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Standing Committee on Social Policy

Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Estimates

Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Ministry of Education

Budget des dépenses

Ministère des Collèges et Universités

Ministère de l'Éducation

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Mardi 15 novembre 2022

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Tuesday 15 November 2022

Mardi 15 novembre 2022

*The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.*ESTIMATES
MINISTRY OF COLLEGES AND
UNIVERSITIES

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities for a total of three hours. The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer. Are there any questions from members before we start?

I'm now required to call vote 3001, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Minister, the floor is yours. You may begin.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you very much, Chair, and good morning. Thank you, committee members, for inviting us to the estimates committee. Your work is important as it provides oversight and a review of how government spends taxpayer dollars. I'm pleased to be taking part in this important process and I'm joined today by Deputy Minister Tapp and our amazing team at MCU.

As Minister of Colleges and Universities, I'm here to talk about our government's investments in the post-secondary education and research sectors. Both sectors play a crucial role in fuelling Ontario's economic engine with a highly educated workforce, both in real time and also as an investment in our future economy. These sectors do so through cutting-edge research and innovation and world-class post-secondary education institutions. Those institutions are key players in preparing students for in-demand and rewarding careers. They are also key sources for new ideas, inventions and productions—things that can elevate Ontario's ability to compete on the global stage.

I know that pursuing a post-secondary education, whether at college, university, private institutions or an Indigenous institute, can be both rewarding and challenging. Having taught at a college in the past and being the mother of three post-secondary-aged daughters, I see first-

hand the difference that a higher education can make. Ontario's students need to know that they can rely on our post-secondary system to fully support them on their education journeys and prepare them for good jobs. That's why the Ministry of Colleges and Universities will continue to take action to ensure everyone in this province has access to high-quality post-secondary education and lifelong learning opportunities.

Today, I'd like to talk about some of my ministry's key strategic investments that are laying the groundwork for economic growth across the province while also bolstering Ontario's post-secondary education and research sectors today and into the future. As I've said here many times before, the people of our province are our greatest asset and there's no greater investment than in the talent and skills of the next generation. This was more apparent than ever during the toughest periods of COVID-19, and, due to key investments that are addressing gaps in our health human resources workforce, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities has been able to make very tangible and timely differences during the pandemic.

We know that a strong health care system starts with a strong post-secondary system. For example, as part of our province's Plan to Stay Open, our government recently introduced the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. This new program addresses the pressing need for qualified professionals in communities across the province. The grant will provide financial support to post-secondary students who enrol in high-priority programs and commit to work in underserved communities when they graduate. Through the grant, eligible students will receive full, upfront funding for tuition, books and other direct educational costs.

For the first year of the program, the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant will be focused on bolstering our health human resources workforce in key areas of the province. As we know, there are certain communities across Ontario that are really feeling that workforce gap. That's why we've chosen to focus on nursing, paramedic and medical lab technologist programs for the first iteration of the grant. Starting in spring of 2023, applications will open for approximately 2,500 eligible students. That's 2,500 more skilled graduates who will be ready to work in underserved communities in the near future. And I'll also point out that all the work we're doing to establish the infrastructure for this new grant now will allow us to quickly pivot and address the province's greatest labour market needs in the years ahead, whether that's in the health care sector or somewhere else entirely.

For the time being, though, health human resources is still a high priority. As such, we've made other critical investments that are quickly preparing learners for careers in this space. For example, we invested \$35 million in 2021 to increase enrolment in nursing education programs at our publicly assisted colleges and universities.

Given how important hands-on learning is for nurses, you may be wondering how the province is preparing them with the skills and experience they need to confidently join our health care workforce. Currently, our government provides clinical education grant funding to publicly assisted colleges and universities each year to help learners translate their knowledge of theories and principles into actual practical settings, essentially helping them to hit the ground running. But we need to do more, especially due to the nursing expansion I just mentioned. That's why to further support the next generation of health care workers, our government is investing an additional \$41.4 million annually over the next three years to support the clinical education component of nursing education programs. This will allow publicly assisted colleges and universities to expand laboratory capacity supports and increase support for hands-on learning for nursing students. Ultimately, this means skilled nurses can get into the workforce faster, to provide Ontarians with the level of health care they expect and deserve.

Similarly, we've made bold investments in personal support worker training during the pandemic. For example, we supported the Ministry of Health's launch of an Accelerated PSW Training Program to train up to 8,200 PSWs at Ontario's 24 publicly assisted colleges. Around the same time, the government earmarked \$86 million to support the training of up to 8,000 PSWs through private career colleges and district school boards, and, at Indigenous institutes, our support of \$34 million over four years will increase enrolment in nursing and PSW programs.

PSWs play such a critical role in meeting the needs of patients and our overall health care system. We knew as a government that bolstering the profession was in the best interest of all Ontarians. That's why, in 2021 I'm proud to say the government invested over \$200 million to train up to 16,200 PSWs. That's in addition to our regular annual investments in PSW training initiatives.

I'm proud to say our strategic investments in Ontario's health care workforce doesn't stop there. Our government is also taking steps to significantly expand medical school education in Ontario. We're adding 160 undergraduate and 295 postgraduate positions over the next five years. To put that in perspective, that is the largest expansion of undergraduate and postgraduate medical education in over 10 years, and it will be worth every penny, because at the end of the day, it will increase access to family and specialty physicians and other health care professionals in every corner of the province.

The expansion will include the creation of a new Toronto Metropolitan University medical school in Brampton, the University of Toronto Scarborough Academy of Medicine and Integrated Health in Scarborough, and expand the Queen's-Lakeridge Health campus.

As we continue to prioritize a strong health care workforce in the years ahead, the support our doctors, nurses, paramedics, PSWs and medical lab technicians will provide—including in underserved communities—will be crucial. Training more health care professionals will ensure that Ontarians can access the health care they need, when they need it, wherever they may live, so our government will continue to make key investments to make this happen.

It's no secret that Ontario is a powerhouse of ideas, innovation and discovery across sectors. In today's economy, the foundation of success and global competitiveness is the value of the ideas and intellectual property that researchers and innovators are bringing to market. The IP generated in Ontario not only expands the bounds of our knowledge but is the beginning of new applications, products and services with life-changing promise. Maximizing the benefits of IP propels Ontario's economy forward, creates jobs and helps keep the people of Ontario in good health.

However, for far too long and across too many sectors, we've seen the benefits of ideas, innovations and research generated in Ontario leave Ontario, and IP assets are commercialized somewhere else instead of creating value right here at home. Between 2017 and 2019, only 17% of Ontario businesses reported owning IP. We need to ensure the strength of our ideas is matched by an equally strong approach to protecting and commercializing them.

0910

This past year, as part of Ontario's Intellectual Property Action Plan, our government took some big steps forward in making that happen. One of those steps is the recent launch of Intellectual Property Ontario, or what we refer to as IPON. IPON is Canada's first provincial agency to help researchers, entrepreneurs and businesses maximize the value of their IP and strengthen their capacity to grow and compete in the global economy. This organization will offer key services to an initial cohort of clients this fall in the medical technologies, artificial intelligence and automotive technology sectors as well as to the recipients of the Ontario Research Fund—Research Excellence Program. They will make more services available to more clients in the coming months. Those will include offering clients on-demand and online educational resources to help them learn more about IP; providing grants to connect them with IP experts and legal counsel to assist them—for example, to file a patent to protect their invention; and advisory services and mentorship opportunities.

Ontario is home to some truly brilliant innovators. By giving them the tools and connections to carefully manage their intellectual property through IPON, we will help them to maximize their IP and drive long-term economic growth for Ontario—yet again, another win-win scenario.

I'll close out my remarks by reiterating that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is committed to investing in our province's future by ensuring that students can access a range of educational paths that lead to in-demand, rewarding and high-paying careers, by training and retaining the next generation of Ontario's health care

workers to meet the needs of patients across the province, and by promoting and protecting made-in-Ontario solutions through research and innovation for the benefit of everyone in this province. This ministry is an important part of our government's plan to invest in Ontario's continued growth and success through our greatest resource: the people of Ontario.

I would now like to introduce Shelley Tapp, the Deputy Minister of Colleges and Universities, who will continue to speak.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Thank you, Minister. Good morning, everyone. I'm very pleased to join Minister Dunlop today to speak to this committee about the important work of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. As Minister Dunlop noted, Ontario has one of the best post-secondary education sectors in the world, producing skilled graduates that are key to keeping our province competitive and on the national and global stages.

The colleges, universities, Indigenous institutes and private career colleges located across our province are critical drivers of economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness. By providing students and job-seekers with high-quality education, training and skills, our post-secondary education system provides a talented and skilled workforce, which leads to knowledge creation and entrepreneurship and helps businesses and communities thrive and prosper, contributing greatly to the health and wealth of our population.

Let's get into the details of the value of the ministry's expenditures. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities' total allocation for 2022-23 is nearly \$10.8 billion. In 2022-23, the government will be providing base operating funding of \$3.6 billion to Ontario's 23 publicly funded universities and \$1.4 billion to the 24 publicly funded colleges. These funds will be used for general operating expenses, including program delivery, student services and staffing, but these investments also support and promote access to post-secondary education for students across Ontario, with priority supports for underserved communities through financial assistance through programs such as OSAP, including new supports for Indigenous learners and micro-credential programs, and the new Ontario Stay and Learn Grant for post-secondary students who enrol in high-priority programs in high-priority communities and commit to work in underserved communities when they graduate. Across the province, the ministry's investments are helping students access learning and training for in-demand careers, including investments in virtual learning and mental health supports.

But the ministry's investments are making big differences in the world of research as well. Ontario's science and research sector fuels the province's economic engine and will be a critical part of economic growth after the impacts of COVID-19. On our part, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities funds world-class research in Ontario's universities, colleges and academic hospitals. Ontario's competitive research funding programs and support for research institutes drive commercialization and innovation and help attract and retain world-class talent.

For instance, to support high-value research undertaken in universities, colleges and academic hospitals, the government announced, in the 2022 budget, that it's investing more than \$500 million over 10 years in research infrastructure. And, truly, to drive home the return on investment, we anticipate this funding will leverage more than \$700 million in additional funding from federal, private and other sources over the next 10 years.

So as you can see, by taking such a strong leadership approach upfront, we've drawn other big players from the research and business space, resulting in even greater contributions—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: —to our economic health and growth. Our investments will help strengthen and drive innovation in Ontario, with strong research partners like the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, the Ontario Brain Institute, Ontario Genomics, Compute Ontario and the Fields and Perimeter Institutes. And this is not the only example of how our ministry expenditures have important multiplier effects.

In fact, since 2016-17, Ontario government research funding has supported more than 1,200 research projects, created more than 98,000 training opportunities for highly qualified personnel and leveraged more than \$1.15 billion in federal, provincial or private and institutional funds. This has resulted in 145 spinoff companies and have created 742 jobs.

In some regions, spending from post-secondary sector activities makes a significant contribution to the regional GDP. In Windsor, for example, the combined impact of university spending and human capital development is \$2.1 billion annually or 13% of the GDP of total regional employment. What does this ultimately mean? It means that many communities across the province rely on post-secondary institutions to provide good jobs, address labour market needs and directly contribute to the health of their regional economy.

Additionally, Ontario research and development contributes nearly \$25 billion a year to Ontario's economy. The higher education sector is the second-largest performer of research and development in Ontario, carrying out an estimated \$5.2 billion. As you can see, the ministry's investments in this space are making extremely tangible contributions to our economy.

Beyond the dollar figures, Ontario graduates contribute to the high quality of life, however, the sector is not without challenges. Financial sustainability is an ongoing challenge for post-secondary institutions, exacerbated by the many impacts of the COVID pandemic. The ministry has an ongoing engagement with post-secondary institutions regarding those particular issues.

In the last year, we have seen the extent to which financial pressures culminate in significant action for one of our large universities. In February 2021, the financial challenges faced by Laurentian University led them to seek creditor protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, the CCAA, while it sought to restructure. Once the full scope of the financial situation

of Laurentian was brought to the ministry, a special adviser was appointed by the government. The special adviser provided advice to the minister regarding the financial situation at Laurentian and of the sector more broadly.

Laurentian is currently in its restructuring process. The government has committed to helping the institution chart a course for success so that it can continue to serve its students, parents, faculty and the community. But beyond Laurentian, I want to be clear that the financial health of the entire post-secondary sector remains a top priority for the ministry. That is why we're working with the university sector to implement greater oversight to ensure earlier and increased awareness of any financial challenges, and earlier this year, work began on a formal framework to monitor university financial health and the respective roles of the ministry and universities addressing these issues.

Minister Dunlop highlighted some significant investments the government is making to build a stronger and more resilient health care workforce, and I'd also like to point out the significant investments that the ministry has made in terms of supporting the government's Ontario's Plan to Build in terms of our capital investments. In 2022-23, Ontario is investing \$210 million to help colleges and universities provide modern and safe learning environments for students, faculty and staff. This funding will help institutions modernize classrooms, update technology, carry out much-needed repairs and enhance the environment for students—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Shelley Tapp:—while continuing to improve the experience for students.

I'll conclude by just reiterating that Ontario's economic recovery and future prosperity is dependent on a workforce that can adapt and respond to an ever-evolving labour market. It goes without saying that people need to be quickly able to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get good jobs.

Investments from the province are helping to provide more flexible post-secondary education options for learners, including virtual and hybrid learning opportunities.

0920

We will continue to work with our post-secondary partners to create the right conditions that help young people access and succeed in post-secondary education and, ultimately, contribute to the long-term sustainability and growth of Ontario's economy.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you, Minister. We'll now begin questions and answers, in rotations of 20 minutes. Last time we began with the official opposition. I don't see any independent members here, so we're going to go in rotation. We're going to start with the government side. MPP Martin, you may begin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and Deputy, for being here today. Given that this is the estimates committee, I don't think it will come as any surprise to either of you that one of the things that the

committee really wants to dig deeper into is how Ontario's colleges and schools are funded. I know, Minister, that you've touched on this in the past, but I'm hoping maybe during your answer you can give a bit of an overview again. That will be helpful for me.

What I'm really curious about is the future of our schools and post-secondary education. We've all heard about Laurentian, and it was mentioned in the comments by the deputy already. I think it's fair to say that no one wants to see that happen to another school again. I know that the Auditor General still has a report that she's going to be issuing, so I don't want to presuppose anything, but if there's any light that you can shed on that, that would certainly be helpful—sorry, I'm just getting all my questions out of the way.

One more thing I want to know and I'm hoping we can hear about is OSAP, which many families in my riding—and, I'm sure, everybody else's ridings—rely on in order to send their kids to school. It's really important to them that OSAP continues to support students wanting to enter post-secondary. If you can just talk about the OSAP program and how the funding works for that, as I know the opposition has sometimes alleged that there have been cuts to that program. I'm just hoping you can shed a little light on that for us. I hope you can remember all the questions I asked.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Martin, for all those questions. There are a lot of important points that I'd like to highlight in addressing your questions.

We'll start with the last one, which was about OSAP. I can tell you that recently I was at the university fair. I was meeting with students who were talking with some of the post-secondary institutions, but I also met with the employees from the OSAP office. It was interesting, because they were saying, "So many times, we're dealing with students behind the computer screen," but here we are, hearing the stories and how everybody has those individual situations.

To really understand where the province is today with tuition, OSAP and how the ministry provides funding to our colleges and universities, I think it's important that we look back to what the sector looked like in this regard prior to 2018. At the start of the 2018-19 academic year, Ontario had the highest average tuition in the entire province. At the same time, we had an OSAP program that continued to grow at an unstable rate. While this predates my time as minister, with tuition and OSAP growing as fast as it was, it was clear that something had to be done for the long term to ensure Ontario's post-secondary education was accessible, affordable and sustainable for generations to come.

That's why this was one of the first issues our government addressed when we came into power, by reducing domestic tuition by 10% across the board, and this is why we have frozen tuition at that level ever since.

Supporting post-secondary education is among the best investments this government has made for our students' future. Thanks to these efforts, students receive hundreds of dollars a year back in their pockets, where it belongs. This has made a huge difference in the lives of our

students. I cannot tell you how many times I have toured a campus and spoken directly with students about the importance of keeping tuition as low as possible for them and how our efforts are appreciated.

This is something I understand on a personal level, as well, as a mom of three university students and as Minister of Colleges and Universities. I know the sacrifices families and students make to pursue a post-secondary education, because they recognize that it is an incredible investment in their future. A strong post-secondary education sector is also an incredible investment into the future of the province as a whole.

While we do not always think of them this way, colleges and universities are as much economic and societal drivers for this province as they are places of higher learning. The work in learning that takes place every single day at our post-secondary institutions lends not only to the fabric of what Ontario looks like today, but will shape the next generation of tomorrow.

When it comes to OSAP, my ministry has always believed deeply in the importance of the program, in that it was designed to ensure students who need it most would always be able to access financial assistance. When our government was elected back in 2018, we recognized that OSAP was inflating at such a pace that there was a serious risk that the program would not be available for future students. Even the Auditor General reported that at the rate OSAP was growing, the total cost of the program would have more than doubled from 2017-18 to 2023-24 to \$2.7 billion. While that number might be appealing to those pursuing a post-secondary education now, the reality is, if we didn't act and adjust the program, there was a good chance OSAP may not have been an option for future generations; for example, by the time they have kids who would need to use it.

What did we do? We hit a reset button on the program and took OSAP back to its initial roots of being a needs-based program that focuses on supporting the students who need it most and ensuring that they would be able to access and rely on a steady flow of financial aid. By keeping OSAP as a needs-based assessment, students in 10, 15, 20 years and beyond will still be able to rely on financial support to further their education. It was the responsible thing to do and a decision that I stand by today.

Before I get into where we are today, I want to address the cuts that you mentioned earlier. I want to be clear that our ministry does not reduce OSAP funding to students from one year to the next. Because it is based on student need and applications, the estimated funding set aside at the beginning of each academic year is often greater than the actual demand of students applying. There are several factors that play into this, such as the cost of tuition of the programs that students are applying to, the number of students and the financial position of those applying, just to name a few. In other words, when a student applies to OSAP, we know for certain that there will be funds that are available for them. I'd like to reiterate that this would not have been the case if the program continued to balloon at the pace we saw back in 2018.

Thanks to the efforts of the ministry, today we have a system that is needs-based, available and responsive to students, but most importantly, one that is sustainable, because it is imperative that we make Ontario's education accessible, affordable and sustainable, not only for today's students but for future generations to come. I have yet to meet someone, young or old, OSAP recipient or not, who hasn't said investing in their future through education was one of the best decisions of their life.

I would like to touch briefly on the challenges that the sector has faced over the last two years due to the pandemic. To help our post-secondary institutions manage their internal needs and pressures, our ministry invested \$200 million in financial supports. For some institutions this funding went toward purchasing cleaning equipment and PPE; others invested in virtual learning technology; and there were also some institutions that used the funds to support staff with the transition to remote work. What was important to us here was ensuring the funding addressed institution-specific needs. So rather than directing institutions on where to allocate their funding, we wanted them to be able to address their needs that would allow them to continue to operate as best as they could.

We also recognized that current and former students needed our ministry to step up and support them through this difficult period, in their greatest time of need, at the onset of the pandemic. So that's exactly what we did. For former students, we put a moratorium on OSAP interest accrual and loan repayment requirements, meaning recipients could focus on spending their money on what they needed most. For some, this also provided a much-needed opportunity to pay down their student loans faster. Again, our ministry's number one priority is supporting students.

With classes moving online, we also made record investments in virtual learning technology and supports for institutions. As well, we worked with eCampusOntario to provide all institutions with the ability to offer online exams quickly and with minimal interruption to academic learning. The impact from these investments has been incredible. So many students have taken advantage of the moratorium, and virtual learning has only served to improve the student experience.

0930

I'm so incredibly proud of how our sector has responded to the many challenges posed by the pandemic. I will say that getting students safely back into a traditional classroom setting was always the priority. Virtual learning is meant to be a supplement for students and not replace their experience. While it took some time, we are proud as a ministry to see students finally back in classes and enjoying a very successful academic year. During my visits to several campuses over the last few months, the excitement to be back in classes and back on campus was clear, from not only the students but also faculty and staff members.

Our government also recognizes the need for stability and predictability in tuition, which is why we created the tuition fee framework. In addition to student tuition, our government provides over \$5 billion annually in operating funds to colleges and universities across the province.

These investments allow us to support our students and the sector, while also providing additional targeted investments into mental health, campus infrastructure and cutting-edge programs for the jobs of tomorrow. We will always strive to make Ontario's education and training accessible, affordable and sustainable for today's students and for generations to come.

Finally, I want to address your questions regarding Laurentian. There have been a lot of questions over the past two years about Laurentian going through the CCAA process, and what that means long term for the institution, for Sudbury and for the sector as a whole. I am proud to say that Laurentian is almost at the finish line and still on track to emerge from the CCAA process this month, and this is a key step forward.

We are also expecting the AG's final report on Laurentian and look forward to reviewing it in its entirety. Our ministry has been complying with the AG's office throughout the duration of the audit, and as always, we thank the AG for her work.

While it would be inappropriate to comment on the full details of LU, our ministry has been doing everything it can to support impacted students through this transition and to provide stability. I am proud to say to each and every one of them: I thank them for their resilience and dedication to their education. And I was happy to meet with the Laurentian student union here yesterday.

Our top priority has always been ensuring that students get the support they need, while helping Laurentian University chart a course for success, so that it continues to serve students and the community. From assuming the role as the DIP lender, providing funding supports for students who needed to transition to another institution for their education and stepping up to provide additional funds through real estate purchases to help finalize the plan of arrangement, MCU has done what it can to guide this process through rough periods, while ensuring Laurentian retains its autonomous control and responsibilities.

We know this has not been an easy process for staff, students and the city, and know that we have read all of your correspondence and taken your concerns with great care. With a new president, a new board and a future beyond the CCAA process, I believe Laurentian will be up to the challenges ahead. As an autonomous institution, Laurentian's future will be determined by the decisions they make in the months and years ahead. As minister, my top commitment is to the students, ensuring that they are protected and their education will not be compromised.

As I mentioned at the outset, our students and families make a lot of sacrifices to attend post-secondary education. Ontario post-secondary education has a reputation of excellence, and we owe it to students to do everything we can to uphold that reputation. I'm proud of the work we do at MCU, and cannot express enough how resilient and determined our sector is to uphold that excellence. Ontario's schools are world-class for a reason, and so long as I am minister, I intend to keep it that way.

I'll just pass it over to the deputy, if you'd like to add some remarks as well.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: With respect to Laurentian, just in terms of where they are at right now, they are expected to emerge from the CCAA protection later this month. A key component of supporting Laurentian's emergence from the CCAA is the replacement of a \$35-million debtor-in-possession loan with a long-term exit loan that provides government with greater oversight, while holding Laurentian accountable. The terms and conditions of that exit loan will provide the province with stronger lender rights, meant to support Laurentian's accountability, transparency and financial discipline.

In terms of some of the details of that, when I talk about accountability and oversight, we would be requiring detailed regular financial reporting on a regular basis. There are financial covenants that must be met, including yearly financial targets for key metrics; limits on borrowing capital expenditures; public reporting—annual reporting to the public on financial and non-financial and transformation progress; governance and senior management renewal—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: —so conducting assessments regarding renewal processes for senior management and the board; and then, finally, approval of Laurentian's transformation strategic plan.

With that, I'll turn it to ADM Kelly Shields to provide additional details.

Ms. Kelly Shields: Good morning. Just to add a bit on post-secondary sector and monitoring, we have been working closely with the Council of Ontario Universities and the sector more broadly—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Sorry, can you just please state your full name and position, just for recording purposes for Hansard.

Ms. Kelly Shields: Yes, Kelly Shields, ADM of the post-secondary education division.

We have been working very closely with the sector on a robust oversight process for our university sector. We will be closely monitoring a range of metrics and looking, for example, at credit rating systems. So we'll be having that sort of close monitoring process in place very shortly, on an ongoing basis, to keep closer tabs and monitoring of the sector and their financial health.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Any further questions or comments? Yes, MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: What are the takeaways from Laurentian that you're applying to the other universities?

Ms. Kelly Shields: I think with just the closer monitoring of financial health and regular reporting. That will be built in as part of our oversight process, so it will be much more closer monitoring and early warning in terms of the reporting to the ministry so that we can have better tabs on anyone that's getting into a situation or difficult challenges like Laurentian did.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: ADM, can you just give us a little example of what that closer monitoring looks like?

Ms. Kelly Shields: On an annual basis, we will be going through all their financials and will have metrics

reporting, and based on that, there will be a rating system of where they fall in terms of risk. Depending on what that might be, there will be a series of measures and follow-ups that will be in place to make sure that there is that close follow-up, as needed. Some of that might be reports into their board, into the ministry, but there will be a series of steps that would be taken, depending on the results for the schools and where they are falling in terms of their financial health.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Just one more question. On Laurentian—and I don't know who's most appropriate to answer—what is the role of the special adviser in that context? Maybe you could just elaborate?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'll take that one. Thank you, MPP Martin. The government appointed a special adviser, Dr. Alan Harrison, and so he provided advice and recommendations to our ministry with respect to the financial state of Laurentian University. We had the Ontario Internal Audit Division conduct an audit of the ministry to access its existing processes and controls to identify and address the financial health risks associated within the university sector. After evaluating the recommendations of the special adviser, OIAD and COU, this past April 2022 the ministry engaged Deloitte to provide advice on a new framework system to monitor universities' financial health and conduct risk assessment—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: —based on the financial and performance measures, and to determine the appropriate responses to the financial ratio and KPI results.

Examples of metrics that could be included in the university financial accountability framework include core financial measures, so the liquidity, financial sustainability, performance; and also the supplement measures, so the activity, the credit rating and application data. These metrics can be used against the risk threshold to provide a risk assessment. Deloitte has also designed a set to-follow-up action—so no action, low, medium or high action—which each institution will undertake based on the core financial ratio-to-metric analysis.

0940

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thanks very much, Minister. I guess what I understand is that these kinds of things didn't really exist before for the university sector, and we're putting in place some things which I think, as you said, will protect the future and sustainability of the system. That makes me feel a little bit better about the future.

As you mentioned, Minister—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you, MPP Martin. You'll have to save your comments for the next round.

It's now time for the official opposition. MPP Gélinas, you may begin.

Mme France Gélinas: Thank you. I'm also interested in asking questions about Laurentian. Just to put it in context, Laurentian is too important to fail. If you look at every business in Sudbury, in northeastern Ontario, we have

Laurentian graduates throughout. I'm a graduate of Laurentian University, the MPP for Sudbury is a graduate of Laurentian University. If Laurentian wasn't there, the future would be very different for all of us.

What happened at Laurentian decimated the university, their good name, and has had a ripple effect through my community that continues to grow. Lately, it's really—we are short about 1,000 students. Those thousand students who used to come to Laurentian worked in restaurants, worked in bars, worked at Tim Hortons and everything else. They are not there to do those jobs because they're not at Laurentian anymore because the programs they wanted are not there anymore.

We had an election this summer. Not a day of canvassing didn't go by that I wouldn't have a mom grabbing her son or daughter and bringing them to the door and saying, "We have \$30,000 worth of debt, and he is working at Giant Tiger and will never be able to finish. He was in third year. The program was cut. He's not able to finish; he will never finish. He was the first one in our family to go to university. We invested \$30,000 in his education, and now he has no way of finishing." The stories go on and on and on of the hardship and what this has meant for my community.

For a lot of it, they point at your government. They point at the government and say, "Why is it that the government was willing to put \$35 million as a DIP lender but they were not willing to give that money before the CCAA process started?" Why is it that the funding formula for university does not take into account that it's more expensive to offer university education in the north, where you have very small classes, than it is in a city like Toronto, where you can have thousands of students register? We don't have those numbers. It is more expensive to offer services in French in university than it is—but none of this seems to be taken into account.

My first question is, how come the money that you're investing now, as a DIP lender, in real estate—why is it that that money was not available to Laurentian to avoid CCAA?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Gélinas. I know we've talked a lot about Laurentian. I too recognize the importance of post-secondary education in the north, not only to students but also to your community and the local labour market needs that the university serves. I know students at Laurentian, I know graduates of Laurentian in the mining industry, and this is a key area.

You had lots of different questions within the question, so I'll start off and then I'll pass it to my deputy. You mentioned the student you saw when you were canvassing who wasn't able to complete studies at Laurentian. From the onset of the CCAA situation, the ministry's priority was to ensure that students were supported at that time. I actually met with the Laurentian student union yesterday and talked to some of the students, and I was up there last year as well to see them, and I wanted to hear from students what the impact on them was, what they were feeling in their day-to-day lives attending classes, and was this causing additional stress on them. The students I

talked to yesterday were happy to be back in the classroom, with things normal on campus and all the exciting events that they were planning for.

I want to talk about the supports that we've provided for students, a little bit about the supports we provided for Laurentian, and then I'll ask the deputy to get into the nitty-gritty on some of the other numbers.

In July 2021, the ministry announced the support funds for Laurentian students in certain discontinued programs, which provided one-time financial assistance to Laurentian students who were impacted by the discontinuation of certain programs. I would hope that the student you were talking to at the door—that you gave that information to students to ensure that they were accessing those funds.

This funding was available for eligible students who transferred to another Canadian publicly assisted post-secondary institution for the fall of 2021 semester due to their program at Laurentian being discontinued and no alternate related programs available at the university. Students were eligible for this funding if they were enrolled in music and music performance within the bachelor of fine arts programs; the midwifery program, for both English- and French-language programs; music; radiation therapy; or the French-language program for theatre.

Students were eligible to receive up to \$4,000 for domestic students and up to \$1,075 for international students. This was to assist them with some of the possible costs involved in transferring to another post-secondary education institution, which could have included \$3,000 for relocation costs if domestic students needed to move to pursue their studies, up to \$1,000 for tuition subsidies for unanticipated higher tuition fees at another institution for both domestic and international students, and \$75 for international students to pay for the cost of renewing their study visas.

The ministry received over 100 applications and has worked with post-secondary institutions to confirm the eligibility. Through the review process, 69 students were eligible for this funding at the time. As I said, the priority was really making sure that students who were impacted had those supports in place.

Back to the supports that government provided to Laurentian during this process: We committed to the initial supports with a total value of \$63 million as a way to provide Laurentian with some stability. The rationale for these components was as follows. There are three different areas: \$22 million—this was over a six-year period—was the enrolment corridor and performance funding protection. This is in recognition that Laurentian has experienced a significant decline in enrolment starting in the 2021-22 academic year and is also likely to experience challenges meeting performance targets for both enrolment and performance funding over the strategic mandate agreement, which we refer to as SMAs. Not recovering this funding, which is in the MCU's current allocation, offers Laurentian a degree of stability in the long-term planning.

We also became the DIP lender which is \$35 million. Laurentian's DIP loan was previously with a private

lender, and it was paying 8% interest. So the government refinanced the loan at a 1.11% interest, providing Laurentian with significant savings on interest that Laurentian continues to use towards their recovery.

Also, \$6 million, which was COVID-19 funding: Laurentian would have been eligible to receive \$6 million as part of the government's COVID fund; however, due to their decision to proceed with the CCAA process, the funding was not provided at that time. Laurentian would be given this funding subject to their successful emergence from CCAA proceedings. This funding is meant to help offset the financial impacts of COVID-19.

Some of the other funding that we have since committed to: We provided more than \$72 million in operating funding to Laurentian in 2021-22, and ministry-provided grants account for more than 40% of Laurentian's total revenue in 2021, compared to a 22% average of the university sector overall.

Over the past several years, the ministry has provided several ongoing and time-limited funds to institutions in order to support particular operational challenges or considerations. Laurentian has been or continues to be the recipient of several funds, including the Northern Tuition Sustainability Fund, teachers' education stabilization funding, the northern Ontario grant, the COVID-19 emergency funding, the Virtual Learning Strategy, the performance-based funding, capital funding. Most recently, we announced the \$53.5 million in real estate.

0950

Maybe I'll ask the deputy to talk more about the emergence from CCAA and what the \$53.5 million will look like as the university emerges.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sorry, I just want to repeat my first question as to—the people in Sudbury are wondering why is it that the government is willing to help and is doing this now, and what you've said is all really happening. I've known this from multiple sources. Why wasn't the money to help them avoid CCAA made available in January 2021? Why do we have to wait until the disaster before money becomes available?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I can take that. Publicly assisted universities in Ontario are autonomous institutions established by individual statutes and governed by their board of directors. Each institution is responsible for their operational policies and procedures, including its finances.

Laurentian had a history of financial challenges and vulnerability, including deficits in each of the last seven years, but the university struggled to fill some positions in some of their programs as well. Laurentian considered a CCAA filing to be necessary to provide the creditor protection.

To answer your question, the ministry was aware that Laurentian was facing financial sustainability challenges and was running annual deficits. However, the scope and immediacy of the challenges facing Laurentian only came to light following the in-depth reviews by external advisers hired by Laurentian to assess the situation. As the minister said, once the full scope of the situation at Laurentian was brought forward to the ministry, a special adviser was appointed by the government to provide

advice to the minister regarding the financial situation and a perspective on governance in Laurentian's current strategic long-term planning process.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So are you telling me that it's really a question of timing, that if you had known sooner you would have been able to help?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I guess I would go back to my first point, where universities and colleges are independent, autonomous institutions. As the minister said, on average our funding is about 20% to 30% of a university or college's budget; it ranges. In the case of Laurentian, it's higher, just because of the lack of funding. But we are not a major funder for our institutions. This is a unique situation where the government—we got involved as things progressed in order to support the community and the long-term sustainability of the institution.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So are you telling me that now you will have a process in place that will flag sooner that a university is in trouble, but given that they're an independent entity, they could still call on the CCAA process to settle their financial position?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: As ADM Shields said, the framework for financial oversight that we are about to release shortly is a more rigorous approach to reviewing their financial situation. All universities will need to have credit ratings now as part of their requirements and there will be a, for lack of a better word, green light—or yellow, or red—in terms of where they are in a risk profile, looking ahead, so that we will be able to work with them to put strategies in place, proactively as opposed to after the fact.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Again, are you telling me that had you known sooner, you would have worked proactively with Laurentian?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Yes. We have worked with other universities or colleges that have had financial vulnerabilities, not to the extent of Laurentian. It's not that the government is going in and providing that funding upfront.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Can you give me an example where you've worked with somebody else—you knew sooner, you worked with them—and it actually worked out?

Ms. Kelly Shields: Yes, we did work with Nipissing University a number of years ago. They had—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Sorry, could you just state your name again? Thank you.

Ms. Kelly Shields: Sorry. Kelly Shields, ADM of the post-secondary education division.

We did work with Nipissing University a number of years ago. They were facing some financial challenges, and the ministry provided funding for a study to have a look at their situation and to come up with recommendations. We did do that and provided them with some funding as well—it was about \$3.5 million—to help them implement some of the recommendations from the study.

As part of our new oversight framework, if an institution falls into a high-risk category, part of that process of working with them and supporting them is having an independent financial adviser that would go in and have an in-depth look at their books and come up with recommendations. We would work with them on a go-

forward basis with that report as well, and there would be regular reporting to us and monitoring.

M^{me} France Gélinas: All right. So when I try to reassure—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

M^{me} France Gélinas: When I try to reassure my constituents that Laurentian will emerge, that it will still be there, I can say that the government has learned; they will put in this more stringent accountability; they will have the green light, yellow light, red light telling them when a university is in trouble and work with them to make sure that we avoid the CCAA. Am I putting words in your mouth, or is that true?

Ms. Kelly Shields: We will have a much more robust process in place in tracking and monitoring the university sector. I would say, yes, we'll be able to know much sooner about any issues, what might be emerging, so that we can get in there and start working with the institutions.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I was just going to say I think your community can be confident in the work that the government has done to step up: the supports that were in place last December to ensure that the university was coming out of the CCAA process, the supports that were there for students—we have been there to support Laurentian during this difficult time—and having the framework in place for the post-secondary sector to ensure that we're never in this situation again.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I like this. "Never in this situation again" is a clip that I will use.

Go ahead.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I would say that Laurentian is expected to come out of CCAA proceedings at the end of this month. That doesn't mean the ministry is saying, "Okay, you're done." Internally we have a team that will be working with Laurentian probably very closely for at least the next five years. They are on our radar. As the minister said, we have invested a lot of money and time to support them and to support the community, in recognition of the legacy and importance of Laurentian in the Sudbury community and the north in general. But—when you're speaking to your constituents—the ministry is committed to working with them side by side to make sure that they're successful.

M^{me} France Gélinas: There's another really, really big question in my community: the green space. The green space that is owned by Laurentian University is used by the entire community. It is also very beautiful and developers would certainly like to build million-dollar homes—even in Sudbury there are some million-dollar homes. But the community really wants to keep the green space as an asset for our community.

In the \$53 million that you have allocated for real estate, can we get any reassurance that the green space will remain either a community asset or a Laurentian University asset?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: That's something that we have looked at. I can't say exactly what we're doing right now, but it is a concern for the community. I know that you and I have discussed that as well, the community interest in keeping that green space as well as the city's interest in it.

Something else I wanted to mention, as we come out of the CCAA process—that commitment to your community—we have a new board in place, there will be a new president in place, and I think they are excited and ready for the future of Laurentian. There's excitement around it. I know I said I met with students yesterday. They're very excited as well and committed to moving forward for the university.

M^{me} France Gélinas: There's a program, the midwifery program—every single midwife in north-eastern Ontario comes from that program, except for one. This program is no more. The midwives are now someplace in Hamilton etc.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

M^{me} France Gélinas: First, is there a hope that midwifery will come back to Sudbury?

And while you search, is there an openness to have a French university? I saw you searching in your papers. Is this an easier question?

1000

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Actually, the University of Sudbury—I can speak to that quickly, and maybe someone else can look for the midwifery.

USudbury is going through the PEQAB process, and so I've had a chance to meet with the president several times and saw the business plan and the programs that they're looking to offer on that campus, and they matched the labour market needs. I think that's really important. They're going through that process right now, and we're looking forward to reviewing recommendations that come from PEQAB.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. Midwifery?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I can speak to that. So—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That's all the time we have for this round. You'll have to save the response for the next round.

We'll now turn to the government for 20 minutes. MPP Quinn, you may begin.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Minister, I first want to thank you for being here today to walk our committee through your ministry and allow us to get a better understanding of how the government is investing in our college and university system.

One of the largest concerns in my riding, and probably many of our ridings, quite frankly, is the need for more health care professionals. I actually began my career working in the health care sector, and I've also helped various children's hospitals and organizations with fundraising. So even before my role as an MPP, this is something I've been very passionate about for a while.

If you go on pretty well any hospital or regional health care website, you can find dozens of vacant positions for all sorts of health care professionals. As an example, I was looking at the St. Elizabeth Health website and got to a page of 40 job postings before a listing was more than two weeks old. Granted, this is for positions within their entire health network, but still, that is a massive amount of positions that we need to fill.

In my community, we have a larger issue where smaller hospitals and health care providers aren't often as appealing to students, or they decide they want to go to Ottawa, because it's larger than the cities of Cornwall, Winchester or Alexandria. While we all want the best for our children, the reality is, we also need these students to stay in their home communities, not just because we would miss having them at home, but because we need the local talent to staff up our hospitals, walk-in clinics, long-term-care homes and other local health care providers. The reality is, young people across the province are leaving, and it is becoming harder and harder to keep people in our communities long-term.

So my question is: How is the minister and your ministry planning to address these gaps so that we can address this health care crisis, make sure people can get the care they need in their communities and, all in all, invest in students wanting to get into the health care field?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Quinn, for your questions, but also for your commitment in the past and present to your community. You've touched on a lot of key points and relevant issues that have really been the focus of the ministry and the government as a whole for the past two years.

It goes without saying the pandemic has brought increased attention to health care systems in Ontario, across Canada and globally. But our government's focus on how to improve nursing, medical education and, really, post-secondary education generally has been ongoing since before the pandemic began. It didn't help we inherited a health care crisis when we came into power, one that saw increased demands because of the pandemic. We recognized that investing in the future of Ontario's health care system starts with expanding high-calibre education for those on the front lines. On that note, I would like to start by focusing in on what you said about issues regarding education and the workforce in smaller communities.

Coming from a mid-range-size community myself, I've seen first-hand exactly what you are talking about, with young people leaving their hometowns for post-secondary education and finding jobs elsewhere after graduation. As a mom of three girls all in university, I would have loved to keep them close and see them go to school at Georgian or Lakehead 20 minutes from my home, but I understand that the education they were looking for and the studies they wanted to pursue were better found at different institutions.

The issue is when we hear a young person talk about the lack of opportunities for good jobs in their home communities, or that the local institution wants to offer a certain program but they weren't recognized as being able to do it. Unfortunately, there are several examples of this. But nursing education is one that particularly stood out to our ministry and our sector as one of those outliers where we could really expand education and give students the ability to determine their futures.

That is why, back in 2019, our ministry brought forth changes that would allow colleges to offer stand-alone nursing programs in Ontario. These changes meant that,

rather than having to collaborate with a university partner, colleges would be able to offer a four-year bachelor degree in nursing entirely at a college campus and work with local hospitals to get students placements so that they could get job-ready for graduation. This announcement was truly groundbreaking for the sector, students and communities.

Prior to 2019, colleges could only offer a bachelor's degree in nursing if it was collaborative with a university. For example, in my area, Georgian College had a partnership with York University, where essentially students would have to complete two years at Georgian College and then the last two years at York. When this relationship worked, we didn't step in as a government because the program was not producing high-quality nurses or that every single relationship was fractured, but we looked at this and said, "How can we create more pathways for students?"

What we first needed to address was the common misconception that a university education was inherently better than a college education. A lot of our colleges actually created the curriculums and were doing at least 50% of the instruction in these collaborative programs. That is not to say that the universities were not playing a major role, but the nature of a nursing degree means that the last two years of your education have a lot of practicum placement education. This is an incredibly important point that I'm going to come back to in a moment. If you compared, year to year, many colleges were actually doing more of the traditional classroom instruction than universities within the collaboration. This issue became even more clear when we looked at other provinces and how Ontario compared.

Manitoba is a great example. Before we made this change, a college grad from Manitoba could get a bachelor of science in nursing and work in Ontario, but an Ontario student would need an accreditation from a university to do the same. Here we have two provinces, side by side, offering the same degree, except the Ontario graduate would have to have studied, at least in part, at a university to get the same job. All the while, we already know the bulk of the education is being done at the partner college. So for us it became clear that our ministry needed to find a way to allow colleges the option—not the requirement—to create their own nursing programs and offer them at the full bachelor of science in nursing level.

What really put this over the top is what I mentioned earlier about the practicum placements. One of the best parts of getting an education like nursing is the practicum placements where students can apply what they learn in the classroom in real-life nursing situations at a hospital, clinic or any facility that requires nurses. Not only do students get to experience working in a variety of settings and gain hands-on learning for different types of care, but it gives them real-world job experience before they even graduate.

It should come as no surprise that their placement locations love this arrangement too. Every year they have a brand new batch of nurses coming in, being shown how the location operates, with the hopes of offering these

students a potential job, down the line. While this is great for students—and, as the ministry, we are thrilled to see our students getting jobs so quickly out of school—what we noticed is that the jobs centre around where students complete their studies. With the last two years of study almost always happening at the university campus partner, what we've seen is that many students are getting jobs in those cities where the schools are based because that is where they are doing their placements—again, great for students and universities, but this has had a negative effect on our colleges and their local communities.

To illustrate my local example, a student from Owen Sound enrolls in Georgian College but finishes at York University so that they can get a job in Scarborough. Now, like my daughters and many of our children, if they want to go to another part of the province and study and get a job, it needs to be their choice. That is what the old system was depriving students of: choices.

With the new, stand-alone nursing program, a St. Lawrence College student can start and finish their studies at St. Lawrence College, get a placement in their community and, hopefully, turn that placement into a career in the community. Now students have that choice, and communities like Owen Sound and Cornwall have an incentive to work with their local colleges to build partnerships and create pathways for students to get jobs right out of school, helping to alleviate the local health care gaps and, in the end, to help build their local economy.

Now, we also recognize that choice goes both ways for students. While some might want to live and work in a larger community, others prefer living in a smaller or mid-sized community that might have more opportunities for a career. When we look at these communities, like Orillia or Cornwall, even with recruiting local students to stay and pursue a career there, not every student will choose to stay. In some cases, even if they did, there could still be some major employment gaps that need to be addressed.

1010

Recognizing this, our government introduced the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant last year, which is going to be a huge asset for underserved communities. In the simplest of terms, if a student enrolls in a school in an underserved community, takes one of the identified programs of need and commits to working in a community in their area of study for two years, our government will cover their education costs. Once this program is in full swing, a total of 2,500 spots will be available for students who want to take part in the program. That means 2,500 new health care professionals that will be dedicated to supporting a needed community, in addition to the thousands more across the province that enter into their first year every single year.

Between Learn and Stay and our stand-alone nursing program, we are making major strides to address the health care employment gap in Ontario. Maintaining excellence in nursing education continues to be a priority, while also expanding choice for students and post-secondary institutions. From Kenora to Cornwall, Windsor to Timmins and everywhere in between, Ontario's next generation of

nurses are receiving the best education possible because of investments from this government.

These investments are making a difference here in Ontario. A few weeks ago the College of Nurses of Ontario announced that for the fourth year in a row Ontario increased the amount of nurses registered over the past year. With this kind of momentum, we are well on our way to making a real push in our health care sector and addressing the overall health care needs of Ontario today and in the future.

I also want to mention one more measure that we are taking at MCU. That is the increase to medical seats and building the first-ever medical school in Brampton, which will help solidify local health care needs in the region for generations.

I'm sure you've all heard from your constituents about the need for more doctors, or how they have to travel to London or Toronto or Ottawa to see a specialist because their area doesn't have that kind of doctor. MCU is taking a major step to addressing this through the creation of 160 undergraduate spaces and 295 postgraduate medical seats over the next five years to help increase access to health care for more communities.

Just to put that into perspective: That is more new medical seats than Ontario has seen in the last 10 years, because we recognize that Ontarians across the province need to be able to access the health care they need when they need it, wherever they may live.

But this isn't just about expansion. It is about making sure we are expanding into the necessary communities, creating new opportunities in Brampton, where future doctors can help serve the Peel community. And, for example, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, which can create connections for their students across the north, will be a major step in providing better access to care in one's home community.

Overall, MCU is playing a fundamental role in shaping the future of Ontario's health care system. We will continue to make the proper investments to ensure our province stays on the right track, and we will continue to work with partners to provide students with the education, skills and training they need for rewarding careers that support a strong and sustainable health care system.

I'll now turn it over to the deputy, who may want to speak about the medical seats, as well as the ADM, who may want to speak about the Learn and Stay program.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: As the minister said, we are adding 160 undergraduate seats and 295 postgraduate seats over the next five years. This expansion is aimed at helping all existing medical schools across Ontario, as well as the new Toronto Metropolitan University medical school in Brampton. The six medical schools are McMaster, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, the University of Ottawa, Queen's University, the University of Toronto and Western. There are a total of 952 first-year undergraduate seats and 1,188 first-year postgraduate seats across all of those schools.

This is a significant expansion, as the size of undergraduate and postgraduate medical education has not been

increased in over 10 years. Training more doctors will ensure that Ontario—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): My apologies to interrupt. The time being 10:15 a.m., we will now recess until 3 p.m. Thank you very much.

The committee recessed from 1015 to 1500.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good afternoon, everyone. We will resume consideration of vote 3001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. There is now a total of one hour and 46 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates. When the committee recessed this morning, the government had six minutes and 20 seconds remaining. I look to the government to continue—I think someone was speaking. Would you like to continue?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thanks for having us back this afternoon to finish the time. I'm going to pass it back to Deputy Tapp to continue speaking about medical schools.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Thank you, Minister. I believe we left off talking about the medical school expansion, which was the first time in 10 years that we had added seats for undergraduate and postgraduate. Of course, everyone is aware there's a growing need across the province, but also in underserved communities—and also for family practitioners. The expansion will support all existing medical schools in Ontario, as well as the new Toronto Metropolitan University medical school in Brampton, and expand enrolment for the University of Toronto, which will support the new University of Toronto Scarborough Academy of Medicine and Integrated Health.

To become a practising doctor in Ontario, one must undergo undergraduate and postgraduate training and then complete required exams to apply for a full licence to practise medicine in Canada. With the additional seats, the expectation is that there will be expansion of postgraduate positions in summer-fall of 2025, and most of these will be family practitioners.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further questions? MPP Rae—and there's four minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Through you, Chair: Would the minister or the DM be able to elaborate on how many new nurses we could expect over the term, and some of the initiatives we're taking in enrolment and expansion in the programs that have been mentioned already?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. I'm going to pass it to one of our ADMs to answer on the number of nurses.

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: Thanks for that question. Tamara Gilbert, the assistant deputy minister of the advanced education learner supports division.

I'm happy to answer that question from the perspective of a new grant, which the government announced in March, which is called the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. In that grant, the intention is to support students to choose priority studies in priority communities. And, as the minister explained a little bit, it would work that a student

who chose a priority program in a priority community in exchange for agreeing to a term of service, those students would receive their full educational costs paid upfront. So, throughout their studies, they would receive their educational costs in exchange for six months of service in the community for every year of grant received.

The link to nursing is that every year, the government is able to identify what those priority studies and priority communities are. For the 2023-24 academic year, the government has identified nursing programs in the north, the southwest and the eastern areas of the province. That is practical nursing, registered nursing and nurse practitioner programs offered by public colleges and public universities in the north, southwest and east regions. And that could support as many as 2,500 nurses who would undertake their studies and then return service in those communities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'll continue on from where the ADM left off.

Some of the investments that we have made towards nursing education: As part of the Ministry of Long-Term Care's plan to invest \$35 million to increase enrolment in nursing education programs, this investment provided funding to enable an additional 1,130 practical nursing diploma students, as well as 870 bachelor of science and nursing students, for the September 2021 to January 2022 intake.

Through the 2021 fall economic statement: An investment of \$342 million over the next five years, and this will strengthen the health and long-term care workforce in Ontario. This multi-year investment will provide and add over 5,000 registered nurses and registered practical nurses and 8,000 personal support workers to Ontario's health care system and hospitals.

In March 2022, the government announced an investment of \$34 million over four years to increase enrolment in personal support worker and nursing programs at six Indigenous institutes. I've actually had the opportunity to visit Six Nations Polytechnic with our MPP colleague from Brantford—Brant and saw first-hand the impact this investment was making on Indigenous learners at this school—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: These students are taking the opportunity, because of the funding that this government has put in place, to retrain. I was talking to a young man who was a bylaw worker who was looking to move into the health human resources area as he had family who was also working in this sector. His plan, because of the investment—he was able to start off as a personal support worker in training, but was looking at eventually bridging his way to become a registered nurse.

I can tell you that the students in this class were a couple months from graduation, every one of them already had a job secured, and this was through the clinical placement that they were working on. The investment made—really seeing first-hand the impact this was having on not only the students and their families but also on their community and the local health human resources situation in those areas.

I'm very proud of the investments that government has made to ensure that we are training more nurses, more PSWs, more registered practical nurses, but also the pathways that we are creating for students and the choice we're creating for students—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much, Minister.

I'll turn to the official opposition. MPP Gates, you may begin.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good afternoon, Minister Dunlop. How are you?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm good. How are you?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm great. Recently your ministry announced that the new University of Niagara Falls—this is a private university that will be operating in downtown Niagara Falls, only a short drive away from Brock University, which has been operating since the 1960s in Niagara.

Has the minister ever done a cost-benefit analysis on the impact of a private versus public university in terms of community benefit?

Interruption.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's probably Brock calling.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: The clock that wasn't working is now working. Sorry. My apologies.

Thank you, MPP Gates, for the question, and thank you, also, for joining me that day at the opening of the new University of Niagara Falls. I know it was a very positive event. It was great news for the community, also for the downtown and the economic benefits that that is going to bring to that region. I know when we were leaving after the event, we tried to go into a coffee shop to grab a coffee on the way out of town and they were closed that day, and, when I walked down the street, somebody made a comment and said, "You know what? Someday when there are students down here, there will actually be employees and these businesses will be open"—so I know it was great news that day.

I have had the opportunity to visit Brock—and I'm sure you have too—to see their new expanded nursing education program, so there are lots of exciting initiatives going on at Brock. When I was there I had a chance to meet with students in the nursing program and see first-hand the exciting things that are going on there. If you haven't been there, and I'm sure you have, definitely stop by and see the things they're doing.

The University of Niagara Falls went through the PEQAB process, which is the degree-granting authority when these projects come forward. On the advice of the PEQAB recommendations that came forward—they were supportive of the university. I know the community has been very supportive and was advocating for the university and, as I mentioned, the local economic benefits it was going to bring to Niagara Falls and the whole region. The students are going to, in the future, be living downtown, there will be more housing available for students, you have the GO train right there. There are lots of exciting things happening in Niagara.

They are offering different programs than what Brock is offering right now, so there's not direct competition.

Again, it's offering more choice for students, it's really meeting the local labour market demands, and that's what the University of Niagara Falls—when they were coming to town, I know they were working very closely with Niagara College. When I visited there as well, the president made a final comment to me when I was leaving, and he said, "I'm very supportive of this project. We've been working very closely together and happy to see them in town," so hearing directly from that institution as well.

They are all offering different courses, but that all really meet that labour market demand, so I think that's what's important to the area.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate the answer, but you didn't answer the question. Maybe you can do that later, because I'm only allowed so many minutes so we can get to the critic. I don't want to take all her time up, but please go over the question again and send me the answer. It would be very helpful.

1510

I do know Brock University is not in favour of the private university. Niagara College, because they have Niagara College GUS already in Toronto, there's some kind of debate that has to happen. I've spent a lot of time at Brock University, but I go there more for their sports teams, who are becoming some of the best in the province, which is nice.

Are there any additional costs that the ministry may incur from the operating of a public university versus a private university?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Any additional costs—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Any other costs, yes.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: For the public, or the private?

Mr. Wayne Gates: For the taxpayers, yes.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Absolutely none for the private. I'm going to ask the deputy—do you have any additional comments?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: There's no cost to the government for a private university. They would generate their fees through tuition that they would charge and other fundraising or sources of funding.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. No, I get it; it's fine. It's a quick question, because I knew I didn't have a lot of time, but it's important to understand how important the publicly funded universities and colleges are, and that's kind of where I'm going with that.

My last question: Will this be a continued direction of the ministry with granting accreditation to new universities? Will the ministry be seeking more private university options? Is this in any way motivated by financial concerns from the government?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. I know you talked about the sports teams at Brock. I'm a Western graduate, and we seem to be doing quite well in the football season.

No, we're not moving away from supporting publicly funded universities in favour of private universities. We're not providing any funding to the global university system for the University of Niagara Falls, and it's the minister's conditional consent that signals the government's commitment to expand post-secondary options in Ontario to

ensure that students can get the education and skills they need to get good jobs. I think when you look at the variety of programs that all three schools in the Niagara region are offering, they're very specific to labour market needs, but they're not competing against each other. I think that's what's important for students, giving students opportunities to make choices in their decisions, but also different programming available.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll finish up with this: My concern is that we will be competing for foreign students. We know how important the foreign student program is at not only Brock University and other universities but also the colleges at Niagara. We all know the fees are a lot higher, and they kind of help with the university.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague. Thanks very much for your time and for answering my questions. And if you can get that question back to me, that would be great. Thank you.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes. I think it's important that, as you mentioned, international students—but as I said the programs that are being offered are very different from one another, so there isn't that direct competition, which was important when we were looking at it from our perspective as well.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a discussion we have at Brock.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. MPP Pasma?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here. I'm filling in today for my colleague MPP Laura Mae Lindo, who is our critic on colleges and universities, but who sadly lost her father this week. So lots of love to MPP Lindo, and I'm happy to step in to be able to ask some questions on this important file.

This morning in your remarks, I heard a lot about the benefits of post-secondary education: the economic role it plays in our province, that it's an economic multiplier for regions; our economic recovery is going to depend on the skilled workforce; benefits to the health of the population, to social mobility and to rewarding careers for students. I agree with all of that. But when I look at the estimates, I don't see those values reflected in the numbers.

In 2019-20, the government's actuals showed a total of \$6.45 billion spent on post-secondary operating funding. In 2022-23, the projected total spend is \$6.46 billion. So, if you do the math, over the last four years, operating funding to universities has only increased by 0.21%. Over the same period, inflation has been 12%. So, do you think, given all the benefits of universities and wanting to run a world-class university system, a 0.21% increase over four years is sustainable?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Pasma, for your questions, and thank you for acknowledging the comments made in my statement this morning.

We recognize the importance of this ministry in every sector. As we come out of COVID, everybody that is out there and needing to be retained is coming through our ministry. If it's in private career colleges, colleges and universities have a great opportunity. I know that the sector is open to the challenge, to ensuring that we are in

a good place, and that opportunities for students are our priority.

Some of the operating grants information, I can share with you. The government provides approximately \$5.1 billion annually in operating funds to support publicly assisted colleges and universities in the province, and the funding amounts are determined using enrolment targets, as set out in each institution's SMAs, and a moving average of enrolment is to be reported by institutions. Universities adopted this model in 2017-18, and colleges entered into this agreement in 2019-20.

Due to the impacts of COVID-19, the government has committed to assess the sector's readiness for activation using performance metrics set out in each of the institutions' SMA agreements in 2023-24, starting as a planned system-wide portion of 10% and increasing to 25% in 2024-25. So compared to the baseline of 2009, funding to the post-secondary sector has increased by 15% in 2022 and currently stands at \$5.1 billion.

Deputy, would you like to add to that as well?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I was just going to add—I was trying to find my notes—that operating grants are a major part of the funding that the province provides—I'll probably turn it to my colleague, ADM Shields—to universities and colleges, but there are other funds that we provide to them, such as capital funding, funding for special-purpose grants, funding for mental health. So the operating funding is based on enrolment, but there are other funding programs that we have funded.

In particular during COVID, universities and colleges didn't have access to the ancillary revenues that they normally would, because students were not on campus—so residence, parking and other kinds of revenue that they would receive through residences. We supported institutions that year with \$106 million to help them support their operations.

Maybe, Kelly, you can add some flavour to those comments.

Ms. Kelly Shields: Maybe I can add a little bit on the capital investment. Over the next 10 years, there will be a \$2-billion commitment made to support institutions with their capital needs. Part of that is for renewal, and this year alone there is almost \$180 million that will be provided to support renewal needs at colleges and universities.

We're also recognizing the need for state-of-the-art equipment at our post-secondary institutions. There will be \$90 million provided over three years for that, to support our institutions: \$60 million through the College Equipment and Renewal Fund for colleges, and \$10 million will go to universities through the Training Equipment and Renewal Fund—again just recognizing how quickly equipment and things become obsolete and making sure that our institutions have the resources that they need to provide a good-quality education for students.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks. Really, it was a yes-or-no question, and I didn't hear a yes or a no in response.

This morning, I was surprised to hear the deputy minister say we are not a major funder for our institutions. I was surprised not because it's not true; it is true. It's the first time I've heard the government acknowledge this.

Per-student funding in Ontario has been falling since 2008-09, and we are providing the lowest level of per-student funding in the country—and not by a little bit, by a lot. Ontario's average is \$5,500 under the national average.

My question is: Does the government have any plans to make up for this shortfall in per-student funding?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Let me start off, and then I can pass it over to Deputy Tapp. You mentioned the operating funding, but schools also rely on tuition. I can tell you that when this government came into power in 2018, the tuition was the highest in the province. We want to make sure that everyone has access to the world-class post-secondary that we know we have here in Ontario. That's why we decreased tuition by 10%, as well as froze tuition in the meantime, because we recognize the cost of living for everyone and students having the opportunity to attend post-secondary—we want to ensure that everyone has access to post-secondary.

1520

Deputy, would you like to add some more to that?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Sure. I think tuition is a common concern that we hear—the tuition fee framework we will be looking at in the coming year in terms of what is the next evolution of the tuition. But there is a current tuition freeze for institutions this year, for 2022-23. Freezing tuition is helping reduce the financial strain on families who have already faced so many challenges through the pandemic. The one-year tuition freeze builds on Ontario's historic 10% reduction in tuition in 2019-20. These reductions have saved students over the time period about \$450 million annually when compared to tuition costs in 2018-19.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm certainly not arguing for any tuition increases, but there are multiple sources of revenue for universities and colleges, and if you're freezing tuition but you're not increasing the government's funding, then that money has to be made up elsewhere. Right now, many of our universities and colleges are turning to international students and putting international students in an incredibly exploitative position, where there's unregulated recruitment, commitments and promises being made, and also unregulated rates of tuition being charged. We're seeing people from countries like India and China and Saudi Arabia—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —mortgaging the entire family business or family farm to send someone over here in the hopes that they can succeed, all to support our universities and colleges, because, apparently, we are not prepared to put the public funding into our universities and colleges to support them instead.

So is the government prepared to regulate international tuition and ensure that we are not exploiting international students to prop up our publicly funded system?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thanks for the question. Sorry; I lost my train of thought before, so I wanted to finish up on the other question that we had about the other funding streams for colleges and universities.

As I mentioned, tuition is the largest share of post-secondary institution revenues. In 2021-22, tuition represented approximately 55% of universities' total revenue and 43% of colleges' revenue. In addition to government funding, publicly assisted post-secondary institutions have other streams, including, as I said, tuition, federal research and capital programs, donations, investments and intellectual property.

Speaking about international students, I do understand that there are challenges related to the increase of international students studying at our post-secondary institutions, with more acute impacts in and around the GTA. Speaking with colleges and universities, this is a priority for them, to ensure that there are adequate supports there for students, everything from mental health supports to ensuring that there is adequate housing in those areas. So the ministry is considering public institutions' level of reliance on international students as part of our considerations for next steps on international education in collaboration with publicly assisted colleges, universities and other post-secondary stakeholders.

Deputy, would you like to speak further to international students?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Sure. As institutions established by the act of the Legislature, publicly assisted colleges and universities in Ontario have a lot of autonomy, as we've mentioned before. That includes responsibility for their own administrative processes, including charging, collecting and reimbursing international student fees. So there is no—the same legislation that is provided for under the post-secondary act—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry to interrupt. The government regulated domestic tuition with a tuition freeze. Are you saying the government cannot do the same with international tuition?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: It's not under the same act.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But not being under the same act is different than "does not have the ability to."

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Well, I should correct—we never say we could never have the ability to; we could always introduce new legislation. But at this point, the legislation does not cover international student tuition.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. And there is no plan to introduce legislation to regulate international tuition?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Not at the this time, but I think it's important to recognize that our taxpayer dollars are paying for domestic students and ensuring that the levels stay where they are, so that the taxpayer dollars for our domestic students keep their tuition at the levels they are. So there's no regulating on the international students.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But international students are also subsidizing our domestic students right now, because we're not prepared to put forward the public funding that would actually sustain our colleges and universities.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I guess I would just say that international students—the reason for them being recruited into our colleges and universities is not solely as an income source. They're an important part of the post-

secondary education sector, and the colleges and universities that continue to welcome them also remain financially sustainable and competitive.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I just wanted to add that international students come to Ontario because of the world-class education that's offered here. They recognize that this is an education that's leading to job opportunities. We have many students coming here as immigrants to stay in Ontario and Canada and recognize the benefits of the education that's offered here, the work-integrated learning, the experience that they're getting here that is going to lead to a job. So I think that's what we're looking at with why international students do come to Ontario.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: And I want to keep welcoming them; I just don't think we should be exploiting them as their first moment of arrival in Canada.

There's also the private-public partnerships with the college system where the international students are being educated through private colleges and receiving a diploma from the public colleges. And the Auditor General's report flagged that the ministry lacks a long-term strategy and action plan to sufficiently mitigate the risks of this reliance. Is the minister comfortable with that risk, or are there plans to address this?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That concludes all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the independent member for 10 minutes. You may begin.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Minister Dunlop, it's a pleasure being in the same room with you and especially with a fellow Western graduate. I would like to follow up on the line of questioning in regard to international students and what some have accused as being exploitative practices. Some of those arguments, frankly, I am persuaded by them. And again, respectfully, I wasn't persuaded by the responses of the government's side in terms of the protections that are proposed to help these individuals.

So I would like to draw your attention to the December 2021 Auditor General's report, which had 26 recommendations. I'm hoping that you might be able to walk me through whether any funds have been committed to any of the recommendations, notably, recommendation number 3, which is that there be increased oversight for the advertising of college admissions processes, that data be collected for fees paid to recruitment agencies, that public colleges monitor the agencies' advertisements—this is internationally—and confirm that public colleges have a formal policy for the selection and removal of international student recruitment agencies.

This was felt by the Auditor General to be within the purview at the provincial level, and I'm curious to know what progress has taken place with that and how many funds have been committed to that.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. I'm going to start off a little bit talking about some of the supports for international students, and then the deputy will speak specifically to the AG's report.

Ontario's public post-secondary institutions can recruit—this is, I guess, similar to the question that MPP

Pasma was asking—and host international students on a federal study permit, as approved at designated learning institutions under the International Student Program. So Ontario's International Student Program sets out rules for post-secondary education institutions that recruit and host international students for the purposes of their studies. These rules also cover student supports, which extends to housing, as I mentioned earlier—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Right, and they were felt to be inadequate, so what progress has been made in updating those, as per the Auditor General's instructions?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: So the ministry is also considering issues around access to student supports as part of its review as the public college private partnership directive, and post-secondary institutions are responsible for ensuring that international students have access to adequate services and supports. While Ontario's publicly supported post-secondary institutions are autonomous, they can only recruit and host international students on a federal study permit as an approved designated learning institution under the program—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Forgive me for interrupting, but my time is limited as an independent. My question is specifically around collecting data related to fees paid to recruitment agencies, oversight of the ministry's directive requirements to include advertising of colleges' admissions processes, confirming that public colleges have a formal policy for selection and removal of international students—I'm not asking about supports for international students.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: No, I was just starting off so that the deputy could get the AG report—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you for that.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Do you have any further comments for that?

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Ms. Shelley Tapp: Yes. I think we'll have to get back to you with that information. We don't have the AG's report. The AG's report on the value for money had a number of recommendations which we are looking at, in collaboration with a review that we are doing on the private career public partnership program. That would be addressing a lot of the issues that the auditor raised.

Mr. Adil Shamji: When do you anticipate that that review will be complete?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Early 2023.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Actually, I do have some further comments.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Please. Of course.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: The audit resulted in 22 recommendations, all of which the ministry accepted and is now working to address. In 2022-23, the ministry will use the recommendations as an opportunity to review and update its policies and processes, which includes developing options to renew programs to ensure programs are up to date and relevant while minimizing the burden on businesses; examine delays in registration timelines for new private career colleges, taking further steps to ensure the integrity of financial protections for students; and

making it easier for students and members of the public to access timely and accurate information on private career colleges.

These are mostly operational in nature and pertain to internal processes and procedures and information-sharing with our other partners. We will continue to work to implement recommendations as quickly as possible. We're estimating it will take approximately two-plus years to implement due to resource and planning requirements.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Have any of the recommendations been implemented at this point, a year after they were submitted?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Sorry, could we refer that to ADM Gilbert?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: I'm actually able to speak to the audit that the—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Can we just have your name and title? Thank you.

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: Oh, pardon me. Of course—apologies. Tamara Gilbert, assistant deputy minister of the advanced education learner supports division.

The minister was actually highlighting a value-for-money audit which focused specifically on private career colleges and oversight of our private career colleges. She flagged a number of the recommendations which came forward in that report. And yes, we have taken some action already to implement those recommendations, but I believe what the deputy was referring to was a separate value-for-money audit that focused on the PCPP, the private—the public—somebody's going to help me out with this acronym.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: The private career public partnership.

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: Minister to the rescue. Thank you very much. That's the recommendation status that we will follow up on.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. Just for clarity: I'm referring to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities public colleges oversight Auditor General's report, published in December 2021. We're all on the same page here?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay, perfect. And in that, recommendation number 12 was that the ministry should reinstate the collection and reporting of student satisfaction by individual colleges. Any progress there?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: ADM Shields?

Ms. Kelly Shields: I don't have an update on that one at this time. We have the auditor's recommendation, but we'll have to follow up on that one. We don't have that implemented at this point.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Respectfully, for many of these questions, I'm not sure that the answers are available. Is it possible to request an update on the status of all of these recommendations? What would be an acceptable time frame to request that update—

Hon. Jill Dunlop: We'll have that to you within a week.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Fantastic.

I'm wondering, are there funds set aside in the ministry expenses for either theoretical or applied research?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'm going to defer to my colleague ADM Simeon, the expert.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Great, thank you. I like experts.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: Hello. I'm Rachel Simeon. I'm the ADM of the data, research and innovation division.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Fantastic.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: I'm happy to speak a bit about the programs that we fund to research with. We have three competitive research funding programs in the province. They all fund across both basic and applied research. I think historically our main research program, the research excellence program, funds about 50% in the applied space and 50% basic or discovery research. However, the program is designed to fund across that whole spectrum, and awards are delivered based on a peer-review process, so research excellence and strategic value to Ontario are the primary criteria that we use to select those research projects.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Are you able to clarify for me how much in the way of funds has been devoted to theoretical and/or applied research?

Ms. Rachel Simeon: As I said, our program funds both, and we don't define one or the other. But the research excellence program—we're estimating to spend about \$53 million this coming year, in the 2022-23 year, and historically, about half of that has gone to applied research and about half has gone to discovery or basic research.

Mr. Adil Shamji: One of the most frequent complaints that I get in my constituency office in regard to youth is either cancelled OSAP funding or inadequate OSAP funding. Are there any plans to increase the amount of funds—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Adil Shamji: —that will be devoted to student support or bursaries?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I can speak to OSAP. We were talking about it this morning. OSAP provides approximately \$4.2 billion in student financial support to approximately 400,000 students per year. This is a needs-based program, and as I mentioned earlier, we have had the highest tuition in all of Canada. We are now the fourth-highest, but it's good to see that with the changes that we made to decreasing tuition and freezing tuition, this is helping students.

We're promoting access to post-secondary students by expanding OSAP to students enrolled in over 1,600 ministry-approved, quality-assured micro-credentials through the expansion of the OSAP program to micro-credentials, as well as to nine Indigenous institutes. We also launched the new Learn and Stay program, which will be run through OSAP—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That concludes all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government. Who would like to begin? MPP Pierre, you may begin.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Having worked in the post-secondary sector, I've seen first-hand the impact our

world-class researchers have had in advancing life-saving technology, developing the latest and greatest in AI and fostering other groundbreaking research. As a province, we should keep encouraging this work, not only from the sidelines but as a direct partner.

Minister, can you please outline for the committee how you have and plan to continue to support future research opportunities in the sector?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for the important question, and it's great to have you as my parliamentary assistant—another fellow colleague from the college sector. You're right: Our sector does amazing work when it comes to research. We have some of the best and brightest minds right here in Ontario.

Throughout the pandemic and over the last few years, we saw what can happen when the world's greatest researchers bring their collective efforts to bear and have the funding, resources and supports they need to do their important work. This is evidenced by the remarkable advances made to combat COVID-19 under extremely tight timelines.

While Ontario has a world-class research and innovation system, the world is changing at an unprecedented rate and the province is in a global race to maintain its competitive edge. Our government recognized that more work needed to be done to support the sector and encourage a leading environment for innovation, to continue to build on our past successes on advancing research into AI, health care and more.

That is why, as noted in the 2021 fall economic statement, Ontario invested an additional \$48 million in research supports over the next two years to address key priority areas in the sector. This includes work at the Perimeter Institute, the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory Laboratory—or SNOLAB, as we call it—and advanced research computing facilities in the province.

Specifically, this investment included a \$24-million investment for the Perimeter Institute, one of the largest and most prominent research centres in the world devoted to the exploration of foundational theoretical physics. With this funding, the Perimeter Institute will continue to undertake fundamental research in cosmology and physics, as well as quantum science and computing. It will also help the institute inspire and train the next generation of scientists and researchers by continuing to offer scientific programs to high school students, teachers and post-secondary students.

We've also invested \$12 million for 13 research institutions across the province that support Ontario's advanced research computing facilities, otherwise known as ARCs, which provide critical computing power and infrastructure to Ontario research institutes and industry. ARC facilities currently help over 2,000 researchers and close to 1,000 faculty members across the province and engage the province in world-class research in a number of disciplines, including engineering, chemistry, biochemistry, health sciences, physics and social science.

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This investment also included \$12 million for SNOLAB, an underground science laboratory that is a global leader

in the field of fundamental physics and astrophysics. With this funding, SNOLAB will have the support it needs to continue hosting groundbreaking work in neutrino and dark matter research—work that will provide deeper insights into the nature of the universe and maintain Canada's reputation as a leader in world-class physics research. This investment will help provide Ontario researchers with the necessary tools to conduct world-class research and technology development, and ensure that access to mentoring and training on the latest technologies are there if they need it. It will also help put Ontario at the forefront of innovation, ensuring that research and research infrastructure continue to be competitive.

Looking at the bigger picture, this will better position the province to attract, develop and retain talented researchers so we can continue making major advances and solving the complex problems facing us today and tomorrow, right here in Ontario.

Our province's future depends on keeping ideas, expertise and intellectual property in Ontario, because Ontario-made ideas are critical to fostering a skilled labour force, developing new products and innovations, and supporting long-term economic growth across the province.

I wanted to share one of my personal favourite projects with you. Before I turn it over to the deputy to talk more about the research initiatives, I want to tell you about one of my favourite research institutes that we fund, one of the eight. It's called the Ontario Brain Institute. It's my favourite because my daughter was diagnosed with epilepsy a couple of years ago, and the work that the Ontario Brain Institute does is quite unique. Something that we're starting to see across many of the research institutes is that the researchers are actually working with the clients and the advocates and finding out what it actually is that these people need to live a normal life. I'm very proud of the work that the Ontario Brain Institute is doing, as well as Clinical Trials Ontario. I'd like to let the deputy talk more about that, but I'm going to talk a little bit about IPON first.

It's no secret that Ontario is a powerhouse of ideas, innovation and discovery across sectors. In fact, the province is home to approximately 1,900 life sciences firms. Thanks in no small part to our sector, Ontario is a leader in academic and research excellence related to life sciences, with world-leading strengths in pandemic preparedness, cancer research, regenerative medicine, diagnostic imaging and neuroscience. Ontario companies generate almost 60% of Canadian revenue and employ well over half of Canada's life sciences personnel.

In today's global economy, the foundation of success and global competitiveness is the value of the ideas and intellectual property you are bringing to market. The valuable IP generated in Ontario not only expands the bounds of our knowledge but is the beginning of new applications, products and services with life-changing promise. Maximizing the benefits of IP propels Ontario's economy forward, creates jobs and helps keep the people of Ontario in good health.

However, for far too long, across too many sectors, we've seen the benefits of ideas, innovations and research generated in Ontario leave Ontario. IP assets are commercialized somewhere else instead of creating value right here at home. In other words, we have not been reaching our full potential in protecting and commercializing intellectual property. In fact, between 2017 and 2019, only 17% of Ontario businesses reported owning IP. Ontarians should and must benefit from the ideas, research and new companies that are generated from the research that's supported by Ontario's grants and supports.

Our government recognized that in order to support Ontario's competitive advantage in the IP economy, there needed to be an increased focus on generating, protecting and commercializing intellectual property right here at home. That is why, in March of this year, our ministry announced a new agency, Intellectual Property Ontario, to support our province's innovators in maximizing the value of intellectual property and address the critical gaps in the availability of intellectual property expertise and resources. IPON is Canada's first provincial agency to help innovators, researchers and businesses strengthen their capacity to grow and compete in the global economy. It will offer key services to an initial cohort of clients this fall, making more services available to more clients in the coming months. Whether a client needs assistance in increasing IP knowledge, support filing a patent or understanding what assets they can protect and commercialize, Peter and his team at Intellectual Property Ontario will be there for Ontario.

Intellectual Property Ontario will also build capacity in the post-secondary sector and will support the implementation of the government's commercialization mandate policy framework, another key component of the intellectual property action plan. While they are just getting started, I'm so excited to see what IPON has in store for Ontario and look forward to seeing them help transform Ontario's IP ecosystem into the powerhouse I know it can become.

With IPON, we are supporting Ontario's entrepreneurs in the global market and ensuring the economic and commercial benefits of home-grown innovation remains right here in Ontario. By providing post-secondary institutions, businesses and innovators with the tools, knowledge and connections they need to harness the value of IP, our government is helping drive real economic growth for the next generation of Ontarians.

I'll now pass it over to the deputy.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Thank you, Minister. Just to add to the minister's comments, over the past five years, research investments have supported the creation of 57,000 training opportunities for researchers and students and 19,000 publications, which have been cited more than 360,000 times worldwide. They've also resulted in 250 patents being granted, 91 spinoffs being created and 400 jobs at those spinoffs. We know that there's more that can be done, and, with the addition of IPON to help our universities, colleges and businesses, this will be even a greater number.

Our government has supported Ontario-made innovation in 2022 with an investment of over \$198 million in 241 research projects at colleges and universities and research hospitals across the province. Particularly, we provided support to eight Ontario research institutes, and I would like ADM Simeon just to elaborate a bit on what all of those institutes provide for the province.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: As the deputy and the minister have both said, we support eight research institutes in Ontario. These represent spikes of excellence in Ontario's research landscape. Each one has a unique mandate. Some engage directly in research while others support research collaborations that accelerate discovery and help to translate those discoveries into new practices, clinical practices, products and services that improve life for Ontarians and provide economic opportunity.

If I were to speak a little bit about each of them in turn, the first, Clinical Trials Ontario, is an organization that the province has funded to the tune of \$17 million since 2012. The current transfer payment agreement with CTO runs until 2024 and is worth \$2 million annually. CTO has a vision to make Ontario a preferred location for global clinical trials while maintaining the highest ethical standards. To support its work, CTO focuses on three priorities. Those are streamlining processes, engaging with patients and the public, and promoting Ontario's competitive advantages.

Some examples of the work that CTO is doing that is helping Ontario is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario's clinical trials community was forced to pivot, putting in place new digital and virtual solutions to maintain trial safety at a distance. These measures opened the door to conducting decentralized clinical trials, which can help to expand trials to reach underserved rural and remote communities. Launched in 2021, CTO's ACT—Advancing Clinical Trials—initiative is helping the clinical trials community to move to a decentralized trial approach. ACT is driven by stakeholders from industry, institutions and other participants who have come together to share ideas and create tools for increased alignment and transparency.

More than 4,600 active clinical trials are under way in Ontario—this is the highest number in Canada—and this number has increased two and a half times since 2012, which has helped Canada rank number one in active clinical trials per capita amongst G7 nations.

The next institute that we support is Compute Ontario. Ontario has provided Compute Ontario with over \$15 million in funding since 2014. The current agreement, which runs until 2024, provides them with \$1.58 million annually. Compute Ontario coordinates advanced research computing—ARC—digital research infrastructure services in the province for Ontario researchers and ensures that they have the tools that they need to remain competitive.

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Next, I'll speak about the Fields Institute for Research in Mathematical Sciences. Fields has received \$37 million in funding from Ontario since 2015. The current transfer

payment agreement runs to 2024 and is worth \$2 million annually. Fields plays an important role in making Ontario a leader in the advancement of mathematical sciences on a global scale through training and educating high-quality personnel, promoting commercialization and entrepreneurship development and attracting the best scholars and researchers from around the world to Ontario. Worth noting is that the director of Fields was a member of the province's COVID-19 modelling committee.

The minister has already spoken about Ontario Brain Institute, so I'll just say our funding through them is in the order of \$20 million annually, and they support us in research, collaboration and commercialization.

Ontario Genomics is the next institute that we fund. Our support for Ontario Genomics is \$2.5 million annually. They are a not-for-profit intermediary organization primarily funded by the Ontario government and the federal research funding agency Genome Canada that focuses on genomics research, program management, business development and outreach. Genomics and related science provide important opportunities for Ontario to capitalize on its strengths in areas across many disciplines such as health, biology, engineering and IT infrastructure to support future economic growth.

Some key statistics regarding Ontario Genomics: They've raised nearly \$30 million and created 652 jobs in 2021 thanks to the projects they support, with a portfolio worth more than \$367 million.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: Since 2000, they have generated a return on investment of \$2.7 billion and raised nearly \$1.3 billion for their ventures. This has contributed to more than 20,000 jobs.

Next, I'd like to speak about the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, OICR. Ontario supports OICR with funding of \$72 million annually. This is a global centre of excellence at the forefront of discovery and innovation in cancer research. Some of the Ontario funding also goes to support FACIT, or Fight Against Cancer Innovation Trust, which is OICR's commercialization partner. They operate with an Ontario-first mandate to help build Ontario companies that are commercializing the IP generated through OICR research. Some of the key research programs that OICR funds include the Acute Leukemia Translational Research Initiative, adaptive oncology, brain cancer translational research, the Cancer Therapeutics Innovation Pipeline, computational biology, drug discovery—this is just to name a few.

Next, I'll turn to the Perimeter Institute, which the minister spoke a little bit about in her remarks. We provide funding of \$12 million annually. Perimeter has a unique public-private funding model in which a third of their funding comes from the province, a third from the federal government and a third from private funders. Perimeter Institute is independent. It's a residence-based research institute and one of the world's leading centres devoted to the exploration of foundational theoretical physics. It's recognized as one of the largest and most prominent research centres of its kind in the world. Stephen Hawking

was a distinguished visiting research chair there and leant his name to their new building when it was built a number of years ago. It's also interesting that researchers from Perimeter were part of the international team that took the first photo of the black hole that you might remember being in the press a number of years ago.

Finally, I'll speak about the Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation, or CABHI. This is an organization that we fund with \$4.7 million annually. They are a first-of-their-kind solution accelerator dedicated to driving innovation in the aging and brain health sector with a targeted focus on dementia. They support research, innovation and commercialization, as well as outreach activities.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further questions? MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for that information. I'm really interested in all that research that is being presented. I'm especially thrilled by the one around dementia. It would be interesting to see outcomes later on and what that looks like.

So as we talk about that, we've talked a lot about investing in education and some of the programming and that that we're doing. I just want to talk about the future of education and what that looks like. As we're planning to go forward, how are we putting in place sustainability things for students, going forward, that will help them to pursue different programming, different types of education that we haven't heard you present yet? You've presented about the research and you've presented about the Learn and Stay program, but I'm just wondering if there is any other innovative programming that you have or are planning that we haven't heard about yet, or that we don't see in the line-by-line items, because I didn't know about half of those research things that you were presenting before.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Those are research institutes. They're not specifically at a post-secondary institution. They're separate from the research that's being done on campus. But I think, even looking at the work that you're doing as a PA in education—you're transforming the K-12 system—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: —to allow students to look at the opportunities of jobs that are out there that they don't even know about. Each institution is responsible for their own programming, so we don't set that out specifically.

I can tell you, when I get to visit as a minister and meet with students in the labs who are actually working on real-life projects—we were recently at Guelph University in an engineering class, and they were working on a project with Magna. This was a real-life adaptation for an issue that Magna was having in their factories, and so these students get that real-world experience.

They were telling me how important it is for them. They said, "When we graduate, if we don't have even this bit of experience, we have no experience. So we get in there, we get involved, we get the experience we need so that when we leave"—although I was hearing from most of the students that they already had jobs lined up for them when

they were walking out the door. The experiential learning opportunities that students have in the classroom, of which we are seeing more and more—having worked at a college, that was something that colleges did really well, years ago—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Pasma, you may begin.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'd like to ask the minister questions for information on OSAP, and it's fine if these need to be provided later. You gave a general number of students who were receiving OSAP earlier, but I'm wondering if we can get the specific number of students who are currently receiving OSAP and how many of them are receiving OSAP for the micro-credentials program only.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I will start off. Do you have the—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What I'm asking for, rather than an approximate, is the actual number.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes. We have expanded OSAP to micro-credentials, and we have approximately 1,600—sorry, that's the micro-credentials. Do we have the exact number of students receiving that OSAP?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: There are approximately 400,000 students who are receiving full-time OSAP supports. I'll just have to search in another note to find the number of micro-credential supports.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Can I get the actual numbers later, rather than the approximates? I'm also wondering, what is the average amount that recipients receive?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: The average amount for university students in 2021-22 was just over \$10,000 for college students; for PCC students, approximately \$20,000; and for other students—for example, at other types of private institutions—that number is also approximately \$11,000.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. So can I get those actual numbers as well later, rather than just the approximates? And when you send that, can you break down the average amount by loan and grant—

Hon. Jill Dunlop: —right now based on enrolment for this fall?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: Absolutely. If I could just build on the minister's point, what I was citing was 2021-22 numbers, which would be the last full year that we have available. I'm happy to follow up on that basis for that year as well. Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sure. Send me the actuals for that. How much did the government pay for the Ontario Student Grant program in 2021-22, and how much do you believe you will be paying out this year?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: There was a total of approximately \$4.1 billion which went out for the OSAP program, overall. That is broken down in terms of funding which is provided by the federal government and funding which is provided by the provincial government. Of the approximately \$4 billion, approximately \$1.3 billion of

that money is from Ontario and the remainder is from the federal government. Of the Ontario amount, approximately 80% of that is provided in grants. Of the federal amount, approximately 70% of that is provided as a loan.

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Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. How many people are enrolled in the province's OSAP Repayment Assistance Plan?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: Let me check what I have available right now. That might be added to the list of follow-ups.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: We don't have numbers for this school year right now. The numbers are based on last school year because we don't actually have the enrolment numbers right now from the schools for this fall.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'll take whatever the latest numbers are.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Okay, so it would be the 2021-22 numbers that we have access to at this time.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. I'll let you search, but what I'm also curious about is whether the number of people enrolled in that program has changed over the last few years.

So this is a less data-driven question—a little easier to answer, hopefully. We've seen a progressive series of increases to the interest rate, and the governor of the Bank of Canada is hinting that more are coming. Prime is currently 5.95%. OSAP's repayment rate is prime plus 1%, which means that students are paying nearly 7% on their OSAP loans. The usual rationale for increasing interest rates is to change the behaviour of the borrowers. In this case, these students have already completed the years of post-secondary education. They can't change their behaviour, but they still have to pay the 7% interest. On the other hand, it may actually discourage some potential students from attending.

Is the ministry considering reducing that interest rate so as not to punish students for the general economic climate or, better yet, eliminating interest on student loans entirely in Ontario, like the federal government did at the national level?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Before I hand it over to the deputy or the ADM, I just wanted to go back to your other question about the usage of OSAP. So we did see a decrease, because it is a needs-based system. Whether that was looking at the COVID pandemic, maybe students not accessing education at the time or taking a break, we have seen that decrease. We will likely, as things return to normal for students and students return to the classroom, see that usage increase again.

May I pass it to the deputy?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay, I do just want to clarify that what I'm interested in the change for is participation in the repayment assistance program.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I'll refer that to ADM Gilbert.

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: What I'm able to advise today is that, as of today, there are over 400,000 students who are in the repayment assistance program.

A couple of other notes on your question related to interest: As you may know, for students who received

loans from OSAP, the Ontario portion of the loans are interest-free during full-time studies. Interest begins to accrue on the student's loan when they cease full-time studies. However, students have at least six months following the end of their studies before loan repayments are required.

As you know, there is the repayment assistance program. I'll jump to the punchline, which is that most participants in the repayment assistance program, or RAP, qualify for zero payments. I'll back up a few steps to how that program works. Enrolment in the RAP is not automatic, but students can apply, and if they, based on their income, require any supports in making repayments, that is offered through the repayment assistance program.

There are, in fact, two stages of the repayment assistance program. In the first stage, the governments make payments towards interest only. In the second stage, the governments make payments towards interest and principal. And in the program, as you may know, participants are not required to pay more than 20% of their family income towards their loans. Again, most applicants qualify for zero payments, and this year's number, as I said, is over 400,000.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: That wasn't really an answer to my question, so I'm going to assume the answer is no, the government is not planning to provide any interest relief to graduates who are paying nearly 7% on their loans.

But speaking about the six-month period, the grace period post-graduation: Research shows that students are most likely to achieve stable employment two years after graduation, rather than that six-month window. Is the ministry considering expanding the repayment period to two years to actually allow students to achieve stable employment before they have to start repaying those loans?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Not at this time. As you mentioned, it's six months, and what we are seeing and what we are hearing throughout the local labour markets and sectors is that they need employees, and students are graduating into jobs, if not—job opportunities being presented to them before they're even graduating.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I think the ADM wants to add to that.

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: I'm happy to build on the minister's response. The average term of repayment is typically nine and a half years, though for RAP we can negotiate a much longer payment period. I was also going to flag that your RAP eligibility is re-evaluated every six months, so to your point about students who might require two years to establish themselves in employment, being more in a position to make payments, that's certainly what is anticipated under RAP, where there is that evaluation of ability to pay on a six-month basis.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay.

Changing topics a bit, I have a few miscellaneous questions we'll see if we can get through. Ontario has got the highest student-to-faculty ratio in the country, and another—how shall I say this—outcome of the shortfall in

public funding for colleges and universities is that they are increasingly making their own staff and faculty precarious. More than 50% of faculty appointments at universities and colleges are temporary rather than permanent. Does the government have any plans to address this staffing situation and engage in faculty renewal across the sector?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'll take that question. Publicly funded colleges and universities are autonomous institutions, so they are making those decisions in the collective bargaining process with their faculty and staff on campuses. Government is not directly part of that process or planning.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But they're making that decision in a context where the government has frozen tuition rates and is also providing less than 30% of their funding. They're not making these decisions in a vacuum.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Deputy, would you like to comment on that?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: The minister is correct in that they are autonomous organizations making these decisions. As we stated earlier, we do provide operating grants to the universities and colleges. Private career colleges do not receive that funding, but there are other sources of funding that we provide to them to support them. In addition, they are governed by a board of directors, and they make those decisions on how best to run their institutions.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You don't see any risk to the quality of education in Ontario as we make our workforce increasingly precarious?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I'd like to defer to ADM Shields.

Ms. Kelly Shields: Just building on what the deputy said, the institutions are autonomous. They make those decisions through their collective bargaining process, so we don't have any say in that. We do continue to provide operating grants to the institutions, and they make their decisions in terms of their hiring and faculty, so we have no control over that.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: All right. Thanks.

What's the maintenance backlog currently at publicly funded universities, colleges and Indigenous institutes across the province?

Ms. Kelly Shields: It's over \$6 billion. We have been providing, as I mentioned earlier, a lot of support for renewal needs at institutions. It has been a priority of the ministry, and over the next decade we'll be dedicating \$2 billion to help institutions upgrade their facilities and also upgrade their equipment in light of the needs.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. Can I get the actual amount later?

Ms. Kelly Shields: Sure.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you.

I also have a question about capital funding allocations to public colleges and why they are not based on need, given the differing levels of deferred maintenance and state of repair at public colleges.

Ms. Kelly Shields: We have been working with institutions, based on information on their facilities audits and things like that, looking at their enrolment, but also

looking to factor in their actual infrastructure deficits, as well. So we are moving towards that basis and looking at how to allocate funding. Through some of our programs, like equipment, we do have a competitive portion where they can come in with projects, and we assess those. Some is allocated based on enrolment approaches, and there are also portions for equipment. That's a competitive-based process that we have as well.

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Ms. Chandra Pasma: So you feel the current budgeted capital repair funds are adequate to meet the challenges of health and safety for students, faculty and workers but also the challenges of climate change?

Ms. Kelly Shields: In terms of health and safety, the facilities renewal program is a shared program. It's not fully the government's responsibility; the institutions share in that, as well. So we do provide funding to support them. It is there to support health and safety so that is one of the areas that's eligible under that program.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Changing topics again, to Indigenous institutes: They rely on government funding for 90% of their operations, yet in 2020 they received only \$4 million a year from the Ontario government, which is an average of only \$444,400 for each institute. The government's own data showed that you provided bursary funding to only 800 Indigenous students in 2021-22, which is an astonishingly low number. And special funding grants for Indigenous learning and the Indigenous student success fund are too little for the entire colleges and universities sector combined.

My question is: While there is much talk about reconciliation, the funding needed for Indigenous learners across the province shows there's no real dedication to this issue. Does the government feel that Indigenous learners have enough resources and support?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. I'll start off by talking about some of the supports that we have in place for Indigenous learners, and then if the deputy or ADM would like to join in as well.

As we stated earlier, OSAP does provide financial assistance to qualified students, including Indigenous students in post-secondary studies. It grants loans, bursaries, scholarships and other financial aid programs. There were 5,758 OSAP recipients across all institution types who self-identified as Indigenous for the 2021-22 academic year. Self-identified Indigenous students received OSAP funding totalling approximately \$78 million for the 2021-22 academic school year.

OSAP has provisions to support the unique needs and economic circumstances of Indigenous learners, which includes the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant. This was introduced in the 2018-19 academic year to address the high costs of travelling to college or university for Indigenous students living in remote First Nations.

Actually, when I was at St. Clair College last year, I was speaking to a First Nation student who was from the most northern point of Ontario, who was travelling to St. Clair College. We were talking about how this grant was actually supporting her in that travel.

The travel grant is delivered as part of OSAP and provides funding for travel costs for eligible Indigenous learners to attend an OSAP-approved institution within Ontario. The funding can include up to \$5,200 per year for air travel for learners, up to \$800 per academic year for hotel accommodations along the way. For learners traveling with families, it's up to \$2,600 per year for air travel, up to \$400 per academic year for hotel accommodations for families and up to \$300 per year for other forms of transportation—trains, buses etc. This continues to be available in the 2022-23 academic year.

Starting in the 2020-21 academic year, the travel grant eligibility criteria were updated to clarify that designated First Nation communities can include those outside Ontario and within Canada.

Deputy, do you want to add to some of those funding supports?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Certainly. Thanks, Minister.

In 2020-21, Ontario invested \$24.8 million into Indigenous institutes, which was an increase of about \$0.4 million from the previous year. This is in addition to a funding increase in 2021 of 7% from the previous year, in 2019-20. Provincial funding is provided through the Indigenous Institutes Operating Grant.

In the 2022 budget, the government approved an additional investment of \$4.5 million over three years to the Indigenous institutes to expand post-secondary program offerings, including independently delivered programs to train more Indigenous learners. This will provide a greater diversity of programs that meet the economic, health and social needs of Indigenous communities.

In addition, in the past year, the government provided up to \$12.5 million to increase the enrolment of personal support workers and nurses in Indigenous institutes, which was really widely received. We provided an additional \$9.5 million under the Indigenous Institutes Mental Health Grant and another \$0.65 million under the Indigenous institutes accessibility funds for learners grant to support accessibility for students with disabilities at Indigenous institutes.

So there are a number of funding programs and initiatives other than the operating funding that certainly recognize that Indigenous institutes are an important part of our sector. They are growing and developing, and we're supporting them. In addition, the colleges and universities—there's funding provided to them to support Indigenous students.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: In 2021, there were over 17,000 self-identified Indigenous students enrolled in colleges and universities across the province.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: One more thing I wanted to include is the student fixed contribution: Indigenous students are exempt from that. All students who apply for OSAP assistance are expected to contribute \$3,600 towards the cost of post-secondary studies. Those who identify as Indigenous are exempt from that contribution, so this can result in additional grant and loan funding for Indigenous learners.

The supports are there, and it's important that Indigenous students have the opportunity to be able to learn closer to home. We have nine Indigenous institutes across the province who provide great learning opportunities for students in their communities.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That's all the time that we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the independent member for 10 minutes. You may begin.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Minister Dunlop, I was sorry to hear that your daughter was diagnosed with epilepsy. I hope that she's gotten the care that she needs.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I had an opportunity to speak with Alan Shepard, the president of our alma mater, just a short while ago, and he had pointed out to me that there has been no increase in the per-student grant for the entire duration of this government. I wonder if you could comment on why that is and whether there are any plans to change that.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Deputy, can I ask you to speak to that, please?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Sorry, is that the per-student grant through OSAP?

Mr. Adil Shamji: No. The per-student grant that the university receives.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: ADM Shields? I'm looking. It probably has a different program name.

Ms. Kelly Shields: I do have operating grants for colleges and universities, so if I just look at 2021, the grant per FTE was \$7,496 at colleges and, 2021-22, \$7,365. So, yes, it has gone down a little bit. On the university side, 2020-21, it was \$8,305, and for 2021-22 it was \$8,334.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, so Dr. Shepard was just pointing out to me that it's been frozen for the entire duration of this government, at a period during which there's been unprecedented inflation. And this just on the domestic side. So my question is: Why is that? And is there any plan to change that?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: At this time, we haven't been having conversations about that, but I can take that back to the team. But I'm going to say, I think with tuition being frozen and the decrease in tuition to help the students, we're not looking at it at this time.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Unfortunately, with frozen operational grants more generally, particularly for infrastructure, with the rising cost of inflation, if what you're saying is accurate—and I'm not disputing that—essentially what that means is, there are less funds left over for maintenance and infrastructure at the universities. So how is that challenge being addressed by this government?

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Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. In 2022-23, the capital allocation for post-secondary institutions is \$210.8 million. That is the \$20 million for the College Equipment and Renewal Fund and \$10 million for universities for the Training Equipment Renewal Fund, as well as the Capital Support Program of \$1.9 million. So this is funds for maintenance, repair and renovation of existing facilities. The facility renewal program is also

\$178.91 million, and this is for new instructional state-of-the-art equipment.

I mentioned the college fund and the university fund, so these are—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Are there any plans to increase that?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: This was the 2022-23 amount. We worked closely with colleges and universities on their needs, ensuring that they have adequate, up-to-date training equipment for students to be learning on, as well as state-of-the-art facilities—

Mr. Adil Shamji: I guess the crux of what Dr. Shepard was trying to share with me is that this amount of funding is inadequate. What worries me even more—and this is probably a second question—is that the FAO has projected that, even according to the expenses that have been committed to in these reports, it's actually anticipated that there will be a progressively increasing shortfall over the next five years, up until 2028, accumulating to, at its worst, an underinvestment by \$2.3 billion.

So, number one, to the crux of Dr. Shepard's question, as per his and other universities' request: Is there any plan to increase the infrastructure and capital allocations over the next few years? And then, a second question: How do you account for the rather dramatic difference in—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Mr. Adil Shamji:—projections between what the FAO has and what you're reporting here?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: In response to the FAO: The capital investments, including the renewals, are a joint responsibility and shared priority of the ministry and the post-secondary institutions. To help address the backlog, as I mentioned, the government is investing \$209 million in capital renewal projects through the facility renewal program and then what we call "the surf and turf" for the college and university training equipment. This is a funding increase of \$118 million compared to 2019-20, so we have seen an increase in that time.

We continue to look for opportunities to increase investments in renewal, while working with the colleges and universities to support institutional-driven investment in their facilities' renewal.

Mr. Adil Shamji: And then how do you account for the discrepancy in what the FAO is reporting will be a \$2.3-billion underinvestment by 2028 to deliver on the programs that have already been promised?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: I think the difference is, what the FAO is talking about is operating funding—and, probably, the relation with tuition as well—as opposed to capital funding. So I guess your question is, what are the plans to address operating funding? And I would say that there's no plans at this time, but the financial stability of our organizations, our institutions, is certainly something that we're concerned about, which is why we worked with Deloitte to develop a framework for greater financial oversight and monitoring of our institutions. I think we spoke about that this morning. You weren't here then—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sorry about that.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: No, no, that's fine. But it's a more rigorous approach for the ministry to work with our

universities and college partners in terms of being proactive in the case where—to avoid a Laurentian situation in the future.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Perhaps we can get a little bit more specific. I wanted to ask: One of the heartbreaking stories that was shared with me as I've been getting to understand the post-secondary sector a little bit better has been that of Lakehead University. They had a shovel-ready project that would have supported Indigenous youth, approved by the Indigenous communities in the area. It had previously been funded by the Liberal government, and then, unfortunately, in 2018, when governments changed—as they do—that funding went away. This Indigenous centre was going to be called Gichi Kendaasiwin Indigenous centre, and I wondered if you might be able to speak to whether there are any plans to restore funding for that.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. This is Lakehead in Thunder Bay or in—

Mr. Adil Shamji: That's the one.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I have an Orillia campus too, so I know they're doing a lot of great work there.

Our ministry doesn't fund new capital projects, so I can't speak to—we wouldn't be funding a new capital project. I'm not familiar with what the situation was prior to our government and who was looking at funding that. But I know our colleges and universities work very closely with their communities' fundraising efforts, local industries that are working with the colleges and universities—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Forgive my naïveté. This is my first time around, so perhaps this is an issue on my end. So the Ministry of Colleges and Universities does not fund any new—

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Capital projects. We don't fund new buildings.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Interesting.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: That's why I'm curious how it was—

Mr. Adil Shamji: May I ask, for my understanding, how was NOSM funded, for example? How was NOSM built? Who funded that?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: NOSM? That was already existing.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Oh, it was an existing—

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yes. The work we were doing with NOSM was to make it independent from Laurentian University.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: That's why I was curious. I'm not sure what the situation was prior to our government and who was funding that, if it was even being funded through government or was it another project with a partner on the side. So I can't speak specifically to that, just that we don't fund capital projects.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Can I just—

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Deputy?

Ms. Shelley Tapp: The capital funding that we do have is for rehab and renewal, mostly, so for new roofs or new HVAC systems. So it is a constant request from our

institutions. They want to build a new building; they want to build a new residence—we don't have that kind of capital funding for new builds. It's only for the refurbishment of what's already existing.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I see. Well, then, in that vein, one of the challenges that we're seeing as we're heading into an incredibly challenging fall season, some universities have felt that they need to mandate masking because they have felt as though they don't have—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That's all the time that we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government for the final 20 minutes. MPP Rae, you may begin.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the minister and the minister's staff as well—

Interruption.

Mr. Matthew Rae: —who are taking great time-keeping skills as well. We appreciate it.

I also apologize; I'm not a Western alum, I'm a Guelph alum, so don't hold that against me, Minister, please.

You talked earlier this morning—if my colleagues can remember to that portion of the day—about investments we're making in virtual learning opportunities and programs, and obviously co-op placements. We all know that careers are evolving and that we also need the education system to evolve. I know my colleague MPP Barnes and I in the Ministry of Education with Minister Lecce are working on that as well. I know our college is doing a great job adapting to the needs of the students in the 21st century, and also obviously employers. So, really, it's your ministry giving them the tools they need to be even more flexible than they already are.

Building on that, I'd like to hear a little bit more about what our government is doing, and your ministry specifically, to support micro-credentials and how they're integrating them into the traditional learning environment at colleges and universities. I know with the pandemic, lots of people are looking to upskill or get a new career. I know some of my former colleagues, of course, took advantage of micro-credentials at Conestoga College as well to advance and upskill some of their skill sets for their current employer. It's really a great way—and I'm a big believer in learning as a continuation. It's lifelong learning.

Minister, can you tell us a little bit more about some of our investments in micro-credentials and what the future might hold for Ontario with respect to the trades as well?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you, MPP Rae. As Minister of Colleges and Universities, I love all colleges and universities equally.

Ontario's economic recovery and future prosperity are dependent on a workforce that can quickly adapt and respond to an evolving labour market. As Ontario continues its work on rebuilding the economy, we know that businesses and employers need skilled workers now who can hit the ground running in a meaningful way, and workers need the appropriate skills and training to land the in-demand jobs of today's economy.

As you rightly mentioned, the future of work is changing. Where it was once commonplace for people to stay at one job for their entire career, we are seeing Ontario workers today changing careers and professions multiple times over the course of their lives. That means there needs to be more flexible, industry-relevant training options to prepare them for rewarding careers. Because more and more Ontarians will need to engage in lifelong learning to update their skills and expertise—and that's where micro-credentials come in.

As many of you know, micro-credentials are rapid training programs that help learners develop the skills and experience that employers are looking for. Alongside degrees, diplomas and certificates, micro-credentials offer a more flexible post-secondary education option and a faster pathway to employment and upskilling compared to diploma or degree programs.

1630

I can tell you, I was on a round table virtual call with OMAFRA last year, and they didn't realize I had come on to the call, and one of the attendees was praising micro-credentials and how great these were for re-skilling employees. He took the words right out of my mouth.

For many Ontarians, attending college or university can be a challenge. Setting aside two to four years to pursue full-time studies can be a difficult path to follow, depending on someone's circumstances. Micro-credentials can help workers who want to re-skill or upskill rapidly but who don't want to leave or aren't able to leave the workforce or their community for years to do so.

Over the past few years, my ministry has taken bold steps to promote this innovative and emerging learning pathway. We made our position clear last fall when we announced Ontario's first-ever micro-credentials strategy. With an investment of nearly \$65 million and the launching of the micro-credentials challenge fund, where we invited post-secondary institutions to partner with industry to design micro-credentials to meet the needs of today's employers and learners, my ministry's work with micro-credentials is only getting started. Today, we are funding over 65 new micro-credential projects, creating up to 250 individual micro-credentials at colleges, universities, Indigenous institutes and private career colleges across the province. That means many more new opportunities for people to upskill or re-skill for in-demand jobs. These projects were designed through collaboration between education and industry partners to help address local labour market needs. While some projects are individual micro-credentials focusing on specific skills such as digital marketing, Indigenous relations or network security, other successful projects include series of micro-credentials focused on topics like dementia care, tourism and artificial intelligence.

With the expansion of micro-credentials, we are setting up the post-secondary education sector for success, ensuring it continues to deliver world-class labour market-relevant education that leads to good jobs. Micro-credentials are truly the future of education, as they will not only support the talent pipeline fuelling our economic

recovery and future prosperity, but they will break down barriers and create a pathway for learning beyond the classroom.

It is also worth mentioning that Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer student financial assistance for micro-credentials, ensuring loans and grants will be available to more learners looking to rapidly upskill and re-skill for the in-demand jobs of today and tomorrow. As of today, more than 1,200 micro-credentials are approved for OSAP. And as more micro-credentials are developed, we continue to review them to determine if they will qualify for financial assistance.

For the first time ever, learners can explore opportunities in a centralized location online to easily find a micro-credential that works for them. When you find a micro-credential of interest, the portal will direct you to the website of the institution that offers it for registration and enrolment details. Hundreds of micro-credentials are now listed in the portal, with more being added regularly.

So as my colleague MPP Rae—maybe you are interested in looking into some additional micro-credentials to further your education? Micro-credentials currently found on the portal cover topics ranging from biometrics and health care to software quality assurance and testing. There's a micro-credential there for everyone.

While there's more to look forward to on the road ahead, these are significant milestones in Ontario's micro-credentials journey. We are supporting students by opening up more opportunities for them to get the skills and training they need for the in-demand jobs of today and tomorrow.

Now I'd like to circle back to your point on the future of the trades. Ontario's skilled trades are vital to the health and growth of our economy, offering careers that lead to secure, fulfilling jobs and a good quality of life. But right now, Ontario is facing a growing labour shortage in the trades.

And I'd like to thank the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour for the work you're doing. I understand that the skills fair is happening in Thunder Bay currently. So thank you for the great work that my colleagues are doing.

The reality is, the need to replace retiring workers in the skilled trades is elevated, as about one in three workers in Ontario with trade certificates is 55 years of age or over. That means these jobs will be in demand over the next several decades, and with so many pathways for students to choose from.

Coming from a family that grew up in the plumbing business, trades have always been near and dear to me. But, as a woman, there's still a real stigma around women working within the trades, and that needs to end. It's no secret that women have historically been under-represented in skilled trades. In fact, in 2021, women represented less than 4% of workers in automotive and construction skilled trades—jobs that are currently in demand. But we are seeing progress, with more and more women considering a career in the skilled trades.

A few weeks ago I participated in—I love the name—the Jill of All Trades event at Centennial College. No, it

was not named after me, but I was very happy to participate. It was incredible to see all the young women who showed up to see what a career in the trades could look like. I was actually talking with a guidance counsellor who had brought in six young women from her school to participate in this, and I thought it was so great because often I hear people say, “Well, guidance counsellors don't know about the trades and aren't encouraging students.” But it was quite evident that this female guidance teacher knew the value and was bringing students from her school to participate in this event. When I attended, I had the opportunity to remind the young women that our government will continue to give women and all learners flexible access to the innovative training they need for good jobs.

With that, I will pass it over to the deputy, if you want to continue on some of the work we're doing with the micro-credentials or with the skilled trades.

Ms. Shelley Tapp: Just to highlight, on the micro-credential strategy, some of the things that we did in terms of implementing it as a very innovative and first-in-its-class lifelong learning program: As the minister said, the 2020 budget announced \$65 million over three years to support our first micro-credentials strategy, which will help retain and upgrade skills to find new employment. So far, that funding has helped to create the new micro-credential online portal, in partnership with eCampusOntario, to help prospective learners access micro-credential training opportunities.

We launched the Ontario Micro-credentials Challenge Fund, incentivizing the development of new micro-credentials that respond to regional labour market needs and strengthening partnerships between post-secondary institutions, training providers and employers through a competitive call for proposals, which was very successful.

We launched a public awareness campaign to promote micro-credentials among learners and employers, and we also expanded Ontario Student Assistance Program—OSAP—eligibility to include students enrolled in ministry-approved, quality-assured micro-credential programs in public colleges, universities and private institutions.

Finally, we're partnering with the Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada and eCampusOntario to implement the development of a virtual skills passport pilot project with 10 publicly assisted Ontario institutions. It's a wallet that will allow people to be able to accumulate their credentials in an electronic format.

ADM Gilbert, anything you'd like to add?

Ms. Tamara Gilbert: On the virtual wallet, indeed that is a tool that would allow students and learners to access and store their credentials as well as share those credentials digitally with prospective employers. It's that really important ability that students have, to walk around with their credentials but also share them digitally with potential employers.

As the deputy mentioned, there are right now 10 publicly funded institutions who are involved in our pilot project to develop the wallet. Those institutions are Brock,

Centennial College, Conestoga, Durham, Fleming, Humber, Niagara, Oshki-Pimache-O-Win/the Wenjack Education Institute, University of Windsor and Western.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Any further questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you for those answers and that information. Just jumping back a little bit to some of the questions that I was alluding to earlier around research: You listed many research institutes and talked about the work they do, but I would like to know how the research institutes access these funds. Can you tell us about some of the funding pools the ministry has dedicated to research over the coming fiscal year?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you for the question. I'm going to pass it over to the ADM.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: The ministry has multi-year transfer payment agreements with the suite of eight research institutes that we discussed before. Those have been long-standing relationships, in many cases; some are newer. They came along when there was the right opportunity and a group of people with an idea and with the right resources and capacity in place to really put Ontario on the map in an area of research. So that's our funding for research institutes.

1640

Perhaps I could talk about the competitive research funding programs and how those are accessed across the province. We have three competitive research funding programs. They're under the Ontario Research Fund banner.

The first of those is the Early Researcher Award Program. This is a prestigious program that provides funding to researchers within the first five years of their first appointment or 10 years from their terminal degree—a terrible term—meaning the last degree that they earned. It's designed to help them build their research teams of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and research associates, and it's an important tool used by universities, academic hospitals and colleges to attract and retain top research talent to Ontario.

I mentioned this is a prestigious program. Donna Strickland, recent winner of the Nobel Prize in physics, was a recipient of this program back in the day when it was called the Premier's Research Excellence Awards.

Our success rate for this program is about 20%. All of our research funds are peer-reviewed, application-based programs, and we fund approximately 20% of the number of applications we receive for this program each year. Funding is awarded through calls for proposals or rounds of the program, and for this program we issue one call per year.

The second competitive research funding program we administer is the Ontario Research Fund—Research Excellence Program. This funds the operational costs of leading-edge transformational and internationally significant research projects that are of strategic value to Ontario. By designing this program, we fund one third of project costs, meaning the province's investment leverages significant additional investments to the province. Our research

excellence program funds projects across all disciplines and, as I said earlier, at all stages of research.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: With that said, within the program we have the ability to target specific areas of research that align with government priorities. For instance, in the latest round of this program, round 11, which is currently being adjudicated, there was a call-out for projects at a higher TRL, or technology readiness level. This was designed to attract proposals with nearer-term commercialization potential, and also to attract more college applications into the program, given that colleges engage primarily in applied research. Round 11 also did a call for proposals in the fields of automotive innovation, AV technology and critical minerals, to align with government priorities of the Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network, or OVIN, and the Critical Minerals Strategy.

We launch rounds of the RE program approximately every 18 to 24 months, and projects that are awarded through that program typically last for five years.

The third competitive funding program is the research infrastructure program, or RI. This funds the modernization, development and/or acquisition of research infrastructure at Ontario's universities, colleges and research hospitals. The ORF-RI Program is a vehicle to bring federal research infrastructure funding into the province, and the funding formula is 40% provincial, 40% federal and 20% institutional sources for those awarded projects. This is how we bring that federal research funding into the province and ensure Ontario gets its fair share.

There are three streams to the research infrastructure program. The small infrastructure program helps institutions attract and retain researchers early on by helping them acquire the equipment and renew the state-of-the-art equipment in their laboratories. There are three rounds of this program launched each year.

There is a college infrastructure fund which is dedicated to colleges, which invests in the state-of-the-art, industry-relevant research infrastructure specifically at colleges, to foster partnerships with the private, not-for-profit and public sectors, and to support business- and community-led innovation. There is one round of the CF program launched each year.

Finally, the large infrastructure program invests in institutional research facilities that bring together researchers from a range of disciplines, along with technology experts at industry partners, to generate new ideas, stimulate technology development and support the growth of strong regional economies.

Rounds of the RI program also launch approximately every 18 months to two years. We are dependent on the federal granting agency, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, on the timing of the launch of rounds for the research infrastructure program, because it is a co-funding program. So we do work collaboratively with CFI, and one of the ways that we do that, for instance, is to leverage their research excellence review very often, meaning that we can focus our time and attention on the Ontario

strategic value review and making it more efficient for researchers.

In addition to these core programs, we have used the framework of the Ontario Research Fund programs to support things like the COVID-19 Rapid Research Fund that the minister spoke about earlier. And also, we have used the structure of the RI program for a new ORF BRIF program that was announced in the budget, a \$16-million investment to match a new federal investment to strengthen bio-manufacturing research capacity by upgrading existing bio-containment facilities to support pandemic preparedness and help reduce reliance on foreign supply chains for critical goods and production capabilities.

All of these programs that I've just described use a peer review process to assess proposals. Discipline-specific panels are struck with leading researchers in each field from all around the world. Projects are assessed based on scientific excellence and strategic value to Ontario, which often encompasses commercialization potential and the quality of the research team and project governance. Recommendations from the peer review panels are assessed by the Ontario Research Fund review board—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Rachel Simeon: —which works to ensure consistency across the panels and rolls up final funding recommendations for the minister.

In recent years, we have also incorporated a research security review into the selection of successful projects. This makes Ontario a leader nationally in doing this. We do this in collaboration with the Office of the Provincial Security Advisor at the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Applicants must complete a mitigating economic and geopolitical risk checklist as part of their application. This asks them to identify any research partnerships or affiliations as well as sources of funding in the project. Then projects that are short-listed for funding through the peer review process would be then put through a review by the Office of the Provincial Security Advisor to identify any risks. Since we started this practice, no high-risk projects have been funded.

Where the risks are seen as able to be mitigated, we then—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. I'd like to thank the minister and everyone who joined us this afternoon.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Mme France Gélinas: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): A recorded vote has been requested. For all of the votes?

Mme France Gélinas: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Okay. MPP Gélinas has requested a recorded vote for all of the votes.

Shall vote 3001, ministry administration program, carry?

Ayes

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

Nays

Gélinas, Pasma, Shamji.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

Shall vote 3002—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Can I ask a quick question?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes, MPP Shamji?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sorry to interrupt. The ministers and deputy ministers have quite a bit of information that they have to get back to us. Does it make sense to vote while we don't have all the information?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Pursuant to standing order 69, we have to vote. Thank you.

Shall vote 3002, post-secondary education program, carry?

Ayes

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

Nays

Gélinas, Pasma, Shamji.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

Shall vote 3005, research program, carry?

Ayes

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

Nays

Gélinas, Pasma, Shamji.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

Shall the 2022-23 estimates for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities carry?

Ayes

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

Nays

Gélinas, Pasma, Shamji.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2022-23 estimates of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to the House?

Ayes

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

Nays

Gélinas, Pasma, Shamji.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I declare the motion carried.

Thank you. That concludes the estimates for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

We will now recess for five minutes before we begin consideration of the 2022-23 estimates of the Ministry of Education.

The committee recessed from 1649 to 1654.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer. Are there any questions from the members before we begin?

I'm now required to call vote 1001, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Education. Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Good afternoon. Bonjour to everyone. I am pleased to be here to discuss the 2022-23 estimates for the Ministry of Education before the standing committee.

I just want to introduce the deputy minister, Nancy Naylor, who is with me, and thank her for her leadership in the public service—as well all the ADMs that have joined us both virtually as well as Yael Ginsler, who is with us as well, from the student achievement branch, and the entire staff that work with us, including my political staff, as we work to ensure quality learning in our schools. It is my honour to serve as the Minister of Education, Chair, and the dedicated individuals in the ministry are fully committed to ensuring students receive the education they deserve with the supports they need so that they can reach their full potential. That is the mission we are on.

As noted, we are grateful for the dedication of our staff, as well, within our schools: the education staff who are ensuring children succeed in schools, who give them the tools to prosper in life. And I want to thank our school boards and our administrators for their ability to adapt to what has been a truly ever-changing landscape, working with us to ensure students remain in class as they catch up from two years of pandemic disruptions that have affected children in the entire Western world.

I also want to thank the child care and early years sector for their hard work, commitment and resilience—often overlooked—but a critical part of our staff, that enabled our economy to carry on and for parents to get to work. They really care for our youngest learners, perhaps the most vulnerable among us, and for that I just want to express gratitude to them.

Lastly, I want to thank parents and students across our province for their resilience over the last two years, as we have truly faced a great difficulty, a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. At the worst of it, we were able to see students and children stand up together and do what was right, even if it was difficult, in the context of following all the rules and doing their very best to flatten the curve over those months. I just want to say thank you to them, given that they bore so much of the difficulty of the pandemic. We now have a double obligation today to do everything humanly possible to keep them in school, which is an issue of priority for this government.

I also want to note the obligation we share to children to ensure that they have the tools to succeed, particularly when it comes to catching up after years of learning loss. To put it simply to my colleagues present, this government has made record investments in education, delivering real results for the people of Ontario. It may be a matter of contention in the Legislature, but not when it comes to the numbers that speak volumes about the historic funding increase, on an annualized basis, every single year in this province compared to the year prior—billions more than where we started under the former Liberals at the peak of spending.

That is a good thing. It demonstrates, in part, a commitment to put the dollars to work where we know it will make a difference: the next generation of our thinkers and innovators in the province. That's why we have invested heavily in spending in public schools. We have connected Internet to every school in the province. We've made practical improvements to technology within our schools. We're now employing the most teachers and education workers in the history of Ontario. And we've made critical modernizations to the curriculum, which I hope all members will reflect upon—the necessity to ensure that life and job skills are front and centre within our curriculum.

We've also combatted disparity that exists, the barriers that hold some kids back, particularly by destreaming the grade 9 curriculum, all of it. We focused on STEM learning. We've added new mandatory learning on coding, on financial literacy, on food literacy, on anti-bullying, on anti-racism, on anti-human trafficking and mandatory Holocaust education, just announced days ago. All of this is being done to ensure that kids have a modern reflection of the labour market as it exists today. We'll talk more about that.

We are also investing in student mental health and reforming the Ontario College of Teachers to ensure that we have the best teachers in the world, by establishing new governance structures that strengthen student protection, public accountability and focus on merit-based hiring,

which I do know is a matter of debate amongst the parties present.

1700

There's no sugar-coating this. To the Chair and to my colleagues: We know COVID has had a profound impact on children, especially over the past year. It's why the government has made more than \$3 billion in resources available to ensure schools could be open and provide a safe learning environment, including over \$665 million of investment allocated for ventilation improvements, with more than 100,000 HEPA units in Ontario's publicly funded schools—a massive lift. There was no comparison in this nation, at any point in the pandemic, when it came to ventilation improvements. That is certainly true today, and we think it is so necessary that we continue to make those investments, which I am committed to doing and our government is committed to doing.

Our kids also need mental health supports, as we look to their wellness. We've seen surveys from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that suggested that COVID had great impacts on the mental health of students. We all know this from our own communities, but the data is clear: 59% of Ontario students say the pandemic has made them feel depressed about the future; 39% say it has made their mental health worse; and a significant number have contemplated suicide over this period.

These are not simply statistics. This is the reality facing our students today, and it's why we have made an unprecedented investment of more than \$90 million in 2022-23 to support student mental health and well-being—an over 400% increase for mental health from 2017-18, the peak of spending under the former Liberal government. This money is being used, or it has been used to date, to hire more mental health professionals. It has been used to support access to therapy. It has been used for critical interventions that allow these kids to get back on track.

It also includes \$10 million through the new student mental well-being allocation. I should note, colleagues, that for this September, this school year, we added another \$10 million of net new spending in this space, which I think is really important to help school boards deliver as much access to the care we know our kids deserve.

We're investing right now because we know students need the support. However, the mental health impacts of the pandemic are just one aspect of the true impact to a child. We know that the youngest learners have had critical developmental education disrupted and they're now struggling with foundational skills like reading, like math and like writing. We're seeing this, frankly, in every jurisdiction on earth, but that's certainly true in this country and in this province.

In the US, for example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a congressionally mandated assessment by the US Department of Education, showed significant declines in reading and math among nine-year-old students. Specifically, math scores were lower in 2022 than in 2020—the first-ever decline in that assessment in a 50-year history. We've also seen data points comparable

to this from BC to New Brunswick, where we've seen significant regression in math skills in the country.

Unfortunately, we've seen this experience in Ontario too. It does match the broader trend, globally, of academic decline during this period. While that may be true, we do have a plan in this province to counter it.

EQAO assessment results have shown that students here are facing some of these same challenges in mathematics and literacy, and I'm proud that our ministry has taken steps, head-on, to combat this phenomenon. We didn't wait for EQAO; we didn't wait, even, for the summer. We started in February of this year, well ahead of the data out on learning loss and the EQAO assessment results, when we launched Ontario's Learning Recovery Action Plan and then scaled it up in the summer to Ontario's Plan to Catch Up, and then, of course, built that out again, with additional supports every step of the way, to demonstrate to families, to educators and to the kids themselves that we are going to get them back on track, whatever the cost and the investment. We are doing that in a pretty profound way, and I want to speak more about that in a bit.

We've also ensured that the curriculum is relevant and labour-market-aligned. Far too often our students will say, "Why did I learn this?"—a question that, perhaps, perils generations of us. I think that is a problem, so we have really made a great effort in aligning the curriculum to the labour market to ensure that there's a greater emphasis on skills that a young person could monetize in life, however they define success, and that they are able to bring in a decent, good-paying income to fulfill the apprenticeship of being a Canadian—get a good education, get a good job, hopefully own a home—which the government believes, too, is part and parcel of this broad plan to ensure good jobs with good wages for these individuals in whatever sector they pursue.

I introduced a modernized math curriculum. This government brought that forward, including new mandatory learning to build that concept out on foundational skills, on coding, on data literacy, on mathematical modelling and financial literacy. I know at the least this is an issue that unites us all. This should have been in the curriculum probably two decades ago, and it took too long for the former government to get on with it. The last curriculum was updated in 2004-05, in math—the former Liberals—and I think that is regrettable, because the economy changed while the curriculum remained static, and many children in our communities will speak about that misalignment of skills and the fact that they have high rates of unemployment in the country. That is a problem which we are committed to fixing.

In September of this year, we ended streaming of grade 9 students in applied and academic courses in all grade 9 subjects, a practice that has in the past disadvantaged students, as I noted. Ending early streaming ensures all students can build the skills and confidence they need to succeed and to pursue any pathway they like, be it in the skilled trades, post-secondary, in the employment market. I believe it is absolutely incumbent on government to

remove barriers for progress, and streaming was one that no government in this generation seized themselves to tackle, and we have, and we are making sure there are additional supports in place in grade 9 for those very kids to succeed given this change.

We've also prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. We've introduced a modernized elementary science and technology curriculum, in addition to the destreaming of the grade 9 courses. That includes mandatory learning for the first time on coding, from grades 1 to 9, to make sure Ontario is a STEM leader, giving students the best shot at success in a modern, competitive global economy. We've connected science, technology, engineering and mathematics to real-world issues, to connect students to learning in a meaningful way.

We are now learning about the rise and application of advanced research, robotics and the development of artificial intelligence. In fact, in the new elementary curriculum, students will learn how to build and then code a robot. If it sounds sort of cool, it is designed to be as dynamic as possible, for children to be excited about learning and to make it a bit more hands-on. As we understand from educators, these kids get quite excited in those circumstances, so you'll see more of that over the coming weeks and months.

There's mandatory learning now from grades 4 to 9 on the relationship between how advancements in science and emerging technologies are enhancing the skilled trades and providing exciting career opportunities. We're actually starting younger, based on the feedback from employers. If you start mentioning it in the careers course in grade 10, it's too late; kids have already chosen their path because of streaming in grade 8, so we've got to get ahead of this. We've got to start early to destigmatize; we've got to start early to inspire young people on the dignity of these careers, which is exactly why we've done that as a mandate from grade 4 and up.

To my former colleague Daryl Kramp, who's very passionate about food literacy, and many of us who are as well—he brought in a private member's bill that ensured that food literacy is now implemented and mandated as part of our learning in our curriculum, particularly how it intersects with physical and mental health, local food production, knowledge of the scientific processes involved in agriculture and nutrition. I believe in personal responsibility, and I think the more we can help young people learn about that type of knowledge, the more we can help reduce costs to the health care system, which is important—but actually just making sure these young people are as healthy as humanly possible, that is why we do this. So we're very proud to have done that, with a great level of support from a variety of medical leaders and researchers across Canada.

The ministry is also aware of the importance of having accessible, easy and comprehensive education in schools, most definitely, but also through the collaborations we have through TVO and TFO. I do want to note the good work they are doing to provide high-quality online course content, appreciating it as a choice for some students.

Obviously, we are overwhelmingly focused on keeping kids in school—we know that is the best place for them—but we also know that many children will use an online course to supplement their learning. So we've taken measures as part of the Broadband Modernization Program—it is somewhat flabbergasting that it wasn't till the 2021-22 school year, in effect, that we completed broadband modernization in this province. But I'm proud to report in 2022 that all schools have Internet, and that is important to ensure we allow digital learning to take place in every community, particularly in the rural communities, the most remote communities in Ontario, where I know members on both sides hail from, that believe, as a matter of equity, they should have access to dynamic learning. Often, it's in-person learning by an educator, complemented by technology—and I think that type of integration really is an option for educators, but it's certainly a strength if an educator knows how to use the technology, so we provided training for them as well because we want them to be their best. For many educators who probably started in the system 15 or 20 or 25 years ago, that probably wasn't the norm for them. So we have to do more to continue to professionally develop their capacities. We know that students still need to learn in a modernized curriculum—learn the basics, and really get back on track, which is the basis for Ontario's Plan to Catch Up.

1710

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Chair. So we are committed to that.

The impacts of the pandemic on social skills—UNICEF had an article recently talking about the isolation during the pandemic and the impact on developmental opportunities for social skills for young people. Some of you are parents and you have spoken to me about your own children and the challenges and some of the regression you're seeing in some of the social-emotional skills and, frankly, in literacy, especially for the youngest kids. We know that social skills are an integral part of schools. It's why we believe—more than academics—these kids need to stay in school. Yes, there's a quantifiable level of regression in reading, writing and math; that's a global challenge. But beyond the academics, it's allowing a child to be within a safe space; allowing a child to access nutritional programs; allowing a child to be with an educator, a person who loves their kids; allowing them to be with friends. That is so important to children. It's why we make the case, the moral obligation we speak about, to these kids—because often it's the most vulnerable ones who pay the price when they're out of class, regardless of the cause of that disruption.

So we're working tirelessly to get kids back to a normal school experience. We have done that over the past months. And I think it's imperative that these kids stay in school with the benefits of extracurriculars, of clubs and sports, to develop that well-rounded leader I think we all aspire.

I do want to speak about the Grants for Student Needs. It's \$35.1 billion being invested in publicly funded

schools. That is the highest number in Ontario's history by far. In February, we did announce the GSN, the funding vehicle for school boards: \$600 million to strengthen learning recovery in reading and math. It was anchored by the largest investment in tutoring in the country. There is just no province, including the New Democrats in BC—no one has done something like this of this scale, by any point. And I say that simply to say we are ahead and leading and doing our very best to provide every support for these kids.

The GSN is a \$683.9-million increase in funding. The total funding overall is \$26.1 billion. This is a 2.7% increase from the year prior. The numbers speak volumes: 9.2% from 2017-18 from when we started. There is \$500 million specifically to fund approximately 150 high-impact initiatives with an emphasis on STEM, on mental health, on job skills in tutoring and reading supports. There is \$175 million, part of the tutoring program that I mentioned, creating a one-of-its-kind publicly funded tutoring program to help these kids in the fundamental skill sets. There's \$90 million in mental health. I did note that increase; it's a 420% increase in mental health since 2017-18. There's \$15 million specifically to provide the largest summer learning program in the province, particularly with an emphasis on targeted under-represented groups. Children with special education needs, racialized kids—the ones that need it most are the ones we really emphasize the school boards to reach out to, to bring them into these summer learning programs, help them reach ahead, help them take a course, help them get that additional support. Frankly, the feedback we have heard is very positive in this respect. We have also invested \$92 million more, an increase year over year, in special education for the most vulnerable kids. It's now at the highest level—\$3.25 billion—ever in Ontario's history.

We know there's more to do. It's why we provided another extension of the time-limited \$304-million COVID-19 learning recovery plan, part of the GSN, because we wanted to provide additional hiring of roughly 3,000 front-line staff, be that educators or early childhood educators or EAs or other education workers that are really critical to learning recovery. We've hired them. Literally, school boards have the resources and the investments to hire thousands of additional staff this year compared to years prior.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: There's \$25 million specifically for reading assessments and early intervention programs for the youngest kids in kindergarten and grades 1 and 2, where literally, for the first time in Ontario's history, we're going to do an assessment of every child in those grades, and then an intervention strategy of the resources to help them know how to read, a fundamental skill. Illiteracy costs the economy billions, and mental health and confidence and so much else.

The Plan to Catch Up is the anchor of our strategy. We are building new schools. We are investing in personnel. We are committed to these kids. The rhetoric I hear often

from some in the chamber doesn't reflect the financial investment, the fact that there are roughly 7,000 more front-line staff in our schools from 2017. This is not a matter of debate: 7,000 more front-line staff—educational workers—and just under 1,000 front-line educators. That didn't happen by magic or through prayer. It happened because our Premier and government had a plan to invest, which we'll carry forward over the next three years.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much, Minister. That's all the time we have for this round.

We will now begin questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition and government, and 10 minutes for the independent member.

As always, please wait to be recognized by myself before speaking. All questions and comments will need to go through the Chair. For the deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and staff, when you are called on to speak if you would kindly give your name and your title each time so that we accurately record in Hansard who we have. We also have staff from the Ministry of Education joining in person and virtually.

I will now start with the official opposition. You will have 20 minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Pasma, you may begin.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm going to skip the preamble since the government's procedural games mean that we have only 20 minutes to ask questions about an incredibly large file. I'd appreciate if you could keep your answers short and proportionate to my questions.

To start, what's the current repair backlog for schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member for the question. What I can confirm to the member is that the Auditor General has requested that the ministry and the government invest 2.5% on an annualized basis—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But my question was, what's the repair backlog currently?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I heard the question. I just want to provide context for the committee on what we are spending on maintenance in schools.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But I didn't ask for context; I just asked for the repair backlog.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, if I can just finish the thought, there's a 2.5% recommendation of the Auditor General of Ontario. I can confirm to the member that we are meeting that request. I can confirm that, unlike the school closure program of the former government, we are building schools, with 100 active construction projects. There is \$550 million invested this year and every year to build net new schools, including in your riding. That's going to continue.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay, but what's the repair backlog? I still didn't hear a number.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Pasma, if you would let the minister finish. I know it's been a long day. We are all tired and we have about 45 minutes to go. But when you speak over the minister, Hansard can't record that properly.

I would also like to remind the minister to try and be a little bit more succinct in answering the questions.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Chair, that is always a challenge for me but I will do my best. Verbosity is perhaps common. But what I will note simply is that the investment we are making in schools is designed as part of a \$14-billion, 10-year commitment to build and invest in and modernize schools. I know that is important for all members in this House.

I assure members that we will continue to build new schools, maintain schools and improve ventilation in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Since the minister can't answer the question, I would like to request that the ministry provide the number later. I can tell the minister that the last number we had was over \$16 billion. Given that amount, I'm wondering why the FAO reports that, when you account for inflation, the government is spending \$3 billion less on infrastructure over the next 10 years than the government did over the past 10 years.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. What I can confirm to you, and what the Auditor General has requested of this government, is that we are investing on an annual basis 2.5%—\$1.4 billion dollars—in maintenance funding. I know that is an important question for all of us. The fact is, we are fulfilling the AG's recommendation fully.

We're not just doing that on the maintenance side; we're actually going above and beyond. We are actually exceeding it when you add in ventilation spending, of which there is over \$600 million more, which is very much part of maintaining a healthy and safe school structure for children—\$600 million to improve mechanical ventilation and to ensure every school in the province has been audited and improved.

In addition, we are building new schools. There are 200 projects that we've approved alone in schools in Ontario, of which 100 are actively under construction today. That is a profound contrast from the mass closure program of only a few short years ago—the largest closure in the history of the province under one government.

We know that there is more to do, and I assure the member that we will continue to make those investments to improve the state of our schools in urban, rural, English and French schools in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What I'm hearing is you're going to do more but with less funding. That's wonderful magic to hear about.

Does the ministry have a plan to create a permanent solution to improve ventilation, including replacing HEPA filters with full mechanical ventilation in all learning spaces?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Pardon me, member. One more time—I just heard the latter part of that.

1720

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Does the ministry have a plan to create a permanent solution to improve ventilation, including replacing HEPA filters with full mechanical ventilation in all learning spaces?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes, MPP Martin?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'm so sorry to interrupt, but I have a really hard time hearing the questions. Maybe you could take the mask off—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Or, perhaps, MPP Pasma, if you want to bring the microphone closer to your face, that might be—

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'm sorry. It has been going on all afternoon. I had my hearing tested, and it's just fine. I just can't hear it. It's muttered.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We'll all speak louder. The point is noted. I've heard the question now. Thank you.

On ventilation: I do think there are some important updates here. The question is specific to sort of a post-HEPA filter world, if you will.

First off, we now have a standard in Ontario. Deputy, I may turn to you to outline it, but as I understand it, there is no standard like this in the country. In a school that doesn't have a MERV 13-quality filter, we have a HEPA filter in every single learning space. I just want to make sure we all hear this. In a school that doesn't have the highest standard of ventilation, filtration quality, MERV 13—which this government, unlike any I'm aware of in Canada, required every school to post, at a school level, last September 2021, in the interests of transparency. You could Google your child's amount of HEPA filters, if the school has been audited, the status of the filtration, how many times it's replaced, and the level, if it's a MERV 13 or below. If it isn't a MERV 13—the high standard, according to all the public agencies of Canada and other leading indicators—we now have a HEPA filter in every single room. So it's not just the classroom; it's the cafeteria, it's the gymnasium, it's the learning commons. We have two in every single kindergarten class in the province, regardless of if they have mechanical ventilation or not, because we know they're young kids and they couldn't really mask effectively.

So we have profoundly improved ventilation. There's \$450 million specifically in HVAC. Of that \$650 million, to the member's question, the overwhelming majority actually went to mechanical ventilation, so that more schools can have mechanical ventilation. The \$450 million was dedicated for HVAC, and then ancillary dollars were developed—part of that broader \$656 million for HEPA filtration with the province.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: That wasn't actually my question, so perhaps you didn't hear it, but I'm going to move on to a different one.

The Grants for Student Needs included a one-time grant of \$304 million for learning recovery and a 1% increase to salary benchmarks, and if you remove these from the comparison, the 2022-23 grants only increase by 1.5% compared to 2021-22. How are school boards supposed to be able to cover the same costs in 2022-23 when inflation is 7% annually and they're getting only a 1.5% increase?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just so I understand, member: You're suggesting that when you remove salary among the other items—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: When you remove the one-time funding.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, and you mentioned salary, if I'm not mistaken.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The 1% increase to salary benchmarks.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Okay. I just wanted to clarify. Thank you for the question.

First off, 80 cents, I will note to the member—you will know this, but 80 cents on the dollar in education currently goes to salaries and benefits; 80 cents on the dollar in education goes towards compensation. So it is curious to say, "If you remove the factor that represents 80 cents on the dollar"—how can we objectively do that? This is all part of how we staff schools. We need personnel. We pay them accordingly. That's part of the GSN. Enrolment is also part of that reality.

What I heard you acknowledge is that funding is up this year, as it was last year and the year prior. In fact, it is \$3 billion higher than at the peak of spending under the former Liberal government. So the acknowledgement of an increase—we could debate the rate of increase, but to hear narratives or rhetoric around a decline in expenditure, when you yourself, by your own admission, have acknowledged the increase of investment—I think it's really important, because for those few who are watching, they want to have confidence that funding has increased to help these kids catch up.

We're the only province with a tutoring program. We're the only province that has made this type of ventilation improvement. We're the only province to announce a plan to catch up that actually increases staffing, with a \$304-million—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm pretty sure there's a hearing problem going on here, because what I remember acknowledging is that there's a 6% real cut once you account for inflation.

Coming back to the hiring of more front-line staff: I would like to get the numbers of how many have actually been hired in each school board with this allocation of \$304 million in time-limited funding to hire new staff.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for that question. I am going to turn it over to the deputy minister, specific to personnel. I can confirm that since 2017-18, since our government started, there have been just under 7,000 education workers and under 1,000 front-line educators who have been hired, current-tense—they're in our schools; they have been hired over the past number of years since 2018. With greater granularity, I'll turn to the deputy.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Thank you. I'm Nancy Naylor. I'm the deputy minister.

With the \$304 million, we do ask boards to track that. I don't have the board-by-board, but as a total, what we know is, we expect that that amount of funding would support about 3,300 FTEs. What we know is that boards are expected to spend about \$255 million on FTEs and about \$17.8 million for occasional teachers, so—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry. For clarification: When you say you expect, does that mean the ministry does not know how many staff were actually hired with this funding?

Ms. Nancy Naylor: It's November. We ask for this data on a monthly basis, so we are just receiving the October numbers now. That is the number that we are seeing boards hiring, yes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. I would like the number when it's available, please. And I'm wondering what proportion of this funding went to francophone school boards.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We will certainly take that back, the differential between English and French school boards. I can assure you that there's a great deal of work. We did launch a task force, led by the former parliamentary assistant, specific to helping recruit and retain French-language educators, where we brought unions, school boards, the francophone community and the government, working together for the first time on a strategy, given that there's a national problem that precedes our time in government. But definitely, those dollars are flowing to French schools to ensure that there's greater staffing, be it education workers or teachers, and we can circle back on that to the member.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. The ministry co-authored a report with francophone stakeholders on the measures required to hire more French teachers, but the funds that were announced in June 2021 were well below the investments outlined in the report co-authored by the ministry. Why has the government chosen to recognize the report and the urgency to act, but not committed to putting the funds forward that are necessary to solve the crisis?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question. My recollection of that announcement was that there are about \$13 million allocated, if I'm not mistaken, of funding specifically for the strategy. We accepted the overwhelming majority of the recommendations. I believe it was something like 30 of 35 or 30 of 33; I'll get the exact number for the committee. The overwhelming majority were accepted.

All stakeholders applauded the government for bringing all the entities to the table to fix a problem that has existed for over a decade. It existed in every region of the province. Outside of Quebec, we're all poaching educators from each other's provinces, so we're now coming up with a made-in-Ontario strategy. We've expanded the amount of French-language educators entering through the faculties of education. We've actually met with consuls general and ambassadors of the Francophonie to recruit. I'm proud to note that there are now some of these educators from the global French community that are working in our schools.

So the money is there. We announced \$13 million the day we announced the report, and I can assure the member that the funding will continue to flow until we really bring down this challenge, because there's a wonderful demand for French-language education, as well as French as a second language. They do great work. The EQAO data over the last decade tells a story. They're doing something very good in our French schools, and we're proud of that, and I want to make sure that they've got the staff in place to meet the demands of the growing population in every region of Ontario.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Having met with francophone stakeholders, I can tell you they are not applauding the government right now. They were happy to see the report released, but not happy with the lack of urgency since it's been released and the lack of action.

Since becoming education critic, one of the top issues I've heard about from all stakeholders, actually—parents, principals, teachers, trustees, education workers—is staffing shortages in the sector: teachers, occasional teachers and support staff of all kinds. We know that Bill 124 made things much worse, with over a decade of wage suppression for these workers. So what investments is the ministry going to make? Where is the plan to actually recruit people to fill these shortages within our education sector and make sure that our kids have all the caring adults in all the roles around them that they need?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question. I'd like to turn it over to Denys Giguère, the ADM responsible for French-language education. He'll be able to provide a great deal of detail specific to the plan, the implementation and some of the results that are coming online as a consequence of that task force.

1730

Mr. Denys Giguère: Good afternoon. My name is Denys Giguère. I'm the ADM for French-language education at the ministry. Thank you for your question and your interest in the issue of the teacher shortage in the French-language system—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm sorry. To be clear, I'm interested in the shortage across the education system, not just in the French school boards.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Would the member permit this ADM to speak to French, and then we can go general? I defer to—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I've only got, like, five minutes left, so talk about the general shortage.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Deputy, then, do you want to take a more macro lens to that? Pardon me, Denys.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We do look at our teacher workforce, our teacher supply-and-demand models, across both French-language and English-language. We work very closely with our partners in MCU and with the Ontario College of Teachers in terms of the number of teachers that we see in the pipeline coming through—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: —and we also work with the teachers' pension plan to understand retirement and propensity to retire, because we do see attrition through the professional year.

At this point we see a reasonable balance on the English side and pressure on the French-language side, so that is why our focus has been on the French-language side. We recognize that the COVID years have been challenging for the English-language boards as well, in part because of illness and early retirements, and so we have worked quite successfully for two years with the Ontario Teachers' Federation to negotiate an extension in pension eligibility for retired teachers. Retired teachers and principals have been extraordinarily helpful in terms of filling some of the gaps and some of the staffing pressures, but it's something

that we continue to monitor closely because it's very important to our sector.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Since 2002-03, just for context, the population of students has largely remained flat. There are 10,000 more designated early childhood educators. There are 19,000 other education workers. There are 17,000 more teachers. There are 440 more principals. Through the COVID recovery fund and the Support for Students Fund, which we have renewed this year, there are going to be roughly 5,000 education staff.

Obviously school boards continue to hire and build in the staffing, but it's a significant increase of staff, notwithstanding a rather flat line of enrolment. That may change in the future, but it's a good story to tell in the context of more staff, more resources to help these kids get back on track. I assure the member that will continue in the forthcoming GSN and the forthcoming school year, 2023-24. We really want to make sure they've got the right staff in place to support them, which is why we took the decision to unilaterally review the Support for Students Fund, which is of course part and parcel of the negotiation we're undertaking with our education unions.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: We also added full-day kindergarten in that period, and there's a reason why you picked 2002-03 as the first year for that. I think the shortages in our schools speak for themselves right now.

Can I get the breakdown of the mental health spending by school board, as well? Maybe that's a question for the ministry to take away.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: With respect to mental health, I—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's a specific question for the breakdown of the spending.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, I mean, I would refer the member to school board websites, where they would post the details of how the ministry funds. What I can speak to is what we provide them, which is a \$90-million allocation, which is 420% higher than where we started in 2017-18. We have 180 permanent psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers who now work within our high schools, in addition to the increment that was already there. We—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry. I just want the breakdown by school board. I don't need the whole summary of the overview.

I would also like to know, has the ministry tracked, for the tutoring funding, how much is going towards private providers rather than to certified teachers within the school board?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I can confirm that the school boards asked the government, as acknowledged through the head of OPSBA, for latitude to leverage local stakeholders. Often, they're non-profit community groups. I think about how for some of these children from, for example, racialized communities, school boards said, "Look, we want to turn to community to help empower these kids with an academic focus," and so we provided that latitude on their recommendation, as acknowledged, I think, in a weekend Star article.

But what I can also assure you is that those funds are supporting, I believe, over 170,000 children up until June—173,000 unique children, to be specific—and that there is a great deal of work being done in school boards now, as we extended the funding allocation to the end of the fiscal—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So that's a no on my actual question, which is, did you track how much went to private providers?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We've followed the advice of school boards. We've provided latitude—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay, but did you track how much went to private providers?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We've ensured that children have access to tutoring in schools—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'll assume that's a no.

I've got a couple of more questions and not much time. You said you budgeted for every licensee in Ontario to opt into the \$10-a-day child care, but only 92% actually opted in. What happens to the rest of the funding?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: First off, I think we should celebrate the fact that 92% of child care operators in our communities have opted in—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But what happens to the rest of the funding?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: And I want to note that your party had recommended we accept the first deal, which would have precluded for-profit child care, and the number would have been a third less had we done it your way. I'm happy the government—

Ms. Chandra Pasma: So what happens to the rest of the funding?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm happy that we had the fortitude to stand up for maximum choice. I will turn to the deputy just to speak about some of the mechanics of the funding allocation, but we've got the dollars. We know there's a need for capital—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That concludes the time we have for this round.

We'll now go to a government for this rotation. MPP Quinn, you may begin.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, Minister, for presenting to the committee. The teachers' unions, as well as members of the opposition, love to claim that our government is in the business of cuts to public education. Quite often, I'm debating this with my educator friends. In fact, nothing can be further from the truth. As the minister implied, and I agree, numbers do not lie. Can you please tell the committee about the record investments our government is making in Ontario's education system?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question and the opportunity just to speak about the commitment our government is making in publicly funded schools. There's \$26.6 billion this school year alone. It is the single-largest investment in Ontario's history. We have noted a significant increase in the Special Education Grant. We heard from members of government and families and providers that we need more supports as demand grows within our schools. So we increased it by \$92.9 million

more. That's now at \$3.25 billion overall—the highest levels ever.

Many members of this committee—I reflect on the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and others who have been very committed to ensuring more investment in special education based on their own lived experiences and the needs of their constituents. So we're really happy to see that investment increase.

There's \$26.1 million to renew 625 school-based public health nurses. How I recall the questions from the members opposite: "Do they exist? We've never seen them"—calling into question the validity and legitimacy of the public health nurse, who did so much work within our school system, from infection prevention walk-throughs with principals to immunization, to a critical level of support and interventions for parents, education to students and staff. We increased that; in fact, we doubled that, and I think that is making a significant difference.

We've also ensured the time-limited learning recovery fund—that's the COVID-19 fund, the \$304 million of staffing—which allows for hiring of more staff, roughly 3,000 as noted, and of course \$2 billion in capital projects. It's a full spectrum of investment. It's new schools; it's more staff; it's a modern curriculum; it's more supports for mental health and special education right across the board. I think it's really important that we speak about this and, more importantly, that we continue to make those investments.

The Premier has been clear that we're going to continue to make those necessary investments in children, particularly through the lens of getting them back on track. It's why Ontario's learning recovery plan is anchored by the belief that kids have to stay in school, have tutoring, have a modern curriculum, have modern schools and have additional personnel. I can confirm to this committee that we're doing each and every element of that plan, and we're going to continue to do so with a commitment to supporting kids' mental, physical and academic success.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Next question?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Minister, good mental health is critical to a student's success in school. Following two years of the pandemic, the statistics are troubling. Approximately one in five students aged four to 17 years old in Ontario meet the criteria for at least one significant mental health challenge. Can you speak to the excellent work our government is doing to support student mental health and well-being?

1740

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Burlington for the question and for her thoughtful advocacy, before she was a member of provincial Parliament, as a parent and leader in Burlington.

This is an area of emphasis for the government; it's great area of focus for myself. I think we need to have access to mental health supports where children need it, be it in community or in schools. We've taken a very progressive lens in the curriculum, for the first time including mental health in Canada within our health and physical education curriculum. It was the first curriculum

we reformed in 2019—that I reformed, rather, as minister in 2019, that the government undertook.

In addition to the knowledge of encouraging positive mental health promotion, destigmatizing this issue, as well, we have massively increased funding. The former government was spending in around \$16 million to \$18 million per year on school-based mental health, and today, it's \$90 million. It's 420% higher than where we started. There were 115,000 kids who were served by school-based regulated mental health professionals in the 2020-21 school year alone, and there were over 1,400 regulated mental health professionals directly employed by school boards in the year, an increase from 1,295 from the year prior.

In addition, over 9,000 school-based employees access the School Mental Health Ontario mental health literacy course that we provided for free to children. It underscores a continuous commitment to these kids' health and welfare, the recognition that the pandemic, the strikes that have proceeded and other disruptions have had adverse impacts on kids. So these investments, this additional staffing, the fact we've encoded it in the curriculum from grade 1 and up, in an age-appropriate way, in high school and elementary school and beyond, I think, is a very positive story. But the backdrop of that light is the darkness of many kids needing support and the pandemic exacerbating that reality.

I know in the community, my colleagues the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and a variety of other ministries are working together to break down this satellization that happens in government to better connect people. Looking at this from a patient experience or an end-user experience, not from government ministries that coexist and don't speak to each other, historically, we have, to great credit of the deputy minister and her team, really worked to integrate ourselves with the Ministry of Health so that the end-user, the child, gets better access to care wherever they need it. That is what drives the government to take action today, with the recognition that there's a lot more to do in the space. I'm open to ideas and recommendations on how we can strengthen that learning and strengthen the access to the care for these kids.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Jordan.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you, Minister—very informative.

The jobs of tomorrow require new skills. We have heard repeatedly that there will be a critical shortage of workers in the trades, and there's the shortage today. Those jobs are the backbone of our economy. Without the trades, new construction will grind to a halt, transit systems will stop and our economy will falter. Skilled trades have long been ignored by previous governments.

Can you please tell the committee what our government is doing to promote skilled trades in schools and eliminate the stigma associated with pursuing a career in the skilled trades?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. I think it is frustrating for observers to understand how it is that Ontario, and Canada, still has a high rate of youth

unemployment, that we have a stubbornly high rate of youth unemployment when compared to the broader employment rate. The question is, why is that? Have a generation of kids lost the inner fortitude, or the fire in their belly, to want to aspire for home ownership, aspire for a good-paying job? Often, I hear some people suggest the student is at fault. I would submit the system has been at fault for a generation, by not ensuring what we teach our kids is related to the labour market and the ever-changing landscape of employment in the country and the world.

A case study for this is, as we really emphasize as a government, on STEM education—science, technology, engineering and math—look at the math curriculum. It was 2005, I believe, the last time the government of the day, the Liberals, updated that curriculum. I often cite YouTube and Twitter and the iPhone having not been launched. That is a profound change in human behaviour, in the public discourse, the use of technology, and yet kids were learning something of a generation prior. The concept of AI, digital fluency and other skill sets were totally disconnected from math. They were not learning to code. They were not learning financial literacy as a mandate in every grade. That created a competitive disadvantage for our children.

Science was updated in 2005, the next year—again, totally disconnected from some of the necessary emphasis on innovation. This ensured many children and young people in our province had that disadvantage when it came to jobs and good-paying jobs. The mission that the government is on and the mandate that I have is to better connect young people to the labour market based on skills they can monetize in life. That allows them to get a good job; it leads them to own a home and retire with dignity—that sort of apprenticeship of being a Canadian. I speak from my own experience as the son of immigrants: That's what we came here to do.

I want young people to know that we are finally modernizing this curriculum. We are ensuring they have skill sets in life and in jobs that will lead them to employment and create real opportunities for them so that, really, the next generation is better off than the one prior. I think for many young people—if I can be so bold to include myself in that category—my fear is that some young people have lost the zest to improve from the generation prior. It might be the first time in Canadian history that that has happened, and we cannot let it happen. As legislators, across party lines, we have to be resolved to give young people the motivation to carry forward and that curriculum alignment is critical to their success.

If we can give them a competitive advantage on coding, if we can provide financial literacy skills to understand how to budget and understand the concept of mortgages and debt and interest, to understand the idea of creating a budget for the year after university—these are skills that young people are urging government to implement, which they finally have, and I think that this speaks to a broader aim of what we're trying to do with our kids. We want them to be technologically savvy, emotionally intelligent. We want them to be highly skilled and ready for the jobs of tomorrow.

The curriculum reforms we have undertaken as a Progressive Conservative government are going to make a massive, quantum difference in the lives of young people. We now have updated our civics curriculum to inspire young people to believe in the principles of our democracy, of our freedoms, as well as the concept of digital literacy, which is increasingly relevant to safeguard our democratic norms. We've updated our health and physical education curriculum to create skill sets related to cyber victimization and bullying, which is a new risk and a new threat. All of these changes were designed to empower young people to be their best, to protect themselves and to live a life of purpose and dignity and opportunity.

I'm really excited by this because it is one of the areas where we can literally change a child's life. It obviously must be complemented by thorough professional development for our staff, which we're also undertaking.

I really want to recognize that the government and all of our members have been very focused on ensuring that young people have skill sets that will set them up for long-term success, and we are well under way to doing that.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Next question? MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I just wanted to talk about our math scores. We recognize that more EQAO results came back where the math scores have fallen and are lower than we anticipated, understanding that we had done an investment with the tutoring program and adhered to the request of school boards to give them the flexibility to use the funds accordingly, especially when they were addressing culturally relevant pieces as well as socio-economic pieces and, of course, the difference of urban and rural for school boards.

I just wanted to move in regard to getting some more updates on the math strategy that we have planned and what that will look like.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You said "we," which I think is an important recognition of the two parliamentary assistants in the Ministry of Education that have endured and, frankly, been an incredible asset to giving a voice to families, to students. I'm very grateful for the work that both parliamentary assistants undertake every day, from schools to child care. You're on it, and I appreciate it.

This is a very serious concern. The global research would underpin a phenomenon which we're seeing in Ontario—it's not unique, but it is real—that math, more than literacy, has regressed. Our EQAO data in grades 3, 6 and 9 would demonstrate that, particularly in 9, and that is a concern. So we have for a four-year math strategy that we've undertaken. This is about \$55 million being dedicated specifically in this space with respect to math leads, a modern curriculum, more staffing and an emphasis on going back to the basics of math, because we undertook a commitment to rid the province of the former curriculum, the discovery math approach, and said we'd go back to basics, which we have done.

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We have more funding for training of our staff. We believe that it's a matter of principle that if you're going

to become a new educator in Ontario, you need to meet a grade 9 math standard. I don't think that's particularly controversial, although it is a matter of contention with our colleagues across. I just think a new educator should have math proficiency. The intersection of math and social studies and so many other disciplines is obvious. So we need to have a higher level of expectation of the staff and of the students. Obviously, as you know, we've made that case to have that standard for teachers.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Five minutes left.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We've expanded professional development. We've expanded direct digital math diagnostic tools for students in grades 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9. We have \$25 million so that school boards, all of them, now have math leads to improve efforts, 140 math facilitators in over 700 schools to train teachers in the classroom. We've literally brought in specialized math educators, the best of the best, who we can second and put into school boards—or, often, they're from the school board—and they go to teach the teacher, with the best practices, the best knowledge, the cutting-edge research that will improve outcomes. That's what we want to achieve for children in the province of Ontario.

We've expanded online digital services through Mathify, through TVO, and Eurêka! on TFO's side.

And there's a new concept, a math action team, which we've announced as part of the most recent learning recovery program, to ensure that there's a greater level of evidence-based instruction to improve outcomes for students.

I do want to turn to the deputy, just if there's anything else to note with respect to mathematics that you would like to mention outside of—we've mentioned the curriculum; we've obviously mentioned the staffing; we mentioned the school board leads; we have mentioned that professional development. I'm not sure if yourself, Deputy, or ADM Ginsler would like to speak on the matter.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Minister, I might ask Yael to speak on it. She's our expert.

Ms. Yael Ginsler: Thank you. I'm Yael Ginsler, the assistant deputy minister of the student achievement division. Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

As the minister has noted—and thank you, MPP Barnes—we did see lower EQAO scores across all grades. This is consistent with what we are seeing in other jurisdictions. As a result of the pandemic, we are seeing lower levels of achievement in math, and math regression.

Our new math recovery plan that we are building towards will build on our four-year math strategy that we've had in place. Due to the pandemic, elements of it were not able to be implemented, as teachers, for example, needed to be redistributed into classrooms when some educators were off.

As a result, now we are ready to get back to basics, as the minister has said, and reinstitute our foundational math learning strategy. That will include, as the minister has said, math coaches in classrooms and in schools. We have a math lead in every school board in the province to help lead these efforts to make sure that we are having fidelity to our new math curriculum, which has, as the minister

said, back-to-basics foundations in math as well as things like coding and financial literacy that will put our students at a competitive advantage going forward.

We also have digital math tools. This will allow students and families to be able to access math learning anywhere, any time—at home as well as in the classroom.

We are also, as the minister mentioned, destreaming our grade 9 math program. That will really, again, allow all students to have a competitive advantage from the beginning of high school through our new grade 9 math program.

So we've got math leads in every board and school. We have teachers with additional qualifications in math. To date, we have over 5,000 educators who have completed additional qualifications through the funding investments available through the government, and we believe there's an additional 4,000 who will be taking this qualification this year.

So we are training up educators in math. We've got our new math curriculum. We've got digital math tools, as I've mentioned, and the one-on-one virtual tutoring that is available through Mathify and Eurêka!—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Yael Ginsler: This is virtual tutoring available to all students in the province to support one-on-one tutoring in math.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention our tutoring supports program, of course, which allows school boards to put even more emphasis—175,000 students, to date, have benefited from the additional tutoring supports that are available through schools to give students that extra support in math and in literacy that they might need at this time.

Of course, there's also the additional funding that is now available to parents directly, and this investment will support families in getting additional extra support that they might need for their students outside of all the support that is available in our schools and classrooms.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I should note, if I may, to the parliamentary assistant, eager for a follow-up: This is ancillary dollars—the support for parents? This claim that it's—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you, Minister. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the independent member. You may begin.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'll be brief; I hope you can be as well. Do your best.

The FAO projects student enrollment between kindergarten and grade 12 will increase at an average annual rate of 0.8%, and yet the FAO projects underinvestment by 2028 to the tune of \$6 billion. Will you commit to not cutting or scaling back any programs in order to make up for this underinvestment?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member for the question. I will turn it to the deputy. But I recall the FAO noting the lack of certainty around compensation, which of course speaks to a massive 80 cents—of our overall expenditures, so he put in a proxy, and so he suggested that

that will carry a massive differential for why that number may be perceived to be less over the years. Of course, the negotiations will hopefully conclude shortly and will provide clarity to the FAO.

To the broader question, if I may turn to you, Deputy.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: We work very closely with the FAO. He asked us for a lot of data and we supported his research, so obviously we look at his projections with some interest. A big difference between his projections and ours is we—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sorry; you don't need to explain the difference. I just need to know: Can you commit to not cutting any programs such as full-day kindergarten or increasing class sizes?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I can affirm to the member that we will continue to increase funding in publicly funded schools each and every year of our government.

Mr. Adil Shamji: That's not a commitment to not cutting full-day kindergarten or not increasing class sizes.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: There has never been contemplation on FDK—we made that clear, and the government has been clear with respect to expenditures. The basis of your question—are we going to invest to meet the needs of the residual gap you're suggesting that could appear over the coming-out years? I'm telling you we're going to continue, as per our track record, to increase investments every single year.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Turning to child care: The federal government is paying 97% of the \$10-a-day child care program, and the FAO has demonstrated that there is a shortfall; specifically, a greater need for investment to meet the demand that the current agreement does not fully cover. I'm not seeing that the province has budgeted for the missing 3%. Where is that coming from, and why hasn't the province committed that?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question.

Contingent on our deal with the federal government was a commitment by the federal government—this wasn't part of the original plan, but they ended up bringing this to the table—to allocate roughly a billion-dollar capital fund to create spaces. The province of Ontario—albeit the last province to join, by design, to get a better deal—one of the concerns we had at the inception, and still today, is that we need more capital investment from the feds to meet the needs of the federal program, which is more universal access of affordable care. We knew there was a delta, which is why we fought for this billion-dollar fund. In their budget a month or two later, they announced it, they unveiled it, and to date—and to the extent you may have relationships with your federal cousins, could you tell them to get the dollars to the—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you, Minister.

The time being 6 p.m., the committee will now take a quick break and resume in closed session for committee business.

The committee recessed at 1800 and later continued in closed session.

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