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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

SP-7

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

SP-7

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Putting Student Achievement
First Act, 2026

1st Session
44th Parliament
Monday 27 April 2026

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2026 donnant la priorité
à la réussite des élèves

1^{re} session
44^e législature
Lundi 27 avril 2026

Chair: Brian Riddell
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Brian Riddell
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Monday 27 April 2026

Lundi 27 avril 2026

The committee met at 1000 in room 151.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order.

The first item of business will be the adoption of the subcommittee report dated April 22, 2026. Could I please have a motion? I accept the motion from MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Your subcommittee on committee business met on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, to consider the method of proceeding on Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care, and recommends the following:

(1) That witnesses appearing be permitted to participate in person or participate remotely. However, a maximum of one individual may appear in person on behalf of an organization, and any additional representatives of that organization shall participate remotely; and

(2) That legislative research provide the committee members with a summary of oral and written submissions following the written submission deadline.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Are members ready to vote? All those in favour, please put your hand up. All those opposed, please put your hand up. It's carried.

PUTTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ À LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care / Projet de loi 101, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'éducation et à la garde d'enfants.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Now we will begin public hearings on Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I will now call on the Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Education.

Minister, you shall have up to 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questions from the members of committee.

You may begin, sir.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, committee members. Obviously, it continues to be a pleasure to be in front of you today.

When we started debate on this in the House, I mentioned that since 2018 the government has been moving quickly to make changes to the education system to refocus it on student achievement. As I said at that time, there have been many challenges that we have faced between 2018 and today, not the least of which was a global health and economic emergency: the COVID emergency. But it really started back in 2018, when Minister Thompson, at that time, began to make changes that would refocus the system on student achievement, accelerated by Minister Lecce, who put his mind to a more back-to-basics approach to education and proven ways of delivering curriculum. And recently, since my time as minister, we have continued that process, with respect to governance reforms and the Ministry of Education having more opportunity to take control of a system where boards have fallen down.

The results have been quite spectacular, to be honest with you. We have a \$43-billion Ministry of Education system that includes child care. Since that time, we have been making significant investments in education—not the least of which was rebuilding our schools. Some 179 schools in every part of the province and every riding almost have seen additions as part of a \$6.3-billion capital program—126 permanent additions. As I said—179 new schools, 126 permanent additions, and more than 9,800 licensed child care spaces at that time.

In addition, last November, colleagues will remember, we passed Bill 33, which is the Supporting Children and Students Act. I mention Bill 33 because part of today's bill, Bill 101, can't be taken in isolation; it has to be taken with Bill 33.

There was a whole host of reasons why we brought Bill 33 forward, not the least of which was to begin refocusing our boards on what matters most, and at the same time refocusing the Ministry of Education on being better prepared to accept responsibility in a fashion that I've argued it hasn't for some 50 years. There are many examples of why this was needed. We had examples in a number of boards with respect to weak financial oversight. We had seen, in many of the boards, trustees who had been fighting each other and spending millions of dollars fighting each other, as opposed to putting money into the classroom.

We have the example of a board—not just one, but the Near North District School Board, whose trustees fought a battle amongst themselves. They fought battles to pit one part of the community against each other, and the result was a school build that, over 15 years, was unable to be completed and ultimately saw students and teachers working out of a partially demolished building while we had to assume responsibility for a build in that area.

The changes that we made in Bill 33 did allow the ministry to move more quickly and to address challenges that we're seeing in boards across the province. Basically, when those boards fall off the rails, when they start focusing on anything other than student achievement, we have given ourselves the opportunity to step in and put the board back on track. We have done that across many boards in the province of Ontario. As you know, colleagues, there are currently eight boards under supervision.

Having said that, I am very optimistic with where we're going in education. I'm very optimistic about what we're hearing not only from educators, but optimistic about what I'm hearing from parents. I'm optimistic about what we've seen recently in EQAO scores, although there are some challenges.

We are seeing literacy rates, reading and writing results at some of the highest levels that we've ever seen in the province, which is a very good thing. It shows that the back-to-basics approach that was started under Minister Thompson and accelerated under Minister Lecce is bearing some very serious and positive fruit for our students, and that is a good thing.

As we've said, though, there do remain some challenges, most notably, of course, in math. While we're starting to see math results trend upwards, I think all members would probably agree that that trend is much slower than any of us would like it to be. That is why we've doubled down, continued through the budget—we've continued accelerated support for math assistance in our school boards. That funding was confirmed again.

We've also announced, as colleagues will know, a review of EQAO results to better understand if the test itself and the supports that we're giving our teachers actually meet the needs of both teachers and students in the system. That work is ongoing right now. We've also noticed that in some boards, the results obviously are better than in other boards, and we're trying to ascertain why that is.

I referenced the Near North District School Board earlier. One of the reasons why we did Bill 33, of course, colleagues, was that under previous rules, it was very nearly impossible for the Ministry of Education to assume responsibility for a school board that was in a positive position. The Near North District School Board had a surplus of over \$4 million, making it very difficult for the ministry to step in. Bill 33, once passed, allowed us to step into the Near North District School Board immediately, which we did shortly after the bill was passed. We are in the process of making changes to that board and bringing about a resolution to a long-standing school build, which will have students in a brand new school come September.

The bill in front of you, colleagues, Bill 101, if passed, has a number of important measures in it, not the least of which are significant governance reforms. The bill, if passed, would strengthen oversight of trustees financially, and local decision-making would also be an element of this. In this, we are reverting back to a cap on honorariums of no more than \$10,000. Having said that, most of our school boards across the province of Ontario already have an honorarium that is \$10,000 or less. This will just impact a couple of boards.

We are limiting the size of boards to no more than 12 and bringing in regulations that will cap it between five and 12. Again, this will see only the Toronto District School Board reduced from 22 down to 12, but it will also solidify the current membership of school boards across the province.

1010

We are prohibiting boards from covering certain external membership fees for trustees, which I think is also a very important part of ensuring accountability.

Another section of the bill I bring to your attention, colleagues, are the changes that we're making with respect to trustee accountability. Obviously, there are a number of examples you've all heard of: challenges within school boards, challenges of governance, challenges within management. These reforms will help us refocus our trustees on what they continually tell me is the most important part of their job: advocating for students and parents. I think we will have a much better outcome with the proposed changes, should they pass.

We're also strengthening leadership in our English-language school boards across the province of Ontario. As you know, colleagues, under the bill, there will be a chief executive officer and there will be a chief education officer in English-language district school boards. So the director of education will now be the CEO. They will be responsible for the financial and operational oversight of school boards.

The CEO will appoint a chief education officer, who will be responsible for academic achievement and will be required to have academic qualifications as well. That position, obviously, can come from an existing cadre of superintendents or, should the CEO believe it is important to move outside, they can do that as well.

The new CEO will serve as a secretary and a non-voting member of the board. The CEO will be responsible for confirming certain trustee resolutions and motions, particularly those with financial implications.

The CEO would lead the development of the budget, which is obviously informed by their operational expertise. Trustees themselves will have the opportunity to comment on the budget, review the budget, propose changes to the budget, but ultimately it will be the CEO who will make the final decision on what the budget should be with respect to a school board. Should trustees not validate or confirm a budget, they can refer the budget off to the Minister of Education, who will make the final decision with respect to the budget.

An important part of that: CEOs will be hired by trustees, but only the minister can fire a CEO. There might be some questions on that, but we've seen in a number of boards—I'd bring to your attention, obviously, what we saw in York region; I think they had seven directors of education over nine years. So the reason for this is to ensure that the CEO has the support that is required to make the decisions that they need in order to move the board forward.

French-language boards, of course, remain out of scope for any of these changes.

The other area that we are proposing for changes is in the collective bargaining. As you know, colleagues, currently, trustees, through trustee associations, are responsible for local bargaining. That will change. The Council of Ontario Directors of Education will become the new bargaining agent with respect to our local school boards, and they will be represented by what will be called the new CEO. The reason why we are making this change is to ensure that the person who has the operational expertise over the board is also the person who is sitting at the table. It also will help us ensure that there is a consistent level of engagement and delivery of educational resources across the province. The CEOs will ratify agreements.

At the same time, we will respect that the French boards will not be a part of this. And the Catholic boards, of course, will continue to have denominational rights protected in this.

Really, colleagues, the rationale for this is to ensure that the process of bargaining is clear, that it is professionalized, and that individuals with expertise in bargaining are the ones who are representing boards of education at the table.

Capital delivery is also another important part of this. We've again seen through examples, not only in Near North but in a number of examples in other parts of the province, where capital delivery has become a challenge. Partially, I would say that we are making some very significant investments in rebuilding schools, in brand new schools and renovations, extensions, child care across the province. We are doing it in parts of the province that haven't had builds in a very long time. So often, some of these school boards haven't seen a build in a really long time, which means that they haven't developed the expertise that is required in order to manage a capital delivery of the nature that we've been talking about.

If passed, this bill would strengthen the minister's and the ministry's ability to oversee capital projects in different school boards. It would allow the minister and the ministry to intervene. It would allow us to select a third party to manage capital projects without putting the board under supervision. And it sets a process that includes consequences, of course, for non-compliance. That is an important part, because there may be a number of different reasons why a board may require us to step in. As we have seen in the Near North situation, it is a member of the Halton District School Board who is helping us deliver on the new build in Parry Sound, which is part of the Near North school board—as I said, a 15-year process which went off of the rails. We were able to step in, we're putting

it back on track, and we have been able to exercise through supervision the use of a project manager from the Halton District School Board, who is helping us deliver this project on time. And I think that is a very important strength of this bill.

School board communications is another feature of this. Let me at the outset say that I think that it is increasingly important that school boards have the ability to communicate, but at the same time, it is more important that school boards remain focused on what their mission is. So boards of education, through regulation, will only be able to communicate those matters which are of importance to their community. A sporting team that does well should be acknowledged. Transportation issues, weather-related issues—that should be acknowledged. Other issues that directly impact students, parents and the board—those should be acknowledged. But as I've said on many occasions, I don't think that people in particular care if a school board has a position on a global challenge. I think it is more important that they focus on what their mandate is: student achievement. Having said that, that doesn't stop, of course, trustees from exercising their own ability to communicate in any way they see fit. So school board communications will, as I've said, remain focused on day-to-day responsibilities, will set clear expectations to ensure consistency in how boards communicate with families and communities. The proposed changes would allow the ministry to issue policies and guidelines to govern communications made by board officials communicating in the name of the board. Part of the reason for this, of course, still remains to eliminate much of the tension that has developed in the system, and as I said, to keep boards focused on what matters most: student achievement.

Colleagues, again, another part of the bill is mandating consistent learning resources in our classrooms. Obviously, we already have—through the ministry, we provide an approved list of textbooks, for example. We've heard from many educators that that's obviously a very important part of delivering a curriculum. But we intend on moving a bit forward. So if this bill is passed, the changes would mandate the use of approved learning resources in classrooms across the province, but teachers would have the flexibility to use supplementary materials. I have been hearing constantly from educators across the province that they feel that the curriculum is too wide open, that they are left to fill in too much of the blanks, that there is not enough support for them, and that they are spending an increasing amount of time finding the tools and the resources that they need to give their students the educational experience that they require. So we are intending on stepping up the way we have in other areas and ensuring that we can deliver more consistent resources across the province.

1020

I'll move into the exams and assessments for secondary school students. As I said earlier, we have seen, through the EQAO results, some very good and promising results on literacy, reading and writing. As I said earlier, we are

at some of the highest levels that we have ever seen in the province of Ontario. That is very, very encouraging. Educators have told me, as we have moved back to more traditional and more proven ways of delivering the curriculum, that they have started to see those results move in a positive direction. But math still remains a bit of a challenge, and it is very different from board to board.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: This will change that. We are, of course, mandating that exams return for grade 9 to grade 12 in an exam period, and a portion of the final mark will be based on that. In addition, for grades 9 through 12, attendance will be a portion of the mark, as will be participation in the class. Those will also become part of a student's final marks.

Colleagues, in conclusion, I think this bill, in addition to Bill 33, puts us back on the right path. It is not the end; there is more that has to happen over the next number of years. So this isn't the last bill that we'll have before you.

I look forward to any questions you have and continuing to work with you to build a bigger, better province of Ontario and a better education system.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister, for your statement.

There will be now 39 minutes of questions and answers divided into two rounds of 5.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 5.5 minutes for the official opposition members, two rounds of 5.5 minutes for the third party, and two rounds of three minutes for the independent members of the committee. As always, all comments have to go through the Chair.

I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Minister, the Education Act in English is 317 pages. There are many references to the minister's powers and responsibilities, but the word "liability" never occurs in conjunction with "the minister." Nothing in the Education Act—317 pages—grants the minister protection from liability, although there are a few clauses that say that trustees can be held personally liable in certain scenarios.

Bill 10: 14 pages in English, and "liability" shows up 43 times, all in clauses that are granting cabinet and you and your appointees liability protection.

Since 1990, when the Education Act was first tabled, your predecessors as Minister of Education from all three parties have been able to operate without liability protection, and now, suddenly, a bill which gives you immense new powers—you need sweeping immunity from courts, tribunals and arbitration, immunity that trustees did not have. So why do you need so much protection from the consequences of your actions when your predecessors didn't need it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think you'll find that members of the crown already enjoy significant immunity from some of the decisions they make as members of the crown. The immunity provisions that you're referencing would extend to the supervisors the same protections that currently directors of education have.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So if you already have it, then why does it need to show up in a bill that's supposedly about protecting student achievement 43 times?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Consistent language and ensuring that, in future, supervisors and the future CEOs have the same protections as do directors of education currently.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Consistent language, when it doesn't appear anywhere in 317 pages of the Education Act?

Hon. Paul Calandra: But you would agree that there are no changes, right? The minister of the crown already has that immunity. Directors of education already have that immunity and so too will supervisors who should be afforded the same immunity as the director of education, as will CEOs.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I don't agree with you at all. There are multiple clauses in here that give the minister immunity and liability protection. If the minister already had that, then it wouldn't need to be in the act. I think that parents and workers can judge for themselves, whether or not that's already there, if it has to be in the act so many times.

Concerns have been raised repeatedly by education stakeholders, including the trustee associations that you're trying so hard to dismantle, that you aren't funding the actual cost of education in Ontario, including areas where you require boards to do things and then don't fully fund it. There's an \$850-million shortfall in special education; \$250 million for sick leave, when it's your government, not the trustees, that bargain sick leave; \$100 million for CPP and EI, which—you know those premium rates are set by the federal government; \$50 million on student transportation—kids can't learn if they can't get to school; and the FAO says your shortfall for infrastructure funding is \$12.7 billion.

With this bill, you want to set parameters for budgets, including what can't be in there. You want to give yourself the power to approve school board budgets, which is pretty ironic since it's you and your government that are responsible for more than 40% of school boards in the province running a deficit—a number that has gone up every year under your government.

Does this mean, now that you're going to have the power to approve budgets, that you're finally going to fully fund budgets, or does it mean you're going to impose more cuts on our kids?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the bill doesn't contemplate that at all.

I think many of the questions that you have are better addressed when we deal with estimates.

Of course, we just did the budget the other day, it passed through the House, and I reflect that at the time, debate on that collapsed as the opposition decided not to put any more speakers up with three hours left on the clock.

Having said that, a CEO who is hired by trustees will bring forward a budget, and that budget will be adjudicated by trustees. If they are uncomfortable with what the CEO has brought forward, they can refer that to the

Minister of Education, who will ultimately have the final say and ultimately will be held accountable by the people of the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, we certainly do look forward to your announcement on education funding, because the FAO has said that your government is cutting funding for education by \$900 million. So I know that parents, teachers and education workers are certainly waiting with bated breath to see what will actually be coming into our schools next year.

Have you done any costing of the measures in this bill, particularly the new bureaucracy that will be required at the ministry and the fact that you're adding a new layer of bureaucracy to school boards with now a CEO and a director of education?

Hon. Paul Calandra: There will be no additional costs, and there need not be any additional cost to boards. As I said, the director of education will be now called the CEO, and the chief educational officer can be appointed through the existing cadre of superintendents. The ministry will not be providing boards of education with any additional funding from administration.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: That sounds rather like magic. There's going to be a CEO and a chief education officer, and somehow in all of this there's not going to be a single penny added to the cost of the school board. What sounds more like—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister. We will now move to the third party. I recognize MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you for being here, Minister. In order, can you tell me the top three reasons for the rise in student absenteeism?

Hon. Paul Calandra: There are a number of reasons, and it's different from board to board, if you ask me. In some of our northern boards, weather has been a big problem for student absenteeism. In other areas, there's a whole host of issues. Some students have told me that they don't feel that they need to go to school because 100% of their mark is based on coursework. Still, following the COVID pandemic, we've seen the mental health issues, the challenges and stresses that come with social media. That is certainly on the rise. But overwhelmingly, we're hearing from students and from teachers, frankly, that that 100% coursework evaluation makes it difficult for them to manage their classrooms.

Mr. John Fraser: I appreciate the answer. I would like to have heard something a bit more definitive. I believe when you look at student absenteeism, it's a symptom of greater problems. I think the way you are addressing it in the bill is a blunt tool for something more complicated than that. I would have expected that you could give me at least what would be the top reason or what was the largest concern that would lead you to put this into the bill.

Kids should be in school, and we should help them be in school. What I've maintained is, right now, our schools aren't safe places to learn or to work, and that's for three

reasons: Class sizes have grown, special education has been starved—kids aren't getting what they need—and, as you said, Minister, there's a mental health crisis in our schools that's not being addressed.

1030

When I look at Bill 101, I don't see something that's going to make one class size smaller, get one child the help that they need that they're not getting right now. I don't see anything that's addressing the mental health crisis that you mentioned. I think those things are critical to solve, not just because of absenteeism, but our kids aren't bad, and the carrot-and-stick approach—I don't think that's going to work. I think you have to go much deeper than that and address those issues. There are 1,000 classes between grades 4 and 8 of more than 30 kids in Ontario. We're \$800 million short in special education funding. And mental health, right now, is just reflective of what's going on in our society, and our kids are suffering. They're suffering because of social media. They're suffering because of pressures. If we're addressing what's important in education, which is student achievement, I would think those things should be top of mind, or top of the list, when it comes to all of us here, and I don't see that in this bill.

So, Minister, is this going to make one class size smaller?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, obviously—I appreciate that—the bill itself is about governance, how we govern the system. It is about listening to educators.

You're talking about student attendance. This is something that was not necessarily on my radar, but every single classroom that I went into, every single educator told me that we have to get a handle on student attendance and that one of the biggest challenges they have in managing their classrooms, particularly at the secondary level, was the fact that 100% of the coursework determined the mark. Teachers felt that participation was important, that attendance was important.

I respect teachers. I think that, using their professional judgment, they're able to ascertain which students are having challenges and which need more help and that they'll be able to make that decision in the best interest of their students.

Mr. John Fraser: Respectfully, Minister, my question was, is it going to make one class size smaller? Are we going to eliminate having 1,000 grade 4 to 8 classes over 30 kids? That's incredible. I've got one school that's just got split grades all the way through.

What parents want to know is, "Is my kid's class going to be smaller?"—not what's going to happen to them if they're not in school or how that's going to affect their marks.

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

Mr. John Fraser: What they want to know is that class sizes are going to be smaller.

What they also want to know is—"My son or daughter needs help in school. They don't have an EA. They haven't had help. They've got ADHD." And what happens when a student's needs aren't addressed in the early

development years—it follows them all the way through school. I would say it would be a likely cause of absenteeism in the future, if they didn't feel they could participate in school in a meaningful way, or they were bad at school.

So the reason that I ask these questions is, Bill 101 is not going to fix any of the things I talked about. What I think people want to hear from their government is—“How are you going to make the class sizes smaller? How are you going to make sure that my son or daughter gets the help that they need?”

And do you know what? We have this mental health crisis and somehow we have to tackle it in our schools.

I'll just leave it at that.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You had five seconds left.

We will now go to the independent for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you to the minister for coming today and talking about what is important. I think we all agree that we want kids to be at school, to have what they need to learn, and that our education workers also have what they need to teach and support students.

I'm going to focus my first question on attendance. As you know, I was an attendance counsellor for 11 years. I am curious if that was a group that you consulted when you came up with this decision. I do thank you for bringing up attendance in this issue. Since elected, I've been talking about how I've seen a growing problem in attendance-related concerns—more chronic absenteeism—and this is, I think, widespread amongst my colleagues.

But what I don't see in here is the work that we do to support kids from a very young age to address some of those issues from the get-go. So I'm curious as to who you talked to to come up with this as a solution for chronic absenteeism.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, and again, what the bill contemplates is that at the secondary level, participation and attendance would be part of the final grade. And 100% of this came from educators.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Teachers are not attendance counsellors, right?

There's a website called Attendance Works. It's an American site, but what it says is that there is no evidence or data to support that this is an effective measure to address absenteeism. What we know is that absenteeism starts in kindergarten. At the moment, we don't have a legal mechanism to enforce attendance at a young age. Typically, we address absenteeism when there's three weeks of a student missing, whereas we need to address when kids are missing 10% of school. Mechanisms like this would help us intervene more quickly. We know we need to address this at an early age, and we know that the root causes of absenteeism are poverty, marginalization like with racialized communities, kids with special education needs—

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: We know that the number one increase in mental health issues right now is social anxiety.

Can you tell me what you'll be doing to address the root causes of absenteeism? Because this is not a recommended approach.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I respect a teacher's ability to use professional judgment to understand each and every student they have in their classroom and the challenges that they face. I guess I'm just more optimistic that our teachers appreciate and understand the kids they have in front of them and the challenges that they are facing.

A student who is missing time because of a mental health issue—a regulation will ensure that that student does not face any challenges.

To be clear, though, we're talking about a 90% standard, which allows the student at the secondary level to still miss 20 days without being penalized—it is those that come after that, and then in what proportion. Absenteeism and participation will form the basis of the final grade.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the government side, and I recognize MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister, for your remarks.

In one of your responses earlier, you mentioned listening to educators.

In my constituency office in Burlington, I regularly hear from parents, I hear from teachers, and I hear from post-secondary educators about the need to focus on student success and academic achievement and outcomes.

Bill 101 refocuses the education system on doing just that—improving student outcomes, especially in core skill areas such as reading, math and writing.

Minister, I know you've travelled across the province, speaking with countless teachers and schools. Can you share with the committee today what you've heard from educators that helped to shape and inspire Bill 101?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Most of the bill, frankly, comes from educators themselves.

What we've consistently heard over the last year is that teachers need additional help and resources if they're going to provide their students with the absolute best.

I heard from elementary teachers that one of the challenges that they were facing was classroom supplies. There's obviously a fund that goes to providing supplies in a classroom, but a lot of educators said that was controlled in some instances by the principal and not by them directly. So we brought forward a classroom supply card, directly controlled by a homeroom teacher, of \$750, to give them those resources.

We're also hearing about challenges with respect to curriculum. Is the curriculum too vast? Does it provide teachers with the resources that they need to succeed? And are our teachers spending far too much time filling in the blanks of a large curriculum that is not focused? We've heard them on that.

Part of the bill provides consistent learning resources, if passed, which teachers have said will be a benefit. We're seeing that in a lot of instances. Teachers show me different things that they are paying for themselves to help

deliver their curriculum. Some teachers will buy it on their own. Some boards are buying different things. So it is different from community to community. The bill addresses that.

We've heard frustration from educators with respect to some of the challenges that they were hearing from their boards.

In the York region Catholic school board, as I said, there were seven different directors of education over nine years. That causes challenges of leadership in a board.

In the Near North District School Board, they're teaching their kids in a partially demolished building because trustees couldn't get their act together.

So what they're saying is that they want consistency, they want the tools and the help that they need, and they want the ministry to step up.

That's what Bill 101 does with Bill 33. It allows the ministry to step up, fill the blanks and provide the resources that teachers need so they can provide their students with the best opportunity to succeed—and similarly, the final point, the attendance and participation requirements that are within this bill, should it pass.

1040

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

Mr. Billy Pang: Chair, through you to the Minister: Minister, you are currently overseeing eight different school boards across the province. Can you share with the committee any insight or unexpected things that you have seen from what you've supervised?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's really different in every situation.

I referenced York Catholic. As I said, not only did they have a massive turnover of directors of education; there is a board where there is so much infighting that was going on. Trustees are spending millions of dollars on court actions against each other.

I've already referenced Near North a number of times. The report on the Near North trustees was an absolutely damning indictment of that trustee relationship.

We are seeing other challenges in other boards: the TDSB, whose trustees were failing to make decisions; same with the Toronto Catholic school board.

So in each board, it is different, the challenges that they are facing.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Ultimately, it comes down to one thing: governance and the lack of involvement of the ministry in helping ensure those boards are on track.

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

Mr. John Jordan: I know that you worked closely with the Minister of Colleges and Universities on this bill.

My wife is a teacher—a principal; retired now. Something that has been talked about for years is moving the teachers' program from a two-year to a one-year program. I'm wondering if you can tell us what has motivated that change that you have in this bill.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Partially, an impending teacher shortage, frankly. There are a lot of retirements that will be coming through the system in the next number of years.

And, again, listening to the educators themselves, they said a two-year program did nothing to improve their ability, but what they needed was more time in front of a classroom. So the one-year program will maximize their time in front of a classroom. And the graduation time period allows them to get right into schools and apply for jobs.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize the official opposition. MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: There has been some talk about absenteeism already this morning, but there's one category of kids that hasn't come up, which is children with disabilities.

The Ontario Autism Coalition found that 6% of kids with disabilities are completely excluded from schools. That's over 20,000 students every day. Another one third are not allowed to attend school full days—we're talking over 100,000 kids.

People for Education, in their survey, found that nearly two thirds of elementary school principals and 56% of secondary school principals have had to ask parents to keep their child with disabilities at home for the day.

Parents of these kids are begging for their children to be allowed to attend school full-time. They have repeatedly asked the Ministry of Education to track exclusions when their kids are not allowed to attend.

With this bill, you're giving yourself the power to make attendance part of marks in Ontario. What are you going to do to ensure that every child in Ontario is allowed to attend school full-time every day?

Hon. Paul Calandra: First and foremost, there will be a number of exemptions that will be allowed within the attendance requirement, obviously, in addition to professional judgment from our teachers.

I tend to agree with you; I think that we have to do a better job of connecting not only my ministry but Minister Parsa's ministry and the Ministry of Health with respect to how we deliver special education and certain needs. The level of special education across the province is different from school board to school board. I'm frankly unhappy with that. I'm unhappy with the disconnect between the three ministries that are responsible. I certainly think we can do a better job. I will be spending a significant amount of time over the next number of months seeing how we can better perform when it comes to special education.

I'm also hearing from a lot of teachers who have differences of opinions, often from their directors of education and from the board.

The nature of teaching is so different now. I was in a class where the grade 8 teacher had eight different IEPs—a class of 27 and eight different IEPs. I don't think parents sometimes understand it's not just one curriculum—it is one curriculum for 19 and then eight different curriculums.

I think we've got to get a handle on this, frankly, so we will be spending a great deal of time looking at special education, how it's delivered in the province, and how we

can deliver it more evenly across all boards and, frankly, how we can bring the ministries together.

Looking at what we also do well—we have provincial schools that do amazing, amazing work in the deaf and blind community.

It's about outcomes. It's not only about education and where they are, but it's about them being able to lead productive, independent lives afterwards.

I'm hearing from a lot of educators that we have dropped the ball on this, so we're going to be looking at that and we're going to be seeing how we can do a better job with that, for sure. I don't disagree with you.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: There's so much in what you just said there, Minister.

First of all, kids with disabilities—their parents aren't asking for them to be exempted from this attendance requirement. They are asking for their kids to be allowed to attend school.

And the provincial schools, other than the Centre Jules-Léger, are not a model for inclusion. Your government has paid out over \$20 million in lawsuits—and there are still lawsuits—over the lack of inclusion, over the harassment, over the conditions in provincial schools. You should actually be providing them with elected boards, rather than controlling them yourself.

The supervisor you appointed in the OCDSB is cutting specialized class placements. He's not taking kids with IEPs out of the classroom and giving them personalized support. He's forcing kids with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. And now you're going to have mini-supervisors all across the province, with these new CEOs.

At the heart of it all is this massive underfunding of special education—\$850 million: That's what boards are spending, that you're not giving them. Some 71 out of 72 school boards are running a deficit for a scenario where this many kids are being excluded every single day. So if you're genuinely committed to ensuring that you do better by these kids and that they can attend school, will you commit to eliminating that \$850-million deficit in this year's core education funding?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me just correct one thing. The CEO, of course, will not be responsible for academic achievement in the boards; that will be—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: They can certainly make cuts.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —the Chief Education Officer, who will be responsible for academic achievement in the boards.

As I said, I want to ensure that we do a better job. Some boards are doing better than other boards. I've heard from parents across the province that they want the best for their kids, and I think we can do better, and that's why we'll be spending a lot of time on special education.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You're giving yourself the power to determine what resources not only teachers can use, but that teachers can't use.

Will you guarantee that you will not implement a book ban in Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think we've been very clear on that. We've ordered our libraries not to destroy books. We've gone in just the opposite direction.

Whatever resources are provided, we'll still allow teachers the opportunity to use professional judgment in the delivery of that curriculum.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the third party, and I recognize MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you, Minister, for being here to answer tough questions this morning.

You've previously agreed that French-language school boards have a strong governance—I make the pitch very often—and there's no indication of mismanagement of funds in those boards. As well, they've got their results in many of the English-language boards; however, it's worth noting that, of the 19 school boards projecting deficits this year, five of them are actually French-language boards—that's five of 12 French school boards. Does this not indicate that governance is not the problem and that there is just simply not enough funding in the system?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, not necessarily. I think what you're seeing—part of Bill 33, as I said to you. One of the challenges that we're seeing in the French-language boards is the continuing popularity of the program; more and more people want to send their kids. The system, though, does not have, I would suggest, enough schools.

Bill 33—the reason I bring that up is because they're experiencing significantly higher transportation costs, as their kids have to go a much further distance to get to school; it's not all like Ottawa.

I bring the Near North again, as an example: There is a board—the system was to receive two underutilized schools from the public system there, which refused to hand those schools over to the French board, despite the fact that the ministry had provided millions of dollars in funding to upgrade those two schools. They had been waiting and waiting and waiting. Instead, their kids are being bused an hour away. So, partially, it is about the transportation costs.

1050

That is why we're putting a significant amount of money into capital build in our French system. I'm very excited by what we're seeing in the French system. It's working well. But at the same time, there are challenges that have come from a lack of funding in previous years by previous governments, so we're building capital.

Through Bill 33, it allows us the opportunity to access underutilized resources in the public system and transfer those to the French system, thereby reducing their busing costs and providing a better outcome for our French students—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you, Minister. I think what you've just said actually confirms that there needs to be more funding in our school system, including in the French boards.

I want to ask you another question about the constitutionality of the changes you're bringing in this bill. I know you and I might disagree on this. I'm still pretty sure that there is a problem with this. I would like to know what

steps you took to ensure that those changes are constitutional and that the ability of French boards to govern themselves autonomously is not going to be affected.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The bill, as I said, has no impact on our French-language boards. As I said, every bill that we do—not just this one. Frankly, every bill that the government presents goes through a constitutional lens, through constitutional law branch, to ensure that it meets the charter.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: So you've got a legal opinion on that?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course. It's not just this bill, but every bill that we—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay. Some other people are looking for that, too.

I'm going to pass it over to MPP Fraser for the remaining time.

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

Mr. John Fraser: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have two minutes and eight seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much.

Thank you again, Minister, for being here.

You said something a bit earlier in terms of—the parents did not understand the complexity of the classroom. I think what parents understand, especially parents of a student with an IEP, is that the needs aren't being met, that they don't have an EA, that thing that they need.

I told the story about Marigold, who is six years old now and has been in school for two years. She came in with an assessment that her family paid for and isn't getting any services. When you're six, two years is a long time in your development.

I think what parents understand is the underfunding that exists in special education. Kids aren't getting what they need. So I'm surprised that the minister would say something like, "Parents don't understand."

It's eight years in—you've been in government for eight years, and special education is in bad shape. Trustees had to find \$800 million in money that they weren't given somewhere else.

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

Mr. John Fraser: How is this bill going to get one child who needs speech-language pathology or who needs some other form of intervention—how is it going to help them?

Hon. Paul Calandra: First, let me just say this: I fully understand the challenges that parents face when it comes to IEPs, and I think every parent, on their own, understands the challenges that their kids face when it comes to ensuring a quality education in the system.

At the same time, teachers don't feel that often parents realize the complexity and the challenges that they are facing in delivering when there is more than one IEP in a class, and the ministry has to acknowledge this, so—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We will go to the independent member for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to focus on mental health right now. I think we all agree that our kids are facing really extreme mental health challenges—as a cause of smart phones and technology in their lives.

I'm a little troubled that with this bill, it seems as though there wasn't a consultation with attendance counsellors; perhaps not with ETFO, which represents thousands and thousands of education workers in the elementary system—OSSTF, OECTA, AEFO.

Will you make a commitment to addressing mental health challenges of our students and the problems that technology poses to them, and when you do or if you do, will you consult with all of the front-line workers who deal with this on a regular basis?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, just to clarify, the attendance features of this bill do not impact elementary kids. That's not to suggest that—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Attendance counsellors work in the secondary system as well.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's not to suggest that there isn't also a challenge in the elementary system that we have to deal with, and the development of regulations, obviously, we will be working with.

It's not just about the mark, but it's also about getting to the underlying cause of why. I think attendance counsellors play a very important part of the system.

I want to be looking at a more fulsome ban with respect to cellphones in our schools, which would be a province-wide—I am contemplating a province-wide ban of cellphones on any school property throughout the school day.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Will you work with us? Will you work with the stakeholder groups to make this happen, to be part of this solution? We all want to be part of this, and we want it to be rooted in evidence.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, we work with educators on a daily basis. There are a number of educators who are seconded to the ministry. That goes without saying.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: There's mandatory consultation with our stakeholder groups.

I think I'm on the same page as a lot of educators and a lot of parents. I'm concerned about social media; I want it out. I'm concerned, with cellphones—I think that although there is a limited ban, evidence shows that if it's off—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to interrupt. I appreciate that—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Out of the schools entirely would be better.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My hope is that, as opposed to individual by individual, you bring us together. We could be part of this together.

Your government underspent by \$500 million last year. Why wasn't this money spent to ensure that kids have access to special education? Inclusion without support is abandonment, and that's what I see in our schools today.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's a per-student funding model—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Do you see problems with that, though?

Hon. Paul Calandra:—so as attendance decreases, so too does the amount that's transferred.

I said that in the supervised boards I want supervisors to give me an assessment of the current funding formula to see if it's meeting the needs of kids. I announced that when I assumed—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the government side. I recognize MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Minister, I would like to ask you a question about trustees in the boards which the ministry now has assumed guidance over. I want to ask you a question about the responsiveness, or lack of responsiveness, of those trustees with regard to concerns that were brought up by parents and others in the system.

My understanding is that the ministry has assumed responsibility for a certain number of boards in the province of Ontario and that, having assumed responsibility for these boards, now there are certain concerns being brought forward which had already been brought forward by either parents or educational professionals, which were not previously addressed by the trustees of those boards. Is that true, and if so, can you please give us some examples of those concerns?

Hon. Paul Calandra: There are a number of instances. One of the things that we did in the supervised board is, we insisted that they have a new student and family office so that parents who have challenges within the system can call the board directly, can have a case file opened for them—whatever the challenge that they're facing is, they know who is working on their issue. They've mandated to have a two-day response time and a five-day resolution time for some of the more easier ones. There are some that are more complex that are certainly more challenging. We are seeing an amazing, amazing response through these offices province-wide, in the supervised boards and a number of boards who are not under supervision, who are moving very quickly to establish these offices themselves. We're hearing from parents that this is a very good way of helping them deal with the issues that they are facing in the system.

We had an example—in fact, it was an example from a member of provincial Parliament from the opposition, the official opposition side, who had a meeting with one of our supervisors, who talked about a challenge that they had had for the last three years with respect to safety at a school. The supervisor was able to address that within, I think, two to three weeks, if I'm not mistaken, and was able to meet the needs that the opposition member raised. At the same time, the member of the opposition suggested—three years of meetings with trustees, got nowhere; a short period of time under a supervised board, and they were able to address that.

The other thing that we're hearing is how quickly in supervised boards they are able to meet the different challenges that they are having.

1100

It was one of the first meetings I had with one of the supervised boards—I was shown a table, and on the table were stacks of reports. I asked, obviously, "What is that?" And the director of education told me, "That's \$5 million. That's five years of inability of trustees to make a decision on the expansion of a school, which has hurt their kids." A supervisor was able to digest that within 45 minutes, and now that expansion is under way.

So it's the ability to move quickly. It's the ability to address challenges that boards are facing. It's taking the politics out of it and refocusing.

The bill contemplates refocusing trustees on what they tell me they want to do, and that is advocating on behalf of students and parents. It allows them to do that.

We're removing much of the noise and politics that has put our boards in a very challenging situation.

I'm aware of one board that suggested that, once we took over supervision, it was called liberation day for them, because the board had been in such a stalemate and unable to move forward that the staff of that board was excited that they could actually do what they wanted to do, and that was focus on student achievement.

So it's a good step, and we're moving in a positive direction.

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

Ms. Jess Dixon: Time check, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): About 1.18 minutes.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you.

We've talked a lot about what's going on in schools, data, getting a sense of what's happening, and obviously, for those who aren't super familiar with the school climate survey, it may seem contradictory to be removing that.

Can you explain the nature of the school climate survey and why this bill removes that particular survey?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It removes the mandated requirement. That's not to suggest that boards can't still seek to survey its population.

One of the things that we saw on this—obviously, one of the questions we have here is, "How often do you feel that you have no one to play with?" "How often do you feel left out?" is another one. "How often do you feel alone?" "Answer the following question: I feel worthless or inferior"—sometimes, most of the time, often. These are some questions that are asked.

The results of these surveys do not make their way to the Ministry of Education. They often do not make their way to trustees. They are in no way identifying students. They have no ability to help a particular student, and the data is not collected and distributed and disseminated in a way—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I'd like to thank the minister for his presentation.

DR. WEIDONG PEI
 ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC
 TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
 CANADIAN UNION OF
 PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will move on to our next set of witnesses.

As a reminder, witnesses have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questions and answers, divided into two rounds of 5.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 5.5 minutes for the official opposition members, two rounds of 5.5 minutes for the third party, and two rounds of three minutes for the independent member of the committee.

I will now call on Dr. Pei to please come forward. Welcome. Please state your name for Hansard, and then you may begin.

Dr. Weidong Pei: Good morning, Chair Riddell and the members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Dr. Weidong Pei. I'm a Toronto District School Board trustee representing Willowdale, here in my personal capacity. But most importantly, I'm a TDSB parent.

I am reminded of the guiding language in the Education Act: "Every board shall,

"(a) promote student achievement and well-being;"

Indeed, families expect safe classrooms, strong teachers, and high academic standards. But too often at TDSB, senior staff and trustees have drifted away from this key principle, focusing on divisive political debates.

Bill 101 refocuses all stakeholders in our system on what truly matters for families, students and educators.

First and foremost, I want to address the impact the bill will have on the TDSB. Our board currently has 22 trustees, but this has not produced effective governance. Meetings are frequently long, fragmented and dominated by political debates that have little connection to student achievement. We are the sixth-largest school board in North America. Of the five largest school boards, only New York City has more board members than the TDSB. Reducing the number of trustees will help streamline governance and allow the board to focus on what truly matters: student achievement and well-being. A smaller board will create clearer accountability, more efficient decision-making and, most importantly, less political theatre.

The Toronto District School Board is one of the largest employers in the city, if not the largest. We had a \$3.7-billion budget in the last fiscal year, roughly equivalent to the budget of the province of Prince Edward Island. We have a massive real estate portfolio, large enough to necessitate a subsidiary, the Toronto Lands Corp. We operate in an incredibly complex unionized environment, supplemented by oversight and relationships with all three levels of government. For any other corporation of this

size, we would not accept a CEO without strong business acumen and the knowledge of finances, human resources, operations and regulatory mechanisms. There should not be a different standard for school boards.

The current model severely constrains the talent available for the leader of a school board. I am supportive of Bill 101's proposal to divide the role into chief executive officer and chief education officer. It ensures that someone with pedagogical expertise still guides education programming, while the CEO can focus on being a business leader. While perhaps not applicable to the TDSB, it is appropriate that the proposed legislation allows one qualified person to occupy both roles, which may be more practical for smaller boards.

I also want to speak to student outcomes. The data from recent EQAO results should concern every parent and policy-maker in this province. In math, nearly half of students in some grades are not meeting the provincial standard. This is not acceptable. When almost 50% of students fail to meet the standard in math, we cannot simply continue with business as usual. Students only get one chance at their education. We owe it to them to maintain rigorous academic expectations.

One way to reinforce academic standards is through meaningful final assessments in high school courses. Final exams go beyond a grade on the paper; they help students consolidate knowledge, build discipline and prepare for the workforce or post-secondary education. Removing this level of rigour would be doing students a disservice. It weakens exam expectations and sends the wrong message to students.

Attendance is one of the strongest predictors of academic success. Simply put, students cannot learn if they are not in class. Students who do not attend class fall behind.

For eight years, I taught in the faculty of dentistry at the University of Toronto. It should not come as a surprise that the students who showed up, asked questions and put in the work did better than the students who didn't.

Only 40% of Ontario high school students attended class at least 90% of the time. Chronic absenteeism is becoming normalized. This trend is deeply concerning.

Bill 101 sends a clear message: Attending school matters.

At the same time, attendance policies must always be applied with compassion. Students facing illness, family hardship, or other challenges deserve support and understanding. But compassion does not mean lowering expectations. It should look like helping students overcome barriers so they can succeed.

1110

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

Dr. Weidong Pei: Students deserve a system that is focused, disciplined and committed to excellence. And parents deserve confidence that the institutions responsible for their children's education is focused on delivering results. Bill 101 takes us one step closer to that goal.

Thank you. I welcome questions from the members of the committee.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now bring on the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. You may start your presentation.

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I'm a Catholic teacher, parent, and the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. We represent 45,000 professionals who teach 600,000 of our children from kindergarten to grade 12 in our publicly funded schools across Ontario.

Catholic teachers, schools and communities were all deeply concerned about Bill 101 and its impact on our students, our families and our teachers. Bill 101 seems to have heard ideas but not really understood them in their complexities, and we urge the government to withdraw the legislation.

Let us engage meaningfully with our school communities. We all need to understand the complexities and unintended consequences of what we want to do. Anecdotes don't make good policy. There are better options if we genuinely seek to support our students.

This legislation weakens local board governance by diminishing the role of locally elected voices. It centralizes control of our schools in the backrooms of Queen's Park. It corporatizes school board governance by installing CEOs. And this approach rejects consultation and collaboration in favour of ministerial decrees.

It would be a mistake to act as if one government voice knows better than the parents, the teachers and the communities about what's best for our students.

The government claims this bill is about accountability, but it seems to be about giving the Minister of Education complete and total power. Despite any good intentions by the minister, that does not put students first.

World-class education systems are built on trust, meaningful consultation and respect for teachers and the education workers in schools, not control and forced compliance.

Public education is a Canadian success story, and everything we're proud of starts in our schools. It's where our global reputation starts. It's the foundation for our stability, good governance and economic success.

Catholic teachers are also deeply concerned about the impact this will have on upcoming bargaining. We need to be focused on working together at the table to address the critical issues facing children, such as class sizes, school safety, and lack of resources and supports. To be clear, these should not be left to the bargaining table, but they are.

We should be providing real and sustained funding to ensure student safety and the best possible learning outcomes for our students. Bill 101 minimizes the valuable education expertise and understanding that local voices bring to the table, replacing that critical independence with ministerial and bureaucratic control, and that will undermine effective bargaining and problem-solving. To best serve our students, we call on the government to maintain

bargaining structures, guarantee independence and ensure knowledgeable local voices are there.

Bill 101 centralization extends in the class, giving the minister authority over student assessment and threatening teachers' professional judgment. By creating a framework that potentially mandates materials used in the class by teachers, it would perpetuate a deprofessionalized teaching. It would turn teaching into a one-way scripted session devoid of the very spark that brings learning to the students' lives, shifting the profession from grounded in expertise and relationships to the model of government control that we have seen fail down south. Teaching is about real, authentic interactions with students, and that's how we improve student achievement.

Catholic teachers believe that public education is a public good. We prepare students for tomorrow, and with real and sustained investment, that is how we best protect Ontario, because Ontario's students are our future.

We urge the government to withdraw Bill 101 and to work with parents, local communities, teachers and education workers on a real plan to protect Ontario. There's a better option than 101, and it starts by rejecting corporate centralization in favour of real public consultation and partnership.

Let's harness the talent in our local education communities to ensure that our schools are ready to meet the challenge of tomorrow.

I will now turn things over to our legal counsel, Paul Cavalluzzo, who will discuss potential unconstitutional effects of the legislation.

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Thank you, René.

We have two serious concerns relating to the constitutionality of the legislation.

The first concern relates to the replacing of the Catholic trustees as the exclusive bargaining agent in central bargaining by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, which I will refer to as CODE. This raises a number of governance issues such as accountability. Up to this point in time, we've had Catholic trustees who were responsible to elected boards, who are obviously responsible to the constituency they represent.

The other governance concern is expertise and experience. The Catholic trustees' association has played a critical role in collective bargaining, with a mandate grounded in denominational rights and a thorough understanding of the Catholicity of the system.

This raises two constitutional concerns. The first relates to section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867, which prohibits the province from prejudicially affecting denominational rights and privileges. And we say that this has this prejudicial effect in two ways. First, CODE, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, which now becomes the bargaining agent, is not independent of government. And of course, it is the government from which these denominational rights may be prejudiced. You should not have a non-independent body with ties to government as being the other bargaining party across the table. The second point is that CODE has absolutely no experience or expertise in protecting denominational rights or the

Catholicity of the system. The legislation makes the trustees' association an observer at the bargaining table.

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

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: And as with observer status, they will not have the kind of expertise, experience and, indeed, influence which can protect the Catholicity of the system, which has been their historic role as steward of Catholicity in the system. The Catholic system is far more than the teaching of a religion course. Catholic schools are infused with Catholic values and perspectives, and this all-encompassing role that a steward must play in respect of protecting denominational rights cannot be played by CODE, which, once again, is not independent of government.

The second potential unconstitutional effect is section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights, which protects freedom of association. Our courts are very clear that the government should not substantially interfere in the collective bargaining process—

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

Canadian Union of Public Employees—CUPE—and Joe Tigani, go ahead, please.

Mr. Joe Tigani: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Joe Tigani. I'm the president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Ontario School Board Council of Unions. We represent over 57,000 education workers across Ontario. We've submitted written materials to the committee, and I want to use my time this morning to focus on what is most urgent.

Ontario's public education system is in crisis—not a governance crisis; a funding crisis. Since 2018, Ontario schools have been underfunded by more than \$6.3 billion. That's not a talking point; it's a documented figure from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and students, families and education workers are living with the consequences every single day.

There are simply not enough education workers in our schools. Students who need one-on-one support from an educational assistant often do not get it. Kindergarten classrooms go without a designated early childhood educator. Schools are not fully cleaned each day because there are too few custodians. School offices are stretched beyond capacity. And we are seeing rising levels of violence in schools directly connected to understaffing and students not receiving the supports they desperately need.

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School boards are not making these cuts because they want to; they are making them because the funding formula leaves them no choice. Underfunding and the resulting board deficits are driving job cuts across this province, and it is the education workers and students who are paying the price. This is the crisis. And Bill 101 does nothing to fix this. In fact, Bill 101 appears designed to insulate decision-makers from public pressure for improved funding and staffing by removing power from elected trustees, who hear directly from their constituents, and giving it to unelected administrators, who do not.

If we want to improve student outcomes and student test scores, the solution is clear: Invest in staffing. Invest in supports. Invest in the people who make our schools work every day.

Instead of addressing that crisis, Bill 101 focuses on governance. It shifts decision-making further away from local communities and concentrates more power with the minister and unelected administrators. Elected trustees who are accountable to their communities would see their roles significantly reduced, particularly in English public boards. Capping the number of trustees at 12 and reducing their compensation to nominal amounts further erodes their capacity to do the job. In a city like Toronto, with a population of over three million, each trustee would represent more than 250,000 constituents. That is not local accountability; it looks more like a rubber-stamp.

At the same time, directors of education are being renamed "chief executive officers." That's not just a title change. It reflects a shift in thinking; one that treats public education like a business. And it goes further than a title. Directors would no longer be required to have an educational background. A business person with no experience in schools could be placed in charge of an entire school board. School board finances are a means to an end—but an end being quality public education for students. Bill 101 gets this backwards. Public education is not a business. It's a public service.

Trustees have served Ontario communities for nearly two centuries. They provide a direct link between local communities and decision-making in schools. Bill 101 weakens that connection, removing or limiting trustee authority over budgets and collective bargaining, while expanding the power of individuals with no democratic mandate. Collective bargaining is not just about wages and benefits. It shapes what happens in local schools every day—staffing levels, working conditions, the supports available to students. Trustees understand what their communities need from that process. Unelected CEOs focused on cost savings do not have the same level of accountability.

At the central bargaining table, trustees' associations would be replaced by CODE, an organization with no democratic accountability. And perhaps most troubling, the minister would have the power to remove CODE entirely if it does not align with his vision. That means the employer side of central bargaining operates under the constant threat of ministerial intervention. This is not about accountability. It's about control.

In closing, Bill 101 takes us further away from what Ontario's education system actually needs. It weakens local accountability. It centralizes power. And it fails to address the real issue: chronic underfunding.

If this government is serious about student achievement, the path forward is very clear. Fund the system properly. Put more education workers in schools. Support students with the resources that they desperately need. Some 57,000 education workers show up every day for students across this province—

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

Mr. Joe Tigani: They deserve a government that shows up for them.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Are you finished, sir?

Mr. Joe Tigani: I am.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Okay.

We will go to round one, and we will start with the third party for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Pei, thank you very much for being here today.

Can you tell me the top three reasons for the increase in absenteeism over the last eight years?

Dr. Weidong Pei: To my understanding, I think that the key issue is mental challenges, especially after the pandemic.

Also, I think the second reason would be, when absenteeism becomes so prevalent, it becomes normalized, so students take consent to skip classes. I think that's number two.

Number three: I would say there are other complex socio-economic or family issues. For example, maybe there's some school bullying or school violence in the class, in the school, so students elect not to attend class.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much for your answer.

I think offering—with all due respect—anecdotal evidence is the problem here. To apply critical thinking to something that we see and “how do we get here” and “what's the reason that kids aren't there” is a thing that we have to address.

I would say, I agree that absenteeism is a problem and something that we have to tackle, but the simple carrot-and-stick approach is too blunt an instrument. It's like using a hammer when you need a Phillips screwdriver and needle-nose pliers. We agree on that.

I just think the approach in the bill is not going to give the results that we want. The results that we want are not just the numbers to be better; we want kids to achieve more.

I want to thank you for taking the time to be here today.

I would like to address my question to Mr. Tigani with regard to safety in schools. I've heard from a lot of educators—a lot of EAs, teachers—about the situation that exists in our schools, even in elementary schools, in terms of injury that's occurring to teachers and the environment for students. I don't know if you want to elaborate on that. If you could do that, that would be great.

Mr. Joe Tigani: Thanks for the question.

You hit a really important point: It's happening often now with our youngest learners, which is extremely troubling. But it is also becoming so normalized in the last five years, where this seems to be the normal behaviour, or it's accepted. And, unfortunately, I think if we had addressed the funding problem that we see, that staffing crisis, a lot of these situations could be hopefully mitigated before they turn into a crisis, or a student who is upset, or that type of violence. And we see this happening more and

more everywhere. It's not isolated, it's not a big-city thing, it's not a rural thing; it is everywhere across this province, where we are seeing levels of violence that are unprecedented. We often hear about—the numbers are staggering. If you dig into the numbers that we're hearing about—and the numbers that are reported to boards are only superficial. Often, people don't report because they feel like nothing is going to change, and that's the problem. We need to see a real change here in this province.

Mr. John Fraser: I have a friend whose wife is 70 years old. In her last year of teaching, she had a particularly difficult six-year-old. One day, she ended up with scratches all over her arms. She went to see the vice-principal, and the vice-principal's first response was, “I think you'll have to wear long sleeves.” This happens. This is just what's happening—not “Oh, my God. What happened?”

So that's a problem. It's a big problem in our schools, and it's something that's not being addressed in this bill.

How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute and 35 seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: Great.

My colleague just gave me some more time, so I'll give you another story.

I have a neighbour who is a principal of an elementary school close to us. I was talking to him about violence in schools, and he said to me, “Well, a 12-year-old girl threw a desk at me in my office.” He's the principal. And then he looked at me and in the same breath said, “It's just another day.” And he's a reasonable guy; he's not political. He's just a principal trying to do his job.

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

Mr. John Fraser: So when all of these things become normalized and not addressed, our kids aren't going to get what they need. There's too much distraction. There's not enough resource going in, the inputs aren't enough—call it money, call it time and attention.

We're eight years into this government, and we have this situation, and somehow it's somebody else's fault. It's somebody else's fault—who's not in the classroom or is not sitting here.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the independent member for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

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Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thanks to all of you for coming today.

I'd like to ask Mr. Jansen in de Wal about this number that we have from last year's budget—\$500 million that was allocated to education went unspent.

What I'm hearing from school boards is that they have to pay CPP, but they aren't given an adequate amount. I know Bill 124, for a long time, was an issue. Sick days are not covered to the extent to which they're taken.

When you think about the budget shortfalls and this money that goes unspent and your staff that you represent every day, how would that \$500 million have made a

difference in the lives of education workers and the students they support?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Well, the concern for me is that it's being framed as a business—it's not; it's a common good. This is a community value, and it's based on people. Kids aren't standard. All of the people in schools are caring adults, and we have less caring adults. So when you unspend that money, you put less people in the class.

Every parent knows, if you have three siblings in a house and one of them starts to get dysregulated, you want to pick up on that early and deal with it and you can cut that off. If you don't get to it, the two kids start fighting.

Every parent in Ontario is struggling with the issues of social media, screen time, dysregulation because of technology and cellphones etc. Every community has that, and the schools are in the community, so we're dealing with the same thing.

There is this collective social effort we need to undertake, and it is being exacerbated—at a time when kids need us more, we have withdrawn the money and the time for human beings to show care and to deal with these kids, and that's a real problem.

This bill deals with governance and control and other things, but it doesn't address what we need. It's about the spending cuts. It's about not having caring adults.

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

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: So when I see money not spent like that, I believe that's fairly significant to take note of, because we know kids need us more than ever, and we're choosing to not spend the money there.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What I hear is that the government isn't paying their bills in certain buckets and then people have to pull from things like special education, building repairs.

I'd like to ask Mr. Tigani about what co-regulation means to your members. We know that relationships matter, and most EAs and other education workers are spread really thin, and it impedes their ability to actually help kids learn that muscle of regulation.

Mr. Joe Tigani: I think it goes back to even what René just alluded to. There are less caring adults in a building, so those levels of one-on-one support are almost non-existent now. When you look back 10, 15 years, you could provide that level of support. Now you have an EA who might have two, four, eight, 10 different students they're supporting on a daily basis. So to have that connection, to see—

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

We'll now go to the government side for 5.5 minutes. I recognize Minister Calandra.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll start with you, Mr. Tigani. You represent how many members?

Mr. Joe Tigani: It's 57,000.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's a huge union.

Let me ask you this: Are you a teacher?

Mr. Joe Tigani: I'm an educational assistant.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Do you think you would be qualified to run a school board as a CEO?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Do I think I would be qualified?

Hon. Paul Calandra: You or any of the members you represent.

Mr. Joe Tigani: I can't say what other members may have as far as qualifications.

Me, personally, no, I would not be qualified to run the school board.

Hon. Paul Calandra: So if members had the qualifications that are required, you don't think that they should be able to run the school board?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Are you asking about my specific members?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

Mr. Joe Tigani: I think if they have the qualifications and could demonstrate that they could run the board, I guess, yes, they could.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's interesting, because this bill allows them to actually do that, and you're suggesting that we shouldn't allow them to do that. The changes that we're talking about, the CEO position—allows for people who are non-educators to become CEOs of the board. I respect the fact that you don't think you could run the board, but at the same time, I appreciate that you think some of your members could run the board, and this change allows them to do that.

Directors of education currently—are they elected?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Are they elected?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

Mr. Joe Tigani: No, they are hired.

Hon. Paul Calandra: So a CEO would also be hired, you'd agree?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Yes, based on what—

Hon. Paul Calandra: So the exact same. You talked about the centralization—you said, the centralization of an unelected administrator. So nothing will have changed in this bill. Would you agree?

Mr. Joe Tigani: In its current form and at face value, yes. But I think there's an underlying—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me ask you this: Who hires the director of education, currently?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Trustees.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Who will hire a CEO?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Currently?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Who will hire a CEO if the bill is passed? I'll answer it for you: trustees.

So I think where we've come is, you suggested that there are people who are not educators who could run a board as a CEO. I appreciate that. You're in agreement with me on that part of the bill. You agree that current directors of education are unelected and that a CEO would also be unelected.

You talked about capping salary and the impact that would have on trustee representation. About 98% of the boards of education fall within the cap already. It would only be really a small amount—three of the boards—that would have that challenge. I do appreciate that.

Mr. Jansen, last year you asked me to assume responsibility for the Peel board. Your president in York region said that the trustees were not properly representing educators in that area and that the decision to supervise was, in essence, a good decision because those trustees had run their course. I'm assuming you'd agree, though, that in circumstances where trustees and boards have fallen off the rails, it is important that the ministry have the power and the resources to step in. Given the fact that you have asked me to do that, you would agree that it is important the ministry have that power?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Well, I wouldn't agree with the way you framed that. We certainly had raised concerns about the trustees. But we don't believe that blowing up a system fixes the problem.

You have now, in this bill, given yourselves control of trustees, and you can deal with the issues where they are. But getting rid of all trustees—to answer: It's like, your government has some issues. Would someone argue that we should get rid of provincial government because there have been some problems? No, we have problems to deal with—

Hon. Paul Calandra: So you must agree, then, that there will still be elected trustees with this bill, right?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: I don't believe they actually have power there. It seems to be driven by the funding—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Are there elected trustees? Yes or no? Are there elected trustees in this bill?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: They are working under the direction of the supervisors. The supervisors control, and they are dependent on funding—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let's just assume that you've read the bill and that you realize there are trustees. Under what circumstances, then, given the fact that you have written to me on numerous occasions with respect to the Peel board—we did accept the advice, and we assumed responsibility of Peel.

In the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board, you suggested that teachers could do it better, as part of the transition there. I do appreciate that.

Of course, in York region, we had the president of the York region Catholic teachers also, frankly, endorse the decision that we made, while criticizing trustees and their infighting.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Another thing you talked about was professional judgment.

Currently, teachers select textbooks from a list that is provided to them by the Minister of Education, right?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Generally, yes.

Hon. Paul Calandra: And that hasn't impacted their ability for professional judgment?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: No. We've been very involved in helping develop those lists, and—

Hon. Paul Calandra: So why, in your estimation, then, would expanding that to other electronic resources that

teachers are currently using and providing a similar mandate as we have with textbooks—why would that, in fact, harm their ability for professional judgment?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Actually, the words I used were, "It provides an opportunity for that to be a problem." It worries us because the tenor of the changes is one that de-professionalizes teachers. If that were to happen, I indicated that is a concern because it allows for that. If that were to happen, we'd be very concerned.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Has it done so in textbooks?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: The past regime didn't exist under the current politics—

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

We'll now go to the official opposition for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you so much to our witnesses for being here this morning. The minister's tone notwithstanding, we do appreciate that you have come to share your perspectives on this legislation.

René, I'm going to start with you. Were Catholic teachers consulted on this legislation before it was tabled?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: No, not at all.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. We were both present at a reception where the minister came and informed teachers that you work for him, that 5% of you are bad, that he can fire you if he wishes. He clearly didn't respect you enough to consult you on this legislation, despite the fact that your members are present every single day in our classrooms and know what our students need.

Why is it important that the Minister of Education actually work in partnership with the teachers who are on the front lines every single day, who know where our students are struggling and what they need to succeed?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Because anecdotes don't make good policy; broad dialogue and understanding do.

I have some very conservative friends. When we sit down together, we talk. We find out the things we have in common. Caring for the kids is in common—I don't doubt that here, but then finding the solutions that are in common matters too.

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When you take a position that is more centrally controlled and it's based on the idea that one person can know more than the community, the parents and the kids, that's not possible. That's bad management style. I urged the government, in my presentation, to consider a different approach, because together we can do something well. That this is confrontational is kind of crazy, because I believe all of us want something better for kids. So we should have that conversation and find a common ground.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Please know that parents and other members of provincial Parliament do respect the work that your members are doing daily.

Joe, same question for you: Was CUPE consulted on this legislation?

Mr. Joe Tigani: Not at all.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You've mentioned how your members are on the front lines of every component of our

schools, from supporting kindergarteners in their early learning, to supporting students who have disabilities and other challenges, to keeping our schools safe, in good repair, clean places.

So why is it important that your members, who are providing all of those supports and services every single day in our schools—why would it be important that you be consulted on legislation that is supposed to protect student achievement and address the challenges that our schools are experiencing?

Mr. Joe Tigani: I think it's really about that collaborative approach. It seems to be missing here.

Again, no one is suggesting that the education system is perfect. No one is suggesting trustees are perfect. The problem here is, a conversation isn't happening. How do we find a path forward with people who are on the front line, who are doing those one-on-one jobs?

I represent members—basically everyone in the province other than a teacher or principal is somewhere in my world. I think we provide a valuable insight into what schools look like, the inter-workings of a school and how to make sure kids are successful.

I think that is the end goal here: to make sure that every child can come to school—we now are hearing that some kids cannot, but every child can come to school and have a great, quality education. I think right now we are seeing across the province that that's not happening. And this bill doesn't really talk about that.

That's really the problem here. If we want to get to the other side, then talk about funding, talk about staffing, talk about the things that can make a real impact in our schools.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: As a parent whose kids are supported by CUPE members, I've seen the difference that they make; I know other MPPs have, as well, and that we really appreciate the work that your members do, even if the minister does not.

The minister is trying to claim that nothing will change, because the new CEOs will be hired by trustees, but of course, the big difference is that those CEOs can't be fired by trustees, can't be fired by the people who are elected by the public to represent us, so they are no longer accountable to us.

We already see in eight boards around the province that the minister has appointed supervisors who are not accountable to the public. What are your members seeing in those boards? What concerns do you think that raises for parents, for teachers and education workers and for community members—that power is being taken away from democratically elected representatives and being given to unaccountable decision-makers?

Mr. Joe Tigani: I think it gets really to the heart of, some of these people who are there—

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

Mr. Joe Tigani: The supervisors who are currently there now are a foreshadow of what it will look like when business individuals are hired to run schools like a corporation. Schools are not a factory. These are not widgets somewhere in a building. These are children, and unfortu-

nately—I think we need to make sure that we look at this from an education lens and not dollars and cents. I think this bill and what it looks like it's foreshadowing and then probably what's to come is just that, and that's frightening. We should actually be looking for ways to make our education system better—year after year, whether it's this government or the next, trying to make it so it improves. And I think this doesn't really address that.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

René, same question to you.

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Sorry, I missed the question there.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Do you think, based on what we're seeing in the eight boards that are under supervision, that having a decision-maker who is unaccountable to democratically elected trustees is a concern for the public and for your members?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: They've been enacting cuts. They're driven by—

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

We will now go to the second round, and I'll recognize a member from the third party. I recognize MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I think it's very important, what we are hearing today. I find it very unfortunate—and you all confirm—that you were not consulted for the development of this legislation. It's really too bad that it has to come to this late stage of the legislative process until we do hear all the concerns. I think we're even lucky that we're in committee, because not all the bills make it. I'm hoping the minister has an open mind and is hearing what you're saying here about what our kids' needs are.

I'm going to start by allowing Mr. Cavalluzzo to finish your thoughts. You were mentioning constitutional challenges with freedom of association, and you were cut short. I would like you to finish that argument.

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Thank you for the question.

The real constitutional problem is that the Catholic trustees who are experts in issues of Catholicity in the system are being replaced by CODE, which is in effect an arm of the government. The government can control CODE's mandates, processes and so on. So we have the Catholic trustees sitting there, having been custodians of denominational rights for over a century. Now we have CODE, which has absolutely no expertise in Catholicity. How can they possibly protect the Catholicity of the system with no expertise, with no experience, and being beholden of the government of Ontario, which has historically been the body prejudicially affecting denominational rights? I note that within the French-language system, that is not the case. For some reason, Catholic boards have been treated differently than the French-language boards because the French trustees' association has not been replaced by CODE as the exclusive bargaining agent. It raises other constitutional concerns as to why the custodian of denominational rights is replaced in the Catholic system, but the custodian of French language rights has not been replaced in the French-language system. It raises huge questions of constitutional law.

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

Mr. John Fraser: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have two minutes and 51 seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: Wow. That's a lot of time.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I can take it back.

Mr. John Fraser: You can take it back. Do you want it back? No, I'm good. I'm fine.

I want to go back to Mr. Pei. Again, thank you very much for being here.

I want to go back to the idea that absenteeism—we don't really know the reason. Anecdotally, we think it could be this, it could be that. That's what I heard from you this morning. I heard from the minister as well—I hear this, I hear that. But to fundamentally address a problem, you have to understand it. And what I know right now is, class sizes are too big.

Do you think that big class sizes would affect student achievement and student attendance—large class sizes, 30 or more for grades 4 to 8, and larger in high school?

Dr. Weidong Pei: MPP Fraser, I totally agree with you. I think smaller class sizes do engage more students by the teachers. They do give the teachers an opportunity to offer support to the students who really need the support. But I think you are talking about underfunding our education system.

I want to give a little bit of context about the TDSB. First, I would like to talk about the TDSB senior team. Right now, the board has 49 senior staff positions, with 4.5 positions not even funded by the province. There are also 50 central principals with a budget of roughly \$8 million. When asked what exactly their roles are, the answer was not very clear. This is money that could be better spent supporting students in the classroom.

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

Dr. Weidong Pei: Second, I will talk about the board's internal investigation process, which has cost about \$35 million over the past three years. At the John Fisher public school, three staff members were cleared by police and child protection within a month, but the board's own investigation continued for another 17 months and cost over \$5,000—

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you. Thank you—

Dr. Weidong Pei: Can you let me finish, Mr. Fraser?

Also, I want to talk about \$22 million the board has spent on—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Excuse me, Doctor. We'll go to MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: My simple question was—I think that you agreed with it—that smaller class sizes make a difference, and there is nothing in this legislation that's going to make one child's class smaller. It's not going to get one child who needs extra help, help. We're not actually addressing those issues, and they are fundamentally involved with the resources that are given and allocated. I wouldn't totally disagree with you that sometimes things aren't the way that they should be—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, MPP Fraser.

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We will now go to the independent member for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to ask Dr. Pei, have you ever talked to an attendance counsellor?

Dr. Weidong Pei: No. Sorry.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Do you know that they're also social workers?

Dr. Weidong Pei: I do know they're social workers.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: They're a combo role.

Dr. Weidong Pei: Yes. Thank you.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Would you make attendance policy without consulting with evidence or attendance counsellors?

Dr. Weidong Pei: As a matter of fact, I'm a TDSB parent. I have a child who is attending grade 11 at Earl Haig Secondary School. He has a serious absenteeism problem. The reason? Very simple: Just like I said, there are a number of issues, mental health challenges.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Do you see in this bill a solution to the mental health challenges that would improve absenteeism? Do you think a percentage would make a difference for your child to attend school, or would mental health supports help your child to attend school more often?

Dr. Weidong Pei: Absolutely. I think mental health support is very, very important. I think if this is policy—it really allows the school to set up a clear expectation of attendance so they can identify the students who are missing class early and then step in—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Did you know that this policy says 20 days? Chronic absenteeism is defined as 18 days. If a student misses 18 days of school throughout elementary school—they miss a whole year of school. So we're going to miss all the kids under 20 days, who would be considered chronically absent.

Do you think we should be making policy about education without talking to the education workers, their stakeholders and their representatives? Is that a way forward that's going to be effective and evidence-based?

Dr. Weidong Pei: Respectfully, MPP Clancy, if you allow me to answer my question in my full capacity, without interrupting—

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

Dr. Weidong Pei: —I would continue to answer your question. Otherwise, you can just interrupt me. That's okay.

I think it's important. You're absolutely right; we should make a proper consultation.

But at the same time, we have to understand that the key issue is, we have a simple truth here: Students learn the best when they're in class. When they're not in class, the school should really be the first one to intervene, to identify the problem. This is not a punishment—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What I'll say is, I think what we agree on is that early intervention matters. We should be addressing absenteeism in September, and we should be addressing it when kids start missing right off the bat, but we don't have that in this policy.

I appreciate that you're frustrated. I'll explain how this works after. It's kind of part of the process. But thank you for that.

Dr. Weidong Pei: What I want to say is, this policy is not punishment. It is identifying a problem—

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

All comments have to go through the Chair, and I'll keep bringing that up if that does not happen.

I will now go to the government side for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize Minister Calandra.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just want to touch on the bargaining aspect of it a little bit. Currently, if I'm not mistaken, OCSTA has observer status at the central bargaining table so that they can protect denominational rights. I think I'm right on that—right, Mr. Cavalluzzo?

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Which status? They're participants.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Their observer status, yes.

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: No, they are participants.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, actually, they have observer status at the central table, currently. And the legislation contemplates OCSTA, on behalf of trustees, retaining that observer status at the central table. How is that any different than what exists currently?

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Well, the problem is, you've replaced OCSTA, which has an historic experience in protecting denominational rights—

Hon. Paul Calandra: But I haven't, sir. Just to interrupt you, sir—we have not replaced OCSTA. OCSTA will have—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Just one person at a time, please.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you.

Just to be clear, OCSTA retains its ability—it retains the exact same position as an observer at the central table, and trustees retain denominational rights on local bargaining through this legislation.

I think we can both agree that denominational rights are something that should be retained by the English Catholic system, right? I'm sure we can both agree at least on that.

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Well, we can agree on the protection of denominational rights, but we certainly do not agree with what's going on in central bargaining before this legislation.

OCSTA has a very crucial role to play in protecting denominational rights presently. However, being replaced by CODE, with absolutely no experience in denominational rights, no history of protecting denominational rights, is an affront to the Catholic system, because central bargaining is crucial.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll just reclaim my time, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Central bargaining deals with the most important terms and conditions—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sir, I'll just reclaim my time.

The legislation itself retains OCSTA at the central table—it actually retains OCSTA at the central table; it does not contemplate that—and the legislation does retain

denominational rights for Catholic trustees at the table, similar, as it does right now—

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: You are misrepresenting.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Currently, there are Catholic trustees who have a different responsibility in supervised boards, to maintain denominational rights.

Mr. Jansen, I just want to get back to you.

Mr. Paul Cavalluzzo: Excuse me. You are misrepresenting.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One person at a time, please.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I want to get back to you, Mr. Jansen. You talk a lot about professional judgment. I assume that is core to the belief of yourself and, frankly, teachers: the importance of retaining and maintaining professional—the ability for teachers to utilize that professional judgment.

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Yes. In every world-class system, if we look at world-class systems around the world—and we want to learn from the best—we will see teachers central to that. Education workers, communities, dialogue and collaboration are absolutely central parts of not only how they produce policy, but how they operate.

Hon. Paul Calandra: And professional judgment in the classroom and delivering on curriculum?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: It's a very important part of making sure that the teachers, as professionals, are able to use their expertise and experience to benefit the children.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I completely agree with you. So help me square the circle, then.

Why is it that when it comes to participation and attendance, the professional judgment of teachers is somehow different, and they cannot be relied upon to use their professional judgment when it comes to participation and attendance? Why is that different from every other aspect of professional judgment within the system?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: I'm not sure why you're separating them out like that.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Because we keep hearing that attendance and participation would disadvantage students, I am suggesting that I would agree with you that teachers, in utilizing their professional judgment, understanding their individual students, will have an ability to properly and fairly assess kids.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm not sure if you agree with me on that.

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: Actually, no. The professional judgment is part of—the challenge is that many of the kids who are missing are missing because they can't get there for other reasons. So my professional judgment wouldn't help them. They need other supports to be in class. So my concern on that is that adding the mark—there's no disagreement that attendance is an issue. And I am agreeing with you in trying to address attendance—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Perfect. We've just got 30 seconds.

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: It's just more complex. Would you agree that attendance is a complex issue that needs more time and—

Hon. Paul Calandra: A thousand per cent, I would agree. That's why I think teachers utilizing their professional judgment is important.

Would you agree with me that the millions of dollars that are spent by trustees supporting membership in outside organizations—that by eliminating that, we would be able to redirect those millions of dollars back into the classroom, and that would have a positive impact on education?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: That would be infinitesimally insignificant compared to the \$6.3 billion in cuts we've already had.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the official opposition for two minutes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: René, I'm going to come back to you with a question about the unaccountable CEOs. We are already seeing the minister's appointed supervisors in eight boards. These supervisors have made it very clear that they are not accountable to members of the community.

Based on what your members are seeing in the boards that are under supervision, what concerns do you think that raises for parents and for teachers and for community members—if we have a CEO making decisions, who can't be fired and isn't accountable to the community?

Mr. René Jansen in de Wal: This is a significant difference that I don't think has been represented accurately here. It's not the same. They're accountable to behind-closed-doors decisions by the ministry that has made \$6.3 billion in cuts. They know why they've been hired. They know what their task is, and they're effecting it in schools. They've made cuts to transportation, special-needs support services, language services. They are effecting cuts. They're looking to sell off property. That's no surprise—that real estate and development are on the radar there. That defines what their role is. It's not the same; it moves to a for-profit, funding-driven—so it doesn't matter if you have trustees there. They can make all the recommendations they want, and they cannot fire that person. There's a significant difference in—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): The committee will now recess until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1200 to 1300.

MR. DOMENIC SCUGLIA
ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION
OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order.

This afternoon, we are continuing public hearings on Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of edu-

cation and child care. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

I will now call on Domenic Scuglia, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. Everyone needs to state their name for the Hansard.

Domenic, you can begin.

Mr. Domenic Scuglia: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Domenic Scuglia. I'm a retired educator, having served 41 years in the sector and my last eight years as a director of education in two provinces, five of them in Saskatchewan and three in Ontario.

I want to begin by saying that our public education system is one of the most important responsibilities we share as a province. My late friend and Holocaust survivor, Max Eisen, always spoke about the critical role that education has in society. It shapes the lives of children. It supports families and helps build the workforce and citizenship that our future depends on. When the government brings forward legislation aimed at improving student achievement, it deserves serious consideration.

In my view, Bill 101 is, at its core, a statement about priorities. It says that student learning, accountability and consistent standards must remain at the centre of our education system. That is a message I believe many Ontarians can support. We owe it to the students to ensure that the system is focused, transparent and responsive to their needs.

One of the strengths of this bill is that it responds to a real concern: the need for clearer accountability across the system. Parents rightly expect to know how decisions are made, how the funds are used, and how school boards are being guided to serve students well. When processes become too fragmented or uneven from one board to another, confidence can erode. Bill 101 seeks to address that by strengthening oversight and creating more consistency across Ontario. That consistency matters. Families should not experience dramatically different expectations, supports or administrative practices simply because they live in one part of the province rather than another. Students deserve fairness, teachers deserve clarity, and taxpayers deserve assurances that public resources are being used wisely and in the best interest of children. A stronger political framework can help achieve those goals.

I also want to speak to the role of governance. School boards have an important role, and local voice remains valuable, but local governance must function within a clear, public purpose. When boards face financial pressures, operational inconsistency or decision-making that becomes disconnected from student outcomes, the province has both the right and the responsibility to step in. Bill 101 reflects that responsibility.

In my experience in Ontario, I was witness to this challenge, as director of education for three years at the York Catholic District School Board. During my tenure there, it was evident that not all of the elected officials were present to ensure student and staff success. Hence, the Minister of Education rightfully intervened.

Some have expressed concern that greater provincial direction could reduce local flexibility. That is a fair question and one worth acknowledging, but the real issue is not whether local input matters—it does—but whether local decision-making is producing the best results for students. In my experience, accountability and local responsiveness are not opposites; the best systems combine both. They preserve professional judgment while ensuring that there are clear standards, clear expectations and clear consequences when performances fall short.

When trustees are responsible for multi-million dollar budgets, creating effective policies, leading strategic planning, hiring and performance managing the director of education—all without requiring any formal qualifications or training—it is not surprising that the system needs to be reset. From a practical perspective, this bill can help create a more coherent system. Whether we are talking about curriculum materials, board spending, capital planning or administrative oversight, the province benefits when there is a more unified approach. That does not mean that every classroom is identical. It means that the fundamentals are strong, stable and aligned with student success.

As someone who has worked in educational leadership, I know that change can be uncomfortable, but not all change is disruptive in a negative way. Some change is necessary to renew trust, sharpen focus and improve results. Bill 101 should be understood in that light, as an effort to make the system work better for students, parents, teachers, support staff and the communities they serve.

Let me close with this: Public education succeeds when it is guided by high expectations, responsible governance and a steadfast commitment to children. Bill 101 represents an opportunity to reaffirm those principles. If we keep students at the centre, insist on accountability and maintain a clear sense of purpose, we can strengthen Ontario's education system for the future.

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

We will now go to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. You have seven minutes. Please state your name for Hansard, and then you may begin.

Ms. Martha Hradowy: My name is Martha Hradowy. I'm the proud president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. OSSTF/FEESO represents over 60,000 teachers and education workers across Ontario from early learning through post-secondary. We have provided a written submission that is on your tables. I'm going to focus my remarks on a few key areas and leave the remainder for your review.

The proposed changes to reduce the time required to become a teacher, alongside increased practicum experience, are welcome. By 2027, retirements will rise sharply. We need more qualified teachers entering the profession.

But recruitment is only part of the story. Ontario already has tens of thousands of qualified teachers who have chosen not to work in the system; that number exceeds 70,000. We do not just have a recruitment problem. We need to turn our minds to the retention of teachers as well.

If we're serious about public education, we must address both the working conditions for staff and the

learning conditions for our students. At its core, I fundamentally believe that this is about respect—respect for teachers and for their daily efforts on behalf of students, respect for the education workers who provide the supports our children need, and respect for the unions elected to represent them. When we're talking about change, respect begins with meaningful consultation with the professionals working in the system, so that you can develop education policy that reflects the reality in schools. We are asking to be a partner in that consultation. Too often, discourse is treated as political theatre rather than as a public good that requires stability, trust and collaboration.

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Centralizing decision-making authority does not strengthen public education.

Bill 101 concentrates power in the minister's office and reduces the role of locally elected trustees—voices directly accountable to their communities. When one office holds this much power, it stops being about students and starts being about control. That does risk politicizing decisions that should be grounded in students' needs and limits boards' ability to respond locally.

A strong education system should celebrate those who make it so. Teachers and education workers need their professional judgment respected and supported when working with students and families. They need meaningful wraparound supports in their classrooms. Over the past eight years, under four different Ministers of Education, our members have not seen that respect reflected in policy or action, and underfunding has removed many key supports from classrooms.

No minister has properly addressed violence in our schools. Musings such as strict cellphone bans mean very little without the support structures needed to implement and enforce them effectively. You do not fix violence in schools with announcements; you fix it with supports in classrooms.

At the same time, we are facing a critical shortage of education workers: educational assistants, early childhood educators, child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, and other professional support staff who are leaving the system.

Just this past week, on Friday, I was informed that York region announced the elimination of 45 professional support positions.

When boards are forced to make decisions based solely on budget pressures, front-line supports—the people who directly impact student success—are often the first to go.

We are also concerned about the loss of tools that help us understand student well-being. Ending required school climate surveys removes an important way to track bullying, safety and student experience. You cannot solve problems you refuse to measure. Removing school climate surveys does not make issues disappear; it makes them invisible.

In June, OSSTF/FEESO will serve notice to bargain. This legislation alters who represents the employer, removing trustees' associations and replacing them with

CODE. The impact remains to be seen, but replacing educators with accountants is not a move that puts students first. I want to be clear: Regardless of who sits across the table, we expect a fair, respectful bargaining process—one that does not risk student success or ruin the student experience because cancelling a program or zeroing out a support line looks better on a balance sheet.

Our team is prepared to bargain through the summer to reach an agreement before the start of the school year. Stability is what this system needs, and the responsibility to achieve that lies with this government.

We are also seeing increasing centralization in decisions that should remain in the hands of educators. Teachers support having the professional judgment to use final exams where appropriate. Educators know how to equip their students for success and what tools and approaches work best. Students will thrive when given the conditions and resources they need to succeed.

Attaching marks to attendance and participation does not address that real issue. Students who are not attending are not motivated by marks. They may be dealing with bullying, mental health challenges, safety concerns, and a lack of supports in increasingly large classrooms. Students struggling to attend school are not asking for punishment; they're asking for support. None of those root causes are addressed here.

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

Ms. Martha Hradowy: This legislation also extends into post-secondary education. Dissolving the higher education quality control office removes an independent source of research and evidence-based advice on higher education quality. We believe that weakens transparency and accountability at a time when both are urgently needed.

This is the first opportunity we've been given to provide feedback on these changes. The ministry had months to consult with those who work in the system every day; unfortunately, that did not happen. And when consultation is absent, mistrust grows.

Claims of historic funding do not match what people are experiencing. Ontarians understand inflation. They feel it when they buy groceries or fill their gas tanks, and they see its impacts in our schools. Calling it historic funding does not make it real. Our members and families feel the gap every single day.

In closing, public education does not need more control from the top. The system needs to be properly funded—

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

We'll now go to the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. Please state your name for the Hansard, and then you may begin. You have seven minutes.

Mr. David Mastin: My name is David Mastin. I am the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, representing more than 84,000 teachers and education workers across the province. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. In addition to my remarks, you will also be submitted a written brief for your consideration.

Educators in Ontario remain deeply committed to our students and our communities, but we are working in a system that is under increasing strain—one shaped by chronic underfunding, growing student needs that are going unmet, and a widening gap between provincial decision-making and local realities.

Bill 101 is being presented as a measure to improve student achievement and strengthen accountability. However, from ETFO's perspective, this legislation does not address the real challenges facing students and educators. Instead, it introduces sweeping structural changes that undermine public education, weaken local democracy and interfere with established labour relations.

One of the most concerning aspects of Bill 101 is its impact on school board governance. The legislation significantly reduces the role of democratically elected trustees and shifts authority to unelected officials, including newly empowered chief executive officers. Trustees are not meant to be simply symbolic figures. They are elected to represent families and communities and to ensure that decisions reflect local needs. It is important to recognize that the only reason elected trustees remain in place today is because of the strong public pushback to the government's original plan to eliminate them altogether. However, what this bill now does is strip them of any meaningful authority that they need to fulfill that role. Bill 101 removes core responsibilities from trustees and centralizes decision-making in ways that weaken democratic oversight and accountability.

At the same time, the minister is granted broad new powers to intervene in board decisions, including the ability to decide which decisions made by school board trustees need to be approved by the chair, the CEO or any other official. The legislation doesn't establish any limits or criteria to these broad powers. This is not modernization. This is a fundamental shift away from community-based governance towards centralized control.

Bill 101 also restructures leadership within school boards by separating the roles of chief executive officer and chief education officer. The CEO, focused on financial and operational management, will hold significant authority, while the role of trustees is diminished. This reflects a move towards a business-style model of governance in public education. But schools are not corporations. Public education is a public good, grounded in relationships, professional expertise and community trust. Replacing democratic oversight with corporate-style management prioritizes financial considerations over student needs.

Bill 101 also represents a significant and unprecedented intervention in collective bargaining. It removes the Ontario Public School Boards' Association as the employer bargaining agent and replaces it with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education. More concerning is the creation of a new committee within CODE that will oversee bargaining, whose composition and authority can be determined by the minister. This gives the crown substantial control over the employer side of the bargaining table while continuing to maintain that it is not the employer.

The legislation also makes it easier for the minister to replace the bargaining agent entirely without consultation and to direct its operations. Taken together, these changes upend decades of established labour relations and raise serious concerns about fairness, independence and good-faith bargaining.

Bill 101 also centralizes control over educational materials and assessment practices. This has the potential to interfere directly with educators' professional judgment—judgment grounded in curriculum, knowledge, evidence of student learning, and professional expertise. Educators are best positioned to respond to the diverse and evolving needs of their students. When decisions about teaching and learning are removed from classrooms and placed in the hands of the ministry, we are replacing evidence-based practice with top-down directives. That does not improve student achievement; it undermines it.

Bill 101 must also be understood in the broader context of recent government actions. We have seen increasing centralization of authority, a growing number of boards placed under supervision, and a pattern of decisions that sideline local voices. This legislation continues that trend.

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Bill 101 concentrates power, reduces transparency, and weakens the role of communities in shaping their public schools. If the goal is truly to improve student achievement, the focus must be on what happens in classrooms. Students need smaller class sizes, more supports for special education, safer schools, adequate staffing and resources, and respect for the professional judgment of educators. These are the conditions that support learning. Structural changes that centralize power and weaken relationships do not address these needs.

Members of the committee, Bill 101 is far-reaching and deeply consequential. It restructures governance, interferes with bargaining and centralizes control in ways that undermine the foundations of public education in Ontario.

Public education works best when it is locally responsive, democratically accountable and grounded in professional expertise.

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

Mr. David Mastin: This legislation moves us in the opposite direction.

On behalf of ETFO's 84,000 members, I urge the government to withdraw Bill 101 and to engage meaningfully with education partners, including ETFO and other education unions, to find solutions that truly support students.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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

We will now go to the independent for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to start with Martha from OSSTF. You said you weren't consulted in the formation of this bill. Going forward, what would good consultation look like, considering how many thousands of education workers you work with?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: Thanks for the question.

Having OSSTF and respecting OSSTF as a partner in education is where we need to start. When you're doing major overhaul reform to publicly funded education and how it's going to be delivered, having the voice of the elected representatives who represent the 60,000 people that we do—to me, it should be an absolute first start. Over the last eight years, we have not been invited to the table, when talking about education policy, education reform. If this government is serious about providing stability in publicly funded education, it must include the education partners.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you very much.

I want to turn it over to Mr. David Mastin from ETFO. You and I saw each other recently at a symposium about children's mental health. I see that this isn't something that's being addressed in this bill. What would you like to see when it comes to working together with the government on addressing the crisis in mental health in our students?

Mr. David Mastin: Thanks so much for the question.

Just continuing on from where Martha was discussing—the government, if they care about what's happening in our classrooms, need to consult with the individuals who are on the front lines, to consult with the individuals who are dedicated and passionate. And they care for, every single day, day in and day out, the students in their care.

I want to stress this: You can't just pick a handful of individuals you have a phone conversation with, to warrant consultation.

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

Mr. David Mastin: You have to have consultations with the bodies that represent those members. That's the way it needs to be done, and that has not happened. As Martha said, this is the first opportunity we've had to represent our members—84,000 members' voices here with this government, with this bill. And they need to do that. Their decisions need to be grounded on what students need. This is not addressing what students need.

That symposium that you attended was to talk about student mental health. Student mental health is at an all-time crisis level, and the actions that this government has taken in the last eight years have done nothing but actually diminish the state of student mental health in our schools. As Martha said, this is why they're not attending school. They're not having their needs met. It's not a place where they feel whole. And it's something this government needs to take more seriously.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know we all care about our kids, and we're open to collaboration.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now move on to the government side. I recognize MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a question for Mr. Scuglia.

Mr. Scuglia, thank you for your presentation. You said something during your presentation which caught my attention. You said the system needs to be reset.

I want to ask you this question: Drawing on your experience, why did you say the system needs to be reset?

Mr. Dominic Scuglia: Well, again, based on my experience as a director of education for three years at York Catholic, there were a number of decisions that were made by the elected officials that were not always in the best interests of children. I don't want to paint all the trustees with the same brush, but specifically, there was a majority in that particular situation that required the Minister of Education to intervene because decisions weren't always being made in the best interests of children.

When you have scenarios like that that exist—creating cultures that are not supportive for children's success, instilling fear in how operations run every day—it's time to have a serious look at the model. Is the model the best way for us, using governance as an important part of how we operate as a school board? Is that the best model we have available to us?

As I stated in my presentation, there is no requirement for financial acumen, there is no requirement for human resources acumen, that allows you to run as an elected official. Training is provided, but when that training is ignored or not attended, then it really defeats the purpose.

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

Mr. John Jordan: I'm going to direct my question to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

We heard this morning that there are many reasons for poor attendance among students. And certainly, there's no "easy" button; there's no one solution to that problem. We also did hear about the importance of student attendance and participation towards student success.

So, given that, do you think rewarding students who do make that effort to attend and be in the classroom is an important part of this legislation?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: The kids who are showing up show up. We need to really turn our minds to the children who are not coming to school on a regular basis.

You'll get no disagreement from me that attendance is an issue at the secondary level.

I'll use my own experience: I come from the Greater Essex County District School Board, and I was a developmental service worker there. There was one time that the board used to employ attendance counsellors. Those attendance counsellors were tasked with reaching out to families and reaching out to children and finding out what was preventing them from coming to school and encouraging them to come back. Unfortunately, as I said in my presentation, when boards are forced to balance budgets, it's those front-line supports that are often the first to go. There are no longer dedicated attendance counsellors in the employ of the Greater Essex County District School Board—those now lie within the responsibility of a qualified social worker. And those, too, are being unfortunately eliminated as well, or people are leaving to go to private practice.

If we're serious and want to find solutions to really addressing attendance in secondary schools, we have to take a look at the causes which are preventing them—as I said in my presentation, it could be mental health challenges, safety concerns, or just a lack of supports.

So we're willing to sit down and find solutions, but I think the government has missed the mark on attaching percentages to attendance.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): MPP Leardi, you have one minute.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Scuglia, I want you to comment on the proposal to bring in what I will call a financial officer to the boards which currently lack financial officers. Could you comment on that, please?

Mr. Dominic Scuglia: Obviously, you need someone with strong financial acumen to help manage a multi-million dollar—in some cases, billion-dollar—budget. Should that person be the overall person who's in charge, without necessarily having academic background and experience? I think there would be challenges there. I think you need a balance of both in the role of who you are currently going to be assigning in the new bill, Bill 101—someone who has financial acumen. I think that person would need some experience with education, because the two will go hand in hand—

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

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for being here. It's really appreciated.

David, I'm going to start with you. I gather that ETFO was not consulted on this legislation before it was tabled.

Mr. David Mastin: That is correct.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You've already shared some of the things that your members would want to see in a bill that was actually focused on student achievement or coming from a government that was prepared to work in partnership with teachers to achieve better outcomes for students.

One the things that this bill does is put power in the hands of an unelected, unaccountable CEO who can't be fired by democratically elected trustees. And we already have a sense of what that looks like because of the eight supervisors the minister has appointed, who also can't be fired and so are making completely unaccountable decisions.

What are your members in those boards that are under supervision seeing that should raise concerns for parents and for education workers and communities, when we're putting power in the hands of unaccountable people?

Mr. David Mastin: Thank you for the question.

In those boards that are under takeover right now, we're seeing a disproportionate level of anxiety, a disproportionate level of challenge in trying to deliver the service that our members are delivering every single day. Whether it's terminations of individuals without due process, whether it's the exorbitantly high number of lost jobs, there seems to be an ongoing avalanche of challenges in these boards, that—you can make the argument—is the way a business would run. The way a business would run—would not be concerned about the service level on the ground. They

would be concerned about the dollars. They would be concerned about power. They'd be concerned about control.

I would suggest that everything you see within this bill fits all of those categories and does absolutely nothing to focus on outcomes for students on the ground.

The Toronto District School Board had a long-running pattern of dealing with class size in the unique environment that the Toronto District School Board is in, and they found a way, over the course of many years, through the work of trustees, to find a balance in addressing the large class sizes in that particular school board. The moment the supervisor came in and took over that board, all of that went out the window. You saw parents across the city rising up and saying how unjust and how inappropriate this is.

To the rest of Ontario: Get ready. Buckle up. This is the way it's going to be run. A business model from downtown Toronto is going to have to suffice in Kenora, Windsor, Cornwall, Arnprior etc.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I want to follow up on this issue of class sizes, because that's the number one bargaining issue for your members. Now these unaccountable, unelected business people will be responsible for bargaining. What do you think that is going to mean when you're coming to the table focused on class sizes?

Mr. David Mastin: Yes, class sizes are at the heart of what will make our classrooms better for students. There's absolutely no question about this, so we have decided to focus on this. It's a simple issue for people to understand. When you have fewer students, you can give more personalized attention to each of those students.

What are our expectations coming up in this round of bargaining with a government that tries to corporatize everything, including this very precious public service of education? We expect them to not understand the value of class size. In fact, what they will understand is the cost of reducing class sizes, and that will be the only thing that they are focused on.

So we have to make sure that we are steadfast in focusing on kids and the benefit to students in fighting for smaller class sizes. We will have that debate in the public sphere, and we'll have that debate with the public. If the government wants to have that debate with us, bring it on.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You and I were at a reception—and Martha was there as well—where the Minister of Education came in, told teachers that you work for him, that 5% of you were bad, and he can fire you if he wants.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: He's got this bill that is centralizing power in his own hands but also gives him sweeping protection against liability, including arbitration judgments. Does that raise concerns for you?

Mr. David Mastin: Absolutely, we're deeply concerned about that. The minister doesn't seem to understand which way is up. On one hand, he says we work for him, and in the next breath, in this bill, he's trying to distance himself as being the employer when it relates to the negotiations and the impact on negotiations. So, yes, we're

deeply concerned about the impact on bargaining. Our members are gearing up for what is going to be a significant fight for students and for the best interests of kids in our care.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

Martha, does that protection against political liability—

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

We will now go to the third party. I recognize MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the OSSTF and ETFO and Mr. Scuglia for making time to present to the committee this afternoon. Those discussions we're having are very important. I think that the minister and the members of the government need to hear your concerns.

Specifically, the fact that you were not consulted in the elaboration of this legislation, to me, is very concerning because, if you're at the forefront of our education system, you deal with students every day. You know the situation on the ground. I honestly don't know who the minister spoke to to decide to craft a bill that doesn't address those really acute and main issues that we have in our school.

I'm going to start with Martha, because you gave a number that was pretty staggering. More than 70,000 teachers have chosen not to pursue a teaching profession. And then there's a question of retention that's really important. Can you speak to that? I know a number of teachers, and most of those people get into the profession because they're passionate. They really want to help kids. So why is it that they are not entering the profession, helping our education system, or even staying?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: Thanks for that question.

I will agree with you. Our members absolutely care for kids. They want what's best for students, they want what's best for families, and they want every child to be able to succeed.

Right now, the working conditions in Ontario are not attractive enough for people to want to stay in the system. They are turning their minds to leaving the system altogether and working somewhere else.

I will say, I have been employed in education for 25-plus years now. A lot of my friends back home have had the same amount of time working in publicly funded education. People are leaving the system right now in mass numbers. A lot of people I was hired with are choosing to leave publicly funded education, and it's creating chronic staffing shortages, particularly for education support staff as well.

And I will point out, that 70,000 number—that's not our number. That's the Ontario College of Teachers number. That's the number that they have used and is on record. So you have to ask yourself, why is it that 70,000 people who are qualified to teach in the province of Ontario don't want to work in education?

The changes to how long you are in faculties of education—we support that move. You're bringing people in the front door, but, honestly, people are leaving out the back at the same time—if not more.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes. I agree with you. It doesn't matter what you do to try to train more teachers if you're

not changing their working conditions. They may enter the profession, but they will not stay, and we're going to have the same problem.

We know continuity is very important, and we see a lot of absenteeism—not on the part necessarily of the students, but teachers. I think it comes from them being exhausted and losing motivation in class sizes that are unmanageable, with kids who have special needs that are not being supported. Is that your experience? Is that something that is being reported?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: I will say, if the government was serious about wanting to turn their minds to why people are leaving the profession altogether, it starts with restoring respect to the teaching profession, and it starts, I will say, amongst these walls. Oftentimes, teachers are feeling deflated. They're not feeling that they're supported. When they're going to administration, asking for that additional support, that's oftentimes not provided for them.

1340

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

Ms. Martha Hradowy: I will say, teachers are really struggling, particularly in grades 9 and 10, with the introduction of destreaming that this government introduced. That has essentially led to larger class sizes and students with more complex needs. It was introduced a couple of years ago with no professional development, no additional support and, in fact, larger class sizes.

So the conditions right now are not attractive to people wanting to stay in the profession.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you.

I'll turn quickly to Mr. Scuglia. You're a retired director of education. I don't know how long ago you retired, but when you were a director of education, were you aware of issues of violence in school? Was there a problem with class size? Was that your experience, and if not, do you think this bill is addressing any of this—

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

We'll now move on to the second round, and we'll start off with the independent for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for Mr. Scuglia.

I know we're all here because we care about kids. We all want the same thing. We all want them to do well.

I do take issue with the representation that boards are not given any leadership when it comes to their finances. I worked at Waterloo Catholic, and we have a chief financial officer and executive superintendent of corporate services and treasurer, Shesh Maharaj. I know him well, and he does a very good job, as somebody who is highly qualified to manage the board's finances.

Can you tell me why you aren't sharing that with the public today?

Mr. Domenic Scuglia: My comment was not with the operational staff. The operational staff who are in those positions in school boards, who are running the daily financial decisions, are extremely competent and extremely qualified.

My comment was regarding trustees, who are elected officials who may or may not come into the role with any experience. Despite not having the experience, training is offered, and you will have trustees who will take advantage of the training but others who will not. That puts them in a difficult position when it comes time to make decisions that have financial responsibility attached to them.

I hope that can clarify.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Would you not say that the ministry should pay the adequate amount for CPP and sick days, that they don't currently?

Mr. Domenic Scuglia: Sorry, I don't understand your question.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: At the moment, the ministry doesn't provide adequate amounts of money to pay for CPP, and the boards are required to pay CPP for all employees. They also don't pay the adequate amount to pay for sick days. People are still sick even if it's not paid for, and that money comes from somewhere else.

Don't you think the ministry should pay for CPP and sick days?

Mr. Domenic Scuglia: I'm not going to give you a qualified response to your question, so I'll refrain from responding to that question. Sorry.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Okay.

I'll pass it over to OSSTF and ETFO.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Don't get me wrong; I think a lot of new teachers need help when it comes to curriculum, and I think there is a role for textbooks.

Can you spell out what the middle ground looks like, in between directives of "thou shalt" and a creative "Here's some support with resources"?

I'll start with Martha.

Ms. Martha Hradowy: We want to be part of that conversation. I do expect that when that list is developed, OSSTF would be part of that consultation, those resources.

Teachers absolutely should have the autonomy to use their professional judgment to determine what resources are best for each individual student. It can't be a cookie-cutter approach in how you deliver education. Each student has individual needs, and so the teacher knows best about what learning materials to be able to provide that—

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

We'll now go to the government. I recognize MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: This question is for EFTO.

We are already aware that there are lots of school boards that have huge financial management issues, dysfunction, and not using and not spending money directly—which is not directing the funding to the classrooms.

In this bill, we are proposing reforms that would separate two new roles: the CEO and chief education officer in English-language district school boards. So the director of education will become the CEO, who would be responsible for the financial and operational oversight and required to have business qualifications. At the same time,

there will be a chief education officer, who has an education background, qualifications, who is going to focus on student achievement.

We have a lot of discussions talking about how to fire the CEO. Why are we so eager to fire the CEO if the board takes the staff to hire the CEO very seriously, so that he can lead the board to manage, one, finance, and two—with the chief education officer, who can focus on student achievement? I want to listen to your comment.

Mr. David Mastin: So you want me to just talk broadly about the presence of a CEO, who cannot be fired at the local level?

Mr. Billy Pang: Yes, or whatever you think of.

On one hand, we need a well-experienced person to lead the board in finance and management. At the same time, we need an education officer with education qualifications.

We have a lot of discussions that this bill is taking away—some people are talking about how it's taking away the democracy of firing the CEO. Why is there so much discussion on how to fire instead of how to hire?

Mr. David Mastin: Thanks. I understand now. I'm sorry I didn't understand before.

I couldn't care less about how they're fired. What is deeply troublesome about this is the lack of local voice. Any time you have a CEO, a chief executive officer, responsible for this precious public service—and I'm going to restate this: a public service; the delivery of public education to our youngest learners, our future citizens.

If we're going to replace locally experienced, educationally experienced people who are experienced in what it takes to deliver a public service—what is happening right now is the replacement of the most important and the highest decision-making individual within any given school board with someone who only cares about financial accountability.

Mr. Billy Pang: Sorry, I want to emphasize on this: Number one—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Sir, please let the member speak.

Mr. Billy Pang: Through you, Mr. Chair: This CEO is, number one, hired by local school board trustees. That's number one. I saw that. Once upon a time, I was also a school board trustee. We hire the director, not locally, from the other boards—so they don't have local experience as well.

So how about this CEO? This CEO has a very clear, descriptive role. It's to manage the finance and also the board in execution. But there is another chief education officer who is working with him or her, side by side, to focus on the student achievement. So what's the conflict? What's the challenge on it?

Mr. David Mastin: I think you misheard. I didn't say that they needed local experience; they needed educational experience, and in delivery of a quality public service, not a business model. Having the most important and the most powerful individual within the school board not having potentially any educational experience is deeply trouble-

some. It suggests a shift away from the delivery of service—

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

Mr. David Mastin: —to a business model.

We talk about—

Mr. Billy Pang: So then I follow the question—a school board is taking care of thousands of educators, staff, and also billions of dollars of budget. In what area do well-qualified educators have the experience and training to manage that billion-dollar budget?

Mr. David Mastin: It's almost like the provincial government. What experience does Doug Ford have in managing a multi-billion dollar budget? What experience does Paul Calandra have managing a multi-billion dollar business, or even more so than that, a public education system?

1350

We don't do this based on qualifications. Democracy is the people's voice electing people to run these services.

The province determined that Doug Ford would be the Premier of this province. He has zero experience in running—

Mr. Billy Pang: Therefore, a trustee decided—

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

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Martha, I'm going to pick up with you again.

We just heard from the government that they don't believe accountability of a CEO to the public matters to the public. But we already have an example of what's happening with unaccountable decision-makers in our schools, with the eight supervisors who have been appointed by the Minister of Education, who have made it very clear they don't feel accountable to parents, to teachers and education workers, or to the community at large.

I'm wondering, from the experience of your members in those supervised boards—what are they experiencing that should raise concerns for teachers, education workers and the public, when there are unaccountable people who get to make all of the decisions?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: I will say, the introduction of a CEO equivalent to a supervisor of a board with no background in education is the introduction of the corporatization of publicly funded education here in Ontario. It doesn't have to be this way. People leading school boards, leading how publicly funded education is delivered in Ontario, should absolutely come from—somebody who has a background in education.

And I will say, this isn't about dollars and cents. Right now, we know that the school boards are underfunded, public education is underfunded by \$6.3 billion. It doesn't matter who you put in there. There still is not enough money for the CPP and EI offset. There isn't enough money for special education, and 71 out of 72 school boards in Ontario are currently spending more on special education than what they're funded for. The funding for transporta-

tion costs have not kept up with inflation. School boards are having to pull from other envelopes—pull from direct classroom supports—to be able to pay for those required things. So it doesn't matter who you put in there. Right now—it doesn't matter the financial background, the financial experience—no accounting person is going to be able to balance a budget when there isn't enough money.

So I would say, directly to your question—what is it that our members are experiencing? Well, in Peel, they're experiencing 300 teachers who won't be there in September. In Toronto, there are an additional 100 secondary school teachers who won't be employed, starting in September. I mentioned in my report, in York region, 45 PSSP will not be there in September.

We have to really take a look at what is going to be best for our kids to succeed and fund it that way. Let's stop treating education as if it was just an exercise in balancing a budget.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Hear, hear.

So when we have the CEOs who have financial background but not experience in education—they're going to be your bargaining partners across the table from you. I know for OSSTF, your focus in bargaining is on those student supports and outcomes—whether it's having a professional support staff to address mental health or student learning, or whether it's bringing down class sizes. What do you think is going to happen in bargaining when that's your focus and on the other side of the table is somebody whose focus is cuts?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: I will say, it's discouraging that this is where we've got to. We're actually bargaining for supports for kids who need them. Kids are being asked to stay home because they don't have an educational assistant in their classroom to give them the support that they need. It just baffles my mind that these are the issues that we have to bring to a bargaining table every four years. Kids need these supports.

We're in a mental health crisis here in Ontario, and at the same time, we're cutting child and youth workers, we're cutting professional support personnel.

The same is true for the workplace violence that I touched upon in my presentation. Why do we have to bargain for safety in our schools? To me, that is absolutely ridiculous. This is happening right now. School boards, government need to take these issues seriously.

We are going to continue to propose solutions—

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

Ms. Martha Hradowy: —and we're going to continue to come to the table with real solutions that I think will benefit Ontario families and Ontario students.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You've highlighted the many areas where the minister is not properly funding education and where his appointed supervisors are making cuts to supports. Now he's got a bill that's going to centralize immense power in his own hands, but he's giving himself sweeping legal protections.

Do you have concerns about the minister giving himself widespread liability protection under these circumstances?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: Of course. Every Ontarian should be concerned with that. The Minister of Education can essentially have no accountability for the decisions that they make. The answer is as simple as that.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the third party for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: It's interesting; I've been listening to all this talk about governance, and you know that governance is something you have to look at and you have to take care of. It's an evolving thing. You always have to look at what it is you're doing. But I think of governance in the context of the government.

You have a government now that meets less than the governments before—not quite half the time; shave 25% or 30% off. What I would say is, the time they have in front of the people, the time we have for debate—we just had a budget that didn't go to committee. We've got a \$260-billion budget, the plan for the province—I don't think anybody would accept that at a school board. It doesn't seem to make sense. You have a government that tried to buy a luxury private jet—didn't let people know—at a time when 700,000 people are out of work and people are just trying to get by and pay for groceries and gas. And their schools aren't working. They're not safe places to learn or to work.

So then one has to ask themselves the question, should we just get on the phone and call Prime Minister Carney and ask him to appoint a supervisor here at Queen's Park? That would be the solution that the government would offer for what's going on right now, with this government that has been here for eight years. It's tired, out of touch and losing it.

This morning, I asked a simple question to the minister: What are the top three reasons for absenteeism? I didn't get an answer; I got anecdotes. What that says to me is that they fundamentally don't understand what the problem is in our schools. They don't understand why kids aren't there. How can you fix it?

I know that it's hard for, I'll say, people at home and for some of us around here—because some of us are a bit older—to understand the context of why schools aren't safe, why there's violence in schools, and it goes from JK to grade 12. I don't believe a six-year-old is violent. They could do things that are violent. It's just hard for people to understand the context of what has happened in schools.

I know that you understand this, Ms. Hradowy. Just for my colleagues and for people listening, could you give the context for what's really happening in our schools in terms of safety?

Ms. Martha Hradowy: It's largely due to unmet students needs, I would say. And when the lack of supports—are not there to be able to intervene early with children and help them self-regulate, that causes an increase in behaviours. As I spoke about earlier, people are leaving the profession. My friends have left publicly funded education to find jobs elsewhere, because there aren't the supports to be able to meet those children's needs, those student needs.

If we're serious about dealing with workplace violence, I do think that there are some solutions that the government can implement quite immediately, and I've provided those solutions to both Minister Calandra and to the Minister of Labour. On the education side, I said we need more of those early-intervention specialists who just aren't there. And for our members, the people I'm elected to represent, public education—believe it or not, there is no regulation in the Occupational Health and Safety Act that deals with education specifically. If you work in a hospital, you fall under the health care regulation. If you work in a factory, you fall under the industrial regulations. There is nothing specific for education. Education falls under the industrial regulations. It's as if you were working in a factory. So it doesn't require legislation; it doesn't require debate—it requires writing a regulation that can be implemented today that will help go a long way in making sure that teachers and education workers are safe in schools.

1400

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have?

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

Mr. John Fraser: Okay.

Mr. Mastin, do you want to comment on that, just in terms of giving some context of what's happening in our schools that many people don't see—because it wasn't like when we were in school.

Mr. David Mastin: Attendance is an issue. It's an issue in elementary as well.

I want to just say something about the nature of young people. Young people want to learn. I don't care who we're talking about; young people want to learn. If, in the right environment, this is a place that's nurturing, that's engaging, that is filled with the supports that students need, they will be in school.

What is happening right now—and it has been happening for the last eight years—is, there has been such an erosion of all of the resources and all of the things that are provided to make a student's life fulfilling. It's not happening incrementally. It's happening with a sledgehammer. This government is—

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

Thank you for your comments.

MS. DEBBIE KASMAN

ASSOCIATION DES ENSEIGNANTES ET
DES ENSEIGNANTS FRANCO-ONTARIENS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL
BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to round two. We are going to call on Debbie Kasman, the Franco-Ontarian teachers' association, and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

Ms. Kasman, you can start. Just state your name for the Hansard, please.

Ms. Debbie Kasman: My name is Debbie Kasman. I am a former teacher, principal, acting executive superintendent and student achievement officer at the Ministry of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee this afternoon.

I commend the government's efforts regarding Bill 101. In my view, these changes are not only necessary; they are urgent. I cannot stress that enough. These changes are urgent.

I am deeply alarmed by the current trends many of us are seeing, which include extreme governance dysfunction; financial mismanagement; a culture of fear, silence and retaliation in school boards; acute levels of distress; trustee infighting; soaring legal expenses; and serious and deep-seated performance issues by boards of trustees and senior administration, which include trustee refusals to follow ministry policies and even ministry directives.

Recently, I wrote an open letter to education minister Paul Calandra and urged him to intervene. I encourage the committee to read the entire open letter, which includes an education governance review that I also completed. It can be found online via a link I provided in my written brief.

Our current education governance structure is 218 years old, and there has been an evolution of flaws through to 2026, some dating from the 1990s which need significant repair. Some of the flaws have developed because times have changed, and the structures and systems that once worked well for us no longer serve their intended purpose. The extreme distress within the system is obvious.

While I support the proposed legislation, I am also offering four proposals for the committee's consideration, to strengthen the legislation.

Proposal 1: Consider amending the bill to ensure that Minister of Education approval is required for the hiring and termination of the CEO position, to eliminate the possibility of trustee refusal to comply with this requirement. Bill 101, as it is currently proposed, will not stop trustees from ignoring new hiring directives for the CEO position if trustees disagree with those directives. Trustee defiance has been problematic in the past. For example, the 2020 review of the Peel District School Board points to defiance and lack of compliance around the hiring of integrity commissioners in that board. A lawyer, Arleen Huggins, concluded that the Peel District School Board failed to follow ministerial directions and showed a disturbing lack of accountability. Huggins also determined that the board lacked even the willingness to provide good governance.

Proposal 2: The Minister of Education may wish to appoint a transition supervisory officer, much like the Ontario government did when the Ontario College of Teachers was transitioning to its new governance structure. The transition supervisory officer, in this case, could report directly to the Minister of Education and be responsible for determining, in consultation with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, the required or approved business qualifications for the new CEO position. The transition supervisory officer could also assist trustees with the hiring of the new CEO position during the transi-

tion period and be responsible for approving the new CEO hires jointly with school board trustees, on behalf of the Minister of Education. This would ensure standardized contracts and salaries, eliminate the possibility of expensive lawsuits from hiring mistakes, and help professionalize the hiring. Both of these proposals, if adopted together, would increase the chances for a smooth transition.

Proposal 3: For current directors of education who do not have business qualifications, the Minister of Education may wish to consider allowing the appointment of these directors to the role of CEO, provided current directors enter into a formal agreement to complete the required business qualifications within a certain time period. Much like regulation 309 currently allows for principals to be appointed to superintendent positions while completing the mandatory supervisory officer qualifications, this proposal would assist with finding enough qualified candidates and would allow for a smoother transition as well.

My last proposal, proposal 4: The Minister of Education might wish to appoint an academic adviser to help consult with academic groups, researchers and parents—

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

Ms. Debbie Kasman: —to assist with writing regulations, particularly as they pertain to changes around consistent learning resources, attendance, participation, final exams and assessment standards.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that the education system currently does need more money, but the governance structure must change before those funds flow.

I would also like to remind the committee of the passing of a well-loved and much-respected principal named Richard Bilkszto.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee might have and to assist further as regulations are developed and future reforms are considered and implemented.

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

I now recognize Madame Lemieux.

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Merci. Mesdames et messieurs membres du comité, je me présente : Gabrielle Lemieux. Je suis la présidente de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, l'AEFO, et fière enseignante. L'AEFO représente notamment le personnel enseignant du système d'éducation de langue française, ainsi que le personnel professionnel, paraprofessionnel et en petit d'enfance partout en Ontario.

Par leur expertise, nos 12 500 membres offrent une connaissance directe du terrain dans les classes et les communautés francophones d'un bout à l'autre de la province. Notre intervention s'appuie sur notre travail avec les membres sur le terrain et sur des consultations récentes partout en province auxquelles j'ai participé et où j'ai eu l'occasion d'entendre des enseignantes et enseignants des quatre coins de l'Ontario me parler de leur réalité quotidienne, de leurs défis et des besoins bien concrets de leurs élèves.

1410

Aujourd'hui, notre objectif est simple : s'assurer que le projet de loi 101 respecte une éducation par et pour les francophones, reconnaisse le jugement professionnel du personnel enseignant et qu'il réponde aux besoins réels de nos élèves, du personnel et de nos communautés.

À l'AEFO, nous reconnaissons que des changements sont nécessaires en éducation, mais encore faut-il qu'ils répondent aux vrais enjeux du terrain. Il y a des idées qui doivent guider toute réforme en éducation, particulièrement en éducation de langue française, et je vous en parle de trois : l'importance de la consultation auprès du personnel enseignant francophone, une gouvernance par et pour les francophones et des décisions pédagogiques qui sont ancrées sur les besoins du terrain. Et au fond de tout ça revient une question très concrète : est-ce qu'on répond vraiment aux besoins des élèves? Parce que, sur le terrain, ces besoins-là, on les connaît.

Les élèves francophones évoluent dans un contexte particulier, souvent minoritaire. Leur réussite dépend entièrement de notre capacité à comprendre leur réalité, pas seulement linguistique mais aussi socioaffective, culturelle et communautaire. C'est précisément pour cette raison que nos écoles doivent être centrées sur leurs communautés et que les décisions qui les touchent doivent être fermement ancrées dans ces communautés-là. La proximité avec les communautés, ce n'est pas un détail; c'est essentiel.

Avec le projet de loi 101, on observe une tendance claire : centralisation, uniformisation et un éloignement du terrain. En même temps, on nous propose des solutions qui semblent réactives, sans vision claire à long terme, ou sans ancrage suffisant dans la réalité des élèves.

Le ministre parle souvent de l'importance du personnel enseignant, et nous sommes d'accord avec ça, mais alors pourquoi ne pas les consulter dans un projet de loi aussi structurant qui touche directement leur quotidien?

Par exemple, le projet de loi donne au ministre des pouvoirs élargis pour encadrer l'évaluation des élèves et l'utilisation du matériel pédagogique en classe. Je discutais récemment avec Mélanie, une enseignante de Casselman, dans le cadre d'une assemblée annuelle locale, et elle me disait ceci : « On m'impose souvent des nouvelles initiatives sans jamais me demander si ça répond à la réalité de ma salle de classe et si ça répond aux besoins de mes élèves. » Nous, on le voit tout de suite quand ça fonctionne et quand ça ne fonctionne pas.

Consulter, ce n'est pas cocher une case, c'est écouter, intégrer, et parfois, c'est ajuster. Puis dans ce cas-ci, il aurait fallu aller beaucoup plus loin. Sans consultation, on impose des approches trop uniformes, qui ne tiennent pas compte des réalités particulières des francophones et qui ne répondent pas aux besoins réels. L'AEFO recommande donc une consultation obligatoire du personnel enseignant. Ce sont les premiers experts, ceux qui savent ce qui fonctionne, ce qui bloque et ce dont les élèves ont besoin.

Dans ce contexte, l'AEFO joue pleinement son rôle de porte-parole syndical du personnel enseignant franco-ontarien en assurant une voix collective structurée, plutôt

que des démarches parallèles basées sur des anecdotes qui risquent de fragmenter la représentation du terrain.

Maintenant, parlons de gouvernance. Les conseils scolaires de langue française sont au cœur de notre système d'éducation. Leur gouvernance est le résultat d'une décennie de lutte pour faire reconnaître les droits constitutionnels des francophones de gérer leurs institutions scolaires. La gestion par et pour les francophones est un droit protégé.

Parler de gouvernance par et pour les francophones, ce n'est pas théorique, c'est quelque chose de concret. Ça veut dire des décisions qui sont prises près du terrain, adaptées aux réalités locales, avec une vraie voix pour les communautés francophones et des élèves qui se reconnaissent dans leurs écoles. Avec ce projet de loi, on voit plutôt l'inverse : plus de centralisation, moins d'autonomie et moins d'espace pour adapter les décisions aux réalités locales. Plusieurs des nouveaux pouvoirs ministériels, notamment en matière d'acquisition de terrain ou de contrôle des projets, viennent restreindre cette autonomie décisionnelle qui est au cœur même du modèle de gouvernance par et pour les francophones.

Sans être formulées comme une atteinte directe à la Charte, ces modifications soulèvent néanmoins des préoccupations sérieuses quant à l'érosion progressive de ce droit de gouvernance qui est protégé. C'est là que notre inquiétude demeure : des décisions plus éloignées du terrain, moins ancrées dans le quotidien des écoles. Ce n'est pas à Toronto qu'on comprend réellement ce que la communauté francophone de Longlac à besoin comme école. L'AEFO recommande de préserver l'autonomie des conseils scolaires de langue française et d'ancrer ces pouvoirs pour garantir une vraie prise en compte des besoins spécifiques des communautés qu'ils desservent.

Pour ajouter, un bon système d'éducation repose sur des décisions pédagogiques cohérentes et ancrées dans les réalités des classes. Le projet de loi confère au ministre de nouveaux pouvoirs sur des enjeux qui touchent directement la réussite des élèves, comme l'absentéisme, les examens et les ressources pédagogiques. Nous comprenons la volonté d'agir, mais pour obtenir des vrais résultats, il faut s'attaquer aux causes réelles et pas aux symptômes. L'absentéisme, par exemple, reflète souvent des enjeux de soutien et de besoins non comblés. En matière d'évaluation, le jugement professionnel du personnel enseignant doit demeurer central. Ce sont eux qui connaissent les élèves, leurs progressions et leurs défis.

Quant aux ressources pédagogiques, la question est simple : seront-elles réellement développées par et pour les francophones et adaptées à nos réalités locales? Elles doivent être conçues en contexte francophone dès le départ—pas une simple traduction—afin de soutenir la mission de construction identitaire des écoles de langue française en Ontario.

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

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Les élèves doivent se reconnaître dans ces ressources. Autrement dit, ces décisions ne devraient pas se prendre loin du terrain; elles devraient se prendre avec celles et ceux qui vivent la réalité des écoles

chaque jour. C'est pourquoi l'AEFO demande une consultation formelle du personnel enseignant francophone avant la mise en oeuvre de ces mesures.

Si on veut répondre aux besoins des élèves, il faut partir du terrain. Et si on veut prendre des bonnes décisions, il faut consulter les bonnes personnes. Dans ce cas-ci, c'est le personnel enseignant de la province. Si on veut bâtir un système scolaire solide pour les francophones, il faut le faire avec les communautés, pas sans elles, ni à leur insu.

L'AEFO demeure disponible pour collaborer à des solutions concrètes, ancrées dans la réalité du terrain. Merci.

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

We will now go to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. Please state your name for the Hansard and you may begin.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: I'm Kathleen Woodcock. I'm president of the Ontario Public School Board Association. I'm also a trustee with the Waterloo Region District School Board, and I'm proud to say that I've served in that role for 20-plus years.

I'm getting a lot of feedback, and I wonder if I can turn my—

Failure of sound system.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Yes, I'm just going to pause you for a second.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): Do you want a recess, and I'll help work with her on it?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Yes.

We're going to have a five-minute recess.

The committee recessed from 1418 to 1422.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We are now back in session. You may continue your presentation. We will start right from the beginning.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Thank you.

I'm Kathleen Woodcock, president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, also known as OPSBA. I'm also a trustee with the Waterloo Region District School Board, and I am proud to say that I have served in that role for 20-plus years. I'm joined today by OPSBA's vice-president Jan Johnstone, a trustee who has been with the Bluewater District School Board since 2001.

It is nice to see you, Chair Riddell, and I hope that we will get to visit a school together again this year during our Take Your MPP to School Week coming up in May.

Additionally, I believe I see MPP Dixon and MPP Clancy—thank you all for the service you provide Waterloo region constituents.

We want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of our member school boards, which represent nearly 1.4 million students—almost 70% of Ontario's kindergarten to grade 12 student population. Our membership includes all 31 English public school boards and 10 school authorities. Collectively, this makes our organization the biggest stakeholder voice for public education in Ontario. Our advocacy is grounded in the practical experience of locally elected trustees who are

directly accountable to parents, communities, and students across the province.

We support boards, parents and communities by promoting good governance, labour stability and fiscal responsibility, and by delivering shared services that improve efficiency and reduce costs. We have long approached our work as constructive, non-partisan, student-focused partners to the government.

That's why I'm here today to provide brief remarks about Bill 101, Putting Student Achievement First Act. We have been hearing about this proposed legislation for months. Now that it has been introduced, we are pleased to see that the position of democratically and locally elected trustees has been preserved. Saving this important role was accomplished through the hard work, strong advocacy and deep community engagement of our members. This is an important win for local community representation and voice. However, I will say that it was extremely disappointing and concerning to learn that many responsibilities that trustees have held, which ensure that decisions about public education remain close to local school communities and the families and students they serve, were weakened or removed. As understood, this model would remove trustees' authority over budgets, collective agreements and core governance responsibilities, reducing their role and eliminating meaningful democratic accountability. This represents a substantial elimination of local decision-making and community oversight. We anticipate that much of the implementation details will be addressed in future regulations, policies and guidelines. We look forward to sharing our collective knowledge and experience with those more specifically. I would say that trustees want to have a better understanding of how things will function, what the changes to their role will look like, how board meetings will operate, how decisions are to be approved and how the community they are elected to serve will be heard through their motions, their votes and their community presence.

I do want this committee to know that OPSBA has always been a long-standing non-partisan partner in Ontario's education system. We have regularly collaborated with the Ministry of Education in delivering the requirements included in past legislation, regulations, policies and guidelines for nearly 40 years. This joint work has been done to ensure successful implementation of government priorities while ensuring students, staff and their families are well supported.

We provide school boards with a suite of shared services that enhance system efficiency and support responsible use of public resources. Through centralized labour expertise, governance training and policy communications guidance, our association enables boards to access high-quality supports that would be significantly more costly and duplicative to develop individually. School boards actively rely on OPSBA's professional staff to navigate complex labour negotiations, comply with evolving legislative and regulatory requirements and strengthen trustee effectiveness. These services help prevent disputes, reduce legal and consulting costs, and

promote consistent, informed decision-making across the publicly funded education system. Pooling expertise and coordinating efforts across boards allows us to deliver economies of scale that benefit not only our members but the province as a whole. From a purely financial perspective, which the government says is a primary concern, I can say that we return more than \$4 of savings for every \$1 we receive in membership fees. That amounts to \$1 million in direct savings to a board like Peel, for example.

If the government does seek to cut our membership fees, I think it would be reasonable to question their motives, given the savings that we provide to school boards and have provided for decades.

We've always worked with the ministry to co-develop much of the professional development for not only trustees but system leaders in our boards.

In fact, just last week, we hosted our annual Education Labour Relations and Human Resources Symposium that brought together trustees, directors of education, superintendents, human resources and labour relations professionals—

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

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Thank you—for PD and important networking. It was a tremendous success.

OPSBA has always said that we welcome modernization, efficiency and strengthened accountability. We support greater consistency across the province when it clearly delivers better outcomes.

Our key priority is to ensure there's a strong, stable and accountable public education system that reflects the communities it serves. I believe these local voices matter and contribute to the incredible system we have in this province.

Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to address this committee today. We would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

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

We'll now go to round one, with the government starting. You have five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have some questions for Ms. Woodcock.

Ms. Woodcock, during your presentation, you mentioned membership fees. My understanding is that you collect membership fees from school boards. Is that correct?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And how much would a school board pay?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: It's based on student enrolment.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Give me a couple of examples, if you can. For example, pick two school boards, and give me an example of what they would normally pay.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: I'll talk about mine, Waterloo region, and then Trustee Johnstone can talk about hers.

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Waterloo pays, in OPSBA fees, \$123,292, and in savings alone—through our school energy coalition and copyright fees, we save \$458,800.

Maybe Ms. Johnstone could talk about what Bluewater pays.

Ms. Jan Johnstone: Certainly. At Bluewater District School Board, we pay just over \$50,000 for our fees, and that covers—because we get this total reduction in energy costs, copyright fee reduction. In other words, we may pay that fee, but in return, we get over \$100,000 to our board because of those savings. That doesn't even include the services that go to our support staff, and particularly in the administrative office. Smaller boards would never be able to actually provide that kind of service directly. And that way, we just have much more money to put into the classroom directly.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: What is the total amount that you collect from school boards in a typical year?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: I'm sorry; I don't have that exact figure with me. We can certainly provide that to the committee after.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you very much.

Do you have any reserves? Do you have an ongoing reserve account?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Most boards have reserves accounts. I believe that we have to have reserve accounts.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Do you have an idea of how much money is presently in that reserve account?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Again, I do not have that information at my fingertips, but I'm happy to provide.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you very much.

Can you give us an idea of what your expenses are? Just a general idea, like how much do you spend on payroll, how much do you spend on office space—if you don't, I can just ask you to follow up with that.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: We will follow up with that because I don't have that at my fingertips. That expense is for OPSBA, you're asking for, right?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Correct—your organization, not somebody else's.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I did go on your website in preparation for today's meeting. I didn't see any financials. Would you be at liberty to provide me with your last year's audited financial statements?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: We can follow up with that. Sure.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you very much.

As part of your actions, I understand that you give training to trustees, among other services. Is that correct?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And do you retain a lobbying firm to assist you in delivering any of these services?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: We do have a lobbying firm that we are working with right now and that has been approved. Using that service has been approved by our board of directors.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: That lobbying firm is McMillan Vantage. Is that correct?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: I believe so.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: With regard to consultants, do you have any consultants in the employ of your association?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: I don't understand what you're saying about consultants.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I went on your website. I saw that there was a board of directors, and then in addition to that, you have some staff.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: So you have a board of directors and you have staff. Do you have other people who are not staff but are on contract, like consultants?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Yes, we do. Sometimes we do hire legal consultants or other expertise.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: With regard to the fees that you collect, do you receive any revenue other than revenue from school boards?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: We do get some sponsorships for some of our events that we hold, like our public education symposium. We don't get fees necessarily, but we do get sponsorships for the events.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And other than school board fees and sponsorships, do you get any other revenue from any other organizations?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: No, we do not.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the official opposition for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pasma.

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

Gabrielle, je vais commencer avec toi : est-ce que l'AEFO a été consultée sur ce projet de loi avant son début?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Non.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: OK. Vous avez un droit constitutionnel de gérer votre propre système d'éducation par et pour les Franco-Ontariens. Pourquoi est-ce que c'est important de consulter les personnes qui sont dans les salles de classe chaque jour, qui connaissent bien les besoins des élèves franco-ontariens, si vraiment la gestion du système sera par et pour les francophones?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: L'importance de consulter c'est de s'assurer que même les petites décisions qui sont prises, qui n'affectent pas concrètement le droit constitutionnel mais qui viennent éroder la gouvernance par et pour—aussi, c'est de s'assurer qu'on respecte ce droit-là, qui est un principe démocratique aussi dans notre société. C'est aussi principalement de s'assurer que ce qu'on est en train de livrer comme système d'éducation puis les décisions qui sont prises par et pour le système d'éducation reflètent la réalité et les besoins des élèves en salle de classe.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: Et si vous aviez été consultée, qu'est-ce que vous auriez dit? Quelles sont les solutions aux problèmes auxquels notre système fait face? Quelles seraient les solutions, selon vos membres?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Bien, comme le projet de loi le dit, il faut prioriser la réussite des élèves, mais pour prioriser la réussite des élèves il faut investir dans les élèves. Puis investir dans les élèves ça veut dire investir dans du personnel, dans les services spécialisés, s'assurer que ces services-là sont disponibles en français partout en province.

On entend des défis au niveau francophone, au niveau de transportation, parce que les conseils scolaires ont un territoire tellement vaste. On voit des défis au niveau de l'éducation spécialisée. C'est vraiment d'aller voir quels sont les besoins des élèves puis d'investir pour répondre à ces besoins-là.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: Merci. Et quelque chose qui peut sembler assez petit pour les gens qui ne connaissent pas le système d'éducation francophone : les ressources en salle de classe. Maintenant le ministre prend le pouvoir pour lui-même de dire quelles ressources peuvent être utilisées dans la salle de classe, quelles ressources ne peuvent pas être utilisées.

J'entends souvent des inquiétudes des enseignantes et enseignants francophones que les ressources sont soit seulement en anglais, soit dans un mauvais français. Pourquoi est-ce que c'est important que les enseignantes et enseignants et la direction francophone aient le droit de décider quelles ressources peuvent être utilisées dans la salle de classe et non pas un ministre anglophone à Queen's Park?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Parce que ce sont vraiment les enseignantes et les enseignants puis les gestionnaires des conseils scolaires qui sont proche du terrain, qui comprennent les élèves, qui les connaissent, qui les entendent. Et c'est tellement important en contexte linguistique minoritaire que nos enfants sont confortables de parler dans leur langue, qu'ils s'entendent parler, qu'ils lisent comme ils parlent.

Quand on traduit des ressources de l'anglais ou quand on prend des ressources dans des contextes majoritaires linguistiques francophones, les ressources ne parlent pas à nos élèves. Ce n'est pas la langue qu'ils parlent. Ce n'est pas la langue qu'ils comprennent. Ils ne se voient pas dans ces réalités-là, donc, ils vont commencer à s'effacer petit à petit. C'est important que nos élèves s'entendent et se reconnaissent dans les ressources en salle de classe.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: Une autre grande différence entre les deux systèmes c'est que souvent les anglophones sont dans de nouveaux bâtiments scolaires, tandis que les francophones reçoivent les bâtiments que le système anglophone ne veut plus. Ça veut dire qu'il y a un besoin de beaucoup de réparations à ces bâtiments.

Maintenant, dans ce projet de loi le ministre se donne le pouvoir d'approuver ou de ne pas approuver les réparations aux bâtiments. En ce moment, ce sont les conseils scolaires qui peuvent décider si, oui, il faut avoir des réparations. Ils ne doivent pas demander la permission au ministre.

Donc, pourquoi est-ce que c'est un problème pour un système d'éducation où on a le droit de gérer votre propre système d'éducation que les franco-ontariens devront

maintenant aller au ministre et demander la permission de réparer vos propres bâtiments?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Sans rentrer dans tous les détails, à première vue, la plus grande difficulté c'est au niveau des nombres. On a de plus petites écoles du côté francophone, généralement parlant. Mais ces élèves-là méritent des bâtiments aussi bien structurés que dans nos plus grandes écoles.

Donc quand on prend des décisions d'affaires—

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

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Quand on veut gérer au niveau d'un système d'éducation, ce sont des décisions comme celle-là qui me semblent inquiétantes. On va peut-être mettre de côté nos toutes petites écoles qui sont autant méritantes que d'autres écoles.

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: Merci. On a beaucoup entendu parler aujourd'hui des absences des élèves. Vous avez fait déjà référence au transport scolaire. Je sais que les conseils scolaires couvrent une plus grande distance. Ils ont un plus grand déficit dans le transport scolaire à cause des changements à la formule de financement. Pourquoi est-ce que c'est important d'investir dans le transport scolaire pour les conseils scolaires francophones si on veut que les élèves soient à l'école?

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M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Dans le fond, c'est de répondre à leur droit fondamental, qui est d'être éduqué dans la langue de leur choix, une des langues officielles au Canada. Donc, c'est de s'assurer qu'on est en train de leur offrir une éducation de qualité qui inclut l'accessibilité à cette éducation-là et le transport fait partie—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much. We'll now move on to the third party. I recognize MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to all the presenters this afternoon. You took the time to be here and to educate the committee, and I think that's very important. I do hope that the government and the minister will take note of all your comments that are addressing the core issues in our schools.

Je vais m'adresser à toi, Gabrielle, pour la plupart de mes questions parce qu'évidemment l'éducation de langue française, ça me préoccupe beaucoup. Je pense qu'il y a plusieurs défis qui existent dans notre système francophone qui ne sont pas les mêmes que dans nos écoles anglophones. Ça, c'est vraiment important, de comprendre cette distinction-là. C'est pour ça que la gouvernance par et pour les francophones, c'est super important.

Dans la loi, le ministre se donne des nouveaux pouvoirs— des pouvoirs d'établir des politiques et des lignes directrices en ce qui concerne l'évaluation du rendement des élèves, relativement aux dépenses des conseils, concernant l'utilisation du matériel scolaire dans l'enseignement et relativement aux communications des conseils avec le public.

Moi, je vois ça comme une intrusion dans la capacité des conseils scolaires de se gouverner. Est-ce que tu as la même préoccupation, et quel impact ça risque d'avoir si

justement la réalité des francophones n'est pas prise en considération dans l'élaboration de ces directives-là? Et peut-être, qu'est-ce que le ministre devrait faire pour s'assurer d'éviter le gros piège qui existe?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Sans avoir la chance de rencontrer le ministre pour discuter de la réalité des francophones, qui est problématique en ce moment, ma réaction c'est qu'on ne peut pas changer un système d'éducation basé sur des rencontres anecdotiques aussi. C'est tellement important qu'on reconnaisse les personnes qui représentent l'ensemble des enseignants—dans ce cas-ci, l'AEFO, du côté francophone—pour qu'on puisse avoir des discussions sur les philosophies derrière ces changements-là, de les comprendre et s'assurer que ça ne vient pas miner la présence francophone dans les écoles francophones.

Je vais rappeler ce que j'ai dit tantôt, mais c'est tellement important dans le système francophone qu'on se reconnaisse dans les décisions qui sont prises, qu'on se reconnaisse dans la façon dont les cours sont enseignés. Du côté francophone, la population enseignante est changeante. On a de plus en plus de gens qui arrivent de l'extérieur du Canada qui viennent enseigner du côté francophone. C'est absolument merveilleux de voir cette richesse-là dans les écoles, mais je ne pense pas que le ministre de l'Éducation a cette connaissance-là du système francophone pour s'assurer qu'on réponde à ces besoins grandissants spécifiquement.

On parle d'une pénurie aussi du côté francophone qui est plus grande que du côté anglophone, un défi de rétention qui est le double que du côté anglophone, et on n'adresse pas ces défis dans des projets de loi comme ceux-ci. Donc sans consultation, on n'est pas en train d'adresser les réels défis qui existent en l'éducation francophone.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Justement, parlant de consultation, vous faites votre devoir—tu as mentionné au début de ta présentation que vous étiez récemment sur le terrain pour consulter vos membres pour voir quels sont les principaux défis. Peux-tu nous faire part des conclusions de votre consultation avec les membres?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Oui. Ces consultations-là ont été faites cet automne, donc c'est très récent. J'ai eu la chance de me promener dans 10 consultations à travers la province. Ce qui ressort le plus, c'est au niveau des conditions de travail de nos membres. On parle des conditions de travail—on est un syndicat. C'est certain que ça, ça résonne fort chez nous, mais les conditions de travail de nos membres sont les conditions d'apprentissage de chacun des élèves dans le système francophone.

Donc, quand les membres nous disent : « Je songe quitter la profession. Ça fait quelques mois que j'enseigne et je veux quitter parce que je me fais frapper tous les jours et il n'y a rien qui est mis en place pour me protéger », ou des enseignants qui sont proche de la retraite et qui disent : « Je ne me rendrai pas à ma retraite. Il faut que je quitte pour pouvoir survivre. Il faut que je réduise ma tâche »—parce que dans un contexte de pénurie, c'est ça qu'on devrait aller chercher. Puis d'aller enlever plus de jugement

professionnel des enseignants, ça vient miner aussi au niveau de notre jugement professionnel.

Tous les enseignants certifiés en Ontario ont deux baccalauréats au minimum—au minimum. Ce sont des gens qui doivent aller suivre cette formation-là. Puis ensuite d'aller leur dire : « Nous, on sait quel matériel pédagogique vous devriez utiliser », ça vient vraiment miner cette profession. Ça va être difficile de recruter puis de retenir des enseignants à ce niveau-là.

La chose principale dont les membres nous parlent, c'est au niveau de la violence dans les milieux scolaires. Quand on parle de violence, on parle de comportement où les élèves deviennent désorganisés parce qu'on ne répond pas à leurs besoins. On ne parle pas de gestes violents qui sont intentionnels; on parle vraiment de réactions où les enfants ne sont pas capables de gérer leurs émotions parce qu'ils n'ont pas l'appui dont ils ont besoin.

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

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Ils sont dans une classe complexe avec des élèves qui ont plusieurs défis, et on vient d'abolir le programme PANA qui permettait de l'appui aux nouveaux arrivants comme élèves. On abolit ça, donc on a des gens qui ne parlent ni français, ni anglais dans les salles de classe. C'est certain qu'un enseignant peine à combler les besoins de tous ces enfants-là. On a besoin de support, on a besoin d'appui, puis ça, ça se traduit par des personnes supplémentaires ou des classes réduites.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Je ne sais pas si on va avoir le temps d'adresser pleinement la question, mais le projet de loi enlève les enquêtes sur le climat dans nos écoles. Qu'est-ce que ça peut avoir comme impact si on n'est plus capable de lire ce qui se passe sur le terrain?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Mais ce sont d'abord des décisions qui sont complètement déconnectées de la réalité. Donc, d'avoir des gens qui prennent des décisions qu'ils ne comprennent pas—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much. We'll now go to the independent for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank all of our speakers for coming today. I know it was very last-minute and people cleared their schedules to make time to be here.

I'd like to start off by asking Kathleen Woodcock—you've been in this job a long time, and you've seen lots of changes. We talk about changing governance to make it function better. What are you hearing from your members in terms of what they'd like to see in terms of governance changes?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Thank you for the question. I have seen a lot of changes. When I was first elected, it was a different story. We're looking at needing to understand the changes. What we're hearing from our members is that they need to understand how this is all going to be implemented and what is actually—we're beginning to understand the "what," but we have no idea about the "how." It is causing a lot of disturbance and anxiety and chaos, basically, in our boards—not just

among trustees, but our member boards are getting a lot of mixed messages. The devil is in the details. The regulations that come out as the legislation is implemented will make a difference.

I'd like to turn it over to Trustee Johnstone and see if she would like to provide some input on that question.

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

Ms. Jan Johnstone: I just wanted to say that, during advocacy week, we actually met with you. I was one of your trustees.

Your question has to do with what our members and, by extension, our parents, communities and our wider communities would really like.

This is what I heard just recently when I spoke with Bruce county council, who unanimously supported not only duly elected trustees, but very much wanted to see a much wider consultation on important parts of this bill. They really strongly feel that we require a wide consultation with our parents and with students and with staff and, by extension, municipalities, because they realize that this kind of change in bills needs to—

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

We'll now move to the government for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Jordan.

Mr. John Jordan: I'm going to direct my question to Debbie Kasman.

I want to thank you, Debbie, for coming today because I realized, during your introduction, the vast experience that you have in the education field—one of those areas is the student achievement counsellor.

I'm wondering if you could speak to the bill relative to what you feel the impact would be of this Bill 101 on the students and the families in achieving their goals and being successful in the classroom.

Ms. Debbie Kasman: Thank you for the question. I appreciate the opportunity to answer it. It's an excellent question.

As you have noticed, I do have a vast amount of experience working within the system—40 years now—and some of that time as a student achievement officer at the Ministry of Education.

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I will tell you that what I am currently seeing within the system is deeply alarming. I am seeing a governance structure that is so over-focused on power and so under-focused on student achievement that I'm deeply concerned for the future of Ontario's education system if the Ontario government does not get a handle on better governance—which I believe this bill will actually do.

I don't think people realize how much chaos, dysfunction and confusion is actually happening within the education system at senior levels. I don't think people realize how much infighting there actually is between directors of education and boards of trustees—and the reason for that is because, the way things currently stand, directors of education have two bosses. One boss has the ability to hire and fire them. The other boss has the ability to give them directions but no ability to necessarily hire

and fire. What I mean by that is, the boards of trustees have the ability to hire and fire directors. And it's the Ministry of Education that has no ability to manage most of that. When you have two bosses and you're given conflicting directives, you're going to follow the directive of the person who has the ability to fire you. What that means is, for the past 40, 50 years, we've had this incredible tension for directors of education to try to manoeuvre within—meaning the Ministry of Education sets these policies, procedures and even directives sometimes under supervision. Yet school board trustees say, "No, we're doing this." So we've had clear opposition of ministry policies and procedures and even directives, to the point where it has created massive chaos, dysfunction and confusion in the system.

And I'm going to be honest: School board trustees are still unwilling to see how much of a role they play in here. They claim there's not enough money, which is part of the story, but the rest of the story is that they often refuse to do what the Ministry of Education wants school board directors of education to do. The tension is enormous for directors of education. They end up doing what the trustees want them to do, because they don't want to be fired, which often is in direct opposition to what the Ministry of Education says. You can't impact student achievement under those conditions. That's the bottom line.

Mr. John Jordan: Just a supplemental to that, Debbie: Do you feel that rewarding students for actually attending school and participating—do you think that those changes will have an impact on student achievement?

Ms. Debbie Kasman: They 100% will, as long as they're carefully done, and I know that because, prior to the introduction of eliminating marks for attendance, we successfully did those things. We did give marks for students for attending school and for exams, and we had a whole host of appropriate reasons when students shouldn't be penalized. There's no reason why the system can't do that again—

The Acting Chair (MPP Mohamed Firin): One-minute warning.

Ms. Debbie Kasman: —as long as the regulations are very carefully written so that we don't further marginalize students who are already marginalized because they're helping their single mom at home, who has three jobs, and they have to miss school to look after their brothers and sisters. There are all kinds of reasons why a student should be and can be exempt from attending school without penalizing their marks—at the same time moving the legislation forward in a way that will address attendance for all students in a very effective, generalized manner.

The Acting Chair (MPP Mohamed Firin): We will now go to the official opposition for five minutes and 30 seconds.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Kathleen and Jan, I want to ask you about these savings that you mentioned. I've been the shadow minister for education for four years. I feel like I have a pretty good grasp on the education system. And yet, this was the first time that I learned about the cost savings

that are available to school boards through their membership in OPSBA. I'm wondering if you can elaborate on that.

How are you saving on energy costs and copyright fees? And are there other examples where school boards are receiving significant savings through their membership in OPSBA?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: Thank you for the question. Like you, I'm surprised you're only hearing about this now.

Working through our partners, including the OESC, we get these savings because of the co-operative arrangement at the Ontario Energy Board. We're able to represent all the school boards so that they can get a better deal on energy savings. Small boards—and Jan can speak to this—would have difficulty getting those savings without the fact that OPSBA is involved with representing them at the Ontario Energy Board.

The copyright savings are also another area.

I can turn it over to Jan if she would like to add to that.

Ms. Jan Johnstone: Thank you very much for that question.

Basically, OPSBA was the organizer with the Ontario Energy Board, and they partnered with them—that's reductions in electricity plus natural gas, and it was through that. If you bring together enough school boards, which is all of the public school boards, and also school authorities—because of that, they can guarantee that they got a reduction for all of our members in OPSBA. Just that alone saves huge money to all of the boards in the province. You could say that for \$1 of every OPSBA fee, you get savings of \$4 to the board.

I think I'm speaking not only for rural boards, but you can go to northern boards, large boards with many buildings—you have to think about what we're saving here. It is so beneficial. And very much, we are a prime organizer of that, because we represent two thirds of the students in this province.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's really going to be costly for our school boards that we lose that economy of scale and that collective bargaining power of school boards being at one table together.

We've heard a lot today about the new powers of the CEO to rule motions and debates out of order that trustees wish to hold, to overrule trustees on budgets.

Jan and Kathleen, you're both been trustees for a very long time, so you've had a lot of opportunities to see what kind of issues trustees are bringing to the table, the impact that it has on budgets.

One of the concerns that I have, as someone who sees regularly the questions and issues that parents are dealing with and how they bring it to trustees, is that you're losing the power to make systemic change. You can pick up the phone. You can call a superintendent. You can call a principal. You can help a parent mediate a solution on an individual level. But when you're hearing concerns again and again and again, you would bring that to the board table for a policy change or to address that issue through

the budget, and now the CEO could just rule you out of order.

Based on your many years of experience, for what kinds of issues do you think trustees will lose the power to advocate for parents and to create systemic change?

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: You've named many of them already.

The Acting Chair (MPP Mohamed Firin): One-minute warning.

Ms. Kathleen Woodcock: There is concern that, for example, trustees will have the ability to hire the CEO and not fire the CEO. That raises some concerns about the value of pedagogy, where the importance of pedagogy fits within the proposed structure. We're pleased that we have the ability to hire the CEO, but that kind of issue is going to hurt us at the system level, for sure.

Jan, do you want to answer?

1500

Ms. Jan Johnstone: Yes. I think my main concern is that in some ways, you're talking about governance, and many years ago there was a whole educational reform—very much what was considered administration and what was considered governance. So you're really—

The Acting Chair (MPP Mohamed Firin): Apologies. Thank you.

We'll now go to the third party. MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Je vais retourner à l'AEFO parce que j'ai encore des questions qui me turlupinent. On va parler de la commission des langues d'enseignement que la loi vient abolir en faveur d'une référence au ministre, qui va s'occuper d'étudier la question. Je ne pense pas que tu l'as beaucoup élaboré dans ta présentation, mais moi, j'aimerais mieux comprendre ce qu'est le rôle de la commission et pourquoi le nouveau pouvoir qui va être délégué au ministre maintenant peut avoir un impact négatif pour nous, les francophones.

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Dans le fond, sans consultations, on n'est pas certain non plus pourquoi ça a été modifié, puis que ce pouvoir-là a été donné au ministre. Ce qui est important pour nous, comme dans toutes les instances où on enlève des—je vais utiliser le mot—institutions, ou des instances qui prennent en considération tout l'aspect francophone ou au niveau des langues officielles, c'est de s'assurer que les personnes qui vont prendre ces décisions-là comprennent réellement.

Il y a une grande différence entre une école où on apprend le français et une école où on apprend en français. Ça, c'est un principe de base qui doit absolument être compris pour pouvoir bien mettre en application les bonnes décisions dans le système d'éducation. Donc, ça c'est une inquiétude pour nous—un autre exemple de centralisation des pouvoirs, ce qui fait qu'on n'a plus ce travail en comité pour prendre ces décisions-là—de vraiment le centraliser au niveau d'un ministre où il n'y a pas vraiment de garantie que ces personnes-là comprennent les réalités.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Puis donc, c'était quoi le genre de question que la commission étudiait? Est-ce que tu es au courant?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Je n'ai pas cette information-là. Ce qu'on sait, c'est que ça faisait quelques années où il n'y avait pas eu de rencontre de cette commission-là.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: OK, merci. Dans la même veine, le ministre aussi va se permettre d'intervenir dans les services de garde et de la petite enfance. Encore là, aussi, il y a une préoccupation. Peux-tu parler de comment important les services de garde sont pour assurer la survie de notre système francophone, et de comment l'accès doit être bien géré pour s'assurer qu'on a un continuum dans le système d'éducation?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Absolument, puis on a vu les résultats d'une consultation sur l'avenir de l'éducation de langue française, qui a été pilotée par l'AEFO il y a quelques années. Un des constats qui sort de ça, c'est justement, comme vous dites, l'importance du continuum : de partir de la petite enfance, aller jusqu'au post-secondaire, donc assurer l'accessibilité et la qualité de l'éducation en français.

Quand on parle de petite enfance, ça va au-delà d'une décision qui est budgétaire, parce que les décisions puis l'investissement qu'on peut faire en petite enfance vont avoir des répercussions tout au long du cheminement scolaire des enfants, si on est capable de les retenir dans notre système. On sait que l'importance de pouvoir s'exprimer dans sa langue maternelle, ou dans une langue qu'on va appeler affective, dès la petite enfance peut vraiment venir avoir des répercussions sur l'apprentissage dans cette langue-là. Donc, du côté francophone, c'est absolument essentiel.

On a vu des belles réussites où il y a des centres de garde qui sont gérés par des conseils scolaires aussi, ce qui font que les enfants restent dans le système. Ils connaissent leur école; l'école est au cœur de leur communauté, donc ça aussi, ça crée une belle rétention du côté francophone pour nos tout-petits.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Oui, puis j'ajouterais même qu'il y a des endroits dans la province de l'Ontario qui n'ont pas accès à une école francophone, parce qu'il n'y a pas assez d'écoles et que la distance à parcourir pour aller à une école est trop importante. Les parents doivent prendre la décision difficile d'envoyer leurs enfants dans une école anglophone, et puis là, c'est toute la communauté francophone qu'on affecte, parce que, souvent, ils vont continuer leur parcours en anglais, alors on perd notre belle francophonie.

Je voulais qu'on parle un petit peu des absences de nos élèves dans les écoles. Je pense qu'il faut adresser les différentes raisons, mais le ministre a décidé d'adresser cet enjeu-là en attribuant une note à la présence des élèves. Est-ce que tu peux nous parler un petit peu de ce que vos membres vous rapportent à propos de l'absentéisme des élèves—le pourquoi—puis ce qui a besoin d'être adressé? Est-ce que vous pensez qu'attribuer une note à la présence des élèves, ça va régler le problème?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Ce dont il est important de se souvenir là-dedans, c'est de se recentrer sur l'élève, puis de comprendre pourquoi ces élèves-là sont absents. Aller attribuer une note, ça n'ira pas changer ça.

The Acting Chair (MPP Mohamed Firin): One-minute warning.

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Puis ici, quand je parle des défis en santé mentale, je ne veux pas dire que puisque l'élève s'absente pour cause de santé mentale, on ne le comptera pas. Ce n'est pas de ça dont on parle. On parle d'investir des ressources en santé mentale, en français, dans nos écoles, pour aller aider l'enfant.

Quand on parle de situation sociétale, donc quand on a un défi au niveau des services sociaux dans les sociétés, ça a des répercussions sur l'école. Donc, d'aller adresser les services sociaux et puis investir dans les services sociaux dans la communauté va avoir un impact sur l'absentéisme dans l'école.

C'est un peu de punir un élève pour le fait qu'on n'ait pas investi dans les services dont lui et sa famille auraient besoin. C'est certain qu'il faut que l'élève soit là pour apprendre—on comprend ça—mais de là à mettre une instance punitive comme ça, ça ne règle pas le défi. Le défi, c'est qu'on a besoin de plus de services pour nos élèves à l'école pour qu'ils viennent et qu'ils soient en mesure d'apprendre.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Oui, puis je dirais même que pour quelqu'un qui ne va pas à l'école parce qu'il a des problèmes de santé mentale, de savoir qu'il va être pénalisé, ça ajoute à la pression. Donc, on n'aide vraiment pas. On ajoute un fardeau à quelqu'un qui a déjà des enjeux.

Je ne sais pas si tu peux me donner, en quelques secondes—ça serait quoi, les grandes priorités en investissements dans nos écoles—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll move now to the independent for three minutes. MPP Clancy, go ahead.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you, again. It's good to be here. I'm proud to represent the residents of Kitchener Centre, to talk about education today.

I'd like to ask Gabrielle some questions. I'm going to use English because my French—I don't have as much confidence. I wish I did my education in French. That would help.

Were you consulted in the formation of this legislation?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Non.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: If there's further legislation addressing Franco-Ontarian educators, students and families, what is your hope to see, in the future, when it comes to a government looking to create legislation?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Je dirais même que ça va au-delà des lois. C'est que n'importe quel ministre qui vient prendre en charge le système d'éducation en Ontario devrait avoir des consultations avec le système d'éducation francophone—les parties prenantes, dont les enseignants—pour s'assurer qu'il comprenne ce que ça veut dire, le système d'éducation francophone.

Mon espoir, ça serait que quand il va y avoir des changements au niveau du système d'éducation, les parents, les élèves—on a des organismes franco-ontariens qui ne font que ça, représenter des parties prenantes : la FESFO; Parents partenaires en éducation; et nous, au niveau des enseignants et du personnel scolaire. Il y a des

associations où on sait que ce sont toutes des personnes qui travaillent pour les francophones. Donc, d'aller chercher la réalité du terrain, c'est d'aller consulter les communautés francophones par l'entremise de ces associations-là.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Merci. What is the impact when we create legislation without proper consultation and integration of the feedback about what it is that you see in your schools all the time?

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: Ça fait que nos élèves, notre personnel et les conseils scolaires se sentent comme on est constamment en train de se battre pour un droit qui, à la base, devrait nous revenir.

Quand on vient faire ces changements-là sans regarder la lentille francophone, sans comprendre ce que ça veut dire, on est toujours en mode survie, à essayer, justement, de survivre, de s'assurer que le système va vraiment perdurer au-delà de ces décisions-là. Pour les élèves, parfois ça les fait se sentir comme s'ils sont des citoyens de deuxième classe—

The Acting Chair (MPP Mohamed Firin): One-minute warning.

M^{me} Gabrielle Lemieux: —donc qu'ils sont moins bons que certains autres systèmes ou certaines autres écoles.

C'est important de miser sur la force des communautés francophones puis d'aller investir là où c'est nécessaire.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you.

My next question is for Debbie.

Debbie, you talked about education policy in the past as it relates to attendance. Have you talked to any attendance counsellors or read any research in coming up to that conclusion that providing a consequence to kids who are lacking in attendance is the way forward?

Ms. Debbie Kasman: Thank you for the question.

Not only have I spoken with attendance counsellors, but I managed the entire student achievement department, which included curriculum and special education, when I was acting executive superintendent. And that meant that the psychological services department was under my umbrella—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much for your comments and for your presentations.

HOLD SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE
PARENT NETWORK

ONTARIO PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL

ONTARIO AUTISM COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Committee members, we have two individuals from the Hold Schools Accountable Parent Network in person. Is there unanimous consent to allow both presenters to sit at the witness table? Please put your hands up. Okay, so that's passed.

We'll now go to the Hold Schools Accountable Parent Network, the Ontario Principals' Council, and the Ontario Autism Coalition.

We'll start with the Hold Schools Accountable Parent Network. Please state your name for the Hansard, and you may begin. You have seven minutes.

1510

Mr. Anwar Knight: Good afternoon, Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. My name is Anwar Knight. I'm here as a parent and advocate and as someone who has spent years working to amplify voices that are too often ignored.

As noted, I'm the founder of the Hold Schools Accountable Parent Network, but I want to be clear: I did not set out to become an education advocate. I set out to find out what happened to my son when he was violently harmed at his school. I was denied the facts. I was denied transparency. And, to this day, the school board has not provided a formal, detailed account about the incident.

That experience is what led to the creation of the HSA Parent Network. What began as one family searching for answers has grown into a leading provincial voice with thousands of Ontario families who have signed our petition to amend the Education Act—but not only families. Educators, teachers and administrators have come forward to HSA as whistle-blowers to help drive desperately needed change.

We are in a crisis, and education reform is crucial. The single most important aspect of our education system is student safety, and that can only be delivered through a system that is transparent and accountable.

Bill 101 begins to advance accountability in a meaningful way, particularly when you consider that nearly two million students are attending schools in publicly funded boards that are not in full compliance with the school board codes of conduct or PPM 128. That is not a small gap. That is not isolated. That is systemic. When our education system does not function as intended, it's not the system that absorbs the impact; it is our children. We support Bill 101 and respectfully offer targeted amendments to help it reach its full potential.

My colleague Elizabeth Lance has reviewed policies across all English-language boards in Ontario. I'll invite her now to speak on what we're seeing across the system.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Please state your name.

Ms. Elizabeth Lance: Elizabeth Lance.

Like Anwar and many parents in our network, when my child was harmed at school, I found a system that relies on self-regulation and that did not hold itself accountable when the system failed. To find out how common this was, I'm now a doctoral researcher in education.

What I'm going to share with you is what the public record shows—not opinion, not anecdote—across 16 English-language boards.

For something as simple as a code of conduct, nearly one in five boards still have not written cyberbullying into it seven years after it was first mandated. Over 80% of boards provided no clear mechanism for parents or the community to report code-of-conduct violations. These

are not nice-to-have items; they are mandated. It's unclear why these gaps exist.

The Ontario Ombudsman receives nearly a thousand school board complaints every year.

Since 2009, section 283.1 has required every director of education to advise the deputy minister when their board fails to comply with provincial policies. If this self-reporting mechanism were working, the deputy minister would already know.

This is not simply a matter of paperwork. There are at least three laws written after children have died at school. One death is too many. These are just the named deaths; there are more. Without follow-through, without accountability, the same problems will continue.

Bill 101 renames the director as chief education officer, but it currently does not change the duty or accountability structures—but it can. With a small number of targeted amendments, it has the chance to do what no other piece of legislation has done in 17 years: make the duty visible and enforceable. Anwar will walk you through three of the five that we have identified.

Mr. Anwar Knight: We are asking the committee to consider five amendments, and we certainly have detailed descriptions in our written submission. But with our remaining moments, I would like to put a spotlight on three of them.

The first is to make reporting visible. When non-compliance is reported to the deputy minister, it should be publicly logged and responded to within a fixed timeline. Right now, issues can be reported, but they also can go unaddressed. If it's reported, it should be seen and acted on.

The second is to create an independent and protected reporting channel. Trustees, staff and parents need a direct path to the deputy minister with whistle-blower protection built in. Without protection, people will not come forward. We've heard this repeatedly from educators. One told us on the record that senior school board leadership told them, "There will be consequences for the whistle-blower." A reporting channel will help create oversight that cannot be controlled eternally, and without reporting accountability that cannot be achieved.

The third is to ensure real separation of leadership. The bill creates a chief executive officer and chief education officer, and that is the right idea. But allowing, in certain circumstances, one person to hold both roles—that is not a true separation. In larger boards, these roles must be held by separate individuals. There needs to be an enrolment threshold. In smaller boards, if combined, there must be transparency and independent oversight or the same issues will persist.

As noted, Bill 101 introduces several meaningful reforms: clear accountability at the top, aligning the CEO role with real responsibility and current pay structure, a stronger focus on learning by formally elevating academic leadership.

The bill also introduces tighter discipline around governance and spending, which is long overdue. That matters, because right now the system pays leadership for

size, not for outcomes, and additional research by Elizabeth supports that. Here are more details.

Ms. Elizabeth Lance: A separate review of director of education compensation was conducted across all boards using the sunshine list data. Everyone in the sample, approximately 10%, outpaced inflation—

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

Ms. Elizabeth Lance: —resulting in raises from \$48,000 to \$70,000. The smallest board, under 6,500, received the largest raise. Meanwhile, over the same period, enrolment dropped 13%, grade 3 reading was around 55%, and grade 3 math remained below 50%.

The current pay matrix rewards seven things. None of them are student safety, academic outcomes or compliance. Even with the new performance appraisals, performance pay remains discretionary.

Ask yourselves this: With this split, will this change build clear accountability? Not yet, but it can.

Mr. Anwar Knight: In closing, Bill 101 sets the system on a stronger path forward, but for many families rebuilding the trust that has eroded will take more than structural change. It will require greater transparency, stronger protections and consistent follow-through—because when those elements are in place, accountability becomes real and confidence in the system can begin to rebuild. When that happens, it is our children who benefit most.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much. That's perfect timing, almost like the weather.

Mr. Anwar Knight: Do you enjoy the sunshine and the warmth?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I do.

Mr. Anwar Knight: Don't get used to it.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Just so you know, he used to be a weatherman—or still is.

I will now go to the Ontario Principals' Council. Please state your name for the Hansard, and you may begin.

Mr. Jeff Maharaj: My name is Jeff Maharaj. I'm a principal from Durham region, and I am the president of the Ontario Principals' Council. Today, I'll be joined by Ralph Sharples of the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario and Dany Dumont from Association des directions et des directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes. Together, we represent the principals and vice-principals at Ontario's public, Catholic and French-language schools.

I rise today to express concerns about Bill 101 and to make recommendations to limit its negative impact on our education system.

While consistency may seem like a worthy goal, this bill prioritizes standardization over the realities of today's classrooms. Students are diverse, and effective teaching depends on flexibility and professional judgment. Rather than mandating uniform ministry-approved resources, the bill should establish an educator-led provincial committee, including strong representation from equity-deserving groups to guide resource development, while still allowing

teachers the flexibility to use supplementary materials to meet local student needs.

The proposed expansion of standardized exams is another step backwards. Evidence shows that exams alone are not reliable indicators of student understanding, yet this bill moves us towards outdated practices that are not supported by research. Any move towards standardized assessment must require transparent consultation with education partners, including principals, and ensure that assessments remain valid, flexible and focused on demonstrated learning as required by current curriculum and policy.

Most concerning is the proposal to tie grades to attendance and participation. This risks penalizing students facing mental health challenges, family responsibilities or other barriers beyond their control. Instead of embedding these factors into grades, the bill should ensure that assessment remains tied to demonstrated learning and require the ministry and boards to establish systems that identify and address the root causes of absenteeism, which can be addressed through appropriately funded targeted, evidence-based supports.

Without these changes to the bill, we risk creating a system that increases inequity, limits effective teaching and strains relationships between educators and families, undermining the trust that effective school communities depend on.

1520

Bill 101 must be amended to reflect the realities of modern classrooms, respect educator expertise and truly support all students.

I would like to now pass things over to Ralph from CPCO.

Mr. Ralph Sharples: I'm Ralph Sharples, president of the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, representing over 2,100 Catholic principals and vice-principals across the province.

As it stands currently, we believe the implementation of Bill 101 will thrust administrators into the middle of conflicts, squeezed by pressures at both ends, leaving them with increased workloads and decreased time to focus on instructional leadership.

At the board level, the introduction of the CEO-CeDO model puts finances above pedagogy, taking a more corporate, standardized approach to education that can lead to a less agile and adaptable education system, as boards lose the flexibility to be as immediately responsive in implementing local solutions. These delays in action will only serve to further frustrate families and heighten tensions, and it will fall to administrators to navigate these conflicts.

We believe the proposed structure should be inverted so that the CEO reports to the CeDO. This shift keeps pedagogy and students at the forefront of decision-making. We also propose a less standardized approach so that boards and schools can be more responsive and adaptable to local concerns.

At the school level, recognizing that growing absenteeism among students is a worldwide issue, we are con-

cerned that the addition of attendance and participation grades does not meet the issue at its core. Rather, we see it as creating a flashpoint for conflict between families and schools. It is also our concern that this approach will worsen, not improve, attendance.

For those students who struggle to come to school, the added pressure of an attendance grade could lead them to give up more quickly, as they believe their credit or credits are unattainable. As a secondary principal, I have seen this occur. But with the current flexibility, we have been able to re-engage students so that they can successfully attain some or all of their credits.

We propose appropriate consultations with board and education partners to look at the root causes of absenteeism—considered to be unjustified—so that we can find ways to re-engage our students.

Should absenteeism and participation grades remain part of the legislation, we propose to meet the issue proactively with the appropriate supports in elementary, where it often starts, rather than through the transition to high school and at a time when it could affect scholarships and entrance into post-secondary programs, making for a volatile situation with parents.

I would like to now pass it over to Dany from ADFO.

M. Dany Dumont: Merci. Bonjour, mesdames et messieurs les membres du comité. Je me présente : Dany Dumont, président de l'ADFO.

Je vais me concentrer aujourd'hui sur les impacts du projet de loi 101 sur l'éducation de langue française.

Il est important de rappeler une chose fondamentale : l'éducation en langue française en Ontario n'est pas simplement une question de langue; c'est un droit constitutionnel protégé par l'article 23 de la Charte. Cela signifie que nos structures, notre gouvernance et nos approches ne peuvent pas être traités comme une simple variation du système anglophone.

Or, plusieurs éléments de la loi 101 soulèvent les préoccupations importantes. Premièrement, la disparition de la Commission des langues d'enseignement de l'Ontario : même si la Commission des langues d'enseignement de l'Ontario était peu visible publiquement, elle jouait un rôle de rempart discret mais crucial pour la protection de l'éducation en français en contexte minoritaire. Sa disparition affaiblit concrètement les garanties institutionnelles qui soutiennent l'accès équitable à l'éducation en français en Ontario.

Deuxièmement, la centralisation accrue des décisions : dans les communautés francophones, l'école est bien plus qu'un lieu d'apprentissage; c'est un pilier de la vitalité culturelle et communautaire. Des décisions prises de façon centralisée risquent de ne pas refléter—

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

M. Dany Dumont: —les réalités locales.

Troisièmement, les changements notés de gouvernance et de relations de travail nous inquiètent puisque le projet de loi introduit des modèles différents entre les systèmes anglophone et francophone. Cela crée une asymétrie qui ajoute de la complexité, fragilise la stabilité et ouvre la

porte à une pression future vers une harmonisation structurelle. Et soyons clair : une telle harmonisation serait incompatible avec les droits des communautés francophones. Nous avons nos besoins d'approche adaptée enracinée dans la réalité linguistique et culturelle.

En conclusion, l'ADFO reconnaît l'intention du gouvernement de moderniser le système, mais nous croyons fermement que la modernisation ne doit jamais se faire au détriment des fondements de l'éducation de langue française. C'est pourquoi nous recommandons la mise en place d'une structure consultative permanente pour l'éducation francophone, la reconnaissance explicite du caractère distinct constitutionnel des conseils scolaires francophones et l'engagement—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much for your presentation, sir.

We will now go to the Ontario Autism Coalition. Please state your name for the Hansard and you may begin.

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Kate Dudley-Logue, and I am vice-president of community outreach with the Ontario Autism Coalition. If you are unfamiliar with the OAC, we are a grassroots organization that represents a membership of almost 35,000 families, caregivers and autistic individuals.

I would like to discuss the potential impacts of Bill 101 in relation to students with special education needs and their families.

Oddly, Bill 101 doesn't mention special education—not even once. There's nothing in this bill that will make accessing supports easier for students with disabilities. There's nothing in this legislation that will make schools safer for these students. And there is nothing in there that is addressing the crisis of exclusions and modified schedules that are being enforced on students with special education needs. This has become normalized throughout this province.

The OAC is in its second year of collecting data from families whose children are navigating the special education system in Ontario. Our now annual report will be released this Wednesday, but I would like to spend a few minutes discussing some of our key findings.

Families from 64 school boards across the province completed our survey, sharing their child's experiences navigating special education during the 2024-25 school year. The findings show a system that is failing disabled students and placing unsustainable pressure on families, educators, school boards and communities.

Our data showed that 26% of disabled students were placed on modified schedules at some point in the school year. This means that these students were not attending school for full days—in fact, many of them were spending maybe an hour to two hours at school a day. With over 362,000 students with special education needs in Ontario schools, 26% represents over 94,000 students. The number one reason for students being put on modified schedules was that the schools lacked the resources to support the student safely.

Some 33% of disabled students are experiencing some form of exclusion. This 33% represents over 119,000 students who are frequently being sent home or are left out of parts of their school day due to lack of resources.

And 6% of disabled students are not in school at all. They're either being fully excluded or their family has given up and pulled them out due to safety concerns or an inability to advocate for meaningful access. This 6% represents over 21,000 students who should be in school but do not attend at all.

Bill 101 puts a great deal of emphasis on attendance. In fact, Minister Calandra is painting a picture that declining attendance is affecting classroom learning. Meanwhile, disabled students who want to be in school are being told they can't be, mainly due to lack of resources. Why are we not sounding the alarm on this? And why are we not looking at the reasons students aren't in school and addressing them head-on?

Exclusions don't just harm disabled students; they destabilize entire families. How are families supposed to work when their kids cannot attend school? Just today, a story in the Ottawa Citizen highlights a family pushed into homelessness, now living in a shelter, after their child was limited to just two hours of school per day due to a lack of resources. I ask again, why is Bill 101 not addressing this?

As you can see, families of students living with disabilities have to do a tremendous amount of advocacy. This comes at an extreme cost to families with already challenging demands being placed on them.

The OAC's data showed that 29% of students with special education needs required their family to engage with their trustee at least once during the school year in order to advocate for the needs of their child in schools. This represents more than 102,000 points of contact with trustees.

While we are pleased that the changes in governance structure indicated in Bill 101 do not eliminate democratically elected trustees, it is deeply troubling that much of our trustees' powers will now be shifted to the ministry.

As of today, eight Ontario school boards are under direct ministry supervision, with elected trustees sidelined. We can tell you unequivocally from what we hear in our community that access to safe and meaningful education for students with disabilities has not improved at these eight school boards; in fact, it has gotten much worse. Not only have many of these school boards overturned decisions previously made by trustees that protect what little special education supports and programming were already in place, but barriers and an extreme lack of transparency are leaving parents at these boards with nowhere to turn. The minister's decision to stop live-streaming SEAC meetings is a great example. We're creating barriers that are making it more and more difficult for parents to have voices in their children's education. And this should be a warning sign to all school boards as to what they may face under Bill 101.

1530

We are recommending that the government engage in real consultation before moving forward with Bill 101.

Families, students and educators should be at the forefront of decisions that affect our education system, and that is not what is happening here.

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

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: Removing trustees' decision-making powers must be scrapped from this bill. Democracy must be kept in place at our school boards so that families can have a voice.

This government needs to address our deteriorating special education system. Commitment to even collecting data on exclusions and analyzing the issue would be a good first step towards acknowledging the lack of supports and how we are increasingly underserving our most vulnerable students. Bill 101 certainly does none of the above. Thank you.

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

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you so much to all of the witnesses for being here this afternoon. I wish I had a lot more time to ask questions.

Kate, I'm going to start with you. Was the Ontario Autism Coalition consulted on this legislation?

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: No, not at all.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And do you think that parents of children with disabilities have a pretty good grasp of what's happening in our schools and should be included in any conversation about how we're going to support and protect student achievement in Ontario?

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: One hundred per cent. Families of children with disabilities have to engage with their school boards, with their educators, with supervisors, superintendents. It's probably well beyond more than your typical parent would have to engage. Most parents are very, very involved; they have to be, because they're constantly fighting for supports.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: When the minister was here this morning, I asked him about the statistics that the OAC has provided about the number of kids who are excluded—that there are more than 20,000 children every day who aren't allowed to attend school at all, and then tens of thousands of kids who are only attending for part of the school day, sometimes as little as one hour—and the minister's response was, "We'll exempt those kids from the attendance being included in the grade." As a parent of kids with disabilities, is that reassuring to you?

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: No, not at all. And how kind of him for exempting them from an attendance-incentivized issue when these kids are not being allowed to be in school. So it would be disgraceful if that was held against them, when they're being told they can't be there. These are kids who want to be there.

Last week, I spoke with a family whose child was allowed to be at school for 40 minutes a day. She had to pick her kid up every day, with her kid crying because her child did not want to leave. The school didn't have an EA to support this child for more than 40 minutes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The minister would not commit this morning to filling that \$850-million funding shortfall, which—we know even that level of funding isn't enough to allow our kids to be at school every day. But school boards are having to pull funds from elsewhere or cut specialized class placements and EAs in order to try to maintain that \$850-million shortfall. He wouldn't commit to eliminating that or any new funding.

As you mentioned, there's nothing in this bill about student safety, about student supports, about full attendance.

So do you find it concerning that the bill does give the Minister of Education sweeping immunity and liability protections from the consequences of his own actions?

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: One hundred per cent. As I was discussing in my remarks, the situation at the school boards that are currently under supervision has only deteriorated since last summer, when that all started. We're not seeing an increase in supports. We're not seeing an increase in specialized classrooms. We're actually seeing cuts happening. And they're happening more at the school boards under supervision than we're seeing in other school boards. So this can only leave us with the realization that moving forward with Bill 101 would mean a tremendous amount of cuts towards special education.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You raise a really good point, because these new CEOs are going to be a lot like the supervisors. They're not accountable to the people in the community. Only the Minister of Education can fire them—which is just like the supervisors. They're going to be people with business or financial backgrounds, not people with educational experience or qualifications.

The trustees will still be there, and they can pick up the phone, call a superintendent, call a principal, mediate a conversation between parents and educators, but they won't be able to come to the table with systemic solutions anymore.

The CEO can rule a motion out of order. They can prevent trustees from debating it. They can refuse to include something in the budget. And if the trustees don't pass the budget, they can just turn to the minister for approval.

So when you mentioned just how much parents of kids with disabilities depend on their trustees—what does that loss of advocacy at the board table mean for kids with disabilities and their families?

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: It's really alarming. I'll use the example of Ottawa—and I know you know this quite well.

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

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: Last year, prior to being put under supervision, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board was trying to implement a new elementary program review that was going to eliminate 39 special education classrooms. The trustees did a tremendous amount of listening; they did town halls, meetings with individual parents, meetings with groups of parents. They finally came to the conclusion, after listening to these parents, that this would

be very detrimental to these students, and they voted against it.

Moving forward, under Bill 101, trustees aren't going to have the power to say no to things that are harmful to the students and the families they represent. That's a real problem. We're losing our democracy in schools.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What we've seen in the OCDSB is that the supervisor is now cutting those specialized class placements that the trustees protected after listening to parents, but parents have no mechanism to hold the supervisor accountable for that decision.

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: That's right.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: In fact, the supervisor did not provide any clarity on what is happening until I reached out to him—

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

We'll now move on to the third party. I recognize MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank everyone for being here today.

I want to start with Kate. We know each other, so we'll use first names.

We had the minister in front of us here this morning, and what I asked him was about absenteeism—not in relation to exclusions, but absenteeism, and what the top three reasons were. He couldn't answer my question. So—he gave an anecdotal answer, I should say. So they fundamentally don't understand why it's happening. It's hard to solve a problem if you don't fundamentally understand the root causes of it.

But one of the things—and I mentioned it this morning—is that special education is starved. Trustees and boards have had to find \$850 million that's not allocated for that. That translates into schools not being safe places, but it also translates into people's everyday lives with their children. What they're experiencing is creating a lot of hardship, as you described.

I do not see how Bill 101 is going to get one child who's not getting the help they need the help that they need.

I don't know if you want to add anything to that.

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: Yes, I will.

You touch on a good point about absenteeism. The irony, that this ministry is making such a big deal about attendance while telling—17% of the student body that is experiencing being told that they can't attend school. There's some real irony here.

Beyond that, for students with special education needs who are attending school full-time—they're still dealing with a real lacking of support, and it can often, as they age, turn into mental health issues. When they're not being supported properly, they're feeling frustration, they're falling behind, and that can lead to absenteeism.

Beyond the irony of students being excluded, we've now got families of children with special education needs who are feeling tremendous anxiety that their kids are going to be punished for not being at school, when the system isn't creating an environment that is supporting them well enough to be there successfully.

So it's a real problem that we're making such a big deal about this.

Mr. John Fraser: It is a real challenge.

I do know that the OAC has been advocating for more direct services, more support. And now we have a policy of inclusion in the classroom, which is good, and it's important. But what is happening—the supports aren't there for kids.

I gave an example of Marigold, a student in my riding. She's six years old—been there for two years, had an assessment, needs services and not getting them. Two years, when you're six years old, is a really long time.

1540

I know that many of the families you work with and represent have a lot of concerns about their children falling further behind.

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: I didn't write about this in my notes, but the Ontario Autism Program, as we all know, has a wait-list of close to 70,000 kids now who are waiting for more than five years to access therapies and services that could help them be so much more successful at school. The challenges that they face in school are amplified by the fact that they're not accessing therapy. So we're not helping them outside of school, while we're cutting the services that are in school, and it's creating—I often use the terminology “the perfect storm.”

How are these kids going to have the opportunity to develop skills to be successful in school, having not received the therapy that they need? And why are we downloading that onto educators? Educators are not therapists.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you.

How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute and 18 seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay.

Mr. Knight and Ms. Lance, thank you very much for your presentation.

I've been working in an office 27 years—it's my office now, but it wasn't. Many families would come with the special education issues that you're talking about, and I worked with them, through the trustees.

The points that you make about big systems being responsive to people is a really important thing. I've seen it in health care. It's systemic.

One of the things that was interesting in this bill is that there's kind of a blanket liability at the centre of this, which is a big part of this bill. I don't see how that squares with the concerns that you're raising, which are valid. The government is doing something different, which is saying, “We have no accountability on this.” That's what they're saying.

So I don't know if you have any thoughts on that. I know there's not much time. Sorry.

Mr. Anwar Knight: I would just say, accountability and transparency is the great equalizer, at the end of the day. So that is a step in the right direction. When you have—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your comments. I'm going to have to cut you off there and go to the independent member for three minutes.

I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I appreciate all of you for clearing your schedules and coming down here and taking time to represent your members and your families and your communities.

I'd like to start with the Ontario Principals' Council.

Having worked in school as recently as 2023—the role of a principal has dramatically changed. I feel like they're magicians who are trying to plug all the gaps in the dam we see—and this isn't just this government. We know society has changed and the way we raise children has changed—and the needs that that causes, when it comes to the Internet and social media and the impact it has on kids and their well-being.

Do you see any of those needs being addressed by this bill?

Mr. Jeff Maharaj: I'll start by saying no. It comes very short of addressing some of the root causes of the issues we're seeing in schools right now. We have a lot of students who are dysregulated. We have a lot of students who are in need of supports, and this bill doesn't address the fact that they don't exist in schools as yet.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, and from my work with young people—co-regulation and teaching those skills involves a lot of attention from caring adults, and we know that, as we have more crowded classrooms, that's harder and harder to find.

In my research and work as an attendance counsellor, I know that the majority of kids who miss school because of ACEs—that's adverse childhood experiences trauma. We know that statistics are higher for kids who come from low-income households, kids who are facing mental health challenges, kids who need special education supports, and kids who are racialized—so Black, Indigenous, and racialized students.

Do you see written exams and marks for attendance as helping these students attend school more regularly?

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

Mr. Jeff Maharaj: No. As I mentioned before, there is no need for standardized exams across the board.

What we have done over the last few years is try to tailor our education system so that we are requiring the skills from certain groups of kids. But we need to make sure that we are flexible in what we're doing with our students. We need to make sure that we're offering opportunities for success to all of our students. Again, this bill comes very short of putting those types of assurances into our system.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, and just to be clear, there is no evidence to support that using a punitive measure such as an attendance mark is effective in improving attendance outcomes.

We know that when kids attend school, they're more literate, they're more likely to graduate, and they're healthier and happier.

Thank you for your participation today.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I will now go to the government side. I'll recognize MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to all of today's presenters.

Essentially, Bill 101, at its core, is about strengthening transparency in governance and delivering a more consistent educational or learning experience for students.

My question is for Mr. Knight.

During your remarks, you recognized the need for more meaningful reforms and accountability and tightening discipline around governance.

Your organization website states something that I'm just going to share: Peel District School Board administrators lied, fabricated details and refused to co-operate with Peel Regional Police. What did that experience reveal to you about how the PDSB treats parents?

Mr. Anwar Knight: I think it's not just my situation—I think there are many parents and many boards across this province who are defeated and deflated before they get anywhere, and I think the system is designed to keep parents in silos. It's designed to protect the system and not family members.

When I spoke as a delegate at the region of Peel council, asking all levels of leadership that safety in our schools be a priority for everybody, the regional chair, on the record, stated—and he's also the chair of the Peel Regional Police board—that in many instances the Peel board acts like a foreign embassy; they answer to no one. That was on the record in council chambers. He went on to say that very often they do not follow protocols, and he was alluding to the local police school board protocol. So this is a systemic problem that must be addressed.

To develop a narrative to say that the school boards are doing their best—they are not. We have thousands and thousands of families who have signed our petition, and the stories that we are hearing—it will make you cry, what is happening behind closed doors.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I represent the riding of Burlington, and I have had similar experiences and have had parents in my office—quite a few of them, actually, just at the beginning of this year—who said the exact same thing about protecting the system. Your comments really align with what I'm hearing in my constituency office.

Based on your investigations, the Hold Schools Accountable Parent Network identified the Peel District School Board as the most violent school board in the province. Where were the elected trustees while all of this was unfolding?

Mr. Anwar Knight: Let me first state, that was from a news report from Global News, from the most recent data that they were able to obtain through an FOI—that it was the most violent school board in the province. I should qualify that the numbers are so not reported—those were the only ones that were reported, and many union leaders have spoken up publicly about that.

What was the second part of your question? I apologize.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Where were the elected trustees while all of this was going on? I'm assuming that you

would have interacted with them when you delegated to the school board. The regional chair was there. The police were involved.

Mr. Anwar Knight: Our trustee—we initially had several conversations, then at a certain point, she goes to dust. She has ignored us. We were in a room in the school addressing a parents' council, and she did not even look at me. I have to tell you, that is another recurring theme from families from across this province. This isn't about my story. How many cases have we documented, interviewed, looked at FOIs and other documents, where the trustee did not even respond?

A sexual assault in Hamilton—the trustee did not even respond to an email. This family formally notified the principal, the trustee, the superintendent, the director of education—this is now the grandparents, who were taking care of this incident with their granddaughter. Because the parents were teachers, they were afraid to go forward when their daughter was sexually assaulted, because of retaliation. This is their quote when they spoke to the associate director: “It was extremely unpleasant, unhelpful, rude, belligerent, accusatory and unsympathetic.”

1550

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

Mr. Anwar Knight: She actually questioned the victim's story, despite the fact there was a classroom of witnesses of the sexual assault that occurred.

That is what families are dealing with. That is a system that protects itself and does not protect our children.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have 44 seconds.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Okay. I'll pass the next question over to my colleague.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: How much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have 31 seconds.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Mr. Knight, I would like to thank you for your responses. I'd probably have to come back to ask you the question—but I do want to say I'm sorry for what you've been through.

I have two kids in school, and their safety is my number one priority as a parent, on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Anwar Knight: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the second round, and we'll go back to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Jeff, Ralph and Dany, my next question is for you. Were any of your organizations consulted before this bill was tabled?

Mr. Jeff Maharaj: I can say that OPC was not consulted.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And Dany?

M. Dany Dumont: La même chose pour nous : la consultation n'a pas été faite. On a été informé une fois que ça avait été fait.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And Ralph?

Mr. Ralph Sharples: We weren't consulted either.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Your principals are on the front lines of our education system every single day in our schools, dealing with the many challenges that there are.

Do you believe that the realities of what principals are experiencing should be taken into consideration if we're actually talking about protecting student achievement and supporting all of our students in the province?

Mr. Ralph Sharples: Absolutely. We're having to remember that we're privy to information that other groups aren't. Taking attendance, for example, and attaching a mark to that—oftentimes, teachers don't have the full picture because we're not allowed to share information. Sometimes it's a CAS issue, students not willing to disclose health issues, students with legal issues or home issues—and attaching something like a grade to attendance is unfair to those students.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I know your three organizations have surveyed principals across the province to ask about what's happening in our schools—the challenges around the increasing complexity of student needs; student safety and the rising problem of violence; greater demands on principals with regard to staffing, mental health, and academic support, which far too often, because of the other demands, ends up being the very last thing that you get to in the day. But at the end of the day, your members are liable for what happens in the school.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Education—who has cut more than \$6 billion in funding from our school system, who is giving himself sweeping new powers over education here but has not added a single cent to our schools or said he's going to do anything about class sizes, mental health, violence—is also giving himself sweeping immunity protections in this bill. Does that raise concerns for you?

Mr. Jeff Maharaj: For sure, it does.

With our survey data from our members—a lot of them are very concerned about the working conditions that they have right now. They're feeling overwhelmed by the work.

To hear that the minister is building in protections for himself and not protecting the people who are on the front lines—teachers, education workers, and principals—is very disheartening for all of us.

Dany?

M. Dany Dumont: Oui, je voudrais ajouter que sans les directions et les directions adjointes, je pense que la mise en oeuvre va être très difficile, puis ça va risquer d'échouer lorsqu'on n'a pas pris en considération de nous consulter puis de s'assurer aussi que les directions puissent continuer de jouer un rôle qui est pédagogique et non seulement un rôle qui est seulement administratif.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The new CEO model that the minister is implementing—these CEOs are going to be people with business or financial experience, not education experience. They are going to be completely unaccountable to the local community, including workers, because they can't be fired by trustees; they can only be fired by the Minister of Education. We're already seeing

what that is like in the eight boards that are under supervision.

Jeff and Ralph, I've spoken with your members in boards that are under supervision about the impact that's having on the work they're doing—when the person making the decisions is not accountable.

Do you have concerns about this new chief education officer, CEO, who's completely unaccountable to the local community and making all of the decisions in local schools?

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

Mr. Ralph Sharples: I referred to that a bit in my opening. The accountability, obviously, is a key factor. All of us have to be accountable to what's going on in schools, whether it's the principal, CEO, superintendents, or other staff. I think it's that model, though, of putting the financial ahead of the pedagogic that's troublesome.

Jeff?

Mr. Jeff Maharaj: I agree. I would say that I'm very concerned about the CEO model. I think putting a business application into education is not something that's going to be successful—not to mention a lot of boards already have someone who's on staff, usually a superintendent of sorts, who has the business background, who has the capacity to analyze finances.

Really, a school board should be led by an educator—a person with a background in education, who understands classrooms and understands leadership.

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

We'll now go to the third party. I recognize MPP Collard.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Monsieur Dumont, vous n'avez pas vraiment eu le temps de compléter votre présentation, et j'aimerais que vous nous disiez quels sont les principaux défis dans nos écoles francophones que le ministre devrait adresser, et quelles sont vos préoccupations par rapport au projet de loi qui est devant nous?

M. Dany Dumont: Si on harmonise les ressources, on harmonise les examens, je pense que les communautés minoritaires francophones vont être affectées. C'est important de toujours conserver la culture, les valeurs qui existent dans certaines communautés. Je veux dire, Ottawa n'est pas le nord de l'Ontario ou le sud de l'Ontario, donc ça, ça me fait peur un petit peu. Il faut être en mesure de reconnaître le caractère distinct puis constitutionnel des conseils francophones.

J'ai aussi une crainte d'avoir deux systèmes qui sont différents pour les anglophones et les francophones. Ça peut pousser le gouvernement de peut-être nous forcer à adopter cette gouvernance qui, pour nous, serait complètement incompatible avec les droits des communautés francophones.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Donc, quels sont nos défis dans nos écoles présentement? Sur quoi est-ce qu'on devrait être en train de travailler pour aider nos étudiants?

M. Dany Dumont: Le rôle des directions, la surcharge de travail : les directions n'ont plus le temps de faire du leadership pédagogique comme c'était auparavant. Avec

l'arrivée de la pandémie, il y a bien des choses qui ont changé. L'arrivée des cellulaires dans les écoles où maintenant les directions sont disponibles 24/7—et les périodes d'été, on doit aussi être disponible. Donc c'est difficile pour nous parce qu'on joue seulement un rôle administratif et non un rôle pédagogique.

Puis ça, ça va nuire : ça nuit aux enseignants et ça nuit à la réussite des élèves. Ce serait important de diminuer, peut-être, ce rôle administratif pour nous permettre d'être en classe, d'accompagner les enseignants puis d'être là aussi pour accompagner les élèves.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci.

I'm going to pass over the time to MPP Fraser.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I just want to thank the Ontario Principals' Council for being here today and for the work that you do. Principals are really important in schools. I can go into a school—and I've been to a few—and I can tell what the principal is like. A great principal makes for a great school. We used to say the same thing in the grocery business, when we'd know what kind of manager there was in the store.

The pressure that's on principals right now is different from when I went to school, and probably just about everybody in this room.

I told the story earlier today about my neighbour around the corner who described a 12-year-old girl throwing a chair at him in his office, and then he said, "Just another day." I ran into him about two months later, and he described another incident to me where a 12-year-old boy was going after an eight-year-old girl and he got in between. He got hit about 20 times, and then a colleague stepped in to intervene and ended up with a concussion. So, like I say, we don't have a context for that, in terms of, we didn't see that. That wasn't something that was happening in our schools.

So there's something going on—if you could all take a chance to comment on that. I think it's taking an increasing part of people's days to manage behaviours and safety in schools.

1600

Mr. Ralph Sharples: I've been in the role for about 19 years, and I've seen dramatic changes. Certainly, when I was in school, the role was very different.

We have shared with the different parties the survey data that we've taken from our members regarding workplace violence. And 79% of our members from all three associations have experienced violence or witnessed threats of violence by a student.

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

Mr. Ralph Sharples: The level of violence is—we're seeing close to three quarters of our members recognizing or concerned that it's interfering with learning and that it's something that's not going away. It's a grave concern.

Ultimately, if we want kids attending, they need to be—first, are they safe? Are they happy? Are they learning? And then they're attending. So we need to make sure that

we're concentrating on all those issues from elementary through.

I'll pass it to my colleagues.

M. Dany Dumont: J'aimerais rajouter : oui, absolument, il y a de la violence dans les écoles, mais la spécialisation d'enfance en difficulté, c'est problématique parce que les services ont diminué puis ils continuent de diminuer. Ce sont des services qui sont essentiels. Les problèmes de santé mentale—aussi, il y a un manque de service puis—

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

We'll now move on to the independent party for three minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to direct my questions to Kate from the Ontario Autism Coalition.

Last year, the government underspent, so it had \$500 million more to spend in our schools. You talked about almost 70,000 kids on the autism wait-list. What do you think the families would do with that money if they had access to the money that was meant to help kids?

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: Well, we certainly need to get that wait-list moving. There's no such thing as early intervention in this province anymore for children with autism. They wait, often, two to three years to get a diagnosis, and then they're put on a wait-list that's a minimum of five years long. The \$500 million could go a long way for getting that moving and expanding capacity so that there are more service providers. It could also go a long way in our schools, to provide more EAs to give supports.

So, yes, it's alarming that there's money there that's not being spent.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I akin this to kind of like the emergency room—it's like all the societal needs that go left unmet by other ministries, whether it's housing and food and, in this case, therapies and supports for kids to have tools in their tool box so they can arrive at school ready to learn.

Can you speak a little bit about kindergarten? I hear that even our principals are doing a lot of diaper changes, because we don't have that support to help kids with toileting. We end up with kindergarten classrooms where kids are showing up and we don't know about the needs that they have. Tell us what we could do differently that this bill doesn't cover to help kids start kindergarten with tools in their tool box so that they have what they need to function in that environment.

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: Certainly, any child who's autistic and who has been diagnosed before kindergarten will not have been accessing therapy yet. They may have accessed some of the other pillars in the Ontario Autism Program, but not the core clinical funding that provides them one-on-one therapy.

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

Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue: So, yes, they're arriving in kindergarten, and they haven't had an opportunity to develop a lot of skills—one of them might be toileting;

others, routine-following, communication levels, being able to manoeuvre socially with peers.

What we're seeing a lot in kindergarten is—again, we're back at exclusions. There are schools that, before even meeting the child, and just hearing from the parent upon registration that the child is autistic and has a level of needs that will require more support—they're immediately being put on modified schedules before the child has even had an opportunity to present whether they can make it through a school day. Schools are really at a point where this is becoming normalized. These kids are not going to be in school full-time.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What I hear from families is that it creates an enormous amount of strain: stress on a marriage, on the mental health and well-being of parents who are left questioning and dealing with everything on their own—let alone financial, when somebody has to abandon work—

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

We'll now go to the government side, and I recognize MPP Firin.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Through you, Chair: My question is for Mr. Knight.

Mr. Knight, it's my first question today. I've sat here since 10 a.m., and I've listened to a lot of the different presenters.

I heard from a school trustee today who talked about the dysfunctions at the Toronto District School Board, which is where my two daughters go. Prior to running, my eldest daughter—I took her to school almost every day for the past seven years. So I have personally witnessed some of the dysfunctions myself. Listening here today—one of the associate directors also talked about some of those dysfunctions. She talked about trustees not taking directives from the Ministry of Education and not following procedures.

I heard one of the association presidents also talk about how the Toronto District School Board was on the cusp of fixing class sizes—an issue they couldn't fix for the past two decades. But right before this bill came forward, they were miraculously going to solve that.

I also did not hear any solutions much of today. I did not hear any ideas on how some of these dysfunctions that are actually a reality that I witnessed myself—how they would be addressed.

Do you think this bill helps with some of the solutions, and why do you think that is?

Mr. Anwar Knight: I certainly do—and thank you for the question.

I circle back to accountability and transparency; that is going to be the grounding plate. What that will do is it also validates every school community—because it needs to rebuild the trust in a school community. The trust has been eroded across this province.

Once a parent wants to engage and has an incident, whether it's violence, whether it's academic, whether it's maybe just something that's going on in a particular school, if they are validated and they can see, "Oh, this is

the process that's happening," that rebuilds the trust and that in itself starts to support the system back up.

I think this is the real problem—there's a real disconnect. And I'm going to be quite frank with you: The narrative of funding, funding, funding as if it's just the magic bullet is dishonest. Funding, 100%, is important, and it should be brought in where it's needed, but if there's no accountability for where that money goes, it's not going to resolve the issue.

When you talk, like some of our other guests, about the violence, and there's a lack of support—another contributing member on our team was the former chief of security for one of the largest school boards in the GTA for 30 years. He called it the "why bother" syndrome. What happens is that teachers now are giving up on reporting violence or doing something, because they're not supported by the principal—I'm sure there are some instances where they get support—and then there's no follow-through from the school board. Teachers are saying, "I'm done. I'm not going to engage anymore because I'm not going to get support if there's a violent incident."

I had a teacher, just on Thursday, email me. A grade 1 student brought a seven-inch serrated knife, with the intention of stabbing another student. She wants to speak to me because there were zero consequences. I realize there's probably a lot in there. But the fact that a weapon was brought to school and nothing will be done, and if she goes to the principal, nothing will be done—that is a severe disconnect.

This bill will start to prioritize accountability, transparency, and I think that is what parents want at this point.

When you talk about lack of resources for special education—100%. But the union rep from OPSEU 2100, in a recent news interview, stated—and this is for the PDSB: "We've seen an increase in middle- and upper-management positions, but this board still cuts EAs and early childhood supports, so students are not being supervised anymore." So, on one hand, the board has money to give to middle management and upper management positions, but they're starving the front lines. And that is a story that needs to be told.

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

Mr. John Jordan: My question is for HSA as well.

You did an audit of 60 Ontario school boards and found out that more than half had no system for reporting bullying. I'm wondering if you can comment on how this reflects on the board's accountability to the students and the parents in cases like this.

Ms. Elizabeth Lance: What was done was looking at every single one of the policies that were publicly available and—if you can't find something, then you can't report it. Specifically, there were gaps around parents' ability to report bullying. How do you address a problem if you can't report it? How do you put resources towards a problem if you can't report it?

There's a complex interplay at the senior level between the trustees and the current directors of education. Who is actually responsible? And it is laid out—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I'm sorry to cut you off, but thank you.

I would like to thank all the presenters who came in today.

We're going to have a five-minute break, so I would like everyone back at 4:16 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1611 to 1616.

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR
ACCESSIBILITY FOR ONTARIANS WITH
DISABILITIES ACT ALLIANCE
ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL
TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We're back in session.

We'll start off with University of Windsor. You have the floor for seven minutes. Please state your name for the Hansard, and we will begin now.

Ms. Judy Bornais: My name is Judy Bornais. I am nursing faculty and currently serving as the associate vice-president external at the University of Windsor.

Most people don't know—although I see MPP Leardi here, so I know he does know—that the University of Windsor is Ontario's most regionally focused university in the province, with approximately 75% of our students coming from Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent. We are critical to our region locally, and we have a national and international impact. Windsor-Essex is the start of Ontario and the start of Canada. We are not just a university in Windsor-Essex; we are Windsor-Essex university. Our graduates are our region's engineers, nurses, health care providers, social workers, lawyers, future police officers, business leaders, and teachers. The teachers we train shape our children's futures.

So I am here today to speak in support of the teacher education provisions in Bill 101, Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026.

The University of Windsor thanks Minister Quinn and Minister Calandra for their commitment to investing in teacher education across Ontario. The \$152-million investment and 40,000 new seats represent a significant step for the sector. We're grateful that the government has recognized the importance of training the next generation of educators.

My focus today is on the section of Bill 101 that looks to move to a 12-month bachelor of education program and what it will mean for our institutions, our students, our region and our Ontario classrooms. There are four key reasons our institutions see this change in teachers' education as a positive step for Ontario and students:

(1) The University of Windsor welcomes changes that would reduce financial costs for aspiring teachers. Candidates will save a term of tuition, plus an additional semester of living expenses. For a student weighing whether they can afford to enter the profession, this is not a trivial number.

(2) The proposed model looks to strengthen and standardize practicum which is central to teacher candidates'

development. This emphasis is aligned with the University of Windsor's approach of integrating strong pedagogical in-class learning with high-quality, hands-on experiential learning for our students. Our faculty of education looks forward to working with the government to identify practicum lengths, maintaining practicum requirements proportional to program length.

(3) We acknowledge this change requires expanded practicum supports and incentives. The province has committed \$16.8 million to support the associate teachers who mentor teacher candidates in their classrooms with honorariums. This commitment will help in supporting the effective supervision and assessment of education students' practicum competencies. Current research supports the view that a high-quality practicum, focused on mentorship and reflective practice, matters more for teacher preparation than program length alone.

(4) It gets qualified teachers into classrooms faster, at a time when Ontario needs them. We have an aging teaching workforce, with nearly 7,800 retirements expected by 2030-31, and real shortages in French, technological education, and in northern and rural communities.

Together, we feel these are student-centred changes, and combined with the investment of \$150 million specifically for teacher education programs, 4,000 additional seats, and a 27% increase in per-student funding for these programs, we feel the investment gives the teacher education sector a solid foundation.

Of course, a change of this scale requires careful implementation. The expertise of faculties of education across the province will be essential in shaping the details of implementation. Curriculum redesign, practicum restructuring, support for students currently enrolled in the two-year model, those who applied for the program for fall 2026 and in concurrent education programs, along with adequate institutional planning time and transition funding are important for the university. We look forward to advancing this work with the government and our sector partners.

The university has a proud history of preparing outstanding teachers for classrooms across southwestern Ontario and beyond. We're committed to ensuring that teachers who graduate from our program continue to be fully prepared to shape the minds of generations to come.

As the ministry moves towards implementation, the University of Windsor is ready to be a collaborative and constructive partner. Our faculty of education will bring its expertise to the table and continue to work with the province and education sector in this transition.

We share the ministry's goal, and the goal of probably every one of us sitting here at this committee: to give our teacher candidates the best education possible so they can shape the minds of our K-to-12 students in positive ways for generations to come.

We look forward to working with the ministry, the Ontario College of Teachers, our numerous sector partners, local school boards, and those of you who are here today to implement these changes thoughtfully and to implement them well.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I welcome the committee's questions.

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

Committee members and witnesses, for this panel, please identify yourself each time before you begin to speak. The reason for this is to help accommodate a witness who is present today. Thank you.

We will now go to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. David, you have the floor.

Mr. David Lepofsky: My name is David Lepofsky. I'm speaking as chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. I also draw upon my experience for several years as the chair of the Toronto District School Board's special education advisory committee.

Bill 101 is a disaster for students with disabilities and their parents. It does nothing—nothing—to make things better. It does lots risking that it will make things worse.

Listen to the whole day you've heard today, of your only day of hearings. Parents' voices—we're a sideshow. We're a small minority of who was allowed to speak here. Listen to the arguments that were made in support of this bill—"Oh, it's all about CEOs," and all that kind of stuff. What they were talking about had no relationship with the world we live in. I daresay a parent, a student or a teacher listening to this would say, "Are they talking about schools at all?" This is, respectfully, ridiculous. But it gets worse.

Premier Ford is known to all of us as the guy who campaigned as the champion to cut red tape and get rid of bureaucracy. Well, this bill injects the greatest load of provincial red tape and bloated bureaucracy in our school system in our lifetimes. Look at the myriad of regulations by the minister, regulations by the cabinet, directives by the minister, guidelines that are binding by the minister, policies by the minister, decisions where you've got to get the approval of the minister, or where, if the director of education isn't happy with the trustees, they can go to the minister. This is called bureaucracy soup.

If you pile it all up—the minister was asked today, "Well, what's it going to cost?" He said, "It won't cost school boards anything." The reality is for school boards to figure out what all these rules are, and, of course, once they're made, they could be changing and they don't have to be consulted—figure out what they've got to do and where they've got to get permission, and then getting permission or trying to get permission from the minister. Have you ever tried to get a decision out of a minister's office? I worked in the Ontario public service for 33 years. Respectfully, there are times you could die of old age—and it has nothing to do with which of your parties is in power. Everything here is decisions of the minister. Our kids will be graduating before their rights in kindergarten may get decided.

Then you've got to have a phalanx of bureaucrats in the minister's office to come up with all the forms and then read all the applications from 72 school boards when they need to get directions on all of these things. That's what will happen when you're trying to have one minister at Queen's Park essentially running the entire system. It's going to be a ton of bureaucracy. It's going to cost a whole

lot more. It's going to cause uncertainty and chaos. And it's going to be really slow.

As a community advocate, if I go to any of your parties and say, "We want to propose a new piece of legislation"—any of you, left, right, centre, whatever—you ask two questions. "What is it going to cost? This hasn't been costed." We were told this morning that it doesn't cost these school boards. Well, folks—oh, man—it's going to cost. Since we've heard there's no new money for it, we know where that money is going to come from: the classroom. Is that putting student achievement first—draining underfunded classrooms to fund more red tape and bureaucracy? I don't think so. The second question that any of you would ask—left, right, or centre—is, "You need a new law? Well, isn't there a law that can do this?" Here's the thing: Before Bill 101 came forward as a means to solve a problem that we were told exists, we got a 300-plus-page Education Act that gives tons of power to the minister. Then, three years ago, we got Bill 98, which gave them more power. And then, last fall, we got Bill 33 that gave them even more power. There is no indication here that the minister has tried to use, much less exhaust, those powers to solve problems. Therefore, he's got to come through with this kind of bulldozer legislation.

Just take the issue of absenteeism. Where's the proof that the minister tried fixing this for eight years with all the powers he's got? I don't see any. Well, I don't see anything, but that's apart from the—okay. But the reality is—like, come on. The way they go about it is bizarre: "So we're going to come up with a rule that requires them to show up." That is a form of public policy—if we translated it to medicine, it would go like this: "How are we going to treat somebody with stomach flu? We're going to put duct tape over their mouth and nose." It makes the apparent symptom go away—not comfortably—but it doesn't solve the problem at all.

Then the question comes: "Well, what about students with special education needs?" Afterwards, the minister said, "Oh, we'll exempt them. So all we've got to do is make them ask for their exemptions." Parents of kids with disabilities have tons on our plates, much less trying to go find out, go through a bureaucracy now to get an exemption from that.

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

Mr. David Lepofsky: I'm going to give you one more problem that you've got to understand: If you tell kids with disabilities that they don't have to meet the mandatory attendance requirement but the other kids do, you have now gifted a brand new source of bullying. And I thought that was a problem we want to solve.

We've got tons of recommendations, and I'd love to talk to you in my question-and-answer about how you fix this.

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

We will now go on to the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. Please say your name for the Hansard, and you may begin.

Mr. Michael Bellmore: My name is Michael Bellmore, and I'm honoured to be the president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. I'm joined today by our executive director, Mr. Patrick Daly.

We're truly grateful to have the opportunity to share with you our concerns and recommendations on Bill 101, Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026. For details, please refer to our written submission that was handed out prior to this particular session.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association was founded in 1930. We represent the 237 locally elected Catholic school trustees in the province. These faith-filled leaders serve on the 29 English-language Catholic school boards throughout our province. Collectively, our boards employ over 59,000 dedicated system and school leaders, teachers and support staff. We operate over 1,320 Catholic elementary and secondary schools, and we represent the Ontario Catholic ratepayers. We are entrusted with the governance of Christ-centred school systems that provide excellence in Catholic education to almost 600,000 junior-kindergarten-to-grade-12 students and tens of thousands of adults in their continuing education centres.

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Throughout our history, our association has taken great pride in the collaborative and effective partnerships that we have enjoyed with representatives of each of Ontario's political parties, Ministers of Education, Ministry of Education officials and provincial education association partners.

It is in this spirit we appear before you today deeply concerned about the harm Bill 101 will cause to Ontario's internationally recognized publicly funded education system.

In analyzing any and all proposed legislation, regulations or guidelines, we do so through the lens to which it fully represents the constitutional and denominational rights of the Catholic school boards, including all of the necessary responsibilities of locally elected Catholic school trustees; promotes academic excellence and student faith formation and well-being; maintains Catholic school boards as the employer of the staff within their Catholic school system; maintains the provincial school trustee association, OCSTA, as the legal bargaining agency of the school boards within their respective school system; and advances the interests of students, parents and Catholic ratepayers.

Mr. Chair and committee members, we respectfully suggest to you that Bill 101, as currently drafted, fails to meet each of these essential principles.

I invite Mr. Daly to comment further.

Mr. Patrick Daly: My name is Patrick Daly.

Further to President Bellmore's comments, we are strongly recommending that Bill 101 be withdrawn or, in the alternative, any regulations, directives or guidelines from it be delayed until fulsome and structured consultation has taken place with regard to the potential impacts on students, constitutional and denominational rights, and the cost to taxpayers.

With regard to cost to taxpayers, we fully agree with and endorse David's comments and those put forward by other associations that without considerable discussion and amendments, the bill, as written, threatens to substantially increase red tape, bureaucracy and place additional financial burdens on school boards.

We say that, Mr. Chair, fully endorsing and welcoming conversations to further strengthen school board fiscal responsibilities, accountability and transportation.

While time will not permit us to comment on all the areas of concern, we would like to do so on one extremely important and pressing matter.

As currently drafted, the legislation identifies/names the Council of Ontario Directors of Education as the employer bargaining agency for all English school boards. By removing OCSTA from this role, it arguably contravenes section 93(1) of the Constitution Act, 1867, by prejudicially affecting the denominational rights of Catholics in Ontario. As well, it seriously risks disrupting the provincial collective bargaining process and, as a result, disrupts student learning.

The OCSTA has worked collaboratively with representatives of other trustee associations, our union partners and the crown in each round of provincial negotiations since the establishment of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. We have been consulting with our member boards and planning for the upcoming round of bargaining, which will begin in just over a month, and we've been planning for almost a year now.

While convinced that Bill 101 in its entirety should be withdrawn or delayed until fulsome consultation has taken place, we urge that immediate action to maintain the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association as the legal bargaining agent of Ontario's 29 Catholic school boards take place and as well, our friends, the Ontario public school boards, remain the bargaining agency for all English public school boards.

In the time remaining, Mr. Chair and committee members, I would just like to comment on MPP Pasma's good question earlier about the benefits of membership in a trustee association. There are numerous advantages—one clear and important one: economies of scale. We're able to support boards in the advocacy—

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

Mr. Patrick Daly: —and the protection and promotion of Catholic education, on behalf of 29 boards. We're involved in natural gas consortium purchases through the OESC. We established Catholic Virtual Ontario, an entity that has created over 130 online learning courses for students in Catholic schools throughout Ontario, saving the taxpayers of this province significant amounts of money. As well, we provide valuable and, I would say, constitutionally protected professional development and faith-formation opportunities for staff.

With that, Mr. Chair, thank you for providing us with the opportunity to speak to you. We would be pleased to respond to any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the third party. I recognize MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Thanks to everyone who is here today for the last deputation of the day.

I'm going to start with Mr. Lepofsky. Thank you very much for your presentation. It was good that it came at the end of the day because I think it snapped us out of the end-of-the-day lull.

You expressed very clearly, I think, some of the challenges that are—I'm going to make a couple of comments, and then I'm going to let you tell me what you think we need to do.

(1) I think, if you want to point at anything about everything being run from a corner office somewhere in Queen's Park, all you have to look at is the minister hanging on to the EQAO results for two and a half months while educators needed it, because he wanted to look at it and study it—evidently, can't walk and chew gum.

(2) Absenteeism: I asked the minister this morning, "Can you tell me the three main causes of the increase in absenteeism in our schools?" I got an anecdotal answer: "It might be this here. It might be that there. We hear this." I don't understand how you think you're going to solve a problem if you don't understand the root causes of it.

I'll leave the floor to you.

Mr. David Lepofsky: Thank you.

(1) Because this is, by the minister's own statement, such a massive change, it should not be proclaimed enforced until at least 2030, to give school boards a chance to see all those regulations, all the policies, gear up, figure out what the heck is going on so we don't cause chaos. Even though the bill isn't enacted, the government can enact drafts.

(2) There should be an independent audit and a value-for-money audit by the Auditor General of this bill before it is proclaimed enforced, because telling us it's not going to cost anything, at least as far as school boards are concerned, just is not plausible.

(3) We propose that it's now completely unintelligible what the job of the trustee will be. I challenge our colleagues from the government to list for us what's the job of the trustee—what are their powers? The bill should be amended to clearly define it.

(4) Next, the bill should require the government to consult before it adopts regulations, guidelines and so on—they didn't on the bill. They didn't consult us. Now, cornering him in the hall here, the minister has agreed to talk to me. In fact, he agreed twice when I talked to him, and he said we'll meet soon. I'll see if I can take him up on that. But we need that built into the law here.

(5) We need a requirement that all of these new policies and regulations do not create any more barriers for students with disabilities—because bureaucrats create barriers.

(6) The bill should set a clear path for the eight boards under supervision to get back to local democracy by November 15 of this year so people can know what they can do. The minister can have power to override that, but can we have some clear benchmarks? Just saying they're

on the right path—i.e., his own supervisors are not on the right path—isn't good enough.

(7) Finally, the minister said we need to standardize; we have uneven practices in special education.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute, 55 seconds.

Mr. David Lepofsky: Here's a solution: The minister's predecessor received a report in January of 2022, four years ago, which was the final report under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act of the kindergarten-to-grade-12-standards development committee. The government promised to enact an accessibility standard for education—strong support for it. They're still, four years later, not doing it. They don't need new legislation; they just need to take the responsibility they now have and actually do it.

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Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. John Fraser: It's John Fraser, MPP for Ottawa South.

You mentioned earlier that you were the chair of SEAC, special education advisory committee at the Toronto District School Board.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'm trying to figure out how one child whose needs aren't being met—are going to be met by enacting this bill. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. David Lepofsky: Things have already gotten considerably worse at TDSB since the supervisor took over. He won't even come to our special education advisory committee meeting.

Two weeks ago, we had a public town hall that invited parents of kids with disabilities and special-ed needs to tell us what their problems were. He wouldn't even show up. It's on YouTube, not because he allowed it—in fact, the minister banned that—but because the Ontario Autism Coalition livestreamed it. You could watch it online, and 1,000 people already have.

We've heard about the need for more accountability. With the absence of trustees, with all their foibles—and I could list them—

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

We'll now move on to the independent for three minutes. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I appreciate you all coming today and taking time out of your busy schedules and sharing your expertise with the committee. I hope that we will learn from you and we will implement changes in this bill so that we can have a bill that measures twice and cuts once.

I'd like to start with Patrick.

Collective bargaining years are always pretty disruptive and stressful on your members and on your unions. It kind of boggles my mind that this is happening one month before bargaining starts. I don't understand how we'll

have all these new people hired and trained, when it does take a while to get up and running with how you do collective bargaining. So I'm worried, as you seem to be as well, that this last-minute change in how bargaining is done is going to create a lot more chaos this year for our school communities.

Mr. Patrick Daly: Patrick Daly responding.

Thank you, MPP Clancy, for your great question.

Yes, we're deeply, deeply concerned. Preparing for collective bargaining at any time is a monumental task, but inserting individuals who have not been involved with the process, who do not have those long-standing relationships, five weeks before notice that bargain can be granted is very, very concerning.

Our priority in collective bargaining has always been fairness to students, their parents, staff, the trustees we represent, and taxpayers, and it is just impossible to realize all of that without the trustee associations there, and, for sure, five weeks away from when the process begins.

I would add one more thing before turning it over to President Bellmore—what hasn't been said. Trustees are required to follow the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act for very good reasons—I did, for 40 years; Mr. Bellmore has, for his many, many years as a trustee—

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

Mr. Patrick Daly: The people who will now be the legal bargaining agency are employees of the employees, who are not required to follow those same requirements. So I think that really should be, as well, a concern. I don't say that about the individuals, but about the process and—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to interrupt. Sorry.

Judy, do you have any evidence that by adding a 10% to 15% mark for participation, it will improve attendance? Is there evidence to support that marks for attendance improve attendance?

Ms. Judy Bornais: I don't have that data, actually. I was prepared to speak to Bill 101 and the impact on teachers' education. So, unfortunately, I don't have that information, but I could always go back and look it up and get back to you.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you. I would appreciate that.

What I've seen from Attendance Works—if you look at the recommendations for improving attendance, it talks about supporting marginalized students and removing any suspensions, truancy penalties and cost to students who don't have that support.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the government for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Ms. Bornais, thank you for being here today.

I've heard from teachers, most importantly, that the most important part of their training was the in-class portion of their training. Sometimes we call this "practicum." Sometimes we call this "practice teaching." But whatever you call it, they have consistently told us that is

the most important part of their training. This bill proposes to expand that portion of teacher training, to get teachers ready for the classroom. Could you please give us your view of that?

Ms. Judy Bornais: Thank you for that question.

The reason I stated that I was nursing faculty at the start is because my pedagogical background is actually in experiential learning and recognizing the critical importance of that in preparing all of our career-ready graduates, whether it be in nursing, in business or in teachers' education. And yes, practicum is a form of experiential learning.

We know that the success of teachers' education is built on a number of things. One of them is a strong practicum component married with really robust and thoughtful curriculum, as well as mentorship.

This bill includes those components, so it does recognize the importance of what happens in preparing the students, not only in the classroom, but also in the practicum or in-class program that you refer to. I think the other piece is that it acknowledges the important role that associate teachers play. When those student candidates or teacher candidates are out there in the classroom preparing, they are getting the mentorship, and we're recognizing and providing those associate teachers with an honorarium. I think those pieces are the right foundation to be able to help train the next generation of teachers.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: A follow-up on the mentorship issue: We have teachers who will mentor the teacher candidates in the classroom. Give us an idea of how that process works.

Ms. Judy Bornais: Teacher candidates are paired with an actual teacher—an accredited teacher by the Ontario College of Teachers—there in the classroom. The amount of experience and the type of teaching that they do is levelled based on their knowledge. In the initial practicum—because typically, it's not that they're out for the entire time; they do some in-class learning and then go into the classroom for practicum. Those students are then paired with a teacher with the experience. They deliver some content. They get feedback immediately from the teacher, who knows what that classroom is like, who can help them with how to structure a lecture. There is one thing about learning how to do it in the classroom—this is their chance to actually deliver that context to students, get the feedback from the teacher, learn as part of the journey, and develop their own ability and skills to be able to be ready to do that when they are a full-fledged teacher and have gone through the process themselves.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Now let's talk about instruction that the teacher candidate might receive at the university. That, I suggest, would probably include a course in educational psychology. Are you able to confirm that, or is that too specific?

Ms. Judy Bornais: That's a little too specific for me, but I can find out and get back to you.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: All right. I'm going to assume that it includes a course in educational psychology, which would teach or at least give the candidate some kind of

instruction with regard to what we refer to as classroom management—that is, how does a teacher manage a classroom in such a way as to reduce disruptions in the classroom?

Can you give us an idea of what kind of instruction a teacher candidate would receive at the university, either before they go to do their practicum, after they do their practicum, or in conjunction with their practicum?

Ms. Judy Bornais: Yes, they do receive education on classroom management. I can say that because I have a daughter who has graduated from the program and is a high school teacher right now, and I have a son who is currently in the program. He's in concurrent bachelor of education with French. So, yes, they receive that education. They receive it in the classroom, and they also have those discussions with their mentor in the actual classes themselves.

I can tell you that being able to provide the teaching component, the educational component of what they need to deliver is one part of what a teacher does, but as you all know, there are numerous parts of what a teacher does—one of those is to be able to manage the classroom, manage those children, be able to provide them with the education that they need in order to be able to learn.

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

Ms. Judy Bornais: That is delivered in class. There is also reflection that the students do as to how they actually did, both when they're in practicum but also when they mock that up prior to going into practicum. Those are built in so that they can reflect, become stronger, think about what the challenges are, so that they are equipped when they go out.

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Mr. Anthony Leardi: If candidates are actually doing teaching in classroom, in schools, that makes them directly exposed to potential employers, who will see their work in the classroom—

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

We'll now go to the official opposition for five minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here.

Hi, David. It's Chandra Pasma speaking.

Michael, I'm going to start with you. When the minister was here in committee this morning, he seemed to be greatly confused about what the role of Catholic trustees is in bargaining—including getting into an argument with Paul Cavalluzzo, who was here alongside the Catholic teachers, about whether or not OCSTA is a bargaining partner or whether you are a bargaining observer currently.

So can you set the minister straight on what your role is in bargaining at present?

Mr. Michael Bellmore: It's Michael Bellmore speaking.

With the legislation that currently exists, we are the official bargaining agent for Ontario's English Catholic schools. We have a great staff at our central office that has been part of that process for a number of years. Pat Daly,

our executive director, has been involved in negotiations. I sat at the CUPE table for the last round of bargaining. Those tables are made up of not only trustees, but we have human resource professionals from various school boards, and we have directors of education who participate in the process. It's a very collaborative process.

I believe his Bill 101 allows us to be observers—which is yet to be defined and we believe contravenes the Constitution Act.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You've actually started answering my second question, as well.

The minister also seemed very confused about the professionalism and expertise of the trustee associations when they are in bargaining—saying that they knew replacement of trustee associations with CODE was going to replace inexperienced people at the bargaining table with professionalism and expertise. But—I see Pat smiling—can you explain to the minister whether or not that is actually the case?

Mr. Michael Bellmore: I'll start, and maybe Pat would like to finish.

The reality is that we do staff with professional, certified human resource practitioners, who have the designations, who have worked in large and small school systems throughout our province, understanding when you're bargaining at a provincial level, you have to take in mind the aspects of all the various parts of the province that you're serving in that bargaining process. We've always been allowed and had the participation, like I said, of directors or other HR practitioners from other boards during that bargaining process. It has also allowed us to maintain that office and that staff.

As Pat mentioned so eloquently in his comments earlier, bargaining, while it's a block of time and the parties come to an agreement—the next round is already starting as you're finishing the last round. You're sort of warehousing that information. You're able to reach out—union representatives are able to reach out to OCSTA as the bargaining agent for our boards. I'm sure that similar things happen with the francophone and OPSBA boards as well. So it's very much structured, and it has followed an act that was put into place to allow for the bargaining that we currently know and participate in.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

Pat, with apologies, I'm going to go to David, because I don't have much time.

David, you've mentioned you're already seeing the behaviours of the supervisors—their decisions which are harming kids with disabilities and their families. Now this bill, Bill 101, is going to give them liability protection.

The Minister of Education was here this morning. He said he has no intention of adding any funding to school boards to cover all of these new responsibilities. He refused to say he would eliminate the shortfall in special education funding.

As you mentioned, there is absolutely nothing in here that provides any greater support to students with disabilities.

In light of all of that, do you have concerns that this bill is giving the minister and his appointees sweeping immunity protections?

Mr. David Lepofsky: I think there are several problems, one of which is that—the next problem is, for those who want more accountability, what this is actually going to create is more of a tyranny of the senior education bureaucrats at school boards because, having taken what are relatively weak trustees already, in terms of their current powers, and gutted them further and put the minister in this driver's seat, there's going to be virtually no oversight. So there's going to be less accountability.

What we're already finding at TDSB right now is that the budget process, which, by law, our special education advisory committee is supposed to be consulted on, is more secret than ever.

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

Mr. David Lepofsky: It seems the bill is driven by the idea that we just don't have enough secrecy around school board budgets.

Last point: Here, let's just agree on one thing. Let's just rename the bill “the putting red tape and bloated bureaucracy first act.” At least the title will be accurate.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: When we know there are thousands of kids who aren't able to be at school every day, hundreds of thousands who aren't allowed to be at school for the full day, did you find it very encouraging when the minister said they would be exempted from any attendance requirements?

Mr. David Lepofsky: We've been asking the minister—and his predecessors, since 2019—to use the ample powers he now has to rein in the arbitrary power of school principals to refuse to admit kids to school either at all or for the full school day. And so far, in seven years, they've done a grand total of nothing.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the third party. I recognize MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I have a quick question for Ms. Bornais.

I think what's happening with teacher education and the one year is a good thing.

The question that I have for you is, do you do any follow-up studies on retention of teachers—staying in the profession for, say, five years, 10 years? Is there any study that's done that indicates that?

Ms. Judy Bornais: Yes, there are lots of studies. In fact, one of the things that we do really well in academia, particularly in universities, is evaluate not only the type of education we're giving our students, whether that be in teachers' college, whether it be in nursing—and we do evaluate their retention in different programs.

There was data from 2015 and earlier than that, when we were looking at one-year teachers' education, and there were changes, and the evidence has now allowed us to look at, where do we go here with teachers' education? We will be looking at evaluating our current program, once it's developed, to see how it's doing, to see how our students

are doing. We do look for feedback from them. It's an important part of what we do.

Mr. John Fraser: My comment is, recruitment is one thing; retention is another thing. So when we have 70,000 educators in this province not educating anymore, not teaching anymore—that's a big number.

I think the government solution is a one-sided solution. If we don't actually make schools safe places to learn and to work, it's not attractive to people—if they don't have the resources that are there. The work that you're going to do, which is important work that I agree with, may go for naught. I just wanted to put that out there.

How much time do I have left? I want to make sure—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Three minutes and 32 seconds, but we're going up to 5. Go ahead.

Mr. John Fraser: Okay. I've got to get it in by 5 and leave you a little bit of time.

Michael, how are you doing? Thanks for all the work that you do.

I do want to say that I was here when the minister cross-examined Mr. Cavalluzzo, which was rather interesting, with regard to taking on a constitutional lawyer who's telling you that what you're doing is not constitutional—and I've heard that very clearly from you. That's a big concern that's there. I think Mr. Cavalluzzo was correct.

The point that I want to get to right now: Trustees' associations and associations that pull boards to get—they're important. Trustees' associations, in particular, are the local

voices. And local voices getting together to talk about what's going on in the province and their experiences is critical to improving education. Can you comment on that?

Mr. Michael Bellmore: As I said in my opening remarks, MPP Fraser, we've been around for 95 years. So there's some magic that has kept us around for 95 years, and that's the common good of coming together and representing the voices at a provincial level to advocate to government. Sometimes it's a combative relationship. That's the nature of the beast. Most times, it's a collaborative relationship—because, truly, in my 20 years' experience as a Catholic school trustee, the folks who are in the role of trustee are there because they care about their community and their schools.

If we go back to Bill 104 in 1997, which created the boards we know today, part of the mandate of that legislation and regulations that flowed from it was that it was mandated that trustees were required to take educational opportunities to enhance their role of being a trustee; the same wasn't said for municipal councillors or mayors across the province. But trustees, by and large—

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

The time now being 5 p.m., I am required to adjourn the committee. The deadline for written submissions is April 27, 2026, at 6 p.m. The committee is now adjourned until Thursday, April 30, 2026, at 10 a.m.

The committee adjourned at 1700.

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