with the local priorities. This ability does not prohibit the province from setting their own priorities, having done so for years through the Priorities and Partnership Funding given out annually.

Second, the removal of local autonomy around funding through the ability to set both a minimum and a maximum on particular line items is concerning. We fear this will lead to overspending in areas which may not need it or underspending in areas of local priority. The provincial setting of funding envelopes is particularly concerning because each city is different. Ottawa is not Toronto, and both differ substantially from Sudbury or the Soo. Trustees are elected and engage in regular consultations to determine local priorities. Having the province turn around and say that there's a maximum allowed to be spent to address these priorities undermines the purpose of these local consultations.

Third, the changes to the disposal of property are concerning. School boards are capable of taking a longer view than most governments. With students joining us in JK and leaving in grade 12, we, by necessity, apply a 14-year cycle to our thinking. School boards and municipal planning also take a longer-term view, with projections going out sometimes decades. The recent commitments to intensification in Ottawa, to greater numbers of families

living in the same area, means that schools will continue to be in demand. The sale of sites, particularly in older or urban-built environments, would mean having to spend exorbitant amounts of money to expropriate new sites in very dense areas in the near future. This puts us at a risk for poor long-term planning.

Fourth, the removal of autonomy for local building decisions has two major flaws. One, environmental and energy efficiency, such as the availability of geothermal in some areas but not others, means a universal design is unlikely to be both as environmentally friendly as possible while still being feasible at all sites. The other concern is that it removes the ability of districts to be innovative, such as forming a community partnership with a local community centre, local health unit or Indigenous group. This inability to share built space would raise the costs for all parties involved, reducing efficiency and causing fiscal waste.

Fifth, our board has a particular concern about changing the curriculum in relation to labour market concerns. There has been a French teacher shortage in Ontario for ages. As a board with a significant Franco-Ontarian minority, ensuring that the core French curriculum remains viable is critical to our local community. We do not want to see our world-class curriculum removing French minutes because of a lack of French teachers—say, from 40 to 20 minutes a day—because it would be easier to find staff.

Some of the minor things for consideration that we have listed: As districts have differing local priorities, a universal director of education appraisal process would likely either be so vague as to be unhelpful—such as, “Did the director meet the goals set out by the board?” or not necessarily applicable to the local needs, such as if the district was seeking a culture change and a director to change that specifically. We feel this would be best left in the hands of local boards.

We had minor concerns about the language around costs to get library books vetted by the publisher, specifically that it may narrow the breadth of books available in school libraries. We feel this clause should be limited to just textbooks.

We had concerns about overly broad language about any regulation impacting the business of the board. Many people would argue that education is our business, and this could be interpreted to mean any regulation. It doesn't strike me as good governance to enumerate where the minister can make regulations in a large number of places and then also have the ability to make any regulation.

1610

We flagged a minor concern about the use of “parents” throughout the legislation, ignoring the many families that do not fit the traditional model. We suggest “caregivers” or “guardians” to acknowledge the grandparents, older siblings, aunts etc. who often fill this role in many families.

It is important to ensure any direct or indirect costs that may arise from Bill 98 and any subsequent regulations, policies or guidelines flowing from the bill are fully

funded through the provision of new, dedicated funding. The more requirements that are asked of the school boards without funding, the more funding we have to pull from classrooms to meet the regulatory requirements.

Finally, we had a concern generally about how this legislation feels like it has the potential for broad government overreach in the form of general centralization of responsibilities. A good law is one that you would be happy to have in the hands of your political opponents. I leave you with the question: Would you want a minister with these powers who held drastically different views from you or your constituents? Because regardless of who the minister is, this looks like too much from where we are sitting.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Lyra Evans: Some of the positive changes that we have—our board is generally in favour of a central integrity commissioner model. We think it would help to address public concerns with trustee behaviour. The question we would like the province to consider is whether or not a longer maximum sanction for particularly egregious behaviour beyond the 90 days currently in the legislation should be proposed.

Our board has long held that all pathways after secondary school are important. University has gotten the lion's share of attention for a long time, and we're delighted to see a focus on other pathways from the ministry. We are a tad concerned about removing students from the classroom entirely before 18 for apprenticeship pathways, giving the importance of anti-child-labour sentiments. We think a co-op model, with a student still in school part-time, would be best. But overall, we are supportive of these changes.

Finally, we are also supportive of the regular cyclical review of curriculum. Cyclical reviews are a best practice seen in many sectors, and we think the education sector would benefit from them as well. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Thank you for your presentation.

We'll now turn to Shad Canada.

Mr. Rob Esselment: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. For the benefit of MPP Rae, I will just quickly tell you what Shad Canada is. My name is Rob Esselment. I am the vice-president of external relations at Shad Canada. We are a national not-for-profit organization that provides experiential education programming during the summers. We've been around for 40-plus years. We were started here in Ontario. This summer, we'll be placing 1,265 grade 10 and 11 high-potential students onto 21 campuses across the country, including 10 here in Ontario. About 60% of our participants are Ontario high school students.

We've been working very hard—and thanks to the support of the Ontario government—to make the population of Shad participants reflect those of the Canadian youth population. With the support of various governments, including Ontario, we've been able to provide funding to support students who otherwise wouldn't be

able to attend our program. We've got 20,000-plus alumni over those 40 years; many of them you might know, but nobody has heard of Shad before, so I'll just start there.

We want to thank the government for their support. We are generally supportive of the intentions of this bill and committing to a focus on student achievement, prioritizing hands-on learning and skills development. These are all things we would typically call STEAM. We are a STEAM and entrepreneurship experiential program, so we are supportive of having more of that focus into the education system. As well, we're certainly supportive of anything that the system can do to secure additional supports for student mental health.

The one issue that I would have with this bill is the current definition of "equivalent learning," which is being repealed in the bill, would incorporate something that looks approximately like the Shad experience—so something outside of the classroom. What appears to happen in this bill is you've changed the language—or the bill changes the language—to speak more specifically to equivalent apprenticeship experience or training, and we think that that just limits it a little bit.

In the national scope, Ontario is a bit of an outlier. We don't have a process within our education system to bring in equivalent educational learning outside of the classroom. The only equivalent credit at the secondary school level right now is the Royal Conservatory of Music. In every other province, there is some sort of process in place that will look at equivalent learning, whether it's air cadets, whether it is 4-H, whether it is things like Shad, or there's a process in which you could be evaluated in order to do that. We would love to see something more like that. We understand that's happening on the apprenticeship side, and we are wholly supportive of additional skilled trades education and apprenticeship training.

What we would like to see is instead of getting rid of the definition that would include us and would include programs like ours, instead of changing that to just simply being apprenticeship, for it to actually be more inclusive again. Include your apprenticeship language, for sure, to include and expand that pathway, but we would hate to cut that off, because Ontario is an outlier in that we're the only province that doesn't have a way for high school students to currently explore getting external credits outside of the current system in the Royal Conservatory of Music.

We are pursuing this around the co-op program, so we would be supportive of an expansion of co-op, for sure, if they could get credits that way, but we think that's a bit restrictive. So that would be the one component of this bill that we would love for people to consider: not repealing that language completely and potentially creating a process that not only helps expand the apprenticeship pathway but also the ability for students who have participated in equivalent learning outside of high schools to get that towards their secondary school diploma.

I'll wrap up there. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to the Ontario Library Association and Ontario School Library Association. You may begin.

Ms. Shelagh Paterson: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Shelagh Paterson, executive director of the Ontario Library Association, and one of our divisions is the Ontario School Library Association. I'm presenting on behalf of highly trained, passionate teacher-librarians and school library staff working in elementary and secondary schools across Ontario. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to provide remarks on Bill 98, Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023.

As specialized educators and literacy leaders, our members fulfill a vital role in ensuring that all students and educators in Ontario have the support and resources needed to successfully build critical literacy skills. It is from this unique perspective that we share the Ontario government's commitment to prioritizing student achievement in literacy. We believe that through the implementation of the measures outlined in Bill 98, there is an opportunity to build upon the Ontario government's recent actions recognizing the importance of school libraries to student success and to work together as partners to realize Ontario's student achievement goals, namely—and to borrow from the Minister of Education's own words—refocusing Ontario's education system on what really matters: strengthening reading, writing and math skills.

OLA and the school library association strongly believe that successfully meeting and/or exceeding Ontario's literacy and student achievement goals must fully leverage and incorporate school libraries as a core literacy-supporting resource in Ontario schools. Tried, tested and proven over generations, school libraries and teacher-librarians are fundamental to student success in literacy and reading. We know that teacher-librarians are literacy leaders and provide support and expertise to the entire school, both students and classroom teachers. Teacher-librarians provide a critical resource for classroom teachers, working collaboratively to equip and prepare these educators to deliver on curriculum objectives. The results speak for themselves: Independent research has demonstrated that schools with trained library staff have better outcomes on the grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.

However, at a time when we need them more than ever, Ontario school libraries and school library professionals are at immediate and increasing risk. Over the past two decades, staffing of school libraries, particularly at the elementary level, has decreased to the point where many schools across Ontario no longer have any dedicated library staff. This means, while there may be a space with books, there is partial or no regular programming or reading and literacy supports for students in the library. The pandemic has only accelerated this alarming trend, with many of Ontario's largest school boards reducing access to school libraries, redeploying teacher-librarians and laying off school library professionals.

The negative impacts of this are both demonstrable and real. Ontario has experienced a steep decline in the percentage of children who report that they enjoy reading, which is a key metric for literacy outcomes. For example, in 1997, 76% of students reported that they enjoy reading. In 2018, only 47% reported this. This closely tracks to the

rate of decline in access to school libraries and trained professionals. Numerous research studies confirm that enjoyment of reading improves literacy skills. A fundamental role of a school library professional, particularly at the elementary level, is the provision of fun and engaging reading programs and activities. If we are to ensure that current and future generations of students have the literacy skills they need to succeed, school libraries and teacher-librarians are essential.

We are encouraged to say that this government has recognized this problem and taken first steps towards this action. For the first time in decades, they've taken action to confront the steady erosion of access to school libraries and library-based resources across the province. As part of the 2021-22 Grants for Student Needs, school boards were asked to submit new enhanced reporting requirements for school library funding, requiring school boards to report on how they are allocating funding in accordance to the provincial funding formula for school libraries and asking those boards that are not fully utilizing the funding to prepare and submit multi-year plans highlighting how they intend to meet this provincial expectation. These new reporting requirements send a powerful signal to school boards of the province's recognition of the important role that school libraries and teacher-librarians perform in student achievement.

1620

With the introduction of Bill 98, there is an opportunity and need to build on this positive start to achieve Ontario's literacy goals. Recognizing and empowering school libraries and teacher-librarians to help students achieve literacy success in Ontario schools. In particular, teacher-librarians are the most qualified and capable educators in the school for supporting student achievement in literacy and reading skills. To this end, OLA and OSLA strongly recommend that the implementation of Bill 98 reflect this through the following actions: In regulation and policy, clearly define the integral role of school libraries and teacher-librarians for achieving provincial priorities in literacy and reading; likewise, integrate the Ministry of Education's existing enhanced reporting requirements for school library funding into any enhanced framework for school board financial reporting and transparency; and, as part of the Ministry of Education's commitment to hire 700 specialized literacy educators and informed by the recently completed GSN reporting requirements, require that school boards prioritize the hiring of qualified teacher-librarians if the board does not currently achieve the level of investment in school library staff set out by the provincial per-student funding formula.

We believe that these three straightforward recommendations will provide direct, impactful results in ensuring that we achieve and deliver on Ontario's literacy and student achievement objectives.

We do look forward to the opportunity to continue working with the Ministry of Education—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Shelagh Paterson: —as well as the members of the Ontario Legislature on fulfilling this important goal

while making certain that future generations of Ontario students will continue to benefit from the tremendous positive impact the school libraries and school library professionals have on their success.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): We'll now turn to the government for questions. You have seven minutes and 30 seconds. MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to all the speakers for your presentations today. I know all members of the committee appreciate you making the time to come to speak to us, either in person or virtually.

My first question is for Shad Canada—and, for the record and full disclosure, I did work for Shad Canada before being elected, so I understand more than most on this committee, I think, the good work they do.

To Rob, basically, my first question is around the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. There's a focus from the minister to help students achieve higher scores, obviously, in reading and math and literacy, and prioritizing those skills and developing those skills and hands-on experiential learning, which Shad is very involved in, as you mentioned in your remarks. So if you could share some of your perspectives on how focusing on these types of skills will help students for the jobs of the future. We can't even imagine, probably, some of the jobs that will be in 20 years, 40 years, let alone 50 years from now, so if you could elaborate on some of the stuff you're seeing.

Mr. Rob Esselment: Sure. Shad exists at one part of a continuum. We acknowledge that we are for a particular type of student, and that type of student is someone who is intensely curious, definitely has plans on going forward to do something with what they're learning and changing the world. That's one of the impacts that we try to measure: how many of our students come out with a change-maker capacity. The more students we can get in to that continuum the better. So we're very supportive of any efforts from the earliest ages right through to a strong post-secondary system and apprenticeship, wherever we can get students to find a passion for disciplines they may otherwise have ignored. I think that happens with apprenticeship training, too, and skilled trades. If we can find a way to unlock these passions, Shad will benefit from that, but I think society will benefit from more students coming through a system that embraces that.

Part of this learning—whether you're doing apprenticeship training or going through Shad or going on to university or becoming an engineer or a doctor or an artist—is that you're going to need to understand the fundamentals. So we primarily deal with students who have come to grips with most of the fundamentals, but the more students we can get to that point, I think that would be a success.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thanks, Rob. I really appreciate those comments.

And I was just wondering, building on the skilled trades, this bill is looking at how we can get people who have a skilled trades certificate in the classroom faster, and to your point, that could be someone with other experience as well—industrial engineer or something along those

lines. In your opinion—there are over 140 skilled trades in Ontario, I think, officially—how would getting those individuals in the classroom faster lead to better educational outcomes in the long run?

Mr. Rob Esselment: Getting them into the classroom or getting them certified to move on?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Getting them certified as teachers.

Mr. Rob Esselment: I think any time we can have skilled, passionate educators in front of our classrooms or in front of students, in general—our program is not based in a classroom; it's based on university campuses right now. But any time that we can get skilled, trained, qualified professionals who, again, awaken that passion—knowing the ins and outs of every component of a thing isn't necessarily the person who has to be there; we want someone who's passionate about it and wants to make a change in the world. We would certainly be supportive of getting more people with that passion in front of the students, who can teach them how to do the things that they're going to need to do. So it's about passion as well as the qualifications, and not just the qualifications, I guess.

Mr. Matthew Rae: One of my other final questions before I pass it, if there is time left, to one of my colleagues is—I know this, but you're a parent, as well, and also at Shad, you deal with parents; obviously, it's minors going to the program. Do you believe that parents need more access to information from our school boards, our schools, around either learning challenges they may be having in the classroom—but just, overall, having that information? Do you believe there should be more of that?

Mr. Rob Esselment: That's a great question, MPP Rae.

Having three children in the school system right now at different stages, it is certainly helpful to know if they are facing challenges before I get a call from the vice-principal or the principal about something that we probably could have worked on ahead of time. However, I also note that students have information that they may not want to share with their parents that they are sharing at school. We certainly see that at Shad in the summers. Once they're away from their school environment or their parent environment, students start to be able to express themselves in ways that they may not have at home. So I think it's a fine line there between what's helping the best interests of the students, noting that the parents are obviously a key component of providing—well, ideally, parents are a key component of providing a supportive environment; my co-speaker had a very accurate and valid point in saying that not every family is a parent family, so we would also acknowledge that. I think there's a fine line there. Certainly, at my house—which was the question—we would want to be able to be supportive of the students before they got into any sort of challenges or to help them overcome any barriers.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Next question? MPP Barnes. There's a minute and 38 seconds.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: My question is for Lyra. Having been a part of OPSBA before—we know that they created

human rights training for trustees and they didn't get a lot of uptake on it. OPSBA also has governance and training modules for trustees that they don't necessarily participate in. And we've seen people get very agitated when it comes to their children—because it is younger children, so they get really involved.

This bill aims to introduce trustee training and a code of conduct that will refocus our boards on student achievement. So I just wanted to get your thoughts on that—in your support of that training or against that training.

Ms. Lyra Evans: Once upon a time, OPSBA had funding to provide training for trustees, so new trustees who came on got intensive training on a whole wide variety of things. At some point, that funding dwindled and they no longer got that funding to provide that training. So anything that brings back trustee training, I think, will improve accountability for trustees and it will improve the public trust in trustees. The more training that trustees have, the better they're going to be able to make decisions. So I would be supportive of anything that brings additional training to trustees.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: My additional question is around—some of the things that you had was labour market concern in regard to training students and—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Sorry; that concludes our time.

I'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses for being here this afternoon and taking the time to share your experience and expertise with us. It's much appreciated.

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Lyra, I'm going to start with you. You mentioned the importance of local input in setting priorities and determining what the multi-year plan should be and also how best to deal with land. This is something that we heard from the OPSBA representatives before and the Toronto District School Board. I'm wondering if you can talk about why that's so important within Ottawa, maybe some examples you've seen. I know, being here as an Ottawa MPP, many people don't really understand how different Ottawa is from Toronto and London and other big cities within Ontario and why it's so important that these local decisions reflect the local culture and the local socio-economic context.

Ms. Lyra Evans: Ottawa has a number of very unique factors about it that mean that the local consultation is particularly important. We are the largest collection of Inuit peoples outside of Nunavut. We are a very interesting mix of rural, urban and suburban that a lot of other districts don't have to deal with. We are one municipality. A lot of my colleague districts around the province have to deal with five or sometimes more municipalities just because they have a large jurisdiction, and we have one municipality. We have one mayor. We have one set of city councillors. So we have the ability to gather public feedback and use it to support our community.

Specifically around land, if you're looking for an example, we have a site on St. Laurent Boulevard, the

former Rideau High School, that closed. That's in my area, so I know all about it. That site closed because there was a temporary dwindling of attendance because the demographics around that community had changed. There were a lot of people who had young kids. Those kids got older. Those kids moved on past high school, and the parents stayed in the home. That's a generation of people who are in the 60 to 80 kind of area, who at some point will move out of those homes, either into long-term care or wherever they go afterward, and they're going to get filled again with people with school-aged kids. So we said, "We don't have the demographics to support a school in here right now, but we know we're going to have the demographics because our elementary schools and our kindergartens have lots of students, so we're going to need to reopen that site at some point in the near future."

If the province were to say that they're going to sell that site because it's on St. Laurent Boulevard, which is a major road in Ottawa and it's probably worth a great deal of money—you could put a lot of housing on it—you wouldn't be able to get that site back. It's an established neighbourhood that's quite expensive to buy large plots of land in. If you sell it, you're not going to be able to put a high school back inside the greenbelt—we also have a greenbelt in Ottawa—and inside the greenbelt, it's very difficult to get land in the size you would need for a high school. So any time that you look at selling those sites, it becomes impossible to get them back.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Absolutely. We've also seen, not in my riding but very close to my riding, D. Aubrey Moodie, which was used very successfully as a community health centre for the past few years by the Queensway Carleton Hospital until the school board needed to take back that school in order to use it as a transitional site for students. So that's an example of how these schools can be used by other public bodies and community partners to support the local community.

Ms. Lyra Evans: I know we currently have Odawa in some of our sites, which is an Indigenous community group. I know we have the Rideau-Rockcliffe community centre in one of our sites. We've got all kinds of community partners in our buildings, yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Can you talk about what kind of outreach you're doing to parents already, what kind of communication, what kind of consultation?

Ms. Lyra Evans: The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has a program, the MLO program, which is a multicultural liaison officers program, where we take individuals who speak a variety of languages from a variety of different cultures and utilize those intercommunity skills that they have to make sure that we're hearing from communities that we might not hear from otherwise. They go into local communities, and they speak the local language, and they say, "This is what the school system is thinking about doing. This is what the school system could do. What do you think? How would this impact your community?" So we have the ability to get local feedback and tailor the programs and the decisions that we're making based on that local feedback. We're

gravely concerned that if you start making decisions from Toronto, you wouldn't get that kind of local community feedback because you wouldn't have the same capacity to do a widespread, in-depth community consultation to every part of the province. As soon as you start applying the same thing to everybody, people are going to get missed.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Actually, what we would probably see is that they would forget to do the consultation in Ottawa because they don't realize that we're in Ontario but then the rules apply to us anyway.

You mentioned the concern about unfunded demands being put upon the school board. I know the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is one of multiple school boards that is facing a funding crunch this year. You paid expenses out of your own reserves for the past few years that had to do with COVID. Now, we're looking at making cuts to programming. Can you talk about, when the minister is looking at setting priorities and talking about student outcomes, what impact do these cuts have on student outcomes and the ability to provide the supports that children in Ottawa need?

Ms. Lyra Evans: So our budget comes in two parts: Our budget comes first in academic staffing, and then second in the rest of our staffing. In academic staffing, the budget that we passed removed a number of early literacy and early numeracy coaches because the funding wasn't there, and the GSNs hadn't come out yet. We have collective agreement timelines where we have to make these decisions by, I think, the first week of April, so we had to make decisions, we had to make cuts because there's a gap in funding. It sucks making those decisions. It's hard, and it is going to detrimentally impact the outcome for children, but as long as the funding increase doesn't continue to meet the demand—and we're a growing board. We have more students than we did last year, and we have less funding, and that's making it particularly difficult to meet the needs of our students.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: This is of particular interest since we also have Shad Canada here, and Rob was speaking about experiential learning and being able to get external credits. I believe some of the positions you lost in addition to the numeracy and literacy coaches were also positions that were specifically aimed at helping older students identify relevant experience and get high school credits for that experience.

Ms. Lyra Evans: That would be correct. We lost two positions that did outreach outside of a specific school. So they weren't school-based; they were board-based, and they would work with individuals—usually people who were above high school age—who had disengaged from the education system for one reason or another, to make sure we could say, "You've done work experience. We can give that to you as co-op credits. You've done things that we can get you a high school diploma so that you will have that to open up further job opportunities." That was one of the programs that we ended up having to cut.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): That concludes our time.

We'll now turn back to the government. Next question, MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you. My question is for Shelagh from the library association. Throughout these hearings, we have heard the human rights commission come in and talk about the importance of the Right to Read report. I know we get distracted sometimes when we focus it just on outreach and consultation, but the real piece we're talking about here is a child's right to read. We know the impact of that. We know how important that is. We know the timelines that happen, and the fallout for students that leave school that cannot read and write.

So my question for you is, having had the human rights commission recommend early learning screening and the government implementing it in this bill in short order to emphasize the importance, what is your thought around the human rights commission's Right to Read report? What do you think the impact of that will be if we're really able to impart that screening process, and what would be the role of your library association within that?

Ms. Shelagh Paterson: Well, we fully support the Right to Read, and we fully agree that early childhood literacy is critical to success down the road, and we were able to respond to that report when it was released as well. Our concern is that we're not convinced that the staffing is in place to support that initiative, because the funding formula is set up so that it's one library staff person for every 763 elementary students. We know most elementary schools have less than that, and so they either have no teacher-librarian, or they have a 0.5 or a 0.2 teacher-librarian. So that's a concern. We fully support the direction, but it needs to be properly professionally resourced in order to ensure student success and ensure that those kids are not falling through the gaps, because once they start to fall through the gaps at that age, it gets harder and harder as they get older and go through the educational system.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for that. We talk about silos, so how do you think public libraries and school libraries can work together and establish a relationship? How could they best encourage reading? How could they support young learners? What would be some of the pieces that would be very important going forward for that?

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Ms. Shelagh Paterson: That partnership is critical in every community, and in every community, the public library and the school libraries are collaborating and checking in on each other and making sure that they have their appropriate materials. School libraries have a strong role to play, particularly on things like, as we approach June, making sure that kids are aware that there is a public library, they should get a public library card, they should be aware of the programs, the summer reading programs etc., so they don't have what we call the summer slide. So there's a really good relationship in many communities already between those two types of libraries, although they do serve different purposes; one is a more public service, and one is supporting the curriculum and learning requirements specific to the Ontario curriculum and to that school and to that community.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for that.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Next question? MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I have a question for Rob Esselment from Shad. Thank you for the presentation. Thank you to all the witnesses for the presentations today.

I just wanted to ask you to elaborate a little bit about how having different programs, like apprenticeship training and things like that, can help unlock passions for students—those were your words: “unlock passions”—and I think that's an exciting way to look at getting that spark going and getting kids to take those paths that may lead to future success. Can you just give us a little more information about how you see that working?

Mr. Rob Esselment: Sure. At Shad, for a long time we were known as just taking the very top academic students and putting them through a summer science camp, and they would come out the other end and be awesome. But they would have all told you that they were pretty awesome going into the science camp as well, and what we've been working hard to do is expand the demographics of the participants that we have so that they're not just the super-high-academic students; they're high-potential students, they're students who—maybe we've got a student there that gets 98s, and that's great, and they are put into 17 different extracurricular activities after school because their parents can afford it, and that student is awesome, and that's great. They will tell you they're awesome. The other awesome student is the student who is potentially struggling academically because they are coming home from school, they are helping their siblings, they are preparing dinner at the house, they've got an extra job to support the family. That student also is high-potential and is also awesome. And that student doesn't have to go to university. Neither student has to go to university.

We are supportive of creating passionate individuals who want to make a change, and how do we accelerate that? How do we give them that confidence that they can go out there and make a change with whatever path they choose? Although about 100% of our Shad participants probably go on to post-secondary education of some sort—I don't know that there are a ton of them that go on to apprenticeship—that doesn't mean that we aren't equally passionate about students who want to be change-makers and make the world a better place and think about social challenges, think about how they make their community and their lives better. So we are quite open to all of those pathways and exploring those pathways, and I think Shad is just a certain option for a certain type of student, but that type of student isn't the super-high-academic student anymore, and we don't think that all students should be forced into just the university pathway to success.

So universities, colleges, apprenticeship—if they want to become an entrepreneur, that's something we teach a lot of, entrepreneurship training—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you very much. I think it's awesome to hear about all these awesome students with

high potential of whatever kind, and I just think the most wonderful thing that we can all work on is helping people get the most out of their lives, however that looks, whatever it looks like for them. So I just want to congratulate you on working on this program and working with all these awesome young people and recognizing how awesome they are. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): Thirty seconds left.

We'll now go back to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Rob, interesting, on MPP Martin's question, because yesterday there was a comment made that I said that my math mark wasn't over 78—but I considered myself a good student, by the way—and you were kind of describing me. I was a person that was a little better with my hands than I was with my head sometimes. I followed my passion, and my passion was to make the world a better place for everybody, and that's exactly what you described about students.

On your comments around the co-op program, I think we should get back to co-op programs. That's exactly what I came out of; I went into an autobody shop after my program in grade 11. Unfortunately, just after that, Mike Harris got rid of that program in our schools, and I think we've been paying the price ever since. So hopefully, with your knowledge and maybe your contacts with the Conservative government, push that along a little bit, because it's important in grade 7 and 8 and into the high schools to be doing those types of jobs. Because not everybody is great in school, but we all have passion, and we can all be good kids and grow up to make a difference in the world. So I appreciated those comments.

I'm going to talk to Ms. Evans real quick, if you don't mind answering a couple of questions—I know my colleague wants to get back in, talking about Ottawa as well. You recently had a very public disagreement with the education minister. Given this disagreement and events where you've been attacked personally a number of times by the minister and the Premier, are you concerned about the powers that this bill grants the ministry?

Ms. Lyra Evans: I think so. I spoke earlier about the centralization of authority and the removing of some of the autonomy of local school boards, who are and continue to be elected officials.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That was a very short answer, so probably a very diplomatic answer.

I've mentioned a number of times over the last, well, 12, 13 hours, whatever we've been here, that there seems to be not a lot of recognition in this bill that trustees are elected and they're elected by their communities. You talked a lot about your community and how important your community is and how it's a lot different than Toronto. Well, your community is a lot different than Niagara, by the way. I've been to Ottawa many, many times, actually, going to the federal government and trying to get CPP and all those other things that I did as a labour leader. Every community is different, and the people that usually understand their community best are the ones that put their

hand forward, run for politics and get elected. I think in Bill 98, we're forgetting about the fact that they are elected, and we should show them respect. Like politicians—there are a lot of great politicians, but, by the way, there are a few bad politicians; we all know that. I read social media. I see my name up there every once in a while. My points there is that there are a lot of great trustees in the province of Ontario as well that are doing an incredible job every day. I want to at least say that to them.

Do you think the discussed goals of the government with this bill and the back-to-basics plan are the full scope of their motivation?

Ms. Lyra Evans: I think public school has to be about so much more than just reading and writing; it needs to be about teaching young people to be creative and to take agency in their lives. It needs to be about teaching the skills that we're going to need for an ever-changing workforce. The world that we are teaching these children to inherit is not basic. It doesn't need the same skill set that we did in the 1920s or the 1930s, and by trying to teach like we did in the 1920s and 1930s, we'll miss the opportunity to ready these students for the world that is coming. I think the focus on back to basics misses the fact that we no longer need accountants to be able to sum large tables of numbers as quickly as possible; we have computers to do that. The world is different, and I think we need to acknowledge that as a school system.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm just going to do one question quickly. I know my colleague is anxious to get back in.

This is to the Ontario Library Association. I can tell you, in 2018, when I ran for re-election for the third time, the Conservative candidate wanted to get rid of libraries. If you can imagine, that was part of the platform. So I'm going to ask this question: Can I imagine that free speech and equity are both very important to you? In regard to that, do you have any concerns about the new powers the province will get with this bill?

Ms. Shelagh Paterson: From a right-to-read perspective?

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, from the libraries and how important they are, not only in our schools but in our communities. In my community of Niagara-on-the-Lake, it's full all the time. A lot of seniors go there. They enjoy that. So I think they should continue to go on, even though we did talk about a changing world. People still love to go there and read and they have computers there and all that stuff. It's kind of like a hub, and you talked a little bit about a community hub.

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Ms. Shelagh Paterson: I think it's critical. I think that we have to defend everyone's right to access the information that they need at all costs, and I think school libraries and public libraries play a critical role in that. We have federal legislation in place that guarantees that. But we also have to ensure that we have people in place that are willing to defend that when there is controversy that arises or people who wish to withdraw or have situations where they don't want people to read certain things or access certain kinds of information. I think public and

school libraries are core to our ability to learn, to wade through the misinformation and the disinformation that's out there. I'm biased, but we need them more than ever.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I agree, and I'll turn this back to my colleague.

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm just going to follow up with you a moment, Shelagh. One of the things that we heard in the fall when the CUPE staff were working hard to negotiate a collective agreement is the impact of worker shortages on our schools and, in particular, the lack of library texts, which means that some students are not getting access to their school libraries—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —because there's no staff to facilitate that access. Do you have any concerns about lack of resources in our schools and staff shortages impacting the ability of our kids to benefit from libraries and to benefit from that life-changing experience of learning to read?

Ms. Shelagh Paterson: I did, but I don't as much anymore. I think what we're seeing in our profession is a resurgence of people seeking work. I think that we were hit, like a lot of other sectors, and there were a lot of restrictions that were placed.

I think the area that we're seeing some concerns is the ability for teacher-librarians to have a role in a school library. We work with teacher-librarians. We work with library technicians. They serve different purposes, and they're very important to the success of the school library program and the learning commons. I think that there's some geography involved as well, when we see some shortages in some areas and then surpluses in other areas—

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): That's time.

We'll now go back to the government for four minutes and 30 seconds. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: My question is, of course—not “of course,” but Lyra, I have a question for you: We've talked about trustees being elected and being reflective of their communities, of being the voices of their communities. My question is around parental transparency in the education system. Right now, we're having a lot of parents—and constituents, guardians as well—that are saying that they do not find the system to be responsive to them, they do not find that their voices are heard, they do not find that they're able to know how, why or what is happening in regards to their children's education, and they're no longer trusting the public education to be the steward of their children. So I just wanted to get your feedback on that. Do you agree? Because I'm sure representing your constituents you do get diverse views on different things, and this has been something that has really grown in the last couple of years, so I just wanted to get your feedback and thoughts on that.

Ms. Lyra Evans: I would say there is a vocal small minority of people who say they feel the education system has left their values behind, usually because they challenge parts of the Ontario Human Rights Code and they feel like

the Ontario Human Rights Code is being taught and defended by school systems but it's not reflective of the values that they hold. The school system doesn't really have a choice to be responsive in that regard, because we are bound by Ontario human rights law, in the same way that all public institutions are bound by Ontario human rights law. So that subsection of the population that says they don't feel their values are being represented because we're upholding human rights law—tough.

When it comes to the people who feel that the communication could do better, I think part of it is that it has gotten harder to be engaged. People are working longer hours. People are spending more time in transit. People are struggling day to day. And when you have other stresses on the mind, following up with what your school board is doing is tough. People pay attention to the federal government. They pay attention to the provincial government. If you're lucky, they pay attention to the municipal government. And then, if you're very lucky, they pay attention to the school system. Because there's so much else going on and there's so many competitions for people's time and attention, it's become difficult for people to follow everything that they should—and I'm using “should” perhaps in a judgmental way that I'm trying not to—that they could be trying to follow. Does that make sense?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Somewhat. In regard to parents, guardians who are saying that they don't feel their voices are being heard—because we're very diverse, right? We talk about the Human Rights Code. We talk about how everybody has the right to their own values and beliefs and religion and that sort of stuff. So, what are some of the things that are being done to really re-engage parents who are saying that their voices aren't heard?

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): One minute.

Ms. Lyra Evans: We have heard from number of parents that they feel—we take the public delegations on any issue. We've heard from a number of parents who feel that the school board has taken the wrong direction on some issues. We give them a chance to speak and we give them people to talk to and let their voices be heard, but the laws that the provincial government has written do not allow the school board to entertain policies that violate the Ontario Human Rights Code. That's not a decision that we have. So if parents come to us and say, “We want you to change that policy to violate the Ontario Human Rights code,” we say, “We appreciate that you've taken the time to engage with us. We appreciate that you've taken the time to come and speak with us, but that's not something that we can do, because the provincial government has said so.”

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Okay. Thank you.
A further question—time?

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Jordan): That's time.

We'll now go back to the official opposition. MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I have a question for both Rob and Lyra about the tech apprenticeship provisions of the bill. I think that getting more opportunities for kids to

explore tech and, especially—it's not something that you learn sitting in a classroom without using your hands and actually getting experience; it's something you learn by being able to practise and being able to do. But there are a lot of questions still about how this new apprenticeship is actually going to be implemented. We don't even know whether the student will get an Ontario secondary school diploma at the end of it or if they will just be able to apply in the future for a GED as an adult, using the experience they've accumulated. We don't know what kind of connections they're going to have to a school and to a curriculum—Lyra, that's why I found it very interesting that raised the option of this be a co-op program rather than a straight-up apprenticeship.

We don't know what kind of oversight a teacher will have, which is a requirement for a curriculum credit—and Rob, I found the point you raised very interesting, about the definition in this bill actually eliminating some opportunities to have experiential learning recognized rather than expanding the scope. It feels like what we're being asked to do in passing this legislation is putting the cart before the horse, because we should actually be having these consultations widely and broadly, figuring out the details and then coming back to pass legislation that implements what has been agreed on by stakeholders rather than rubber-stamping legislation that—we don't even know what it will look like in practice. I'm wondering if you can comment on that.

Ms. Lyra Evans: Like I mentioned, our board had concerns about making sure that we're not shuttling people out of education and into the workforce too early. As a public school board trustee, I'm a huge proponent of public education and of the education of young people, and making sure that people are leaving our system with an OSSD is important. Having it as a co-op program would give that opportunity, would give that ability to make sure that, yes, there is oversight; yes, they're still doing half the day in their core classes, the math and the English that we've heard are so important, while still making sure that they get the hands-on skills they need to be able to enter the work world immediately upon graduation. But I think the “graduation” there needs to be underlined, because I don't want the graduation rate to go down because we're pushing students into the workforce without that education component.

Mr. Rob Esselment: My hope would be that we're not going to devalue the Ontario secondary school diploma but to also be able to recognize that there are other equivalent learnings that students might be able to get in order to get to that pathway, to get to that completion.

Once you have that OSSD, they can't take it away from you. That's the beauty of education, that once you've attained a credential, they can't take it away. Our organization is very specific in a very certain time in a student's academic career, but we'd love to have that recognized, that they spent the entire month of July in an academic setting—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Mr. Rob Esselment: —and get that towards their transcript, even though it's not in the traditional setting. We're not trying to devalue. We're open to lots of different pathways. But my concern with the specific language here was that something that actually fits very well for us is specifically going to be repealed, and then it's going to be replaced with something that we are also supportive of but that doesn't encompass all of the opportunities that might be there for secondary school students.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So in terms of amendments, what would you propose? Broadening the current definition as opposed to repealing the current definition?

Mr. Rob Esselment: I'm not legal counsel, so there might be a reason that they want to repeal that one section. I would leave that section in, not repeal that, because that definition can then have some sort of process around it to evaluate what those other opportunities might be, not just limiting it to what appears to be just apprenticeship.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Finished? All right. I'd like to thank you for your involvement and your comments today. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentation, the deadline for written submissions is tonight, on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. Thank you very much.

I would like to call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: ANCHOR Canada, Toronto Catholic District School Board and Community Schools Alliance.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Would you like a recess? Recess for five minutes.

The committee recessed from 1703 to 1710.

TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL
BOARD
ANCHOR CANADA
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ALLIANCE

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I will now call the next group of presenters to please come forward: Toronto Catholic District School Board, ANCHOR Canada, Community Schools Alliance.

Welcome. As a reminder, each of you will have seven minutes for your presentations, followed by questions from the committee members. I will provide a one-minute reminder of the time remaining during presentations and questions.

Please state your name for the Hansard, and then you may begin.

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you, honourable Chair and honourable MPPs. I am Nancy Crawford, chair this year of the Toronto Catholic District School Board. We will introduce the other speakers at their appointed time, if that's okay.

We sincerely appreciate this opportunity to speak to you, the members of the Standing Committee on Social

Policy, about the proposed changes to the Education Act. And we especially thank you for accommodating Trustee Rizzo to come in person.

We are in agreement with the Minister of Education in strengthening publicly funded education in the province of Ontario for the benefit of student learning and well-being.

We do have concerns about uniform expectations for all boards and all students across the province. Circumstances are very different from community to community, from urban to rural, from demographic to different demographic. We will illustrate these concerns as we address each pillar of the proposed legislation.

Accountability and transparency: Provincial education priorities, although valuable, may take precedence over local student learning needs. The student population throughout the TCDSB, Toronto Catholic District School Board, is very diverse, made up of students from many countries and cultures, speaking many languages. English as a second language is essential for the immigration and refugee students. We advocate for the ability to continue to address local needs. Transparent financial reporting from school boards to report on how provincial funding translates into student incomes is needed to be accountable for public funds received. However, limited flexibility in directing funding to needed areas such as special education will be a challenge for the TCDSB. We advocate for the ability to direct sufficient funding to local board needs.

Accelerated apprenticeship pathways will benefit students who want to explore this area of training and work. Will these students have the benefit of qualified teachers and educational oversight standards? Will other provincial educational priorities suffer? We advocate for a balanced approach to all career pathways.

Governance and leadership: Standardized training for trustees is a welcome initiative.

Directors of education performance appraisals: As one of the boards in the province that has implemented a consistent and effective director performance appraisal process for many years, we advocate for the autonomy to continue to do so. We are concerned that the goal-setting and achievement review for our director may have to be aligned to provincial priorities and not be designed to meet the needs of our local board.

I would now like to talk briefly about teacher training and oversight. We support the proposed more efficient disciplinary processes and consistent approaches to student learning. We support strengthening mental health supports and parent involvement in their children's education.

I would now like to ask Trustee Markus de Domenico to talk to the pillar of maximizing capital assets.

Mr. Markus de Domenico: Thank you very much, Chair Crawford, and thank you, committee members, for allowing us to speak and delegate here today. I am Markus de Domenico. I am the trustee for Etobicoke Centre, ward 2.

In ward 2, we have a unique problem which this bill would have dealt with if it came in earlier. We're very

appreciative of this element, which is allowing the minister to move properties from one board to the other much quicker. We have been working for years to obtain property so we can expand the Catholic presence in ward 2, and it has been a bit of a struggle, to be frank, but it is coming to an end. We are about to open two new schools in the near future, and for that I thank Minister Lecce and MPP Surma and, of course, the Premier for his support. It has been a struggle because boards do not have to get rid of property when they can drag their feet if they so choose—and keeping in mind too that boards are somewhat competitive with each other for the student population at the secondary level. So I'm very supportive of Bill 98's move to speed up disposition of properties, to have the minister play a very open and transparent role in moving these properties from one board to the other, because after all they are public assets.

That would conclude my remarks. Thank you, panel.

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you, Trustee de Domenico.

Trustee Kevin Morrison, please share our focus on denominational property rights concerns.

Interjection.

Ms. Nancy Crawford: We can't hear you.

Mr. Kevin Morrison: One second. Can you hear me now?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Yes, go ahead. Yes, we can.

Mr. Kevin Morrison: All right. Thank you, everybody, for giving us an opportunity to speak this evening. I would say that we are largely on the same page as a group of trustees, but we have various different concerns that we have been able to identify in the legislation as proposed.

One of those in particular that I noticed—I am Kevin Morrison, the trustee for ward 9. That is literally downtown Toronto; we're sitting in it right now, or at least you folks are.

We have a number of properties in the older parts of Toronto. These schools are on land that was and still continues to be adjacent to the churches that the many immigrants and settlers to Toronto built when they arrived. Oftentimes that was land was originally purchased by the archdiocese, the community—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute left.

Mr. Kevin Morrison: —or, indeed, one of our many religious orders, and then they would have gone ahead and built a school and educated our children. As time passed—

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Trustee Morrison?

Mr. Kevin Morrison: Yes?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you. I need to give it to Trustee Rizzo. We only have one minute left. Thank you for that.

Ms. Maria Rizzo: Thank you very much. We support a more streamlined approach to the trustee code of conduct. The trustee code of conduct investigation process has been streamlined with the requirement that it be led by an independent integrity commissioner.

I would love to be able to answer questions, because I can go on forever on this one, but school boards,

basically—I'm not going to tell you what the legislation says. I'll tell you how it impacts us—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I'm sorry to cut you off, but your time is up.

We'll now have ANCHOR Canada. Please state your name for the Hansard, and then you may begin.

Ms. Shernett Martin: Hi. Good afternoon. My name is Shernett Martin. Can you hear me?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Yes.

Ms. Shernett Martin: Perfect. I'm from ANCHOR Canada, the executive director. It's great to be here. Sorry for the delay.

Good afternoon, MPPs, guests, ministers. My name is Shernett Martin. I'm a mother, teacher and executive director for a non-profit organization named ANCHOR Canada. Our organization has been supporting student learning through our social and economic programs throughout the province, embedded in cultural affirmation and competency, and I'm here today to speak to Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care.

I want to begin by stating that I've always been very concerned with this ministry. Education and the educating of our children is of tantamount concern to me, as are the policies put in place by those in power, including school boards, trustees and the Ontario College of Teachers. We have had a system in place for many years that left things at status quo. Changes were not taking place that put students first. We were excusing bad behaviour from school boards and trustees and leaving parents and community groups like ours to fight for their children without much success.

When I read the contents of this bill, I breathed a sigh of relief; finally, we're addressing issues that will have a real impact on the education of our children.

The legislation, from subsection 8(1), has the ministry establishing policies and guidelines in the area of student achievement, adding the revision of curricula, training, including the frequency of training, with board members, directors of education, SOs and superintendents, requiring them to comply with the policies and guidelines. This is what parents and organizations invested in student outcomes and accountability have been asking for. There are too many occasions when, as a parent, I have reached out to school boards regarding my own personal concerns and I have been sidelined and made to feel disempowered. Fortunately, I persisted until I saw the change that I asked for. But this is not sustainable. Parents and advocacy groups should not feel that unless they continuously fight and blow the whistle on school boards and directors, the system will not work for them. It needs to come from the top. We need to see that happen from here—and it finally is with Bill 98.

1720

Parents will now be able to hold school boards accountable who are not providing resources and materials for their children—like neurodiverse children. Boards will now have to comply with policies and guidelines that will communicate with parents—and they can ask questions

like, “What is the protocol if my child needs support in this area?” and “How much funding is being allocated to your special education programs, interactive learning materials and resources?” They can ask those questions without fear or reprisal, and they can find information for themselves. Now this is progress.

As a teacher, I intrinsically know that all children learn differently; their learning styles are germane to them. We cannot predict outcomes for our students, but we can guide their creativity, wonderment, curiosity, intensity of learning and nurture their core selves.

For our students who have a curiosity about skilled trades and see a future opportunity as a chef, designer, seamstress, builder, painter or whatever skills they're passionate about, we need to be able to support their paths.

What this bill does is confirm what we have always known but until now have never really put into place—these policies to support the fact that students need an opportunity to learn the skills that drive their passion. With amendments as per section 30 of the act that allow students to be considered as attending school when they are participating in an equivalent apprenticeship learning opportunity, this will allow for a fulsome education experience for all students.

Three years ago, our organization provided a program during the summer months for our students. We were able to access an older school in York region that was still serving the community, although it was not an active school. The building was a former school, perfect for a program aiming to provide accelerated and remedial learning for students. It was in a picturesque location, and we were extremely grateful that we found the space. This space was somewhere that we felt we could have a continuation of this program the next summer and the summer after that. Unfortunately, within three months of us wrapping our program, we were told that the land the school was on had been sold to a developer and townhomes would be built within a year. Surprisingly, that time frame was actually true. I drove by and the school was gone, demolished, and in its place homes were going up.

I know from many years conducting and presenting at teacher workshops that there are several unused, underutilized and underperforming board professional development properties—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute left.

Ms. Shernett Martin: Thank you—and vacant lands that could serve community, whether it's for community use of space or other important use.

The bill, in subsection 194(10), amends the paragraph to state that boards “shall give notice to the minister of a sale, lease or disposition” of a school site or partial site.

I realize that I only have seven minutes to speak to this bill. My intention was to encapsulate the real-life scenarios that this bill speaks to, the changes we have been seeking, the accountability our students deserve, and the forward-thinking measures that will support effective school boards and fair stewardship of our tax dollars. I hope I was able to articulate that.

Bill 98 may not solve every issue in education, but it's the first time I've seen somebody attempt to do it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much.

I will now call on Community Schools Alliance, who are right here, I guess. Please state your name for the Hansard, and you may begin.

Mr. Doug Reycraft: Mr. Chair and members of the committee, good afternoon. My name is Doug Reycraft, and I am appearing before you as chair of the executive committee of the Community Schools Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Social Policy today.

The Community Schools Alliance was founded in 2009 and has been active ever since that time. Our goals, as stated in our constitution, include having students offered the opportunity to be educated in their home community, and to have school boards and municipalities work together to build partnerships that allow community resources and services to be delivered with education in joint-use facilities. There is much in the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act that is consistent with these goals.

We were pleased to hear Minister Lecce's words about joint-use projects in his opening remarks in the debate on Bill 98. We fully agree that there is great benefit to a community, large or small, if a school board and municipality can collaborate on building and operating a school and a community centre or recreation facility together, instead of doing them in silos. We applaud the proposed amendment of the Education Act to require school boards to collaborate with municipalities to facilitate early and integrated planning for schools to meet current and future needs. That collaboration is already recommended by the ministry's Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline that was announced in 2015. However, compliance with that guideline has been inconsistent across the province. Inserting the requirement into legislation and regulation will improve consistency.

The catalyst for the creation of the Community Schools Alliance was the widespread closure of schools in rural areas of the province around 2008. From its very beginning, the alliance advocated strenuously for a moratorium on school closures or changes in the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline, and for changes to the so-called funding formula to better address the needs of small schools in rural and northern Ontario. Our alliance welcomed the moratorium—and that was announced June 2017—and we appreciate that the government has maintained it. It has spared communities and students in rural and northern Ontario the turmoil and stress that results from the announced intention to close their school.

We also welcome the opportunity to be very involved in the thorough consultation that was conducted to improve the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline. That consultation occurred in 2017 and 2018. School boards develop their own accommodation review and school closing policies using that provincial guideline. That

consultation concluded with the announcement of the new guideline in April 2018. Meanwhile, the moratorium remains in place, and we were very pleased to hear Minister Lecce say in his opening remarks on the debate of Bill 98 that it “will stay in place until we have resolved long-standing concerns around the economic impacts ... of closing a school in a small town of this province.”

We recognize that the per-pupil costs of operating a small school are greater than in a large one. There are several factors that make it impossible for certain economies of scale to be realized in small schools, regardless of whether they're full or underutilized. Because of that, small schools have been favourite targets of boards trying to downsize their total number of schools and pupil places. That reality will be somewhat mitigated by the Rural and Northern Education Fund. This fund, originally \$20 million, now up to \$21.6 million, annually, was introduced at the same time as the announcement of the moratorium in 2017. It provides supplementary funding for school boards according to the number of schools each has that qualify under the formula for the fund. Boards are required to use the RNEF funding to improve education results for students from rural and northern communities. In my own board, the Thames Valley district, it has allowed extra staffing for three small secondary schools, each of which is the only secondary school in its town. The extra staffing permits those schools to provide a greater range of course options to satisfy the needs of their students. The Community Schools Alliance continues to advocate for a significant increase in the fund to allow the qualifying schools across the province to enhance their programs even more.

1730

Much of the debate on second reading of Bill 98 addressed the 2023-24 funding of education recently announced by the ministry. The CSA shares the concern of the official opposition at Queen's Park, school board associations and teachers unions that the increase in education grants will fall well short of the cost of inflation during the next school year. Failure to keep school board funding whole at a time of relatively high inflation will increase the pressure to close schools if and when the moratorium has ended. History tells us that the future existence of small schools—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute remaining.

Mr. Doug Reycraft: Thank you—in rural and northern Ontario will once again be at risk. Increasing the Rural and Northern Education Fund will help to mitigate that risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee this afternoon.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the government side, round one, for seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Wai.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to all the presenters for coming in today. Thank you for your presentations. I can really feel the passion that you have.

Let me ask this question directed to the TCDSB first: I understand Chair Crawford mentioned that you agree with

the standardized code of conduct for the trustees, and that is a very good thing to hear, because the conduct of trustees is very important. But I would also like to see—will you see the top priority for improving student achievement using taxpayer dollars for that purpose is just as important?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you very much for your question. Trustee Rizzo would definitely like to speak to the code of conduct, but if I may comment, student achievement is essential. That's what we are here for: to help students learn and prepare for life and, in our privileged case, through the lens of faith. But if the trustees are not functioning well, if the governors are not doing their jobs of governing policy development, multi-year strategic planning, budget oversight, then it doesn't work either, so it's very hard to say—they go hand in hand, in my opinion.

Trustee Rizzo?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Of course. And I can see that for them to be transparent is so important, so that we know how to see whatever they're delivering is right for us.

Sorry—did you want to have some more comments?

Ms. Maria Rizzo: Yes, thank you very much. My comments are very similar to Chair Crawford's. I've seen our board work, and I've seen our board broken. We have had issues with 2SLGBTQ, with racism, with misogyny, you name it. Our focus is supposed to be about kids, so please, standardize it. Do whatever you need to do. Spending money on an integrity commissioner should come from you, and it should be really, really important that it's impartial and independent, because trustees don't want to go against each other, just like you wouldn't want to go against each other, regardless of your party lines. You don't like to do that. So, basic bottom line, it's better because we're afraid of retaliation, like "I owe you; you owe me." If we hadn't had all the problems that we had, if we had an independent integrity commissioner, we wouldn't have had to spend money on judicial reviews, which we had to do in this particular case to defend 2SLGBTQ communities in Toronto. It's really, really important.

If I may, because I didn't get to say it earlier: trustee mandatory sensitivity/equity training. I can't say that enough. If you leave it up to the boards—I've been on the board for more than 20 years; there has never been any, so please bring it on.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you very much. I'd like to pass the time.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): The Chair recognizes MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: This one is for Ms. Martin. I'm so glad you're in the room. We've had a lot of delegations and feedback. We talk a lot about the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read and the importance of that and how that affects, particularly, communities that you represent and do advocacy for. You've spoken very eloquently about the challenges. We had the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read—they have consulted with numerous parties, and this is now an

important piece that has come to the government to implement. What is the impact that you see that that will have on the group you represent—and also Bill 98?

Ms. Shernett Martin: Thank you, MPP Barnes, for the question.

As a teacher who spent a lot of time when we used to have programs specific to reading, I know that ensuring that all children—and we know, as you mentioned, Trustee, what you just said about equity training and the importance of that within your school board. We know that there are students who are marginalized, parents who feel like they're unseen. The bill in itself has got to be inclusive of all children, and it is.

I think that when we deal with things like Right to Read as well as the skilled trades and the changes that we're seeing in the bill, a lot of times we're seeing the impacts in my community, in racialized communities and Black communities, of what that's doing for children. What it's doing is sending a clear message to educators, to school boards, to those who are in power that this is something that you need to be seeing. You need to be looking inside of your classroom, looking in your community and seeing who is not benefiting from these policies, who is not benefiting from all of these reports and studies that have been tabled and have been seen and have been printed up and polished up. And once you see what that community is, it's time to really do a deep dive into that and to ensure that the student outcomes you are working toward include students who have been historically marginalized, who have felt the brunt of what that means in education.

These bills are very important, and the message from the Ontario Human Rights Commission is very important, but it's more important in terms of the intention and the impact: What are we doing about it? Just hearing that every child has the right to read—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Shernett Martin: —deserves more than that. We have to be intentional about the way in which we ascribe to that.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you. I almost want to say "amen."

That's my time.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): There's one minute remaining.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Oh. I can ask my question of CSA.

You talked about the ability to share and co-locate and work very closely to municipalities, so what do you think would be—quickly—one of the big impacts of the bill to that?

Mr. Doug Reycraft: Thank you for the question.

I think the impact of the bill will be that we will see more collaboration between school boards and municipalities. I suppose I should caveat that by saying there may have to be corresponding legislation that applies to municipalities, because for collaboration to occur, there have to be at least two—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your comments, sir.

We'll now switch over to the official opposition for seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses for being here today and taking the time to share your experience and expertise with us. It's really appreciated.

I'm going to start with the Toronto Catholic District School Board folks. You mentioned the importance of local input and being able to determine the priorities for your students and for your school board. I'm wondering if you can talk a bit more about why that's important, and perhaps offer some examples of why it's so important that these priorities be set locally.

1740

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you for the question. Let me begin: A very recent, very prominent example is we have approximately 800 new students from Ukraine. We are welcoming them with open arms and trying as best we can to meet their educational needs. They have escaped, come here to Canada for reprieve from a very traumatic situation. Trustee de Domenico has two of the schools affected, if you would like to hear from him as well.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sure. Trustee de Domenico?

Mr. Markus de Domenico: Thank you, Chair Crawford, and thank you for the question. Chair Crawford is correct, of course, that I represent St. Demetrius and Josyf Cardinal Slipej, two of the three Eastern Rite schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. No one could have predicted what was going to happen: the incredibly large influx of Ukrainian newcomers desperately looking for help at the Toronto Catholic District School Board. We did everything possible to bring them in, get them settled and make them feel welcome, because they're very traumatized by the war that they're experiencing. This was definitely a great example of a local issue being handled locally, and with, of course, the support of the board of trustees and the senior staff and local staff. It was an on-the-ground, all-hands-on-deck effort to accommodate hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of children coming with a suitcase, whose father is either dead or on the front lines of the battle back in Ukraine, their homeland. So I think it's a very good example of how local initiatives are so important and can be handled better than a large bureaucracy. We need to work hand in glove together.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. It's really difficult to imagine the amount of work that that must have taken and the situation in which these children are arriving and need to be accommodated within our schools.

You also mentioned that there's a lack of flexibility now with regard to funding, and you don't want to see further restrictions on that funding. You mentioned special education; that's actually something that we've heard a lot about over the past two days of hearings, the insufficient funding for special education to meet the needs of all the children who need supports within our schools to make sure that we are supporting all children, regardless of their disability or their special learning needs.

Can you talk more about the challenges that you face in trying to spend on local priorities when there are so many strings attached to funding, and why setting more conditions on funding would be difficult for you to be able to meet the needs that are locally important?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you for that question. You have expressed it extremely well. Funding is—the term is “sweatered,” so it's restricted for certain things, and it is challenging to move money to give to more educational assistants, more technical equipment, more services for students with special needs. Toronto Catholic has, for a very long time, been spending many more millions of dollars on special education because we really want those children to have the best education that we can give them.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And I know that the Toronto Catholic District School Board is one of multiple school boards that paid out of pocket or paid out of your own reserves for some of the COVID-related expenses of the past few years, that you're one of several school boards that is looking at having to implement cuts this year to the supports that we provide to students, cuts to teachers and education worker positions. Now, this bill has additional demands being placed on school boards, like with the integrity commissioner process, the disposition of lands, without funding being provided for that. We had the Grants for Student Needs announced at the same time that this bill was tabled with a level of funding that is well below the rate of inflation in Ontario for the fifth year in a row. So my concern is that, if the minister sets priorities but the funding is not being given to actually allow school boards to meet their obligations in this bill and their obligations generally to students, that is actually setting up school boards to fail. Do you share that concern?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: We do share that concern, very much so. Thank you for that question. Toronto Catholic is facing a \$25-million deficit going into this budget year, the budget being due in June. And we are, with our financial staff, doing our best to look at how we can deal with this appropriately and to minimize the effect to the students. So yes, COVID has contributed to the situation, for sure. The funding for COVID measures is no longer coming and, yes, we are concerned about how we're going to deal with this.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Can you give us a sense—
Interruption.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry about that. Can you give a sense: What does \$25 million look like if it comes to cuts to the supports that our kids deserve?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Yes, it would mean changes to staffing, where possible. In our collective agreements, we have standards, so it's only through possible retirements and attrition that we can—there's not that many workers that can be surplus. But if they can be, we have already done that because the deadlines with our collective agreements have occurred. There's cutting of programs, which is just not good for the students.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your comment.

We'll now go to round two—

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): —once that stops. The government for seven minutes and 30 seconds, and I recognize MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Doug, I'm going to give you an opportunity to finish what you were saying in regard to the shared space.

Interjection.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: It's not on.

Mr. Doug Reycraft: [*Inaudible*] 2015 Community Planning and Partnership Guideline, and it is just a guideline. With the creation now of legislation and regulation, it will direct school boards to collaborate with municipalities. I am sure that we will see more of it happening. There are some school boards and municipalities who already collaborate and do so very well. There are other places where there's little, if any, collaboration that occurs, so we welcome that part of the legislation.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you. And for the TDS—

Mrs. Robin Martin: TCDSB.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: —TCDSB, a question. You've talked about having a \$25-million deficit. This particular bill is asking for transparency of school boards in regard to funding and how funds are used. Do you support that, then, in regard to the understanding of where your deficits are and how they're being reported to the ministry or to the public, as well?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you for the question. Yes, absolutely. We just completed our budget consultation to our community members approximately 10 days ago. We will, through our minutes and through our meetings, make it transparent.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: A quick question for Shernett: The bill is really focusing on accountability and transparency. What is the impact of that for your community?

Ms. Shernett Martin: Well, I'll give you a real-life scenario. Many years ago, we approached the ministry regarding really gross issues regarding accountability and transparency within my school board, York Region District School Board. And there was none then, when we asked for more. So what this is really showing us is that the minister is listening and that there will be more transparency and accountability in terms of how taxpayer dollars are spent, but also in terms of—and you mentioned this, how there seems to be this bond of, "I can't say that you're doing something wrong because we're friends" or "We work together, therefore I can't say that you've spent this or that it should have went to this area." So there's kind of a cover-up that's happening that is wearing on student learning and outcomes, and that's not right.

So to publish your budget, where it's being spent, to make that seen by people, to be accountable and transparent, is the way we need to go. That way, there's not going to be this sort of fear of speaking up and having

somebody else get you back or whatever the terminology that was used earlier was. That's not positive for student learning. That's not a part of what we're trying to do when it comes to educating our students. So we're all for that. There really needs to be that amount of transparency and accountability, and I'm happy for that in the bill.

1750

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you. I have a follow-up question to that. The bill is talking about student achievement and outcomes, and we know the impact of students that underachieve or students that do not graduate from high school—we talk about the school-to-prison pipeline. We've talked about the long-term effects of students that are leaving school that don't know how to read or how to do math. Somebody said that is old-school thinking, but we know that this is fundamental thinking. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Ms. Shernett Martin: Absolutely. Again, these are issues that parents are coming to either the boards or trying to get to their superintendent or their trustees or the director about, these concerns regarding graduation rates, expulsion rates. I've sat on many expulsion committee hearings. We're actually going through one right now with a school trying to get a child—the OSR now has the suspension report—to get that removed before the end of June. We're doing the exact same scenario right now.

We see this amongst Black students and racialized students, and we need to ensure that in areas of things like achievement, outcomes, availability of resources, communication to parents, even the way that grades are given—the way that parents have complained that there's just no transparency on how this child has this mark and this mark and why their Black child from grade 9 to 12 has never received certain things even though their ability and their academic success is proven outside of that. So this bill, I think, needs to ensure that school boards understand what their role is and that we weed out what has been choking us as a system and we set course for a new day and set course to see everybody.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: A quick one—I don't know how much time we have left—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): There's 2:25.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Okay.

We've had it said during these depositions that unions were not consulted on this bill. We have talked to the Human Rights Commission, and they have said that they have consulted unions on this bill. What are your thoughts about that piece in regard to this bill and student achievement?

Ms. Shernett Martin: In terms of consultation process?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Well, that voice being missing from this—we have a system that has been in place that has always had union input. What has been that impact for students?

Ms. Shernett Martin: Well, I'll say this: We've had many parents come to us complaining about teacher unions, that they have gone to them for help and support

and there has been very little. It's always when something is coming out that's going to be impactful for student learning that you start to hear voices come out at every single corner. I think they've had a lot of time to share how they feel about certain issues. But I think when it comes to even the Ontario College of Teachers, school boards and some unions, there has been a lack of concern, a lack of movement, a lack of real impact in terms of trying to turn things around for students. So I find it interesting that's there is some interest in not being consulted—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Shernett Martin: —because I think, from our standpoint as an advocacy group, we have knocked on every single door when it comes to the power structures that exist, whether it's unions or school boards, and we have not seen any movement. So if this is going to anchor something—sorry for the pun—we're all for that.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Forty-two seconds.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Oh, 42 seconds—go ahead.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to all the witnesses for coming. I wanted to comment—I know that Trustee de Domenico had told us that you're happy to hear about the speeding up of the disposition of properties. I wondered if you could just elaborate on how that will help.

Mr. Markus de Domenico: Thank you very much for that question. And yes, you have captured it perfectly: I am beyond happy to see it in there. If I may give you the example of—

Failure of sound system.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Your time is up, sir, just so you know.

We'll go to the official opposition for seven minutes and 30 seconds. MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much.

I'm just going to open up by saying that I'm a big supporter of Catholic education. My daughter is a teacher. My oldest daughter works with special needs in the Catholic school board—and they all belong to a union. I can tell you that they have the heart and the passion to make the education system the best they can.

I believe that the unions that came here and were asking to be consulted on a bill that is so important—and they weren't; none of them were. I think it was a big mistake. I've said it over and over again.

Seeing as it was raised by my colleagues on the other side, there are a number of reasons why we've got a problem in education—nothing bigger than Bill 124, which has really hurt our education system; nothing bigger, I think, than class sizes. We let class sizes go to 39, 40, 41 students. We were calling to have smaller class sizes so our kids could get that hands-on education.

We needed mental health supports, in particular over the last three years, which didn't come across. Our kids are waiting longer and longer to get mental health services, to

the point that they're waiting six months to have those types of services in our communities.

There are lots of things that we could have discussed, and I believe that the unions that represent those workers, who have been arguing for that and begging for that for the last three years—so I'm going to stick up for my daughters.

My wife was a principal, actually, in a public school, and she did an incredible job. I know she was working until 10 or 11 o'clock at night, and I know how much she cared. So I just wanted to get that out.

I will say, on the reserves that you had at one time—and you had to use them, and that has really hurt. You used your reserves—forcefully, by the way, by the government—and now you're looking at a \$25-million hole, and where do you get that money? So I understand that.

I want to say about the trustees—I've said it three or four times: Our trustees are elected. Let's not forget that. They're elected by the community. They knock on doors. They try to get elected. They talk about why they're running and all that stuff, the same way I did. So I want to say, to the trustees—and I've said this already today. There are bad politicians, my friends. There are bad lawyers. In every sector of the economy—there are bad workers, by the way; if you talked to General Motors, they might have said I was a bad worker. But at the end of the day, they were elected to do a job, and I believe they did it to the best of their ability.

I want to say a couple of things that I think are important to say. I believe in community hubs—and I think this is to Doug. Two things we can do with schools—and I argued this for eight years in my riding of Niagara-on-the-Lake, when they were going to close Parliament Oak school, which had an incredible heritage history in my community. I said, "Let's make it a community hub. Let's not get rid of that school, because you never know if you're going to need that school again."

The other thing I argued about, as we closed schools in Fort Erie and we closed them in Ridgeway—they built one school, but we had two other schools. Why didn't we make them trade schools? We all knew we were going to get into a skilled trades shortage; that wasn't a secret. We knew that the tradespeople were getting old and were going to retire, and we needed to have that coming up behind them—the apprenticeship, the new journeymen. Why would we not have done that with our schools?

So there are lots of things we can do better with our schools, instead of making them—as I think one of the panel members said, you drive by and you see a whole corner of apartment buildings. Yes, we need housing, but we also need people to build that housing. We needed our tradespeople. So there are some things we could have done.

And on the community hubs—unfortunately, I don't see that in this bill. I think it's something that we should really take a look at, and I'm glad, Doug, that you raised it.

I know my colleague is going to get mad at me because I'm talking too long, but I got thrown off a little bit about the union part, so I'm going to talk to all the trustees, and if any of the trustees can answer this, it would be great—or maybe all of you could. It might be a good opportunity for all the trustees to talk. Can you speak to the importance of the role of trustees and their need for autonomy from the province?

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Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you for the question. I would like our newest trustee, Kevin Morrison, who hasn't had a chance to speak yet to start, if that's okay.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Great.

Mr. Kevin Morrison: It's a good question, and really, it gets back to some of the local issues that we discussed earlier with the arrival of our Ukrainian refugees, but it also gets back to when we look at our communities as single entities. Every community is a little bit different, and I touched on it a little bit earlier in that we have some very historical communities in the city of Toronto. Some of them have been around for as long as 200 years. They were built by refugees; they were built by immigrants; and they actually still preserve a lot of the features that they had from 50 years ago, 100 years ago, 200 years ago. It's that sort of community leadership that people like myself have to advocate for, those particular individual communities, because they would be decimated if we were to start closing schools in some of those communities just because they happen to be on prime downtown real estate. This is something that's very important to me personally as a trustee, and I know to many of our trustees as well.

It's also important that we have renewal, and that we're able to take some of our older properties and our older facilities and update them for a modern time, and this is, really, the role of a trustee. Technically, by law, we're only supposed to balance the budget and hire a director, but we do so much more. I like to think that, along with my colleagues, we do it well. I am the new guy, of course, but I have followed this along for 14 years.

Ms. Nancy Crawford: Thank you, Trustee Morrison.

Mr. Wayne Gates: How much time have we got left?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute and 24 seconds.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to say something about the Ukrainians who have come into our country through a terrible, terrible situation. What Russia is doing to that country I never thought I'd see in my lifetime. I've never seen a war in my lifetime. It is absolutely terrible. But I can tell you, they are contributing to our—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Mr. Wayne Gates: —community. They're already getting some jobs. People—obviously, some churches and some of the organizations of the Ukrainians—have really stepped forward. And, now, we have the situation with the refugees that are coming into Niagara Falls. I can tell you they're going to school—they're staying in hotels right now—but, obviously, at some point in time, we'll have to

figure out how we're going to service them. But they're going to our schools, the new refugees. Some can't speak English; some came here with nothing. And I want to say to you—and you can take this back to your trustees—it is absolutely incredible the job that not only the Catholic school board is doing, but also the public school boards are doing with these kids that are coming here from countries that we can't even imagine. So I just want to make sure you say thanks to everybody and thanks to the trustees for the incredible job you do every day under tough situations. So thank you very much for allowing me to say a few words.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Now we'll go back to the government side for four minutes and 30 seconds, and I recognize MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I just want to preface that we know that we have trustees that do amazing work, and we know we have teachers in our system that do amazing work. There is nothing in here that's saying that trustees don't do amazing work or that we don't have teachers that do amazing work. So I just wanted to put that on the record, and then I will turn it over to Trustee Martin.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you. MPP Barnes just called me "Trustee Martin," and I haven't earned that accolade. But she used to be a trustee, so she could easily say things like that. I haven't earned the accolade of trustee yet, but thank you.

Trustee de Domenico, you were going to answer my question when we got interrupted by blaring signals and then lost our time, because I didn't have much time left when I asked it. Could you just explain how the disposition of surplus properties being sped up is going to assist the Toronto Catholic District School Board?

Mr. Markus de Domenico: Thank you for that question. I'm sorry; I'm not quite sure what happened.

To get to the point quickly, in 2018, I was elected for the first time. I ran on a platform of building a high school in Etobicoke Centre. I have been supported in that by my local MPP Kinga Surma, Minister Lecce and the Premier. It was difficult because the TDSB is, in essence, a competitor of ours for students in the ward, because at Catholic secondary schools we take children who are not Catholic, so we are looking for the same base. That creates a certain competitiveness that is unhealthy for the students, unhealthy for the community. And I did point that out to my friends at TDSB—that these are all our students together, of the ward.

So I'm very grateful for this change. I know Minister Lecce—if this had been available at that time, I believe he probably would have stepped in quicker to say, "You don't need this property. The Catholic school board needs it. Please get it done," and facilitate the moms and dads, the boys and girls of ward 2, Etobicoke Centre, and give them a place to learn.

Mrs. Robin Martin: We heard some comments earlier about mental health supports and special needs. These are things that are very important to me.

I know that our government has invested a lot into mental health supports, both \$3.8 billion over 10 years, which we've exceeded across the province, but also increasing mental health funding in schools, I believe, by 420% or 460%—I can't remember the exact number. We've also, as I understand it, reached historic levels of special-needs funding and may have doubled—I think it's doubled—the amount of money spent on special needs in schools. However, I have many parents who come to see me who have children with special needs. I have special-needs teachers who come to see me—I'm not necessarily saying they're Toronto Catholic District School Board teachers.

I understand that special-needs funding is one of the first places that school boards look to take resources from—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Mrs. Robin Martin: —when they're looking to address other budgetary concerns. The problem is, we don't know how much we need to spend on special-needs schooling etc. when we don't know what we are spending on it. The money goes into a black hole and we don't know exactly how it's spent.

Trustee Crawford, you mentioned this issue, and I just wanted to know, because I didn't quite understand—the way you were explaining it seemed opposite; you're putting more money in, and that's great. From a parent point of view, from an MPP point of view—I'd like to know what the money is spent on. I think this legislation helps that, and that is a provincial priority. Can you just address that?

Ms. Nancy Crawford: I'd like to start off by saying that that is not where the Toronto Catholic District School Board looks first to reduce—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your comments. I have to cut you off there.

Now we'll go over to the official opposition for four minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Shernett, I have a question for you. Yesterday, we heard some testimony from Kathy McDonald about experiences of racism within the education system. Kathy very strongly recommended that this legislation be amended to require that integrity commissioners have training and experience in dealing with anti-racism. Is that an amendment that you would support?

Ms. Shernett Martin: Thank you for your question.

I have deep respect for Trustee Kathy McDonald. I know of the work that she does in Peel, and we are grateful for the changes that have been made in that school board, especially regarding anti-Black racism.

Absolutely, if there is an amendment that—sorry; say exactly what the amendment was for.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: That integrity commissioners would be required to have training and experience in anti-racism.

Ms. Shernett Martin: To even have to state that is worrisome, because the thought process would be that as an integrity commissioner, that will be intrinsically a part of their role and a part of their job description. But certainly, if that's not the case, to include anything that is going to support equity, inclusion, and look at ways that we can improve on the way we treat and address anti-Black racism and create an equitable space for all racialized students—definitely, we would support that.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Doug, can you talk more about the importance of schools to rural communities? I know that you've done some interesting work within the Community Schools Alliance on how schools support not only the education of children and give them opportunities locally but also support the community.

Mr. Doug Reycraft: Well, I think in a rural community there's a reciprocal rapport, I guess, between members of the community and the school itself. In rural municipalities, towns and villages, schools become much more than just educational facilities. They're places where community organizations can have their meetings, hold their fundraisers, do their activities. And there is a link, I think, between the community and the school that doesn't exist in many large urban areas. So I think that's valuable.

When a school in a small rural community is closed, first of all, it changes the life for the students who have to attend school outside their own community. And secondly, it changes the community itself, because it no longer has the same attraction to new families who may be looking for a place to settle. In fact, when a school is closed, we know from—there's lots of anecdotal evidence that families leave the communities if their only school is closed. So the importance of schools in rural and northern communities cannot be overstated. It is critically important.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And schools also end up being—not necessarily a magnet, but we know when schools are there, there tend to be other amenities, because, for instance, the local family doctor has somewhere to send their children to school, and that communities that don't—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —have those educational opportunities for their children have greater difficulty attracting these kinds of important supports and services to the community.

Mr. Doug Reycraft: Agreed. We had research done by a group at Western University that proves exactly that, that communities with schools have more amenities and services than communities that don't. And the extension to that is, if you close the school in a single-school community, then many of those amenities will, over the course of time, gradually leave the community as well.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And if we don't provide an increase in support for remote schools and rural schools, are they going to be able to achieve the kind of better student outcomes or priorities that the minister would be able to set with this bill?

Mr. Doug Reycraft: Well, I see no reason why they shouldn't be able to. But that extra support is important—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much for your comments. We'll have to end it there.

I would like to thank everyone for their involvement and their comments. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your

presentation, the deadline for written submissions is tonight, on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

This concludes hearings on Bill 98 and our business for today. Thank you again to all the presenters.

As a reminder to committee members, the deadline for filing amendments to the bill is 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

The committee will now stand adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, May 16, 2023, when we will meet for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 98.

The committee adjourned at 1814.

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