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Social Services**

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Department of Education

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Education

Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Chris Tibbs, MHA

Members: Perry Trimper, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA
Scott Reid, MHA
James Dinn, MHA
Paul Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Evan Beazley (A)

Appearing:

Department of Education

Hon. Krista Lynn Howell, MHA, Minister

Tracy King, Deputy Minister

Lisa Baker-Worthman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Learning

Terry Hall, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education Operations

Robyn Hayes, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services

Scott Linehan, Assistant Deputy Minister, K-12 Education

Tanya Noseworthy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education

Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller

Angela Picco, Director of Communications

Angelica Hill, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Hon. Andrew Parsons, MHA, Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology

Hon. Lisa Dempster, MHA, Minister of Labrador Affairs

Hon. Gerry Byrne, MHA, Minister of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills

Craig Pardy, MHA

Eileen Anderson, Government Members' Caucus

Ashley Politi, Official Opposition Caucus

Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Craig Pardy, MHA for Bonavista, substitutes for Chris Tibbs, MHA for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Andrew Parsons, MHA for Burgeo - La Poile, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, substitutes for Scott Reid, MHA for St. Georges - Humber.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Gerry Byrne, MHA for Corner Brook, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

The Committee met at 6 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): Okay, we're right on time, we're ready to go. I'm going to call the meeting to order. I'm going to announce the substitutes first.

For Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, we have Bonavista substituting; for Lake Melville, we have Burgeo - La Poile – he will be here shortly; for Mount Pearl North, we have Corner Brook substituting; for St. Georges - Humber, we have Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, who will be here shortly; and we have St. John's Centre and Topsail - Paradise here.

So an hour and a half in we'll probably take a very short break, we'll see where we're to through the subheads at that point in time.

Just a few reminders, if your tally light doesn't come on after I say your name, just wave, and sometimes if you just wave, they'll see you first. Also, wait at all times for the tally light to come on before you speak. If you could say your name and position each time, it would be great. Sometimes what happens is the minister's tally light and

the Opposition Member's will stay on, so that's fine then.

We're asking that you not adjust the chairs and if you have – well, whoops. The water coolers are down there and up here.

I'm going to start out with the Committee Members and the substitutes introducing themselves and then we'll move over to the department, starting with the minister.

We're going to start up here with Minister Byrne.

G. BYRNE: Gerald Francis Byrne from the historic District of Corner Brook.

A. POLITI: Ashley Politi, Opposition Office.

P. DINN: Paul Dinn, the shadow minister for Education and the Member for Topsail - Paradise

J. DINN: Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Caucus Office.

A. PARSONS: Andrew Parsons, Burgeo - La Poile.

L. DEMPSTER: Lisa Dempster, Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

C. PARDY: Craig Pardy, District of Bonavista.

E. ANDERSON: Eileen Anderson, GMO.

CHAIR: Okay. So the Committee Members have a set of minutes there from April 19, I'm just asking if there are any errors or omissions in the minutes, and if I could ask for a mover?

The Member for Bonavista.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: So we'll now proceed to the Estimates and – no, we won't, we'll introduce this side.

K. HOWELL: Krista Lynn Howell, Minister of Education, Member for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows.

T. KING: Tracy King, Deputy Minister.

R. HAYES: Robyn Hayes, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services.

T. STAMP: Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller.

T. NOSEWORTHY: Tanya Noseworthy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Lisa Baker-Worthman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Learning.

T. HALL: Terry Hall, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education Operations.

S. LINEHAN: Scott Linehan, Assistant Deputy Minister, K to 12.

A. HILL: Angelica Hill, Executive Assistant to the Minister.

A. PICCO: Angela Picco, Director of Communications.

CHAIR: Okay. So we'll now proceed with the Estimates.

I'll ask the Clerk to call in the first subheads.

CLERK (Beazley): For the Department of Education, Executive Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: The Department of Education, 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive Services.

So we'll proceed now with the minister, if you'd like a few minutes for an introduction.

K. HOWELL: Sure.

I'd just like to say hello and thank you very much to this wonderful A-team for joining me as my backup here this evening. They are a very hard-working bunch of people who've kept me in line over the last little while. They are a wealth of knowledge. We will endeavour to answer all of your questions. If I can't, I'm sure these fine folks will be able to do that.

A few changes in the department over the last year. We've integrated the school districts, so that's probably the most notable thing that will be evident in the Estimates this evening. A few things here and there that I'm sure we'll have some good conversation about. But other than that, not much to say. Let's just get into it.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be here and I'll echo the minister's comments, the staff behind you, I've worked with some; I know some from other arrangements. You have one fine soccer manager over there. So you're very lucky to have them behind you. So I'm looking forward to some proper answers, we'll say, tonight. So let's just get started.

I'm recalling the Budget Speech, and the minister knows this is near and dear to my heart so why not start with it, \$41 million was allocated for schools in Cartwright,

Kenmount Terrace, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Pilley's Island. Over the next three years, we're planning to spend \$146 million on these projects.

Can I get a breakdown on the allocation of this? How much is going towards each school and for what?

K. HOWELL: Right.

Since the school district has been integrated, a lot of those operational things fall within the TI portfolio now. So I'm sure that we can have that information.

P. DINN: My understanding in another press release – I think it had to do with busing and such – spoke to the fact that TI would take that on, but they would still be advised by Education. So what you're telling me is you have no understanding of what's happening with those three schools this year?

K. HOWELL: We do have communication with the Department of TI, communicate regularly on a lot of our projects, but the operations of it and how it's managed falls within their department. That's their expertise. So the folks that would've normally done that for us are now employees of the Department of TI.

P. DINN: So you wouldn't have any estimates on the finish dates for these schools?

K. HOWELL: As soon as possible.

P. DINN: Okay.

So moving along, there was \$50,000 allocated for a new school in Paradise. What is the expected outcome of that \$50,000? What are we expecting to get done for \$50,000?

K. HOWELL: So it's very early initial stages for that school. As I said, we have some experts in the Department of TI now that

can take on some of the roles that need to be done. Simply because there's not a budget item for it doesn't mean that the department can't look at it, that TI won't be looking at.

For a breakdown of what we get for \$50,000, I'll turn it over here.

T. KING: MHA Dinn, in the \$50,000, really, the TI staff can do a lot of school design and planning in-house; those folks exist there. So we'll see preliminary planning and design layout, the size, the footprint of the building, the – I can't come up with the words, but it's the designation of the footprint between the class sizes and the square footage for the purpose that is required for the population of the school. That kind of work is the work that'll happen this year with planning funding.

P. DINN: So to follow on that, I know last year the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure awarded a contract valued at about \$950,000 to Allnorth Consultants Limited for engineering and architectural services related to the extension to Dorset Collegiate on Pilley's Island. That's a lot of money to do your engineering architecture. I understand that Transportation and Infrastructure have in-house plans on schools. So when you tell me \$50,000 is going to be used for very preliminary, it is very preliminary, correct?

K. HOWELL: Yeah, so the \$50,000 that's allocated upfront will get us to a position where we know what we're asking for, to go out and pitch a tender and to get the architects and the plans to come back out of that.

P. DINN: Thank you.

There were a couple of other schools mentioned. Last year, I know the minister and the Member for Harbour Main had taken a tour of Frank Roberts Intermediate – and I stand to be correct on the wording – but was of the understanding that there

would be some work done at Frank Roberts. Is there any money allocated in the budget for Frank Roberts?

K. HOWELL: There might not be a specific budget line, but I, too, had the opportunity to visit Frank Roberts and have identified that that's a school that I wish for us to proceed on looking at replacing. So just because there's not a specific budget line doesn't mean that we can't take a look at that.

As we mentioned, there's a lot of expertise in-house now that can look at those preliminary parts of the plan and they'll lead us in the direction that we need to go.

P. DINN: I just want to touch on a point I made earlier. It talked about the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure has taken over some new responsibilities and daily operations of things like student transportation and supporting maintenance services to school. What role does Education play in those, student transportation and maintenance?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer that question to Terry Hall who's the ADM for Education Operations.

T. HALL: Thank you.

Yes, so they did take over the actual provision of the service; however, they still work with Education Operations in terms of the number of students, where they live, in order to be able to acquire the buses and the routing that is required in order to provide the services.

So we are in lockstep in terms of them being able have the information to be able to secure the service that we need for all the students.

P. DINN: So I'll just follow up. Where are they getting that information, Transportation and Infrastructure?

T. HALL: They would get that from Education Operations in terms of our enrolment numbers by school and by geography. So, as they can plot their GIS points to know addresses and residents, they can do the bus routes.

P. DINN: So if I go back to my first question on Cartwright, Kenmount Terrace, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Pilley's Island, does the department have an indication what size those schools will be and how many they will accommodate?

T. HALL: Yes, of course, because these schools, where they're going to be built – and specifically Pilley's Island, we knew we were expending a school to be able to bring in the populations from two other schools. So they would go out and understand where any school is being built to determine the footprint that we have and get an idea and, ultimately, the configuration of the school would fall out after they get an idea and we go to tender.

P. DINN: So what is the approximate population for these schools?

T. HALL: Which schools is that?

P. DINN: Cartwright, Kenmount Terrace, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Pilley's Island.

K. HOWELL: That's information we can provide for you. Don't have it right now specifically for our Estimates, but we can get that info for you.

P. DINN: Thank you.

One good thing – not just one good thing, but one thing we pushed for was the elimination of the 1.6 busing. It's targeted this year to be eliminated, which is a good thing. Just curious, how many new buses will we need to accommodate this full 1.6 being eliminated?

K. HOWELL: Again, I think that's information that we're going to provide to TI and they will make a determination when they look at the catchment areas and zones. We don't have that information right now. As we prepare to start the new school year, we'll do a more fulsome evaluation of what that looks like with our counterparts in TI.

P. DINN: I actually sit on a school council and that school council is already telling us that out of the five buses they utilized last year, they're going to need eight this year – an additional three. So that school already knows how many buses are needed for that school. So what you're telling me, we don't have a full count of what the other schools are going to need?

K. HOWELL: We do have a count, but again, we don't want to assume that there's going to be no growth, nobody is going to move in, nobody is going to move out. That's a target that we'll have nailed down closer to the time of the school year, but TI would definitely have that information presented to them already as they make their preliminary decisions on what potentially they're looking for in a contract.

P. DINN: So when looking at the busing, one big issue that's come up – and I've talked to a number of schools on this, because it is a safety issue that we're bringing in this 1.6 for, but it also creates some issues when it comes to traffic flows around the schools because you'll have additional large-size vehicles going around there. Has there been work done on all traffic flows for the schools that will be taking on this busing?

K. HOWELL: I will pass that question again to the ADM for Education Operations.

T. HALL: Traffic flow is ongoing all the time. Our staff will always look at the parking lots. If the school raises a concern that's coming up, they'll go out and check traffic flows. It's not a new thing with these buses, but it is

something that they are aware of as they roll this out.

P. DINN: I think in the budget it was \$30 million over the next five years to revitalize the fleet of school buses. Will consideration be given to electrified buses?

K. HOWELL: That's a very interesting conversation that we've been having. I'd love to see all of our fleets electrified, but that is certainly part of the conversation and I'm sure if my colleagues in the Department of TI see fit and if that's the most reasonable solution, then they'll definitely pursue that avenue.

P. DINN: And just for my own information here as well, when we talk revitalization, it is not necessarily all new buses.

K. HOWELL: No.

P. DINN: I am assuming there will be those that would be, I guess, upgraded or repaired. So do we have any indication or any knowledge of how many new buses we may need or how much of the current fleet we need to upgrade?

K. HOWELL: I don't have that information right here in front of me, and I would assume that my counterpart in TI would have a better understanding of what the school bus fleet is actually looking for in their purchase orders.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I'm just going down here – I'm assuming when the 1.6 is implemented, this year is supposedly the last of it and that would be available in all districts, all schools, so that kids who have the opportunity to do so or want to will be able to get on a bus. Am I correct in saying that?

K. HOWELL: In all schools that have busing services, there will be an elimination of the 1.6.

P. DINN: Okay.

A big issue for K to 12 has been – and we’ve talked about it – the violence in the schools. Recent information looks at about 25 incidents a day and upwards to 1,000 that have occurred over the first 38 days of the year. What is being done by the department to curb this violence?

K. HOWELL: That is a very, very important issue and it is something that has been one of the leading conversations in the department over the last year since I’ve been here. We’ve been working with our counterparts at the NLTA. Because I don’t assume to know what the ins and outs and day in the life of a teacher looks like, I rely heavily on the good counsel of our friends at the NLTA when we’re looking at solutions for our classrooms.

We were able to join a violence prevention coalition. The NLTA headed that up and invited us to be part of it and we were certainly eager to do so, as well as my counterparts in the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development. Recognizing that the approach that we’re going to have to take to violence in our schools is more than a one-pronged approach. It is going to require a multi-departmental collaboration with our stakeholders and certainly the community has a role to play and the school system itself has a role to play, but it certainly wouldn’t be fair to expect that the answer to this problem is solely dependent on our classrooms.

So we’re continuing to work on a plan for that, looking at what it is that best suits the needs of our students and our teachers and how we can support them. One of the biggest issues that was identified was the need for additional student assistant supports.

So after the Think Tank, that was something that resonated very clearly with us; we were

able to provide supports that day, implement some of the needed supports. Then in the budget we proposed the \$3 million to increase about 104 positions for student assistants, which takes some of the pressure off while we’re trying to reconfigure what our classroom compositions look like, how we do our allocations and how we can better service the environments that our students are learning in and that our teachers are working in.

P. DINN: So with that, it’s interesting you brought up the student assistants. I’m giving you an opportunity to clear yourself on this because I’ve been hit with questions based on our back and forth in the House recently on this.

Student assistants, as we know, were hired to mainly deal with children with exceptionalities. Somehow what we talked about in the House recently got misinterpreted because I had a call saying it’s not just the kids with exceptionalities that are the result of violence in the classroom. So I was happy to hear you say that there’s more to it than just 104.

So are there other things we’re looking at, that you can name, other than those 104 teacher assistants?

K. HOWELL: Yeah, certainly.

One of the big things that we’ve committed to is looking at our classroom allocations, looking at our composition, and we’ve implemented our inclusion model. I think it’s high time that we re-evaluated what that looks like and how that sorted itself out in our schools and where there may be room to improve on that. So we’ve committed to taking a look at that, as well as looking at a needs-based allocation for our classrooms, as opposed to just strictly numbers based and some of the schools that we can provide that.

But it’s important to note that a lot of the instances that are referenced as violent

instances can be solved by our student assistants. They are a very key player in the solution to that issue. Because teachers are there to teach and we want to allow them to do what it is that they do best. If there is another professional who can provide the services that are required to keep the classrooms safe, then we'll certainly be able to support that as well.

P. DINN: Okay.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Just to follow up on a few questions that my colleague from Paradise asked before I get into the other ones.

With regard to school designs, we have a number of designs that are already out there, whether you look at Elizabeth Park, Holy Trinity Elementary, the former Holy Cross Junior High and Hazelwood. So you have designs that work. Are we looking at reinventing the wheel for anything or looking at basically we've got a design, let's put that there?

K. HOWELL: I think that's what the initial stages will lead us to. If there is a model that is appropriate and it's the right size for the community that we're looking at, then that's certainly something we'll be able to pursue. But if it doesn't meet the specific needs of a community that's been identified, then we'll have to go above and beyond what we might call the cookie cutter or the already implemented type of plan.

J. DINN: Will child care or daycare centres be attached or incorporated into the schools?

K. HOWELL: They will be, yeah.

J. DINN: Okay.

K. HOWELL: Where it makes sense, we'll be looking at implementing child care centres and pre-K.

J. DINN: Okay.

Will you be also, I guess in the design, making sure that it adheres to class capacity fire codes because more than one site, I can tell you that if they did a survey, I'd say there are a number of classrooms that are in violation of the fire code right now. It's certainly not 20 square feet per individual and certainly no 30 inches between each row for escape, depending.

So I'm assuming that you're going to be looking at the class sizes and just making sure that there's actually physical safety.

K. HOWELL: Certainly.

J. DINN: Would that be correct? A commitment?

K. HOWELL: Yeah, that's definitely part of the initial take on it. We can't really predict where the population of some of these classrooms go and I think that may be some of the issues that you've identified with space, when there's more kids than there is space. So we're trying to look at ways with which we can relieve some of the pressure in those instances as well.

J. DINN: Which is the key to making sure that class sizes don't balloon, especially in primary and elementary.

K. HOWELL: Out of control, yeah.

J. DINN: Any discussion in metro for use of Metrobus, either Metrobus on existing routes, especially for high school students, but also, I know there have been projects with public transportation where sort of the bus, like an Uber, it follows a specific pick-up route. So has there been any discussion of working with or partnering with Metrobus, because I know they would probably only be too happy to solve that problem as well?

K. HOWELL: We've definitely had that information and had that conversation in the past. Right now, it's not really where we're looking. We've been focused on the elimination of the 1.6 and ensuring that everybody has an adequate ride to school, by school bus. But once that plan is fully implemented, of course, we'll take a look at it and evaluate what the merits of it are and where there may be needs for alternative measures.

J. DINN: In regard to the student assistant positions about violence in the classroom, I will say this, this is from principals and my own experience, that student assistants by themselves, you might think that's a large part in dealing with violence in the classroom, it depends, but I would suggest that's not the answer. That's from school administrators who have responded to the Think Tank proposals and everything else.

By the way, I'm glad you say it's not solely the classroom, but I can tell you that's exactly where it is. That's exactly where it is and where it's going to stay for a while. You might talk about bringing Justice in and bringing the other jurisdictions and families and so on and so forth, but unless you've got the extra social workers to work with families, you don't have that.

I will tell you primarily and mostly in the primary and elementary system where you have that violence, it's great to talk about how this is not solely the responsibility of the teacher, but I did have a Member over here, last year I think it was or the year before, saying that the single greatest factor in student achievement and everything else is the teacher. I would agree with that, but I would say that the single greatest factor of putting out a fire would be the firefighter, but if you're giving the firefighter a garden hose, he or she doesn't have much of a chance.

So I think, here, if you want to look at violence prevention, it also looks at class composition and class size and that, rather than look at it, needs to be addressed

sooner than later because it's been a problem for as long as I've been a teacher.

Anyway, I can't stress that enough.

K. HOWELL: I'll take a moment to respond to that and I certainly appreciate that perspective. As I said, I don't pretend to know what the day in and day out is and I'll certainly defer to your experience on those measures, but when we look at the short-term solutions that we could implement right now to make a difference, while we're trying to evaluate the composition and make that change to a different allocation model, that was a stopgap measure that we needed to implement so that our students felt more safe. That was where the student assistants played a key role.

J. DINN: Perfect.

The Budget Speech announces about reliable transportation, the 1.6-kilometre busing rule. It also talks about \$3 million to increase student assistant hours and hire more student assistants that will help meet the needs in the classroom and when travelling on school buses. It also refers to \$3 million to meet the needs of student population or I think it's also around growth in certain populations. There's \$850,000 for recruitment and retention.

I'll try to get through those; I'm not going through it at this point, but let's talk about the student assistant. Did you say that there was 104?

K. HOWELL: One hundred and four full-time equivalents will be created with that.

J. DINN: So I'm trying to think. There are 125 hours that came out of the Think Tank. So these teachers, then, are you still keeping the 125 hours that were announced as part of the Think Tank or are they being subsumed into the 104 that have been announced?

K. HOWELL: The hours that were allocated after the Think Tank, we found that out of savings last year, but we have committed to maintaining that as we move forward in this number.

J. DINN: Okay, we're not looking at 125, we're looking at 100 new positions, more or less, that's it?

K. HOWELL: It is 104.

J. DINN: Okay, 500 hours, I would assume.

K. HOWELL: Sorry, say that again?

J. DINN: I guess, if you're looking at student assistants, roughly five hours a day, 500 extra hours. Let's be clear, the 125 that you announced are continuing on, they're part of the 100?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay.

Where in the budget is that extra \$3 million? On page 198, it shows salaries. I'm just trying to get an idea, because you have to allow there have been contracts renegotiated, increases. Is that \$3 million there? I think it's on page 198. I am just trying to get an idea where these numbers are. So the salaries are \$43 million.

K. HOWELL: It's in section 4.1.02.

J. DINN: Okay.

Part of that \$3 million is in that?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay.

So how many of these 100 positions then will land in school in the fall? In terms of if you're looking at student assistants who are dealing with busing, who may or may not want the extra hours – but I'm trying to get an idea of how many of those 100 are

actually going to be towards supervising busing and how many are actually going to be in the classroom and support the actual classroom of those hours.

K. HOWELL: So we don't have a concrete number yet until we get the full numbers for our enrolment in the fall, but we think it's going to be about half and half. Our intention is to eliminate any of the positions that might have been like split shifts. So once a student assistant is signed on for the day, then they don't have to go home and come back and continue their day at a later hour. It's to get some continuity in their schedules, providing them with a full day shift.

J. DINN: So half the number is going into supports in the classroom, 50? So really, all we've increased supports the classroom is by 25, not by 75?

What I'm saying is that when I hear the 100 new positions, it sounds very much like, wow, we've got 100 new positions in the classroom. But what I'm being told is that 50 of those, 50 per cent of them, are actually going to be supervising buses, not in the classroom itself, which you've just said student assistants are key to helping mitigate the violence. So, really, 25 announced for the remainder of this year and we're really talking about 25 new positions in the classroom.

K. HOWELL: So any teacher assistant who gets onto a school bus would then follow the student through to the classroom day anyway. So it's not like they stop their shift on the bus and they only provide service on the school bus, but they would follow the student throughout the day.

J. DINN: Yeah, but basically, they're on the bus. But 50 per cent of the increase is basically to accommodate supervision on the bus?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: My point is if half are doing that, then basically we've only increased the number of student assistants in the schools on the ground to help the teachers help the students by 25. That's what it comes down to. Not a significant amount.

K. HOWELL: Fifty and 50; 50 per cent in –

J. DINN: That's my point, so 100 out of 100.

K. HOWELL: Fifty in the school, 50 – but again, that's to be determined. We don't know what the exact amount will look like, but it's important to recognize that the service is required on the school bus as well because not all violence takes place in the classroom.

J. DINN: We are talking about the classroom, too – classroom violence. So I would hope that that number is determined quickly, sooner than later than in September, let's say.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I'll just talk about, because the minister mentioned about getting a handle on – I don't want to use the word "handle," but getting a handle on enrolment numbers. I know, from past experience – at one time I was with Education – you get projections. We have some very good projections of who's moving to what grade and who's coming in.

I would suspect when we're dealing with this, we would utilize that information and come up with, for lack of a better word, a good guesstimate of what's going to be utilized and where you need them. Am I correct in that?

K. HOWELL: Absolutely, yes.

But if I was to say that and give you those numbers emphatically, then come the fall, you'll be questioning me on why I said that. So that's why I always preface it by saying these are just preliminary numbers and we're not (inaudible) –

P. DINN: No, I understand.

But I guess my point being is we would have a good understanding of what the projections will be.

K. HOWELL: They are very safe estimates, yes.

P. DINN: Has the department completed air quality testing in schools since buying the air purifiers?

K. HOWELL: I'll have to defer that to our ADM of Operations.

T. HALL: No, we haven't gone out and done an across-the-board analysis. I'd have to defer to our colleagues in TI now who's managing the schools to determine what they may do and what they may have in their plan.

P. DINN: Assuming that – oh, sorry. Go ahead.

CHAIR: Minister.

K. HOWELL: But that is information that I would like to have as well, so I'd certainly like to know what schools have been evaluated and where that comes from. We can get that information for you.

P. DINN: So are all schools equipped with air purifiers now? They are.

We all try to recreate the wheel and make a better wheel, but it seems to me, with some of the responses, that we're very much dependent on what TI does, so it gives me a

little uneasy feeling that we actually have a grasp on what Education needs.

What mechanism is in place to ensure that you and TI are working together to be as up to date on the information that's needed?

K. HOWELL: There are several employees within the department that have open lines of communication to our ADM, as well as the ADM in TI, and they report regularly. So that information is shared, I would venture to say, on the daily as these things unfold. There is, as I said, very open communication as to what is actually happening on the ground with our Operations team.

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

I've read a statistic there recently that more than half the schools in the province have no cafeteria or they have one, but it is not being utilized as a cafeteria. What has government done in this budget to address this situation?

K. HOWELL: I think one of the most important things that we've announced in recent years is the implementation of our school food program, recognizing that not all of our schools are equipped with cafeteria services. Some of them, as you just said, may have appropriate space but no provider. They might not have a space, or it might be inadequate, or it might be available space but just not fully functional.

So through the implementation and the growth of our school lunch program, we will be taking an inventory of which schools we can utilize better, which ones need new investment to bring them up to a level that is functional, and how we can provide good meals, solid meals, for our students all across the province. That will be starting in the fall. We'll be looking at some of our most vulnerable communities first to determine where the most value may come from in terms of our school lunch program.

P. DINN: And, of course, part of the school and participating in school – I mean yes, you need to have good nutrition and food, but there is also a social aspect of having your lunch hour break. I would present that with kids having to eat in their classrooms and such would probably exasperate the rodent issues that some of our schools are dealing with.

So there's really a need for children in the schools to have a set space that they can go and call a cafeteria and eat there, especially when we're dealing with half the schools without that.

I mean, yes, I agree with the school lunch program and the school programs that are happening, but you really do need that space.

K. HOWELL: When you identify that half of them don't have a cafeteria, I'm not sure if the definition that was proposed when they asked those schools, if it was a designated space or if it was a serviceable space. I'd have to get more information as to which of our schools actually have a designated cafeteria space as you're referencing.

P. DINN: Okay.

Just to talk about curriculum, because there was some talk about the curriculum that would present cultural sensitivity, Indigenous education and LGBTQIA+ curriculum. What are the updates on that?

K. HOWELL: Our curriculum is evaluated regularly on a rotational basis, so we look at certain subjects in a rotation of years.

I'll defer to the deputy to have – or maybe Scott – one of the folks who have the understanding of curriculum can explain where we're to in that cycle.

T. KING: Thanks for the question.

As the minister noted, of course we review all our curriculum on a schedule; however,

issues like the Indigenization of education or multiculturalism, as we're redoing and looking at all our curriculum, those issues are considered in all of the reviews ongoing. So it's not just, say, in the new health curriculum that's coming over the next couple of years where those issues would be looked at, but it's in all of our curriculum as we're renewing them. Issues like those are being addressed in the resources that we're using in the curriculum to ensure we're meeting the right bar there.

P. DINN: So how often is curriculum evaluated?

K. HOWELL: I'll ask the ADM of K to 12 to speak to that one.

P. DINN: Okay.

S. LINEHAN: All curriculum is on a renewal cycle of 10 years, but we can be very, very responsive as well to updating resources and updating teaching-learning strategies as ongoing PL. The typical renewal cycle is 10 years, but we are aiming to have a more modernized platform whereby we can be more responsive to curriculum in real time.

P. DINN: Currently, what would kickstart an earlier evaluation of curriculum, because you know the world changes quickly out there in some aspects? What would kickstart something that would not wait the 10 years?

K. HOWELL: I think the issues that are identified in social aspects are often issues that are addressed upfront and immediately, also issues where we see that there might not be academic performance. There might be something identified that needs to be addressed right upfront instead of letting it fester for 10 years before we take a look at it.

As the ADM mentioned, we do have a curriculum now that is digitized so it allows us to be more fluid in how we can change some of these things and have a look at

what needs to come out, what needs to be implemented and what need to be changed.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Last year in the budget Estimates, it was noted that the disability and support services area of the department is undergoing a review and an overhaul.

With that in mind, what specific changes have been made to support children with exceptionalities in light of the Churchill case?

K. HOWELL: I will defer that to the ADM for K to 12 to give you an update.

CHAIR: Scott Linehan.

S. LINEHAN: So the NLSchools branch have a dedicated director for deaf and hard of hearing. With that director as well, there's a program specialist responsible for deaf and hard of hearing. We've allocated 22 itinerant teachers to the deaf-and-hard-of-hearing schools and we've provided three additional itinerant teachers for deaf and hard of hearing above the allocation this year.

P. DINN: A case was brought forward to me recently and it talked about a child who's in school, is non-verbal and he is losing his teacher assistant who is equipped with American Sign Language.

What measures do you have in place to deal with children who lose that much-needed resource? What do we do when a child loses a teacher or a teacher assistant that is equipped to deal with him such as, someone equipped with American Sign Language?

K. HOWELL: I can't speak to an individual case but I can let you know what the overall plan is when we look at children who have these specific needs. There is an assurance that a student assistant will be provided and

that supports will be maintained for that student.

For whatever particular reason, people may not be available or there might have to be a new allocation in a new building or however that looks, depending on some of the seniority list and how that unfolds, but the assurance is that we continue to provide the student assistant and the resources for children who would need those specific resources.

Every endeavour is made to have individuals who are equipped to deal with American Sign Language and can provide that service, but that is often a rare occurrence. So if there's an opportunity for somebody to be trained to undertake that type of learning, then we'll certainly explore those avenues as well.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre and we're still in the first subhead.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Would it be possible to get the number of schools that either do not have an HVAC system or do not have a functioning HVAC system throughout the school? I think we have roughly 255 schools.

K. HOWELL: Certainly, we can get that info.

J. DINN: I think Assistant Deputy Minister Linehan referenced the fact that there were three additional deaf-and-hard-of-hearing itinerants over and above the allocation. Did I hear that correctly? Is that part of the \$3 million allocated to help meet the needs of the student population?

K. HOWELL: No, that's in addition to.

J. DINN: Pardon me?

K. HOWELL: That's in addition to.

J. DINN: In addition to.

So with regards to that, the \$3 million to help meet the needs of the student population, I think if I heard it also talked about to address the growth of certain populations. I'm just wondering what is that money going towards then, specifically, when you talk about the growth of the student population? Just general or is it addressing specific needs?

K. HOWELL: It'll be resources as needed and we continue to evaluate students on a case-by-case basis and look at whatever particular resource a student may require. Our primary allocation was for the student assistants in whatever role it is that they can be of support in our classrooms, but other than that we did monitor our students on a case-by-case basis for whatever need it is that they need a particular resource for.

J. DINN: So this is \$3 million for teaching services as opposed to student assistant services. I want to put it in this context –

K. HOWELL: No, I'll correct you there, Sir. The \$3 million that's allocated is for student assistants.

J. DINN: In the budget it talks about \$3 million to increase student assistant hours and then it says: We are increasing the teaching service's budget by \$3 million. That's mentioned twice, so are you saying there's no second \$3 million?

K. HOWELL: No, there is an additional \$3 million for teaching services.

J. DINN: Teaching, that's what I'm referring to.

K. HOWELL: Sorry, my misunderstanding. Okay.

J. DINN: So in Immigration, Population Growth and Skills, we basically had an acknowledgement of the fact that we have 686 Ukrainian children in this K-to-12

system; 634 are in the metro area. That's the size of a school. That's what the population has increased by. I know that schools – and I've brought it up in the House – have struggled just to provide the extra services there. That's what precipitated the reconfiguration of PWC, Larkhall, St. Andrew's, Leary's Brook and so on and so forth.

So how much of that is going towards, let's say, just addressing it when it comes to LEARN teachers, EAL teachers and so on and so forth?

K. HOWELL: I'll ask the assistant deputy minister for Corporate Services to speak to that.

R. HAYES: So the additional teaching units that we added this year were specifically for English as an Additional Language resources.

J. DINN: The extra \$3 million, okay.

That's fine, but basically, you're saying – because again, the budget gives the impression – when it comes to addressing the other needs in the classroom, whether it's educational deficits, behavioural, whatever, you name it, there's really nothing new there just for the classroom.

I will support, personally speaking, to make sure that anyone who comes into the school system has the language training, LEARN, to fill in the gaps. But what we've been talking about here, when it comes to the increasing school violence – because some of the schools have classes approaching 30 in a primary and elementary. So there's nothing there in that budget really then to address the needs of what we've been talking about in violence, except the promise that it's going to be looked at.

We have \$3 million to address that, but nothing there in the immediate term to actually bring down class size is what it comes down to.

K. HOWELL: As I said, that's certainly not a simple solution. It's going to take a re-evaluation of our allocation models. So when we look a numbers-based allocation, that's fairly simple to chuck out in the beginning of the year. You can determine how many bodies are going to be in the classroom and then assign a teacher.

But when you look at the specific needs that are going to be represented in each classroom, and our endeavour is going to be to base our teacher allocation on needs-based, that's going to take more time than simply just a numbers exercise.

So without throwing out a number and just saying I've thrown numbers at the problem, I think it's more important that we have a valid solution that actually gives us a data-informed decision as to why we would change the allocation, what is needed in a classroom, and validates the allocations that would be needed for each classroom.

So that can't be accomplished overnight, but it is certainly something that we've taken on in the department.

J. DINN: Minister, I respect that, but it's not a simple solution, yet it's not a numbers game. Yet, that's exactly what we're seeing here. There is a need. There is an influx of students that their needs were identified here in terms of we had an influx of 686 students from Ukraine and other countries as well. There was a need and it's a numbers game, and it was responded to by putting an extra \$3 million in for EAL services.

So, in some ways, it's as simple as that. Because I'm willing to bet if you look at whether it's 360, the reporting models, examples of violence, you can easily figure out where we need to start splitting classes or reducing the numbers.

I think in terms of needs-based recommendation around teacher allocation, if you've got 50 per cent of the class with

special needs or exceptionalities, then split that class, put hard caps in, anything at all. There are ways of doing it.

So I would challenge that in that if you're telling me that it was a lot more complicated than simply numbers, I would suggest that helping any child, especially a child that's coming from another country and who may be traumatized by war, it is not a simple process either.

But, in fact, what you've done is exactly that. You saw a need and you responded with teachers. That's what I'm asking. That's what teachers are asking. That's what the NLTA is asking in terms of addressing the needs of the classroom. Start with that emergency. So if it can be done here in the budget, it can be done for classes that are already struggling. Violence, I would argue, is because there are a lack of supports there – simple.

K. HOWELL: I would agree to an extent, but to say that simply adding a teacher to a classroom is going to solve our violence situation, I would adamantly oppose that stance because I do believe that these are very complex social issues and our classrooms are microcosms of our society. I'm sure you're well aware of a lot of the issues that are facing residents of Newfoundland and Labrador right now. They do ultimately show up at the doorstep of our classrooms.

So we have to be more collaborative in our approach to how we deal with that, rather than simply saying we're going to put another teacher in a classroom and assume that that person can be responsible to solve the issues that would be represented there.

J. DINN: I think, Minister, I'm going to have to invite you to come – let's go teach in a primary and elementary classroom for a week and I'll be able to see it as well because I'm high school trained. We'll see because it's not about putting a teacher in the classroom; it's also about reducing the

number in that classroom. That goes for the children that are coming from other countries as well. It's not simply adding \$3 million to it; it's also making sure that they have the services they need and that's what I'm talking about.

K. HOWELL: I think we're saying the same thing, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Oh, I know.

K. HOWELL: I think we're saying the same thing.

J. DINN: But I'm saying let's respond to it a little bit more rapidly than looking at it.

With regard to the integration of the K-to-12 education system into the department, is it possible to have a list of the efficiencies that have been achieved; where the office space has been rendered unnecessary; how much money has been spent to whether the changeover is stationary, the logo, you name it – I'm looking at, where has it been found? Are we saving any money? Is that money being diverted into the classroom?

When this was first announced in 2021, the promise was we'll have a better idea of the efficiencies we want to achieve when we get into it. Well, now we are into it. So I'm trying to get an idea if this was a worthwhile effort, the cost-benefit analysis. I saw it done in 2013 when the four districts were collapsed into one. I can't say it made the system efficient, so I'm just wondering some proof, hard numbers here, please.

K. HOWELL: So we are four months into that process now. The integration started on the 1st of January, and we do keep running totals of what expenditures there may have been, what efficiencies may have been identified.

But right now we're still very much in the developmental phase. There is still a lot of movement and a lot of people that we're trying to find the right size, right fit for the

integration process. So I would be hesitant to give you a number right now because it's not fully implemented.

But knowing full well that there is a record of what it is costing us and where we're going – and I would also add to that, the integration wasn't necessarily a cost-saving exercise. It wasn't primarily focused to be a cost-saving exercise; it is certainly to provide a more efficient and effective mechanism of delivery of our education system here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I just want to continue on with one comment on what my colleague was speaking to in talking about the classrooms and teacher allocations. I know, last year, it was noted that a larger portion of the student population are now being identified as having exceptionalities. I think we all agree that education is to set up our youth to succeed and give them the best environment to learn and be safe.

So just related to what I was asking before: How many translators have been employed or are employed in the school system as English As A Second Language, as well as American Sign Language?

K. HOWELL: I'm not sure if we have specific translators hired as translators, but our teachers as English As A Second Language would be able to provide much of that service. I don't believe – correct me if I'm wrong – that we have specifically hired translators for that purpose.

P. DINN: So for someone from the Ukraine, as an example, who comes in, is in the classroom, who's working with that child to ensure they're gaining the knowledge of the English language?

K. HOWELL: We can get a description of the supports that are available in our classrooms. Do you have it, Scott?

S. LINEHAN: No problem.

K. HOWELL: Okay, I'll defer to Scott Linehan to give you some of that information.

S. LINEHAN: In addition to EAL teachers, as well we've subscribed to a service whereby a translation service can be provided in real time. So when we're having parent teacher interviews, as an example, if the parent has questions for the teacher, from a host of different languages, we can have that interaction with the family through this platform of real time of an app. We have a translator who can talk for the teacher and the parents.

P. DINN: But how does that happen in the classroom, for the children who are in the classroom?

S. LINEHAN: So the EAL teacher will work in the classroom with the teacher and in other times, the EAL teacher may take the student out for pull-out supports and work one on one with the student. So it's a mixture of academic as well as social integration with the EAL teacher with the classroom teacher.

P. DINN: Okay, thank you for that.

Still in the classroom, with the ever-increasing use of integration of screen-based technology in our schools, what measures or how much has been budgeted to address any potential detrimental effects from the use or excessive exposure to digital resources?

K. HOWELL: There isn't a particular budget line that identifies that type of resource, but, as I said, on a case-by-case basis, we look at what it is that are services that our children may need and we'll evaluate those as they come in.

P. DINN: Okay.

Research has shown, again, that technology has a deteriorating effect on reading, writing, math competencies and, of course, our latest reports show us that we're suffering when it comes to math.

What measures have been taken to address this?

K. HOWELL: As I mentioned before, we undertake a curriculum review when something like this would trigger or necessitate it. So we continue to look at our scores in our literacy and our numeracy, looking at our reading skills, our math skills on a regular basis, especially when we have standardized testing results that would come out.

P. DINN: I guess, staying on the theme here, because I'm mainly focused on the technology and excessive use of technologies and any detrimental effects that it would have on our children. It's been indicated that media overuse can lead to obesity, less sleep, delays in language development and delays in social and emotional development. We all know the effects COVID has had. So what measures is the department taking to address those effects?

K. HOWELL: Our plans for transformation, the development of our transformation plan for the K-to-12 system will certainly take those things into consideration. I think it's very important that we realize we can't run from technology in the space that we live in. So it's important that we teach our children appropriate usage and teach them the means necessary to continue to grow their education and use it responsibly.

As part of our early learning platform, we've introduced digital literacy programming that'll help parents of early learners be able to develop a proper understanding of usage of these devices, as well as implementing it through our K-to-12 system to ensure that

the students have a basic understanding of how to manage their time and manage their usage and use it for the best-intentioned purposes for education. At the same time, recognizing it plays a massive role in the day to day of society. We don't want it to become something that we fear or that we assume to be all bad. So as we look at our plans for transformation and use in the Education Accord, looking at how we use those things over the lifespan of a learner, will be key in that.

P. DINN: Yeah, no argument from me that technology, you have to have an understanding. A three-year-old can do more than I can right now, that's just the way of the world. I guess it relates partially to my question on cafeterias, children need those spaces where they can go and concentrate on something else other than being stuck to a screen. I would even go so far as to say in some instances some of the violence in our classroom may be caused by what you're looking at on the screens and overuse of it. I know my three kids, my oldest, she got her cellphone at an early age, the next one got it earlier and so on and so on.

So what's the current policy or are we looking at a policy with regard to the use of technology and, in particular, cellphones within the classroom?

K. HOWELL: Cellphone usage in the classroom is certainly a discussion that we've had ongoing with our partners at the NLTA. Again, they are the folks that see the day-in and day-out of how this unfolds in our classrooms. So it's a continued discussion. We hear from some teachers who say ban it flat out, altogether. Then we hear from others who say it's not the way to go. That's not how they want to spend their day, trying to deal with those types of issues.

So achieving a delicate balance and looking at what the best, most appropriate use of these devices would be is where we find ourselves. I think that teaching children to

use it responsibly is part of the proposed change and certainly, again, something that society has to grab onto and recognize that these kids have these devices in their hands all the time.

There comes a time when some people might need a little extra encouragement to put down their device. Maybe it's the role of finding a new activity or parents engaging in conversation with their children that gets them off their device; sometimes parents are as guilty as the children of sitting down and getting absorbed in our devices and in our technology. So I think that's very much a societal trend that we all have to come to grips with and figure out a solution for.

P. DINN: I think the solution there is in having some very concrete, well defined, I'll say, regulations or policies around that, depending on the age group. I know some teachers in the past would have on the back of their door like a shoe rack and you put your phone in because a learning environment is a learning environment and, yes, when you have to learn about how to utilize a phone, yeah, you access it.

But I think that creates a lot of issues within a school environment in terms of your attention. It's a little different now; you'd be passing a note along in my day.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

P. DINN: But now they're just texting and texting. You see it in this House on a regular day.

So it's really something that we need to get a grasp on and something we need to look at in terms of policy there. As you said, there's a time for technology and there's a time for not and we've got to find that balance because a lot of teachers are left to struggle with this.

K. HOWELL: To your point, MHA Dinn, I think that's where we, as a society, have to make decisions about our responsible

technology use because it's not just in the classrooms. It's in every workplace, it's in every setting and it's certainly something that we see in our schools.

So in terms of policies or regulations, right now they operate on a school-by-school basis and teachers and administrators can look at what is the best solution for their classrooms. Again, as I said, there's a mixed review on what that implementation should look like. Some teachers are more pro a complete ban and some see it as a futile exercise. Because, to your point about the shoe holder over the door, in some schools where that was implemented, students were bringing a second cellphone to school and using a dud to put in the slot and still had their own device at their desk.

It certainly requires the input of our schools on a case-by-case basis and, overall, looking at responsible use, I think, is our safest way to assure our students have the appropriate technology without being overwhelmed and overcome by it.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I'll talk a little bit about the technology and pick up a little on what the Member for Topsail - Paradise said. As a teacher who dealt with the burgeoning cellphone, it was a struggle in terms of having students paying attention, what they were using the phones for and so on and so forth.

In my capacity as NLTA president, I would talk to a number of school counsellors who would basically say that if you want to look at the impact on mental health, it's not maybe the cellphone, but the social media that came with it and the inability to escape the public scrutiny. Even at night, of having it and so on and so forth, buzzing and going off on their nights and the inability to forget the stupidity that we all done in our early

years. So I'm glad there were no cellphones around at that time.

I will say this, as a teacher, about banning it. I know about the use of the duds and so on and so forth, but I'll put it this way: It comes down to the supports you get from home and from the school district. I will tell you that when it came to enforcing rules and regulations, I will have to say that teachers had precious little support from the district I think. Because if the parent complained or whatever else, any action by the teacher could very well be overruled, and that would happen.

After a while, it came down to the point, well, why bother enforcing it because we're not going to get the support? No different than filling out the violent incident forms. What's the use of filling it out because nothing is ever done? All we're doing is just adding more work to ourselves with no hope to respond.

So I will say that it does have to be addressed in terms of if we're looking at outcomes, as to how much students are paying attention to what is going on in the classroom versus how much they're paying attention to what's going on, on the screen. And, as a teacher, I could always tell when they were engaged in lap gazing. You could tell. It came down to how much of a fight do you want to have.

I think there has to be some policy and it's got to come down, whether it's from the department or whether it's from the district, but it's got to be prepared to stick by the teachers in the classrooms in schools that we're going to enforce this. Otherwise, it's a futile exercise. It really is.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, I would agree with you on that measure. If it's a stance that the department takes, then of course we have to be prepared to support our teachers in that stance. That's why right now we're certainly not looking to make it an additional task for teachers or to compromise their classroom

management with putting that task onto them if it's not something that they feel would be appropriate for their classroom.

Looking at our school-by-school consideration right now is the information that we take back in terms of how we deal with this and make policy or regulations around. We're continuing to work on that with our partners.

J. DINN: As a teacher, all I want to know is if I'm enforcing a rule, am I going to be backed up by the department, by the district? If I'm not and the students say, ha, I got my phone back, you've just basically undermined the teacher in many ways. To me, if you're not going to enforce the rule, then don't make the rule. If you're going to make the rule, enforce it. That means standing up to public pressure as well, whatever it is.

So with regard to technology, on that note, I did have a question here related to – it's a budgetary question. This was sent to me by a teacher with regard to the Windows 10 expiry. That any device, laptop or desktop, running Windows 10 basically will represent a security risk and will have to be removed from the networks by October 14, 2025. Now, that's a ways off, I realize, but closer than we think.

So I'm just wondering here who's going to be responsible then for replacing that technology in a school. Because that represents a significant challenge, especially if it got to come out of an operating budget. Some schools, they're probably scraping by anyway. Some schools enter into fundraising just to get technology for the 21st century learning that comes with it – SMART Boards and so on and so forth.

I'm just trying to think here, what's the plan in terms of making sure that schools are not disadvantaged, that they're not chewing up their own operational budget, which they could be using for other things, to basically

replace that kind of technology on that scale.

I think for one school in particular, you're probably looking at \$120,000 they've got to come up with. That's a chunk of change for a school.

K. HOWELL: So IT management is certainly something that falls under the realm of NLSchools, and something we're very keen to continue working on.

I'll defer to the ADM for Operations to speak further on that.

CHAIR: Terry Hall.

T. HALL: Thank you.

MHA Dinn, we are very, very aware of that, and we've been looking at it for a few months now. I guess what I can say here is that there's potentially a solution that will extend the life of Windows 10, that we're exploring with our provider. If that, in fact, doesn't come true, then we'll have to look at what we do to replace these devices, and work with schools to be able to make them still be able to function with their technology.

Now, 7 to 12, we make sure all students have devices anyway, and all teachers, so they'll be able to at least avail of the devices that we put in their hands to continue doing work at those levels.

J. DINN: I appreciate that, especially if it can be extended, but even if it's extended, at some point, they might get to the point where you really can't extend it. So I guess my thing here is please, that burden shouldn't fall to the schools. Because some schools have a base where they can raise a significant amount of money, and others, it's just because of the socio-economic factors, they just don't have that ability. I would draw your attention to that.

With regard to schools, the Public Procurement Policy, they're subject to that process as well?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: If I may make a comment, maybe a look at reviewing them for schools, and I'll give this explanation. I was talking to one school during COVID – and it's interesting how it was put to me, and I've had this experience. I can go out and source the product for a lot cheaper, but because I've got to go through the onerous process of getting three quotes – it's onerous on the teacher who doesn't have a support staff, but it also ends up costing much more. I would say that's the case for a lot of – if anything, if you know a teacher, we can be incredibly industrious and efficient in finding deals for the classroom.

All I'm saying here is I worry about the process because, I think in many ways, it's forcing schools to stretch an already tight, limited budget.

I don't expect a response to that, unless you say you're reviewing it, it's fine, but that needs to be brought up, especially when it comes to replacing expensive technology.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, noted.

J. DINN: So onward and forward, I referenced violent incidents, the investigation process, and I'm just wondering what the timeline is, if the department or the district gets a report of a violent incident, such as a teacher in one of the schools here who had her jaw broken as the result of a young student, believe it or not, in terms of dealing with that, what's the process? How long does it take, if anything at all is done to address it?

K. HOWELL: Thank you for that question.

Again, this is one of the things that has become a daily discussion in our department and, I guess, the length of an

investigation is based upon what it is that we're investigating in terms of the most serious incidents. The more rare occurrences that actually do result in having to take it above and beyond our school system, if there's a criminal aspect that needs to be considered, of course, that will take a little longer. But for the case-by-case basis, I'll get Terry Hall to speak to what the investigation process looks like for, we'll say, our day-to-day operations.

T. HALL: Thanks.

I know you don't expect me to, but I can't speak to specific cases, but when an incident comes in it's determined, first of all, what caused the incident, whether or not an investigation needs to happen and we'll kick in the process immediately. We try and get through it as quickly as possible; it depends upon the nature and how many people we need to speak to. Again, a result of that could deviate it to an outside authority, if we feel that we need to do that, especially if it involves a student, we may have to get outside forces to help us to deal with younger people in those types of incidents.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I just want to talk to a big issue which is teacher retention and recruitment. We know that some classes are being doubled up and guidance specialities are being pulled away from their job to teach. A lot of these continue. I know last year in the budget Estimates it was indicated that a draft retention and recruitment plan was completed along with the NLTA.

Just curious as to what's the status of that retention and recruitment plan that was already completed in draft a year ago?

K. HOWELL: In terms of the recruitment and retention draft that was –

P. DINN: Yeah, there was a draft plan last year in the Estimates that was said to have been completed. I'm just curious as to whatever became of that.

K. HOWELL: We realized that it needed to have more in it and that was resulted in our Think Tank. We had to go back to the folks that are on the ground day-in and day-out to get a more fulsome picture of what it is that would be effective recruitment, retention measures. We wanted to engage our partners at the NLTA.

I know I say that a lot and I even say it in Question Period, but it is something that's very important to me, because the frustration of being a front-line worker and having a policy implemented and just completely downloaded on to you without having time to respond or give your input was incredibly frustrating to me and I don't want that to be something that's ever said of a department that I am responsible to speak for. I always want it to reach the front lines so that we get input from those who do the day-in, day-out.

That was the premise of our survey that was sent out to our teachers and our administrators to get their feedback. We had an overwhelming response to that, 2,200-plus responses to how we can better do things in our classrooms. There was a wide range of suggestions, which we managed to group into some themes that came out and the top priorities that were identified there, and able to move quickly on some of the issues that were identified. As we've talked about here tonight some of them are a little bit more medium- and long-term goals that we wish to achieve.

So as we build our plan for recruitment and retention, those are the things that we'll be looking to build on, in particular, I think the outcome of our Education Accord will inform our 10-year plan. So it will identify some

upfront things as well that we can do, as well as some medium- and long-term goals that we can implement right across our education spectrum.

We've also committed to a committee, through the collective bargaining process, that will look at what these measures will look like and how the implementation rolls out, if they deem that it would be appropriate or if we're out to lunch on some of the things that we're looking to implement, then this committee will certainly remind us of that and ensure that we have the best plan moving forward.

P. DINN: So what was the process for the plan that was drafted last year?

K. HOWELL: The plan that was formed was in collaboration with the NLTA, but I don't know at the end of the plan if everybody thought that it was what we hoped it would be. So not necessarily to go back to the drawing board, but certainly to put more meat on the bones of what was the plan.

P. DINN: So would I be correct in saying, currently, we do not have a full-fledged, retention and recruitment plan?

K. HOWELL: We have several pieces of a plan. To say we have A, B, C, and D and let's figure that out, I wouldn't say that we have that plan. But when we look at the different pieces that make up our recruitment and our retention, they form a very vast group of bonuses, incentives and places that we think we can make improvements for recruitment and retention. Not the least of which was a commitment in this year's budget for \$850,000 to recruit for some of our harder-to-fill, some of the historically challenging areas to fill, and some creative solutions to some of the problems that are identified in those areas, particularly the schools in Labrador where housing seemed to be an issue. We were able to provide housing for our teachers. If they were not NLSchools housing, then we were able to offer a stipend to find housing

that was appropriate in the community and give them that opportunity.

We also looked at access because air access is sometimes a challenge in some of these places, so we were able to offer travel for the teachers in and out of the areas throughout the year.

P. DINN: Interesting.

So in Budget 2024, it includes this \$850,000 for recruitment and retention initiatives in hard-to-fill rural, remote and isolated areas. It went on to say that these initiatives will build on efforts made last year, as well as information garnered from the recent Teachers' Think Tank. These will further enhance activities and recognize the value of teachers and educators.

So, just curiosity here, what were the results from last year's initiatives?

K. HOWELL: We were able to fill 97 per cent of the targeted areas that we apply these principles to. This recruitment initiative was applied to, as we said, some of the rural, remote areas and had a 97 per cent success rate in filling those positions.

So that was evidence to us that what we were doing was meaningful and we want to build on that.

P. DINN: So what areas did you focus on? What areas were in that 97 per cent?

K. HOWELL: Those were primarily in Labrador, and I'll defer to the ADM of Operations to add additional information.

T. HALL: Sure, thanks.

That was primarily in what we called our hard-to-fill areas, as the minister alluded to. So, yes, a lot in Labrador where we were trying to attract teachers to go. Some more remote places even here on the Island that we were trying to get people to go to, places like Fogo Island, where it was a little

remote, those types of places that we would have put some incentives to attract people to go there.

P. DINN: So how many positions in total? We're talking 97 per cent of them were filled of the targeted. So how many was targeted?

T. HALL: We had a little over 100 targeted that we needed to fill, and we had 97 per cent. So a little over 100 is what it was.

P. DINN: Okay.

T. HALL: I can get you an exact number at some point, but I do know that it was 79 that we filled, which was a 97.5 per cent fill rate.

P. DINN: Okay, thank you.

If I can get it later, the breakout of where they were in the remote areas.

T. HALL: Sure.

P. DINN: Just on that, were there any areas that were left with a huge, unmet need? Now, I know you said 97 per cent, but that was for the total. Were there areas where you particularly had trouble filling or recruiting?

K. HOWELL: Again, 97 per cent of those classrooms were filled and the other 3 per cent were often met with substitutes or emergency supply. It was every endeavour to have a substitute, a trained teacher, in those classrooms and, where the resources could not allow, then often it was required to implement an emergency supply.

P. DINN: Okay.

There's a continued phase then of the Kids in the Know body safety program for K-to-9 classrooms. I'm just curious to how many classrooms is this program currently available in.

K. HOWELL: My memory is failing me on that number; I don't know if the ADM for K to 12 can speak to that?

CHAIR: Scott Linehan.

S. LINEHAN: So we've expanded to 40 additional schools this school year.

P. DINN: So how many was last year?

S. LINEHAN: I think it was 23, but I'd have to verify. I think it was 23.

P. DINN: Let's talk about pre-kindergarten. Let's move along.

Locations are opening and phased in throughout the province, with the creation of something like 3,000 regulated child care spaces. Last year in Estimates, it was noted that 245 graduates would be coming out of the College of the North Atlantic, as well as there were about 600 who had left the profession.

I'm curious as to how many of those, last year, that 245 as well as the 600 that were identified as having left the profession, were employed or are employed?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the ADM for Early Learning.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: There are 263 ECEs employed this year, newly attached to the workforce.

P. DINN: Just –

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

P. DINN: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay, I'll get you next time.

CHAIR: We'll move on to the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

The last discussion, we were talking about violence in the school. I want to point out one thing. If you talk to any teacher who's been the victim of violence, it's interesting: It's never about blaming the child.

I've had teachers who've been punched, kicked, who'd come to me, still come to me, and have suffered extreme violence, but it's always about the child needs the supports in a large classroom that he or she is not thriving. Whether it's a lack of self-regulation or the inability, I didn't see it as much in high school. Most of the violence there is probably student on student, let's take it out in the parking lot and that kind of thing.

But I will say, in some ways, it is about teachers, because when we did supervision, you might say, in high school, most of the students could pick me up and make a pretzel out of me if they wanted to. So it wasn't about breaking up things, but the mere presence of a teacher, that extra person there was a deterrent. And it's also about building relationships, too, if nothing else.

So I will say that maybe there is also looking at alternate settings as well or alternate schools. I come to believe that the public school system may not be the right venue, the right place for all students at any one time. Some thrive later and some thrive in that time. This is from just talking to students, what they needed. Sometimes it's just to have that one on one, basically.

I'm just wondering then in relation to that, one of the things that rankled with me as a teacher and other teachers has to do with the whole notion of soft caps and hard caps, as to what would qualify. We've got class caps but they're soft caps and you can go a little bit over.

So I'm just wondering here, will the department then – and you've got a partner, as you've indicated, with the NLTA, maybe in what remains of this year, to set up class caps that can be then enshrined in

legislation as hard caps. So if it meets that cap or goes over, it automatically triggers maybe a splitting of the class in some way. Or, depending on the composition of the class, if you have three students who have diagnosed exceptionalities, that they count as three students each. So they are formulas that we have proposed at one time.

I'm just wondering where you stand, will you work with the NLTA to establish hard caps in all areas of instruction? I mean, that would be one very clear way of enforcing it because, as long as we have soft caps, it's a moving target.

K. HOWELL: So given the considerations of our classroom allocations, that's a piece of the discussion that we're looking at. We continue that discussion with our partners at the NLTA. When we look at the number of students that we find in our classrooms now that have exceptionalities, it's more difficult to say that you can flow students in, flow student out because there are significant implications when you have children in classrooms with these resource needs.

So, as part of our commitment to looking at a needs-based allocation, the hard caps will certainly be part of that discussion.

J. DINN: I'm thinking of substitute teachers. I know several of my colleagues who served with me on the NLTA, who I worked with, now are retired and not necessarily by choice, but out of the necessity, they are subbing full-time, not because they need the money, but because if they didn't do it, there would be no teacher. I'm thinking of some sole-charged schools and colleagues who, if they wanted to, they could be working full-time but they have not.

So with regard to that, in terms of retention and recruitment, a lot of teachers are covering for colleagues, they are giving up their prep time, which I can tell you is used for either calling parents, photocopying,

conferencing with the student, you name it. It's lost.

I'm just wondering, if you want to look at a retention device, maybe compensating teachers who had to fill in for their colleagues because there is no substitute.

K. HOWELL: As we look at our recruitment and retention plan, those are ongoing discussions. We're certainly not taking anything off the table in terms of how we can build a plan that works and makes sense for the K-to-12 system here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

To your point, there are a significant number of retirees still attached to the system. The simple math is that 250, on average, are retiring every year and we're only getting 130 out of our education system, post-secondary level.

So there are a significant number of retirees still attached to the system and we continue to work on that as part of a recruitment and retention plan: How we can get more people to be interested in this profession; what can we do as we've identified, how can we incentivize some of these positions; how do we get people to take the hard-to-fill positions; people who choose to not take full-time versus substitute; and all of those measures are included in our plans for recruitment and retention.

Fully admitting that we don't know all the answers right now, but the things that we have implemented that work, we want to continue to build on that.

J. DINN: Thank you, Minister.

I think that's what I've been doing by asking my question here are some ideas.

Can I ask a question: How many over on this side were primary and elementary teachers at one time?

Okay, I wasn't either. I have a reason for asking it.

You want to recruit teachers, you want to become their best friend and a new best friend for the NLTA, commit to eliminating supervision in the school system and hire people to do that, especially in primary and elementary where supervision is onerous and because of the nature of the child, you've got small children and so on and so forth. So if you have paid professionals who come in and they take care of that supervision, that frees up teachers to do an awful lot of work that they need to be doing. If nothing else, it gives them some downtime.

But if you've got – because of busing schedule – a 40-minute lunch, you might be doing it three or four times in the run of a week, from a primary and elementary school perspective, especially, that would be significant.

So that's one thing: Will there be a commitment to finding a plan to eliminate supervision for teachers in the school system and have someone else do that?

K. HOWELL: Certainly, as I've mentioned, when we talk about our recruitment and retention, all of these suggestions are welcomed and noted. As I've said, I will always defer to the folks who have been there, lived it and done it, to give us the best perspective. So thank you for that.

J. DINN: Perfect.

And one other thing, eliminate the fractional units. You're not getting a teacher to go to a remote area for 0.25 or 0.15.

K. HOWELL: I agree.

J. DINN: Okay.

K. HOWELL: We've made a concentrated effort to ensure that in places, especially in our rural areas, where there might be a 0.5

or 0.25, that we are trying to attach that to another 0.5 or 0.25 to give something meaningful for our teachers to want to be part of. Because as you said, it's very difficult to – like, what's 0.25 of a teacher? I'm sure there are times when they can be utilized in the system.

So we have decreased the number of our partial units significantly, but we're continuing to work on that. This past year, an additional 19.75 units were distributed to allow for partial positions to become full-time, equivalent positions, that allowed for an additional 58 positions to become full-time instead of partial.

J. DINN: So you introduced another 19.75? There you go, fractional again.

Anyway, my point is that even in town, a 0.25 position is not affordable, if you've got to pay rent. Most teachers are doing 100 per cent of the job, even if they're only getting paid for 0.25.

I had one last question just on retention here: \$850,000 was announced in the budget for recruitment and retention, just with regard to that, I'm just wondering is that new money? Because both the English and the Francophone systems were offering signing bonuses, so is this new money or a simple continuation of that?

The other part is: Once you've got them recruited, what are we doing to retain them?

K. HOWELL: The additional money that was used last year was identified at a savings from the NL English school district to implement some of these recruitment, retention measures. So this commitment of \$850,000 this year continues that investment and assures that it will be available. We won't have to go just picking for it through savings, it is a commitment that we will be instituting.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

It's 7:36, we are going to take a 10-minute break, exactly 10 minutes.

Recess

CHAIR: Okay, we'll start again.

Just a reminder that we're still in 1.1.01 to 1.2.01.

We'll start with the MHA for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Just to start off where I left off, talking about the pre-kindergarten pilot program. I'm just curious, what's the status of the pre-kindergarten implementation in terms of how many locations are currently in place and how many are expected to be in place this September coming?

K. HOWELL: So we've made significant progress on our pre-K sites. I'm hesitant to give a number, I will turn to my ADM of Early Learning because that changes almost by the day now. There are a few that are in the final stages of clueing up.

We had 24 pre-K pilot sites that are operational through the YMCA that has created 457 spaces and we have 10 that are currently a work in progress.

I am told that my ADM, right at the moment, has an update to this number.

P. DINN: My God, news at 11. This just in.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yeah, we now have 29 sites that are currently operating and six are in progress, for a total of 505 spaces.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Just before I forget, are we able to get a copy of your briefing binder, please?

K. HOWELL: Yes, absolutely.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Just to go back to a point that was made when I asked about how many graduates were employed. I think the comment was 263 are new and attached to early childhood education jobs. How many, out of the 245 graduates of the College of the North Atlantic, do we hire each year or did we hire last year?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: I would say that would be 100 per cent of the new positions would've been hired into.

We do have a number of those who attended post-secondary who actually went in as a result of the wage grid and wanted to upskill. So there are some additional positions that they were already working, then they went in to get the additional level so that they would get the higher wage and that's obviously good for quality for our centres as well.

P. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

In relation to the early childhood education staff, have all of them received their full retroactive payment from government?

OFFICIAL: Yes.

P. DINN: Do we have a total on how much was paid out in the retro pay?

K. HOWELL: We can get that number for you.

P. DINN: Okay, perfect.

If it's all paid out, I would assume that all ECEs are now currently getting paid at the appropriate level?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

P. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

K. HOWELL: If there are any that think they're not, then, by all means, reach out and ensure that we have captured who represents what level. Because as the ADM mentioned, as you increase your education, increase your certification, it certainly provides an extra layer of rigour to the centres and the quality of service that they're providing.

P. DINN: Thank you.

In November, the Premier announced 160 new \$10-a-day spaces at a new building on St. Michael's Avenue in St. John's, the Discovery Collegiate in Bonavista and the Eastside Elementary in Corner Brook. These spaces were anticipated to be open, well, next month, and would have hours that would meet the needs of medical professionals.

What is the update on those three locations? Are they going to open on time? How many will they accommodate? If they're not open on time, when?

K. HOWELL: As you referenced, some of them were new builds, some of them were renovations, so different timelines for those two types of structures.

I'll turn to the ADM who can give us a centre-by-centre breakdown.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We do have an additional site, actually, added to that. We actually have a total of four sites. There's a site on Austin Street. That one we anticipate will be the quicker opening within the next say month, month and a half. Discovery Collegiate and – I'm not sure which one was in Corner Brook?

P. DINN: Eastside Elementary.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Eastside Elementary, those ones are working through the renovation phases and within the next three months we anticipate those will be open.

The location on St. Michael's Avenue is taking a little bit longer because it's a brand-new build, so they had to do the additional work with respect to municipalities. We anticipate by September for that one.

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

There were 160 new positions or spaces announced, so with the fourth site, does that change?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: That changes, yeah, absolutely. So that's up to 210 additional spaces.

P. DINN: Related to that, are we perceiving any issues coming up with proper staff for those sites?

K. HOWELL: Our recruitment and retention efforts are ongoing in our ECEs. We've had great success in uptake and believe that we'll continue to have success in those positions.

P. DINN: Thank you.

There's also additional funding to post-secondary institutions to ensure early childhood education programs are more accessible and to increase the number of graduates. A needs-based grant was provided to eligible students in approved programs, with non-repayable grants of up to \$10,000. Do we know how many availed of that program?

K. HOWELL: We can certainly get that information from our partners.

P. DINN: I'm looking at in September, the Department of Education announced an allotment of \$7.5 million through the federal Child Care Capacity Initiative towards a new time-limited funding program called Create A Space Incentive Grant. This grant assists eligible applicants with creating a total of 750 new regulated care spaces throughout the province. What's the status of these spaces?

K. HOWELL: These spaces are, too, at various stages of development. I don't know if you have a more –

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: They're at various stages over the next, again, month to 24 months, depending on what's required, whether it's a new build, the size of the centres themselves. It's actually 761 spaces now. We've had some additional people come forward and we've been able to work within the budget to allow those additional spaces.

P. DINN: So these spaces are not connected at all to the earlier question on those?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: No, that's correct.

P. DINN: Those are separate.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yeah.

P. DINN: Can we get a breakdown of where these are being built and what they're going to accommodate? You may not have it now but we can get a breakdown of that?

K. HOWELL: It was part of the news release that was released last week, but we can certainly forward that to you.

P. DINN: You had one last week? I missed that one.

Okay, thank you.

Just moving along here, the Early Childhood Education Recruitment and Retention Grant would provide eligible childhood educators with \$2,500 upon initial certification renewal of Level I and II certification, up to a maximum of \$7,500. How many have availed of that program, the Early Childhood Education Recruitment and Retention Grant?

K. HOWELL: That's a number that we can reach out to our partners at AECENL to get for you.

P. DINN: Thank you.

The child care demand portal: Do we know what the latest stats are on that?

K. HOWELL: I am so excited to talk about the child care demand portal.

P. DINN: That question was planted by the way.

K. HOWELL: I paid you to ask me that one. No, no, no that is a fallacy.

I certainly would like to give a huge shout-out to our colleagues in the department of OCIO who have worked so diligently on this portal. I actually received an early-stage demo this week as to what that looks like and once that is fully implemented and realized, it will be an invaluable resource to our early learning platform and how parents can sign in and they can roster their children in their select areas.

Providers will be able to sign in and see what the base is, what the needs would look like for their centres in their area; if they intend to expand, then they may be able to garner information from this website. It also looks at resource allocation, where we may have extra ECEs in the area. So I look forward to sharing that with you in the fall.

OFFICIAL: No.

K. HOWELL: No?

Oh, sooner.

OFFICIAL: By the end of May.

K. HOWELL: By the end of May. See how quick this crowd over here works. They just knocked off time like that.

By the end of May we will be able to give a rudimentary version. Of course, there is a lot of opportunity to add bells and whistles, overlay with maps and all of those types of things. The possibilities are limitless when

we look at this gateway and how it can provide information to parents and to centres who offer these services to our children. So looking very much forward to that.

P. DINN: Okay, I thought I'd squeeze one more in, but that's all right, I'll get you on the way around.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to pick up with the \$850,000 for the continued funding for recruitment and retention, and in context, too, I'm looking at the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, the 28.5 per cent vacancy in social workers. I'm looking at it from this point of view, a question I wanted to ask is: What's being done for retention? Recruitment is fine, but it's about retaining them.

I guess one of the things in sort of analogist to the social workers is that if the problems that are keeping teachers from taking the position and staying there are not addressed, whether that means like complex cases and the workload, then you can recruit but you won't retain.

So I'm trying to get an idea of what's being done to retain because the budget really hasn't grown, it's a continuation. It's not like it's new money; maybe more needs to be done. So I'm looking at how successful, but how well are we doing at retaining teachers?

K. HOWELL: Again, that was part of the conversation that we had with our teachers during the Think Tank. We looked at some measures that we may be able to implement to encourage the retention process, as we look down the line, not the least of which is the 2 per cent wage increase, which will, by the end of the collective agreement, see our

teaching services budget go to \$750 million. We offered the one-time recognition bonus for teachers.

We want to ensure that there's competitiveness here in Newfoundland and Labrador. So recognizing the wages was a piece of that and continuing these incentives for our rural and remote areas. Also looking at how we can do a more timely selection of teachers for the start of an academic school year so that you're not last minute trying to shuffle and see what that looks like, what our process looks like there. We've added an additional report card day to assist teachers in managing their workload.

We're taking a closer look at our responsive teaching and learning model, given some of the feedback that was acquired through our Think Tank process on that. Sometimes you implement these programs but it's also very important to evaluate what it looks like and see where there's been success identified and where there maybe opportunities to build and develop.

We're also looking at modernizing some of the definitions that we use in terms of harassment and discrimination, giving the teachers a little more concrete platforms to build those words and see what that means to them. We've agreed with the NLTA to a committee that will address these issues on an ongoing basis. So simply giving the one-offs won't be the plan moving forward.

There are some things that you can implement earlier or on an immediate basis, but we've recognized again that we need to do that in terms of a constant evaluation of what it is we're doing, what's working and what's not.

We offered an additional \$450,000 to support mental health for teachers in the classrooms, recognizing some of the stresses and strains that they've been under. So the NLTA has been given a grant to allocate for that.

Continuing into their French school board, we've added two additional floating teacher positions to help cover off some of the rural and remote pressures that they've been facing.

So all of these things in conjunction with our continues efforts and commitment to evaluate what we're doing to see what's working.

J. DINN: I'll be honest, it's minimal and it really is minimal: \$450,000 for mental health – great. It all helps, but, as a teacher, I don't want to get to the stage where I'm going to need EAP. Most of us don't want to get to that stage. Looking at continuing to talk is not going to make a row of beans in some ways with regards to this.

I'm looking here at the retention piece and I'm just trying to get at it terms of, I think, Minister, you mentioned the collective agreement, the salary increase and most of the times in the process, we'll accept that because it comes to the stage when we're told we're not getting anything else, period.

Certainly, as a teacher, starting off, I understand the need for money, I was there, but after a while what becomes extremely more valuable is time. The time to do the job properly; the time to be able to make the phone calls that you need to make; the time to prepare, to correct, to talk to, counsel students; and so on and so forth.

So we can look at the collective agreement and say, wow, we got that increase. It still comes down to, it's not addressing the retention piece as much as you might think. Money will go so far; otherwise, I guess we'd have nurses in the system and everything else, you name it. It's about, also, the time; making sure that the working conditions are such that it's manageable, that they're able to achieve a work/life balance. So I draw that there.

It's \$850,000, I still want to see something more concrete that is going to make this a

profession that people want to come to. I was talking to one young teacher downtown who is finishing up his degree and is planning to head off to Calgary – not planning to stay here at all.

It's troubling to know that's what's keeping a lot of schools, I'd say not only in rural areas but in the centre of the city, are our retirees. That's significant. Part of the reason, I guess, is that as a retiree, you can walk in and you can walk out. Your arms are swinging, as simple as that. A lot of retirees have been asked: Would you fill in full-time? No, I'm not interested in full-time.

I think when we're looking at that \$850,000, it's about seriously looking at retention and not just the recruitment.

Has there been any discussion with the NLTA with regard to addressing this or setting up, I don't know, a plan, a framework, a discussion? Is there anything here, because I know if I had a wonderful relationship with the minister, I know what I'd be bringing up if I were president in that position. So I'm just wondering what has the NLTA been talking about and what have they suggested?

K. HOWELL: As I've referenced before, there is a committee that was established as part of the collective agreement to look at recruitment and retention on an ongoing basis, to evaluate the things that we've implemented to see what's working, what's not and where we can make improvements.

It's vital to us that we have that feedback from our partners at the NLTA in terms of how we develop this plan and that was, again, the premise of the Think Tank to determine what were the key issues that we could identify. I'll say it again, I did not want to make this a top-down approach where I looked at a classroom and assumed what was to be the issue in the classroom.

We had the Think Tank 21 working days before budget day. That was not a

significant amount of time to make changes to allocations or to look at putting different resources in classrooms; 21 business days gave us some immediate actions that we implemented to relieve some pressure points, but we have to take a more concentrated effort on what it is that we can implement in our classrooms.

Again, if I came out swinging after the Think Tank and offered numbers and dropped teachers in classrooms all across this province, I would have been accused of being reckless with that allocation and not really knowing what I was doing with it, so it was important to me that we have an understanding of what's required.

It is going to take time, and I will reiterate that, when you look at a needs-based allocation, it's going to take time to figure that out. Right now, we want to make sure that the classrooms are supported until we get to that point where we have an actual plan that makes sense, that's approved by the NLTA and that looks like something that's actually going to work in our classrooms.

J. DINN: Minister, it's going to take time. Since 2004, when Dave Dibbon put his report out, *It's About Time!!* – it's 20 years. We're well past the time right now – we're well past it. So the question I was asking is: What did the NLTA, your partner, tell you is needed to be done to address it, because it's not about a Think Tank? Unless you're expecting me to believe that they haven't given you any suggestions or told you anything about their concerns, whether in a meeting, in correspondence or whatever else.

K. HOWELL: With all due respect MHA Dinn, in 2004 the only thing I was concerned about in school was what colour my grad dress was going to be. I only got here a year ago.

As we've worked through some of the issues with the NLTA, the ideas that came

from our Think Tank were presented. As I mentioned, 2,200 people had responded to our surveys and they identified some of the key issues being classroom allocations, being teacher resources, being student supports. All of this information is available in the *What We Heard* document that you can reference from our teachers' survey.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I just want to make a comment along the lines of the discussion right now. Yes, the minister is new to her role, there's no doubt about that, but I think it's a bit disheartening, I guess, as a teacher or as a student or as the NLTA, when you look at the multiple, multiple reports that have been done over the years and we always seem to be in a reboot mode. I think that's what's disheartening about this.

All these reports that have been out there and done, surely, surely there's been something of value that has come out of those reports that can be implemented. So in all due respect to the minister, yes, you're new to this, but this has been an ongoing issue for a long time. Trying to see and learn what's been implemented and what's working out of those reports is a key piece to getting some success here.

K. HOWELL: If I can have a minute to respond.

P. DINN: Yes, go ahead, sorry.

K. HOWELL: That is indeed the premise of our Education Accord, is to take a look at some of the things that have come forward from reports past, not to create a new report, but to indeed look at what has been established in past reports; what has been identified as priorities; what has been implemented; what has been not; and things that we need to move forward on, on any

report that has been presented in the past, consolidate all of that information into a plan of short-, medium- and long-term goals.

P. DINN: I guess that's my point. What have we been doing all this time, if we have not been looking at those reports and pulling out what's useable there.

K. HOWELL: We have.

P. DINN: Because essentially what we've done is with the Education Accord, we're pulling together another mechanism or another report that's going to come out with, I guess, many of the same issues that have already been identified.

K. HOWELL: So some of the plans or the reports that have been brought forward to government in the last number of years have been actioned. The Education Action Plan that came out of the Premier's Task Force has a number of measures that were implemented and numerous items of various reports.

So to say that we haven't done any action on those would be a misstatement because there has been significant work on some of them. I think that's why, right now, it is important to know what was moved on.

Our responsive teaching and learning model was one of the things that came out of that. We recognize that there are challenges with that; it did not go as smoothly in some areas as we would have hoped. So it is important to look at what was not working, as well as just simply saying, well, this was recommended and we did it. What's the point of saying we did it if it was unsuccessful?

So that's where we are right now, is taking stock of the things that have been implemented, that have worked, those that maybe need some reediting and ensuring that we have the best product to move forward.

P. DINN: I can go on about this one, that's not where I want to start it, but I wanted to make that comment that we've had more than enough. I think the Child and Youth Advocate, when she put out a report on absenteeism in 2019 – I stand to be corrected – her quote was: We have enough reports already – essentially – when are we going to work on it?

But let me get back to the early childhood education. People have reached out to me, a number of people have reached out to me, parents, who have been having concerns with inclusive education and with after-school programming. They've indicated that they seem to be forced out of those spaces because we've made, I guess, the toddler or the infant spaces more lucrative for the operators.

So can you comment on that and what's being done to address that.

K. HOWELL: So that was a part of our Operating Grant Program review we identified there. We had different centres that were operating on different tiers. Some of them were providing inclusion services and some of them were not. But now, as we look at what has to be implemented, the expectation will be that all of our centres provide inclusion services and they will be funded accordingly.

Given consideration to the centres who are already in operation, ensuring that they don't cancel those spaces to move into the infant care space is again something else that would be part of the regulations moving forward.

P. DINN: So for those who currently have lost their spaces, and I've heard from some who, essentially, had to give up their jobs. Currently, there's no mechanism in place to ensure that persons losing their seat is not reinstated.

K. HOWELL: If there is a specific centre that you're speaking to, please let us know

because we've been able to work very closely with our operators to find solutions for some of these issues.

I don't know if there's something else that our ADM may be able to add to that, but I certainly do encourage you, if there's a specific centre that you're speaking of, then let us know because there might be a solution that we can offer.

P. DINN: I've reached out to your ADM and we've had a discussion and very good to deal with, no doubt. We do continue to get other examples of this coming forward. So it's not a one-off. There are some out there that are doing this on a regular basis and it's probably something that the sooner we get a policy or something in place to deal with this, the better because, as I said, there are individuals who are giving up their jobs as a result of this.

K. HOWELL: And there will certainly be expectations associated with our Operating Grant Program so if you're on the operating grant then there will be requirements. There are some centres that operate outside of our Operating Grant Program which don't have to report to the department as succinctly as those that are on.

P. DINN: I just want to continue with child care. There was a grant and bursaries offered, an allocation of \$2.7 million to offer bursaries and grants for students completing post-secondary programs to become an early childhood educator. Do we know how many early childhood spaces are currently available?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We do know that all of our post-secondary seats are full. In terms of the number of ECEs attending: We have 361 who are currently attending Level 1 training. There are 328 who are currently attending the Level 2. We have 23 who are in our four-year program, which is really exciting, that's our new associate degree and then at another one of our post-

secondary institutions, we also have an additional 62.

P. DINN: Perfect. Thank you.

I know I was reading some information that talked about child care deserts, one space per every three children or more. Do we know of any regions in the province that are really terrible or are in desperate need of help in those regards?

K. HOWELL: That is one of the objectives of our Early Learning Gateway and our portal is to capture the areas where the need may exist. So, again, I put the call out to any parents who find themselves in a position where they're waiting for child care to please get on to the portal and register.

That is the way that we can capture need and allocate resources and focus our attention in the areas that seem to have those – as you mentioned – regions where the need is greatest and where we may have to pay more special attention.

P. DINN: Yeah.

So I've gotten a good answer on the numbers involved. How many early childhood professionals do we currently have, that are registered in the system, or maybe registered and not in the system as well? Do we know that number?

K. HOWELL: I'll pass that to the ADM.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We have 1,315, currently, right now in the system.

P. DINN: Do we know if they are currently working, all that 1,315?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yeah, we're active on the wage grid, so we are paying them on the wage grid, so that's how many are –

P. DINN: I know we talked earlier about bringing those who left the profession back

in. Do we have any indication how many have left that are out there wanting to come back?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Do you want me to answer that?

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Okay, yeah.

So we do have our Association for Early Childhood Educators tracking that, but that's been recent. So we don't have that actual data right now, but I can certainly get that for you.

P. DINN: Okay, I appreciate that. Thank you.

Quickly, how's the department working with the Indigenous communities to provide early childhood educators and those that are trained, culturally relevant education, to provide that?

K. HOWELL: I'll get the ADM to speak to that. I know she's quite passionate about that.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: So we are currently working with our Indigenous partners. We're doing a co-design of our Early Learning Action Plan. So we have regular connects with our partners to start that process. We have two people at our department who are working with our partners around that. We also have a number of supports that we do provide to our child care services, who are from Indigenous, and we're regularly ensuring that the staff operate in a culturally safe manner.

Some of the early consultations and the information that we received actually resulted in a shift in terms of our approach with respect to our legislation and regulations with those partners.

P. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair, I'll pick up where we left off.

Minister, I think you said that in 2004 you were more focused on your prom at that time. In 2004, I was teaching at Holy Heart, I was probably over halfway through my career and very much focused on making sure that the students in my class had the supports they need, met their requirements for their exams. I spent over half my career at that time teaching on the Southern Shore in small schools.

I say that because you've been in this job for 10 months now, and soon to be 12, that's a significant period of time. A lot of teachers have been in their career, either they're just starting off, they're getting close to retirement, or they're halfway through.

If anything else, if you've listened to the interview with Mike Walsh when he was on in December, if you've heard the stories that came out and if you got a fraction of the emails that I got from teachers, then you know that what teachers are looking for is some hope; something here to show that you're listening, that the department is listening, that they're not just simply looking at this through a budget-based lens.

I guess what's not being heard here is that. Because in the end it comes down to teachers wanting to have the resources to do their jobs. Now, I know primary and elementary school teachers will spend a significant portion of their own money on supplies for the classroom. I know that personally because my wife was a primary teacher and my daughter's a primary teacher, I know what they spend. They're very proud professionals, not only of their classroom, but of their students and want to see them do their best.

I think right now when I'm talking about recruitment and retention, it's not just a number to me. It comes down to: How do we make sure that good teachers stay in the field and how do we get good people who will do well in the classroom to come and stay? That's what we're looking for here, which is what I'm passionate about. I've been retired really since 2017, but I still identify as a teacher. It's about who I am. I wasn't a job to me; it was who I was.

So I think, if anything else, in any of the comments when we're talking about what we were doing 2004, there are a lot of teachers out there who just want hope. They hear the stories of, like I said, Mike Walsh who came out and they're nodding in agreement because that's the reality for a lot. I've seen pictures recently of schools in a primary class, of the damage that was done. I'm talking about desks thrown and going through walls and good teachers who are pushed to their limit.

I don't know if we can wait for another report to be finished. There are plenty. Like I said, the Dave Dibbon report, *It's About Time!!*, makes references to class size and composition. He had that lived experience. It references the prep time, it references the supervision, it talks about all of the – there are very practical things that would help the classroom. That is what we're looking at here, not another report.

I will tell you, if I were in the classroom, if I heard: Oh, we've got the Think Tank, the Task Force and the Education Accord, I know what I would be doing by now. Oh my God, here we go again, and tune out and go back to doing what I'm going to do and hope for the best.

One thing I brought up here in the House, and I guess I'm talking about downloading from other departments, half the time we'd be joking as teachers that sometimes there were students who were sentenced to school from the justice system and the

school had very few resources in which to deal with it.

Recently, I referenced in Central Newfoundland, the fact that Central Health or the health authority there, had requested that teachers at schools, administrators and school counselors: Please don't send any more students for referrals, we've got a backlog here. Which means basically saying: You're on your own, it's your problem, deal with it.

I had another school counselor who was expected, more or less, to do the visual screening. We've seen, certainly over the years, I remember starting off, school nurses, public health nurses who would visit the school. They'd do everything from even checking for lice and so on and so forth. I remember you didn't see it so much in the high school by that time, but in the primary and elementary, their presence became less and less and the jobs they were responsible for were cut back. It meant that a lot of that fell to the school or they didn't have those supports.

Social workers: In many ways, when it comes to absenteeism, I don't know how the school is going to solve it because it's primarily a parent issue. If we want to talk about the collaboration, that really should be a responsibility of social workers, maybe CSSD, to talk to families in that way. The school can only enforce – there's another one – absenteeism, lateness. They're powerless to address it. It really needs to come from somewhere else.

In many cases, parents would get funding as long as the child was attending school, but, eventually, it didn't matter if they were attending every day, but did they show up once a month, or whatever else. You can sort of see, over the years, the requirements getting less and less and the demands on the school getting more and more.

Even with ISSP meetings, at one time, I would sit in on a few of those. Really, other

agencies are supposed to be there, but primarily it would be teachers and not the other agencies, like Health. I would talk to school counsellors who I worked with, one said: It took me eight hours to log a time to set up a meeting with the Janeway at the time – eight hours to set it up. That's to call back and forth before they had a meeting.

So I guess here the question is: What steps will your department take to address this so Education is a partner in this but it doesn't fall solely on the responsibility of teachers?

I think you said at the beginning, Minister, this is not just about the classroom. So here's a real practical way: What discussions have you had? How are we going to work with the other departments to make sure that the child who's in front of me, who may be a client of CSSD, who may be involved with the justice system, has that true collaboration, if we believe it takes a village to raise a child?

A big question, you got a minute and a half.

K. HOWELL: Thank you.

It is, again, something that is going to require a collaborative effort, so the close intersection between the Department of Education, as well as Health, and Children, Seniors and Social Development. That's part of the conversation that was initiated when we looked at our Violence Prevention Initiative, but it certainly didn't just end in terms of violence. It was a recognition amongst all departments that, as you said, there has to be a concerted effort on everybody's part to support our students, to support these children and to look at what are the extenuating factors that play into the demonstration of behaviours that we're seeing in our classrooms, the abilities to learn and what barriers there may be for our students.

One of the things that we're working on in our department is a means by which we can have that communication between

departments. When you're dealing with some students, some children, some families' person information, their health data, some of their social work connections or interactions, there are a lot of privacy discussions that have to be had and regulations that have to be established in terms of what can and cannot be shared.

That's kind of where we are at this stage, is figuring out, legally, what it is that can be shared in terms of a person's medical information between departments so that the educators in our classrooms do have access to that information, so they know if there's an issue in the home, then that's something that can be present in their dealings with our children and their responsive activities. Again, not leaving it solely to the teacher to identify these challenges and then report back.

So it's important that everybody has the access to the information, everybody knows the situations that are facing our children and our families and we can then have a collaborative effort on how we can approach that. It will, as you mentioned, include all different types of professionals working in tandem to make sure that these services are available for our children.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Quick question here – I thank my colleague for passing it along to me: Do we have specific numbers available for IRT teachers and the positive approach to student success to teachers?

K. HOWELL: Yes, we do.

We can dig through and find that information. If you'd like to move on to your next question, and we can get that for you.

P. DINN: Okay, I appreciate that.

It's been in the media a bit the last week or so, the concerns of MUNFA in relation to the search for a president. The chair of the committee has come back and offered some suggestions on that and talked about the process is working. There seems to be concerns around the openness or transparency of the process.

Now, given government gives an operating grant of about \$370 million to the university, does the Education Minister have any concerns about this process and whether it's going to be open or transparent?

K. HOWELL: I would certainly defer to the folks at Memorial University who make those decisions, who have an understanding of what that process looks like in academia and the implications of open versus closed in terms of procuring appropriate candidates. We certainly wouldn't want to weed out some of the more qualified candidates based on whatever type of procedure was selected. So, again, as I said, the judgment of the university in their capacity to perform an open-versus-closed process is something that they would evaluate and whatever it is that they conclude, we would work with them to fulfill that.

P. DINN: So can I interpret that as you're having no concerns with the process?

K. HOWELL: No concerns with the process, right.

P. DINN: Okay.

K. HOWELL: And I don't think they have fully identified what their plan is at this point in time. I do have regular meetings with the current president, the acting president, right now. So if these issues come up, I certainly do have an avenue by which I can approach them because, as I said, we do have monthly meetings where we do accountability sessions to see where some of the challenges may be.

P. DINN: And I ask that because, in listening to the chair of the Presidential Search Committee in the media this past week, he actually indicated that, as a result of the process for the previous president, he felt they need to do a deeper dive.

So that gives me an indication that the process was flawed in some way, previously. I am just curious as to what they're doing and whether the minister has a handle on what they're doing to ensure what's happened in the past doesn't happen again.

K. HOWELL: Again, once they have a finalized process, I'm sure it will be something that comes up in our discussions with them monthly, with the chair of the Board of Regents as well as the president of the university.

When that is enacted, the Department of Education will be informed and we'll be able to work with them as we've done on a number of issues that have become highlighted to us in our department. If there's something that we don't think meets the standard or expectation that we would have set out, we have those discussions and move that forward.

P. DINN: Something near and dear to the post-secondary students – is government considering any tuition freeze for MUN?

K. HOWELL: Over the last number of years, we have identified that the tuition freeze that was implemented has been eliminated, and we continue to support our students to ensure that education is accessible and affordable. The measures that we've included there, largely, are included in our student aid process, but also in measures that we can introduce to offset some of the ongoing fees.

This budget identifies a \$6.5-million investment in direct returns to the students. About \$500 each in terms of the campus renewal fee that would normally be charged.

We were able to work with the university to ensure that the money that would be saved from that is directly applied to the students.

P. DINN: “In collaboration with the provincial health authority,” – and this was in a release – “more than 450 nurses and more than 80 physicians have been recruited to work here. More than 120 internationally-educated nurses completed bridging in the province in 2023 to become Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses.”

Who is responsible for the bridging education here for these individuals?

K. HOWELL: The specific program is operated by the Centre for Nursing Studies. The bridging program that is operated in Newfoundland and Labrador is offered by the centre.

P. DINN: So all these 120 internationals have gone through the Centre for Nursing Studies?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

I do have an answer to your previous question, if you'd like.

P. DINN: Sure.

K. HOWELL: There are currently 314 IRT allocations in the province, as well as 30 Positive Action for Student Success teachers. So that's our PASS teachers and they provide a specific level of instruction to some students who may have particular challenges.

P. DINN: Yeah.

So that's the current numbers.

K. HOWELL: Yes.

P. DINN: What's the difference between now and last year? Have we seen an increase, decrease?

K. HOWELL: We'll have to get that information for you.

P. DINN: Okay, appreciate it.

K. HOWELL: I believe our past allocation is consistent; there would be 30 last year, 30 this year. But IRTs all have to, I think – we'll have to get that information for you.

P. DINN: *Budget 2024* includes an additional \$2 million to increase the number of faculty of medicine seats for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; that's an expansion of 10 seats. So what is the role of the department in the expansion of the faculty of medicine?

K. HOWELL: The faculty of medicine is the responsibility of the Department of Health.

P. DINN: So there is no involvement from Education, no?

K. HOWELL: There are continued negotiations with the university and how that applies to their overall operations as part of the discussions that our department would have with Memorial University. But in terms of implementing or expanding these seats, this would be an item for the Department of Health.

P. DINN: So how is government ensuring that there are sufficient teaching personnel and/or supervisors for this? I mean, you just can't take on 10 seats and –

K. HOWELL: Yeah, so again, that would be discussions that occur between the Department of Health and the faculty of medicine.

P. DINN: And I guess related to that, is there any additional classroom or laboratory space required for this?

K. HOWELL: That is a conversation that we have daily – or I'd say not daily, but in every meeting that we have with Memorial University, is their space allocation and

what they require to successfully implement the programs that they've committed to. And, in terms of speaking of the faculty of medicine, that would be a discussion that occurs with the Department of Health and then would translate to us.

P. DINN: So are we seeing any red flags in that respect?

K. HOWELL: You would have to defer that question to the Department of Health.

P. DINN: Again, this is from the Budget Speech: "To support new nurses entering our workforce, Budget 2024 allocates more than \$500,000 for a new nursing mentorship education program to compensate experienced nurses who mentor nursing graduates."

What extra workload does this mentoring place on our nurses?

K. HOWELL: So, again, this is a discussion for the Department of Health in terms of negotiations with the Registered Nurses' Union and how that plays out in terms of their membership. But this is my bailiwick; this is where I find myself comfortable.

Knowing full well the associated responsibility that comes with taking on a student or mentoring a new nurse in the workforce, there is an additional level of work, but it is one that we deem necessary as a profession, as registered nurses. If you want to have a workforce that's stable and that's building and you're creating new nurses, it's very important that we provide that mentorship.

I think there's been a long-standing myth, or maybe not so much a myth – you often hear it said that nurses eat their own young. That often provides some very hostile situations for new nurses who don't feel supported or don't feel like they have an avenue to garner new information, to feel comfortable in a workplace.

So we don't want that to be the norm here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to continue to work with our partners at the Registered Nurses' Union to determine what resources may be necessary for nurses on the ground, why some of those challenges may occur and that's built into the mentorship program, recognizing full well that some of these newer staff that do hit the workplace need that support of the seasoned professional to be able to rely on and give them the guidance that they need.

P. DINN: So what is the role, if any, of the Department of Education in facilitating this mentorship?

K. HOWELL: This is done through the Department of Health.

P. DINN: Lastly on this, how does this differ, this \$500,000, from how it was done before; or is there any change in it, in how mentorship was done before?

K. HOWELL: Again, that's a question that's better suited for the Department of Health, although I do know that in the past there has been a stipend for registered nurses who take on mentorship roles taking on students or new hires. That's usually funded through the union and their per diem process.

I do believe, now, that this plan will be a bit more comprehensive, and the Minister of Health could speak to that.

P. DINN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, in an attempt to get the information to determine allocation and what we've been talking about, will you consider, or have you considered, setting up pilot

projects in schools? It can be here in metro or maybe a small rural school. Based on what I'm hearing, there are a number of schools I can probably give you right off the bat that that would be useful.

Basically, you put in the resources, reduce the class size, look at the composition, put in whatever resources are needed and see just exactly how that works and assess it, even for this year, the coming year, and to monitor that for a year. I think that alone would indicate to an awful lot of teachers, and to parents and school communities, that this issue is being taken seriously, because, in the end, it's about having the resources for the kids.

So would there be or has there been any discussion about setting up a pilot project like that, selecting certain schools to see how this works? You'll certainly have the data before and after and then you can certainly inform the Education Accord, as well, in making those decisions. You would certainly be informing short-, medium- and long-term solutions.

K. HOWELL: Yes, thank you, that is certainly a part of the discussion.

I think the most appropriate way to determine what may or may not work is to establish pilots in different schools of various levels of class sizes, rural versus our urban centres and to determine what the specific needs would be.

I think that's certainly something that the NLTA has referenced before: If you can't do it in one sweeping motion then, certainly, by all means put in pilot projects that would give us informed data to make further decisions in the long term.

J. DINN: Is that something then that's possible for this coming school year?

K. HOWELL: I would certainly believe that it's part of our conversation and interested in making it happen as soon as possible.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

With regards to the recent realignment of schools, PWC, what necessitated that exactly, and was it tied to the influx of the newcomer students and so on and so forth? Was that the main reason?

K. HOWELL: Yeah, the school population in some of the schools that you've referenced has been the driver for this. We recognize that there are significant issues in some of those classrooms and where space is available, we're looking to make some adjustments.

J. DINN: Is that something that only became a problem most recently or something that the department and district have been aware of for a while?

K. HOWELL: It's been compounding to the point where we've lost some resource spaces, where we've had to take libraries to turn them into classrooms and things like that. So over the course of time it has worsened to the point now where it's definitely a priority item that we have to address.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I think not just EAL supports, but the other supports that go in place, as I've already referenced.

Just with regards to the long-term effect of building a new school in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and about moving half the population down there. I think PWC has a population of 640. So has there been any discussion or study or review to make sure that services to students aren't impacted? Because allocation now will determine what gets taught many ways.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, that's certainly one of the things that we're talking about. As we move through this process of speaking with some of the school community to see what this new redistribution would like look, that

will inform us more appropriately on how we can continue to support programming in the school systems.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Can we expect in the next budget, then, paid internships, not only for student teachers, but also nurses and social workers? Can we expect to see that?

K. HOWELL: We certainly had a great opportunity to discuss these things last night with the MUN Students' Union. They were very passionate and made that case for paid internships. Having been an individual who worked through that system and feeling the pressure sometimes that was required when you had to make such a significant time investment in clinical practice and then have to pay to be there, it's definitely something that I'm keen to move on.

As recently as last week, we had discussions with some of the Department of Health staff on what that might look like, how we may be able to build that and to look further at how we can continue to support some of those professions that do have unpaid work terms. There may be opportunities there to use this as a recruitment effort and how that would look for these specific course loads.

J. DINN: Sounds like we might be expecting an increase in the budget lines next year then. That's good.

K. HOWELL: Stay tuned.

J. DINN: Okay, don't use that all the time, please. I've heard it too many times.

Child care: Has there been any study about the impact of the lack of child care spaces on the workforce? I've had a number of parents who've come to me, telling me they had to split their work, to step away or whatever else. Has there been any indication about the impact it's having on

our workforce, and maybe in particular, women, in this case.

K. HOWELL: We've certainly heard that anecdotally as well. That's one of the things that we're hoping to accomplish through our early learning gateway, is to capture those individuals to identify those who may be working in specific areas that need specific timeframes, and as we get a clear picture of what that looks like, then we can link them to resources that are appropriate.

J. DINN: Perfect.

Early childhood educators and benefits: With regard to access to pension and health benefits, any discussion along the lines of expanding the provincial plan or allow them, between their employer and them, to pay into that so that they do have those benefits, basic benefits?

K. HOWELL: Yeah, as we look at recruitment and retention plans for our early childhood educators, we've been very clear that we want to continue with discussions of anything and everything that may be potential to offer a more concrete recruitment plan or retention plan. So those discussions are still ongoing, but I believe that's one of the items that has been identified and we'll continue to make headway on.

J. DINN: Thank you.

The healthy eating in schools program, that's been something that the Auditor General has flagged and I know we'd like looking at expanding it, the school lunch, to Grade 9, I think it is. Basically, she flagged in her report last year regarding incomplete recommendations from the review in 2019. So what work is left in order to meet the outstanding recommendations of that eating healthy in schools program?

K. HOWELL: Again, that is something that we're very proud to be talking about is providing school lunch programs in our K-to-

9 schools. As I've referenced, there are a number of schools that have capacity, there are a number that don't. There may be some that require upgrades.

Right now, that's part of our plan and figuring that out so that we can implement in fall of 2024 in our most vulnerable communities. That's a process that we don't need a whole lot of time for because it's our own building, so we are able to assess those quickly and figure out what resources need to be implemented.

J. DINN: Why wouldn't you go include level I to III, as well? I mean, there are students there who are without, but why not go to the high school level?

K. HOWELL: So, right now, again, we mentioned identifying some of the most vulnerable, and students, in some cases, they're too young to leave school to go and get a lunch for themselves and those were the ones that we wanted to focus on first.

J. DINN: Okay, but there are vulnerable kids in high school too, who –

K. HOWELL: Absolutely, yeah.

J. DINN: – don't have the money to eat in school and don't have the money to go out with their friends, as such.

They might have younger children who are in the lower grades who are not getting fed and, I guess, to make it truly universal, like all grades. I hope you would look at, if this works out, then expanding it quickly.

K. HOWELL: Yeah. That's certainly the end goal.

J. DINN: EAL teachers: Where are they mostly located, in the metro area or in other parts of the province?

K. HOWELL: In the metro area.

J. DINN: Okay, good.

Now that we are four months or so into the integration of the district, how will future school infrastructure be decided?

K. HOWELL: So, again, that's the process that always existed. You know, we're not reinventing the wheel on that one. We continue to work with the district staff now in our department to meet whatever the requirements for the schools are to evaluate which schools may need to be looked at, which catchment areas, which communities are growing, looking at the numbers of students that are in our communities and what needs may need to be met.

That will be, of course, in conjunction with our partners in TI as we look at, as we mentioned before, what resources are already available and what types of plans are out there, but the same process will be conducted.

J. DINN: So NLSchools will be autonomous in making that decision and won't be surprised with infrastructure announcements? Will the minister or the department be having some say in that as well, or will that be the NLSchools?

K. HOWELL: The NLSchools Branch is under the department, so the decisions that are rendered there do translate up to the minister.

J. DINN: So the department is going to have a say in it as well?

K. HOWELL: We'll certainly be aware of the decisions, yeah.

J. DINN: Okay.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I'm just shifting gears a bit here. I mentioned earlier about all the different reports and plans that have been done.

I want to ask: What is the status of the June '18 *Education Action Plan: The Way Forward*, with its high-level Steering Committee, to implement the recommendations of the Premier's Task Force? Where are we with those recommendations of that report?

K. HOWELL: I'm going to ask the ADM for K-12 to speak to that.

S. LINEHAN: There were a series of 82 recommendations over nine key areas. Some of them were implemented in short order; some were medium- and long-term goals, so Indigenizing the curriculum, for example, it's going to be an ongoing long-term goal. But all 82 recommendations are either partly or completely implemented.

P. DINN: Sorry, did you say all of them are —?

S. LINEHAN: Are either partly or completely implemented.

P. DINN: Moving along, what is the status of action on the January 2019 Child and Youth Advocate report on chronic absenteeism in the schools of the province. Have all the Advocate's recommendations been fully implemented?

K. HOWELL: Again, I'll turn to the ADM for K-12.

S. LINEHAN: There were four recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate in 2019. We all know what 2020 brought us; COVID gave us a pause, then we had some turnover in staff. But the first recommendation was to develop an action plan, which is under way. The second recommendation was to assess and respond to chronic absenteeism. So we had two working groups to develop a policy.

Actually, that group is coming together this week.

The other working group is a group of administrators who are looking at some action research to delve into the nature of why students are absent in their schools. The third recommendation is to identify what is the point at which chronic absenteeism should be referred for further investigation.

So absenteeism looks very, very different for many, many reasons. Part of that process was evolving PowerSchool to have a more fulsome look at what absenteeism looks like. We've done that as part of the professional learning for principals.

Those are the status of the recommendations.

P. DINN: You didn't comment on number four.

S. LINEHAN: Oh, sorry. The fourth recommendation was how all the partners are going to work together. So the working group to determine how all different departments are going to work together.

P. DINN: And would it be possible to get information on who's involved in those working groups?

S. LINEHAN: Certainly. Yes, absolutely.

P. DINN: Thank you.

What is the status of the April 29, 2021, Public Post-Secondary Education Review, *All Hands on Deck: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century by Leveraging Public Post-Secondary Education*? There were two documents. They were a total of 386 pages and contained 83 recommendations on transforming and modernizing our education system.

How many of these recommendations have not been fully implemented?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM for Post-Secondary to speak to that.

T. NOSEWORTHY: The report is still under review. As you would have noted, several of the recommendations in that report related to the governance structure, financing mechanisms and others of post-secondary institutions. With the Auditor General in reviewing MUN, some of these changes were put on hold but have been under review, and that review continues.

Some of that work will form the foundation now for the fourth pillar of the Education Accord, which is post-secondary and learning across lifespan. That is a foundational report, and we will be building off that one to develop the Education Accord component related to post-secondary.

P. DINN: Thank you.

What is the status of the 2021 consultations on Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan and future changes to the *Child Care Act*?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the ADM for Early Learning to speak to that one.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: All of the consultations are now helping to form the Early Learning Action Plan, provincially and federally, so we do have a federal action plan as well so that all of the consultations have been used for that.

With respect to regulation changes, those are certainly under way in terms of putting those forward for decision. We anticipate that would be within the coming months.

P. DINN: Thank you.

What is the status of the 2022 independent Teacher Allocation Review Committee Report, which had 90 recommendations?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the ADM for K to 12 to speak to that report.

S. LINEHAN: Part of the bargaining process with the NLTA and teachers involved Letter #13. Part of that commitment was to look at the feasibility and appropriateness of the TARC Report. A report was due one year from the formation of the committee, so we can expect a report as part of the collective bargaining agreement within one year of the committee first meeting.

P. DINN: Thank you.

It was mentioned much earlier in the night about the deputy minister of Education Transformation. So what is the role of that new deputy in implementing the strategies and working with the Education Accord offers?

K. HOWELL: The deputy minister of transformation has been tasked to look at the current situation in our education system, in our K-to-12 system, to identify strength and challenges that we may face and to develop a plan for how we may create a learner for the future, to look at what we're actually expecting of our students, what the world is expecting of our students. Through that process, to collaborate with educators all across Newfoundland and Labrador, to build pillars that have been identified as mechanisms by which we can accomplish our goals of creating stronger students in Newfoundland and Labrador. Looking at evaluation methods; looking at curriculum; looking at teaching and learning and how that's conducted; and creating a space for education in what we would call the post-pandemic world and what that looks like for us here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm sure he could do a much more adequate job of describing what it is that his role is and responsibilities are, but for right now that is our understanding of the tops of the trees of the deep work that they're conducting.

P. DINN: Well, my response there is: Why do we need the Education Accord?

K. HOWELL: The Education Accord will inform our early learning space, as well as our post-secondary space and our life-long learning space. So the transformation team has been tasked with specifically looking at our K-to-12 and what they bring forward will be largely informing the Education Accord on that specific area of learning.

But it is important to recognize that there is indeed much learning that occurs prior to entering our K-to-12 system and we're only really now validating and recognizing the role that our early childhood educators play in the development of our students. So I think it's important to identify that.

We also have to look at what our post-secondary institutions are doing and the roles that they're having in equipping us for a modern economy and what that looks like here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to encourage lifelong learning. There are seniors who, I'm sure, would like to take part in some learning activities in their capacities. So the transformation will be a pillar of the Education Accord but not the entirety of it.

P. DINN: Thank you.

What's the status of the review of the Operating Grant for child care centres? It was announced in June of 2023 with results due this past September.

K. HOWELL: Again, I will reference the news release that I made last week. We have the review of our Operating Grant Program that has been concluded. There were four major issues that were identified in that; four actionable items that we were able to move forward on. As I referenced earlier, some centres were operating on two tiers, some with and without inclusion. We've made the expectation now that every centre will operate on an inclusion model.

We looked at providing additional professional development days for our early childhood educators, given the fact that there are so many opportunities for them to grow and develop their skill set right now, so we wanted to do that. We've got two paid professional development days for our early childhood educators.

We've also instituted a more streamlined approach to paid statutory holidays. We've concluded that there are 12 statutory holidays that will be implemented in all our Operating Grant Program recipients, as well as five flexible days that the centres can use at their own determination, be it storm days or necessitating whatever closure days they would have identified.

There's one more thing

OFFICIAL: I'm not sure, Minister.

K. HOWELL: Anyway, that's three –

P. DINN: Yeah, they don't know.

K. HOWELL: That's three. I can't remember what the fourth one is, but I do know that there was a very substantial review done and we've implemented the major issues that were identified.

P. DINN: That review is available, right?

K. HOWELL: Absolutely, yeah.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to new child care centres, how many have opened in the last year or so, or two years, or since we've had the reduce cost?

K. HOWELL: I'm sorry.

J. DINN: Given the fact that people are having a hard time finding child care spaces, have there been any new centres or childhood daycare centres opened, and how many, I guess?

K. HOWELL: Since January of 2023, we've opened 1,642 spaces.

J. DINN: Are they new start-ups as such?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM for Early Learning.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Some of them are brand new services; some of them are extending their current licences so that they would be able to build on their existing spaces. It's varied. It depends, but they've maximized their licence and some of them have expanded their licences.

J. DINN: If I may, how many new ones are we talking about and where would they be located, presumably in the metro area, but maybe not?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: That's correct. It's all over the province. Actually, we have a listing of where they would, I can certainly get that for you. In every region, actually, there's been new spaces developed. So these are brand new spaces. Even in existing services, there would still be new spaces that they've added on and built onto their existing structures.

J. DINN: I've actually had, over the last few years, people who are interesting in starting up one. I'm looking at where would they go, what support can they expect from the Department of Education funding and so on and so forth?

K. HOWELL: So anybody who is interested in being part of the solution to our early learning space creation projects can certainly reach out to our department. There are specific staff who can walk them through some of the process, as it is determined, if it's a for profit, not for profit

set-up or what that may look like. So certainly, by all means, reach out to the department.

J. DINN: Okay.

I may very well have some people who are interested; they are serious about it. But, again, because they, themselves, are working out of the professions but they're having trouble with child care so they're very much interested in starting up. I'm meeting with them next week so I'll be passing on the information and they might have a building that's going to need some major renovations.

K. HOWELL: Please do.

J. DINN: Is there funding available?

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

J. DINN: Perfect. That's even better again. That's the kind of stuff.

According to Radio Canada, the province has only created 1,345 of the nearly 6,000 affordable spaces pledged by 2026. I commend you on the fact that we seem to be moving ahead here. So how does the government plan on closing that gap in the next two years or are we well on our way to actually closing that gap?

K. HOWELL: We certainly are well on our way. When we look at space creation in terms of the timeline that was established, our time was linear, but space creation is not. There was certainly an onboarding process that had to happen to understand what it is we were actually looking for and what that looked like for our centers, our communities. At the beginning of this process, there was some time invested into that. I think now that we've got nearly over 2,200 spaces in some form of creation, I think we're on target, certainly, to meet that goal.

J. DINN: So there shouldn't be a problem meeting that goal of 6,000 by 2026?

K. HOWELL: No.

J. DINN: Okay.

You're obviously doing some projection as to the number of children that are going to need it. What is that projection based on because it can't be just birth rates in the province, but it's also going to have to be – not that I plan to have any children any time soon. Again, I mean.

But, in terms of, are we factoring bringing newcomers into it with families? Because one of the things that anyone with children is going to want, if they want to engage in the workforce, is having reliable child care. So is that taking into all factors, or how did you arrive at that number, 6,000?

K. HOWELL: There is certainly a calculation process, and I'll turn to the ADM to explain that.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yes, absolutely.

So this is 59 per cent, which is what they did, 59 per cent of population. We work closely with our partners in IPGS. We have a good forecasting – or they actually have an excellent forecasting for newcomers who are coming, based on the number of children that are coming as well. So that is part of our growth projections.

In terms of the commitment, the 5,895, again, that was the 59 per cent. Recognizing, of course, that not all families require child care. But our Early Learning Gateway and our child care demand portal has given us a really great estimate in terms of where we need to focus our efforts for space creation.

In terms of the actual commitment, we've got 3,606 that are either created or under development, leaving only 2,289, and that's remaining over the next two years. We're

quite comfortable with that number and, again, we will reach that.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

A side question altogether with regard to enrolment in the K-12 system: Is that expected to increase or decrease next year?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to ADM for Operations to speak to that.

T. HALL: We're expecting that it's levelled out, so we're expecting to stay about the same.

J. DINN: Okay.

And is there a long-term expectation that we're going to start to decline?

T. HALL: It's possible; however, similar to Early Childhood, with immigration numbers, we try to project those as well to see exactly where we're to.

J. DINN: Okay.

How is the collaboration going with MUN – and you may have already touched on this in a previous answer – to address the issues that the Auditor General flagged in the report? How is that going?

K. HOWELL: Certainly, a continuous conversation. We have monthly meetings with the president and the chair of the Board of Regents, where we look at the progress that's been made on some of the major issues that have been identified through the AG's report. The Auditor General has identified herself what success in some of these areas look like.

So it's given a very focused approach to how they look at some of the things that she would consider having moved the dial on. They do a very good job of presenting that information to the public by updating their

website regularly with where they are on some of these recommendations.

A lot of the things that were identified don't necessarily translate to immediate sensationalized responses or actions. There was a lot of backend policy, very tedious things that had to be addressed. So they're making progress on that and we continue to hold them accountable to that as we work through these issues together.

J. DINN: Are there any particular issues that are proving to be particularly thorny or causing some concern?

K. HOWELL: Not any that stand out that we've found to give any attention to at this point in time. We do recognize that there's been significant movement on a lot of, as I said, some of the more policy directive ones that they had direct control over. So continuing to build and work on that.

J. DINN: Okay.

We recently amended the MUN Act with regard to the ratio of students to the medical school. So I'm wondering here, too, would it be possible then to add an amendment somewhere that would enshrine the principle of governance in the legislation with regard to how the administration makes decisions?

That was something that was asked for by MUNFA and I'm sure that's something they would like to see. It would cost nothing, I guess, in many ways, but it would enshrine it in the legislation, similar to the ratios for students to the medical school.

K. HOWELL: So we did open up the MUN Act to change the definition of a Newfoundland and Labrador student this year. We've also committed to doing a more fulsome review of that policy and, at that time, we would give all the stakeholders an opportunity to give feedback as to what they would like to see changed. I'm sure that's something that will come up.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'll come back in a minute; I have another question or two.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time is expired. We are at three hours and one minute.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I'm just going to ask some questions around – because there's \$30 million that's invested in the student assistance programs. Of course, it includes non-repayable, forgivable grants and such.

I have three questions in the one here. I'll ask them and you'll know where I'm going. How do the non-repayable and forgivable grants work for a student? Essentially, how much is non-repayable per semester; how much is forgivable; and when are they disbursed to students?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the ADM for Post-Secondary Education to speak to that.

T. NOSEWORTHY: As you're aware, there is both a federal and a provincial component to the Student Financial Assistance Program. The federal grant, which is non-repayable, is around \$4,200 per academic year; that is based on an eight-month year. The provincial grant is \$100 per week for eligible students that meet the requirements for the financial assistance.

That's the grant. Students also have availability to a provincial loan, which is \$100 per week. And that will be fully refundable if they graduate within the required time and they meet the requirements for debt forgiveness. Those are all available on the website. That is an automatic deduction.

The federal loan is the only component that is generally remaining and the federal

government has decided that will now be permanently interest free. It is also important to note that students don't have to begin repaying their loans until they make at least \$40,000 and the most of their income that they're expected to pay back at any time is 10 per cent of their salary.

So there is a great reduction in the overall component. Right now, the provincial and federal average loan for students in Newfoundland and Labrador is just over \$11,000. The provincial component is \$903.

P. DINN: Thank you.

You may have answered, but I will go down through the questions. Forgive me, I've gone through this process. You know I know this one.

T. NOSEWORTHY: I know you know it.

P. DINN: I just have to ask them for the record; I was hoping to see Mr. Feaver here to put him on the hot seat. Anyway, that's not working.

T. NOSEWORTHY: I'm sure he's listening.

P. DINN: Are students taking on debt that they would be responsible for if they were to fail to complete their programs?

T. NOSEWORTHY: If they fail their program and fail out of their program, then there is debt that they will be responsible for and there is a time and a requirement before they can reapply again.

P. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

Are students permitted to extend their programs and switch programs, or is there a limit on how many years they can receive grants?

T. NOSEWORTHY: There is an ability, but there is also a limit. Generally, the component for grants is a degree requirement for the program – so if it's a

four-year degree, it's the degree plus one year is the time that is given for full-time funding, and that's where they'll grant eligibility but there are certain conditions.

There are also exceptions for students that have any challenges or kind of extra circumstances that need to be considered and there's an appeals process for that consideration.

P. DINN: Thank you.

How do these work for masters and Ph.D. students?

T. NOSEWORTHY: Masters and Ph.D. students are eligible for provincial funding. There is less federal funding. I can confirm those components for you.

P. DINN: I appreciate that.

How about students in professional schools with longer programs?

T. NOSEWORTHY: They get extended periods.

P. DINN: How about students on paid work terms?

T. NOSEWORTHY: I'll have to look into that for you.

P. DINN: The reverse to that is what about students on unpaid work terms?

T. NOSEWORTHY: Okay, unpaid work terms, we'll follow up.

P. DINN: Okay.

Are students penalized for earning income while in school?

T. NOSEWORTHY: There's a limit of what they're allowed to earn while they're still in their program and they'll still get full funding with that, if they stay under that certain allotment. Then if they earn additional to

that, it's taken into their needs consideration as they reapply for the program.

P. DINN: We hear students using food banks, availing of food banks and what not. So are we giving them enough money to live on?

T. NOSEWORTHY: The Student Financial Assistance Program is provided based on measures that are assessed on an annual basis. So, for example, housing need is assessed based on CMHC numbers and their need is determined as they reapply or as the circumstance changes for those students. It's often referenced in terms of international students, but the federal government just changed the threshold level that those students have coming into the country to help fund that.

P. DINN: Thank you.

How does this all work for non-Newfoundland Canadian students?

K. HOWELL: So we had the opportunity to share in that conversation with the MUN Students' Union last night, as I identified then and I would assume the same to be true for all Members in this House of Assembly, the primary focus of our funding is for Newfoundland and Labrador students. We're legally responsible for the Newfoundland and Labrador residents, but our moral obligation does include the international students as well.

OFFICIAL: He's asking for Canadian students.

K. HOWELL: Canadian or international?

P. DINN: Non-Newfoundland Canadian students.

K. HOWELL: Canadian students, okay.

P. DINN: But I was going to ask about international anyway.

K. HOWELL: I figured that was coming next anyway. So I'll continue this and then we'll revisit.

See, I can read your mind already.

P. DINN: That's scary.

K. HOWELL: As we look at the numbers of international students that are entering into our province, we certainly consider the valuable contributions that they make while they're a part of our society here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have welcomed international student representatives from the union to come and sit with our office to determine if there are needs that are not being met and how we could possibly offer some solutions for that.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Are the forgivable grants contingent on where a student works after graduating? Does it matter where he or she goes to work?

K. HOWELL: I think in some of the rural, remote areas there's an additional bonus to taking up positions in those areas, but the Newfoundland and Labrador portion is forgivable regardless of where you're employed, as long as you successfully complete your program.

P. DINN: Amazing, I worked for the Student Loan Corp, too, trying to get the money back. Do we have stats on student indebtedness, how much they're owing?

K. HOWELL: Do you mean the debt that's incurred for students over the course of time?

P. DINN: Yeah.

K. HOWELL: Yes, we do.

Right now, for our Newfoundland and Labrador students, the provincial portion of debt that they incur is about \$903 and then

the federal portion is somewhere \$11,000. So we're looking at a student debt of about \$14,000 at the end of a degree program right now.

P. DINN: That's good. Staff have you trained well – repetition.

Thank you for that.

I'm going to look for your opinion on this as well, and I think it was asked, because a big issue has been around paid work terms for, especially, nursing, being one, going off and doing their clinicals and not getting paid for them, yet having to go God knows where, having to pay for room and board.

I think you already touched on it, but can you just resay what consideration is being given to implementing paid work terms for students because that eliminates a lot of debt they take on and encourages them to stay here as well.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, that's certainly a discussion point that we've had, more specifically with our colleagues in the Department of Health, as it applies to nursing students, but definitely looking at social work students as well and, of course, our own education students, as means of maybe recruitment into some of these more difficult-to-fill professions. You know, we've seen a decline in registration in some of these programs. People are just choosing different options, so if there's a way to make these professions or this program more attractive, it's certainly something that we're looking at doing.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I'm just stepping back a little bit here now. What is the status of consultations announced in September of 2023 to develop a new model of assessment and evaluation for high school students – and you may have touched on it earlier – which the minister said, "is a part of transforming and modernizing education for students in

our province so they can reach academic goals to the best of their ability.”

So what’s the status of the consultations on the new model of assessment, basically?

K. HOWELL: I’ll turn to the ADM for K to 12 to answer that question.

S. LINEHAN: So we recently engaged with the Office of Public Engagement to get feedback from the communities and we’ve heard from many stakeholders, so we’re in the process of collating that information and synthesizing it to make decisions based on feedback that we received from the province.

P. DINN: Okay.

CHAIR: The Member’s time is expired.

The Member for St. John’s Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

With regards to EAL instructors, what is the current teacher ratio to students they serve? I’m assuming that some of them might be responsible for multiple students over several schools.

K. HOWELL: My team will correct me if I’m wrong, surely, but I think it is one to 35.

J. DINN: One to 35.

Okay, I’m assuming that those 35 students might be over a couple of schools or are they mostly within the one school? I’m just trying to look at how that works.

K. HOWELL: The intention is to be in one school but it depends on how many students are there. If there’s not enough to make up that cohort, then they would be over a couple of schools.

J. DINN: As an itinerant, I would assume, then, that they would be going around to the

schools and working with the students, pullouts and so and so forth. Correct?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Individual supports or maybe in small groups, would that be a fair assessment?

K. HOWELL: Sorry, can you say that again.

J. DINN: If I were an EAL itinerant, I would be going to the school, I might be working with an individual student or I might be taking several from the classroom and working with them.

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: So I’m just looking here, then, at the amount of time that a child might get with that EAL teacher in the space of a week and, I guess, in a relation that EAL teacher, do they have several schools that they’re responsible for? I have a reason where I’m going with this.

K. HOWELL: I’ve no doubt that you do.

J. DINN: Guaranteed.

K. HOWELL: I’m starting to read your mind, too. I’ll be in the Brothers Dinn category before it’s over here tonight.

I’ll turn to the assistant deputy minister for K to 12 to speak to that.

S. LINEHAN: The model would be based on an itinerant model, which gives the itinerant EAL teacher the ability to travel from school to school so they can service students across different schools.

J. DINN: So what’s the average number of schools an itinerant EAL teacher would have, would be responsible for?

S. LINEHAN: So that could vary based on caseload. Schools that would have a larger population of newcomers would be certainly

different than caseloads where we're in, let's say, the West Coast as an example.

J. DINN: Right.

So would the ratio then for an EAL teacher on the West Coast be the same, 1-35?

S. LINEHAN: That's correct; we deploy 1-35.

J. DINN: So it's safe to say that that EAL teacher – by the way, I sort of know these answers because I dealt with it, anyway, but I've got to ask them.

Would it be fair to say that the EAL teacher on the West Coast then would probably have more schools or maybe a larger geographical area to cover?

S. LINEHAN: I think that would be a fair statement.

J. DINN: Has there been any thought to – because the same thing came up with the school counsellors. They might have the same number of kids but five schools, a large geographical area. The running joke was, if a student's going to have an emergency, better make sure it's when the school counsellor is in the school.

I'm just wondering here, with regard to considering the complexity, on that very practical level, consideration to reducing the ratio right there, in terms of I would say, especially the primary and elementary, that's a pretty large, big ratio for an itinerant – it really is.

So is there any chance of looking at decreasing that? And especially if you've got to do an awful lot of driving to get to your students, it's a significant amount of time. I don't know, there may be some creative scheduling in that the itinerant works in one area at a time, but still if I'm only seeing that student once a week, or twice a week.

K. HOWELL: I'm sure there are creative measures implemented in meeting some of these student needs, but as with any of our policies and procedures, they're always open to evaluation, to see if they are working effectively, if there are particular challenges that need to be addressed. This certainly would be no different. If we identify that there is something that is not working, then we would make every effort to try and ratify that.

J. DINN: When my children were getting ready to go into late French Immersion – my first two especially – there was a summer camp offered for that. I forget, maybe a month-long camp. I guess it was an opportunity to introduce them to some basic skills and so on and so forth.

So I'm just thinking here, has there been any consideration, especially if you got children who – some will adapt. I found that in Holy Heart they picked up the language – they actually picked up everything real easily. They integrated, they blended in a lot more readily, let's say, than their parents and adopted a lot of the customs and so on and so forth.

But I'm just wondering, has there been any consideration to having maybe something like that for families where the children may have significant language barriers, significant learning barriers, of even having something like that alternate setting at the beginning to bring them up – and I guess when they enter a school, that they have every chance of success.

Now that, to me, is a key thing, that you want the child to thrive in the school system, at least academically, one less thing, so that they have a more intense education when it comes to language.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, certainly, there have been some efforts made to increase the availability of these types of resources. In conversations with our colleagues in IPGS, a lot of those things are contracted through

the Association for New Canadians. But there are some things that our department does specifically, and I'll turn to the assistant deputy minister of K to 12 to speak to that.

S. LINEHAN: Some of our newcomers who are in hotels, the Association for New Canadians does involve families and programs with the newcomers. So we work in partnership with ANC to help deliver those programs to our newcomers in the hotels.

J. DINN: Okay.

I'm thinking the school system though, and not just the ANC, which is a not-for-profit organization, but I would like something in the school system we're doing to concentrate those resources as well and give the children the interaction they need.

K. HOWELL: So we do provide the teachers for that process. There are teachers positioned in some of the communities to ensure that that resource is available. We want to make sure that our partners at the Association for New Canadians get the chance to – they're the ones that build the best connections and the most interactions with them. So then they will let us know how we can support them.

J. DINN: Perfect.

As part of the integration of the district into the department, will there be any office or branch that will deal specifically with the region of Labrador, with Labrador itself? In terms of whether that's an office space up there, whether that's –

K. HOWELL: There is a district office still remaining in Labrador and will remain in Labrador. There's also a director of schools for the schools in Labrador.

J. DINN: Okay, good.

Do you have an update on the work to create the Provincial Advisory Council on Education and their work? I guess they're the replacement, then, to the NL Federation of School Councils?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM of Corporate Services to speak to that.

R. HAYES: So we are in the process of getting regulations in place for the Provincial Advisory Council on Education. That should be coming shortly.

J. DINN: Will PACE then have the ability to be advocates publicly, similar to what the Federal of School Councils is right now? They're autonomous and they're able to either disagree or agree with what the initiatives of the department of government is doing. I'm just wondering, what will be the advocacy role? Because, right now, it's an advisory council and I assume they'll be a creature of the department and, therefore, will be bound to shut up and put up.

K. HOWELL: No, they'll certainly have an advocacy role. That was one of the cornerstones of how we wanted this to unfold, was that each region had representation, that voices were able to be heard and that schools at the local level still had the ability to voice their concerns and make sure that they were heard. That some of our smaller schools didn't get lost in the mix and that the conversations didn't get consumed by one big issue that might not apply to our little school in Cook's Harbour.

So we wanted to make sure that each of those had the opportunity to be represented and that the council has that ability to translate information to the department.

CHAIR: Okay, the Member's time is expired.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Just a couple of more questions on this section. With regard to private training institutions, what's the status of the Train Out Fund?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM for Post-Secondary to speak to that.

T. NOSEWORTHY: The Train Out Fund continues. As you are aware, as institutions are registered and are offering, they contribute to that fund, to have it available. It is available in the event that any of the institutions have trouble, to be able to train the students and to avoid the circumstance where that would not be able to happen.

P. DINN: How much money is in that account right now?

T. NOSEWORTHY: I'll have to confirm and get back to you on that.

P. DINN: Do we have an accounting of how much is paid by each school to date?

T. NOSEWORTHY: I'll confirm. There is an accountant that monitors that for the private training corporations so I'll take that away as well.

P. DINN: Okay, so you'll supply that.

T. NOSEWORTHY: Yeah.

P. DINN: I do have a question though, related to it, because there are institutions that are new; there are institutions that have been around for a while. Why is there not a cap to that in terms of some of the institutions that have been around for a while?

T. NOSEWORTHY: My understanding is the cap was not put in place, as of yet, because the intent was to grow the fund and institutions have – some of them – brought forward that consideration. As the department moves forward, if we revisit the regs or the legislation, that is one thing that we've committed to looking at, whether or

not it is the right financial decision for the province based on the way that it's currently funded.

P. DINN: Yeah, and I appreciate that, you know, for the province, but at the end of the day, there are some that are paying more than their fair share as opposed to others.

That's it for me for this section.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Just a couple more questions there. Just with regard to PAC – and this is what I need clarified – if in advising the department or the minister, they fundamentally oppose the decision that the department has made, they feel they've been ignored, would PAC, this council, have the ability then to issue its own press release, speak to the media, give interviews, which is the power, basically, the federation of school councils has right now? That's what I'm looking for. They still bring the concerns of the different schools and that to the Department of Education, but they also have the ability that if they feel the department is not listening, to be very public and very vocal about it. That's what I'm wondering. Will the Provincial Advisory Council have that same ability or will that ability be neutralized under this framework?

K. HOWELL: As their role in advocacy would dictate, they would have the opportunity to do that.

J. DINN: Okay, good enough. I think that was a concern by some.

I know in speaking to students after the event last night, one of the things that the students were concerned with had to do with the possible changes to the uncapped weekly worked hour allowance for international students that will wind-down on April 30, 2024, and that the federal

department is looking into setting a new work hour limit. So they're concerned this will restrict their affordability.

I'm just wondering what measures are going to be put in place to make it more affordable. I had one student, in particular, he's working so many hours and also does Uber Eats deliveries, like DoorDash, that kind of thing.

I think as we referenced last night, for an international student, \$90,000 for a degree at MUN, I'm just wondering what are the concerns and what steps are going to be taken now to address that, whether that means you've had conversations with your federal counterparts and so on and so forth. I'm just wondering what's the plan to deal with this so that we don't lose students.

K. HOWELL: As you've referenced, those are federal regulations that are in place. We've heard the concerns of the international students, as I've said, in the interactions that I've had with the MUN Students' Union, as well as the Canadian union representatives. That is one of the items that they've addressed, that they've brought up as a concern is supports for international students. So as I've said before and as I've said last night, I've invited representatives from the international student community to come to our department to have a meeting and to see what plausible solutions we may be able to work on to support them here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

J. DINN: Okay. So you are looking towards some solutions to this?

K. HOWELL: Certainly open to discussions to see what we can do.

J. DINN: They brought this to you already before, have they?

K. HOWELL: I haven't had this specific conversation with international students, it's just been through the union representatives

who, you know, because they had so many issues to identify, I thought it would be important to break that off as one specific meeting to focus on that and we're still waiting to book that meeting with them.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

A general question then, one last question with regard to the Carter Churchill case, I'm just trying to figure out what lessons have been learned from the department. One thing I learned from the hearing is that it confirmed the don't-ask, you're-not-getting-it approach to funding because it became very clear that the district and schools would never ask for a resource because we knew we weren't going to get them. I think the director at the time said: We never heard anything from the district.

So I'm just trying to get an idea as to how do we make sure, especially that we don't have a case like this, but that children with exceptionalities, children who are deaf and hard of hearing in other parts of the province that, basically, they get the education they deserve. So lessons learned and how are we seeing those lessons learned being implemented?

K. HOWELL: Certainly, there's been a number of measures that have been implemented as a result of that. I think I'll let the deputy of K to 12 speak to some of the more specific things that were implemented.

But I think as a department overall, it gave us the opportunity to ensure that we were supporting students in an appropriate fashion, recognizing that everybody's needs are different, but there are some things that every student can benefit from. Implementing those measures was very important to us. Also, giving us the opportunity to make sure that the decisions we're making do have a lens of accessibility and those children with exceptionalities reiterating the focus and the commitment to ensuring that those supports are there.

With that said, I'll turn it over to the ADM for K to 12 to speak specifically to some of the deaf-and-hard-of-hearing implementations.

S. LINEHAN: So to further the minister's statement, the Department of Education has a steering committee on the deaf and hard of hearing. That committee is comprised of our stakeholders in NLAD and Shaw, and both of those organizations reached out to their communities asking for parent representations on the steering committee. That steering committee has done some work with some working groups and they've forwarded to the steering committee 14 recommendations that the Department of Education can implement with respect to deaf and hard of hearing.

So some of those recommendations have already been implemented and some of them are partly underway. We met with the steering committee just a couple of weeks ago. The minister was present, as well, and the committee are very, very strong partners with the department and take those lessons and we'll implement those measures to best address the needs of our deaf-and-hard-of-hearing students in the province.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it.

CHAIR: Okay.

Seeing no further questions, I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: Executive Services, 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive Services, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: Corporate Services, 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Corporate Services, 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Hopefully, we'll breeze through these last few.

I'm looking at the Grants and Subsidies. There's an increase of \$2.5 million there. Can you explain that increase in 2.1.02.10?

K. HOWELL: Grants and Subsidies, 2.1 –

P. DINN: 2.1.02.10, Grants and Subsidies: There's about a \$2.5-million increase.

K. HOWELL: So *Budget 2024* has, as you noted, an additional \$3 million. That will reflect the funding that has been approved to begin the rollout of our school food program.

P. DINN: Can we get a list of all the educational agencies that are receiving funding of that \$10 million?

K. HOWELL: Yeah. It's part of the booklet.

P. DINN: Okay, perfect.

And is there a dollar amount allotted to the recently announced Education Accord included here?

K. HOWELL: No.

P. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Moving on to 2.1.03, Administrative Support, we see an increase of \$2.7 million. Can you explain that increase as well?

K. HOWELL: 2.1.03 – I sure can, when I find it. I don't see a 2.1.03.

P. DINN: It's under Corporate Services.

K. HOWELL: Okay, we're over here.

P. DINN: In the Total: General Administration, there's an increase of \$2.7 million.

K. HOWELL: Sorry, MHA Dinn, can you reference your section again?

P. DINN: So do you have it? Yeah, it's the total.

K. HOWELL: So the total line would be then the sum of the value of all of the things that are outlined in the portions ahead of that. Under the Property, Furnishings and Equipment there's an additional \$850,000 for property, furnishings and equipment for child care centres. Then under the federal revenue, there was an offsetting federal revenue from the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

Then when we look at the Grants and Subsidies that are captured in this category, there's a cost related to the negotiated salary increases, and \$500,000 additional funding for digital and physical library materials and additional library hours. We also have a revised number, in addition, of \$734,700, which was funding provided to supplement our public libraries annual operating grant to support the board with costs for maintenance, operations and acquiring additional resources.

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

You may have answered this, but I'm looking at the Provincial Informational and Library Resources Board. In the Budget Speech, it spoke to providing additional

\$680,000 to this board. It went on to say this will bring the budget this year to almost \$13 million.

I'm not seeing that in that section under 2.2.01. Are we talking about the full administrative part? I'm talking specifically to the board.

K. HOWELL: The total for the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board referenced under Corporate Services \$12,822,300.

P. DINN: Just to confirm, so that's what we're talking about when we're talking about almost \$13 million?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

P. DINN: Okay, thank you.

I think that's the end of the section, is it not? Yes, okay, I'm fine.

Thank you.

J. DINN: Go ahead, Chair.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

2.1.01, last year it was mentioned that the manager of the legislative review in the department was looking at the *Teacher Training Act*. Has there been any consultation with education stakeholders regarding potential changes to the legislation as a result?

K. HOWELL: Not yet.

J. DINN: Not yet.

Salaries were below what was budgeted last year, but the budget has increased for this year. What accounts for that variation?

K. HOWELL: There was some savings due to vacancies in some positions for various

periods throughout the year, but there was also increased funding then needed for salary increases and for union management staff.

J. DINN: Okay.

I could probably get it on the web, but is it possible to have a breakdown of the staff in Education and in the new Newfoundland and Labrador Schools positions, the number of people in that administrative section?

K. HOWELL: Yes, certainly.

J. DINN: Okay.

In 2.1.02, I think we've got that already.

2.1.03, I have to go back to that because I'm trying to make sense of it. I heard the various lines but I'm looking here at – usually you'd see, and maybe I'm missing something, but there's \$850,000 for Property, Furnishings and Equipment, Operating Accounts, but we still have an amount done in General of \$12 million, usually there are other lines otherwise, but for the budget for 2023-24, there's nothing. I'm just trying to figure out, what's the money being used for or am I missing something there?

K. HOWELL: So the \$850,000 would be for Property, Furnishings and Equipment for child care centres.

J. DINN: So that's brand new, that's to fund any new child care that has gone beyond, let's say extended their services?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the ADM, Corporate Services, Robyn Hayes.

R. HAYES: The money voted there, that is funding under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, specifically related to capital infrastructure that will be put in place for child care centres and it's fully offset by that agreement. That's why you see the total

there as zero, because it's fully funded by the federal agreement.

J. DINN: Okay, perfect. That takes care of that one, then.

On 2.2.01, Provincial Information and Library Resources Board: Are there any plans to boost, to increase funding for libraries on a permanent basis, tied to cost of living for that matter? If not, why not?

K. HOWELL: Certainly as always we look at the resource allocations for any of our entities and continue to work with them on how we can better support them.

J. DINN: It's interesting if you go to schools where they have a public library attached to them, the one thing you will note compared to sometimes a school which doesn't have a full-time learning resource teacher is just the organization of the library, because most teachers, especially if you have a part-time school librarian, it's hard to keep that organized, but I would argue that there's a value to that, to increasing that as well.

K. HOWELL: I had the opportunity actually to visit the public libraries throughout Central Newfoundland just this past few months and saw what you reference. They've done a great job of dealing with some of the challenges that they've had to face with limited resources, so we've definitely put in a plug to the board to take a look at some of those positions that may not have adequate hours. There's a significant administrative time that is required in some of our public libraries and we want to make sure that doesn't eliminate their opportunity to interact with the children and students.

J. DINN: I think, too, in terms of having availability, the librarians I spoke to, their hours are limited, maybe several times a week.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

J. DINN: So that funding would, I think, allow them to be – at least during the school day, right?

Okay, 2.2.01, what accounts for the variation between what was budgeted last year and what was projected in actuals? It went \$11 million, \$12 million, we're up to \$12.5 million, Grants and Subsidies.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, so the revised budget was additional funding provided to supplement the libraries' annual operating grants to support the board with costs of maintenance and operations, as well as acquiring additional resources, such as new hard copies and digital books. We also had to provide negotiated salary increases, retro and a bonus payment.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In 2.2.02, the projected spending for this current fiscal year is higher than what was budgeted, and the budget for this year is even higher. So what accounts for these variations?

K. HOWELL: So there was increased funding to provide for capital projects.

J. DINN: For capital –?

K. HOWELL: Projects.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

Good enough, appreciate it. Done.

CHAIR: Broadcast is requesting we take a five-minute break.

We'll recall the subheads first.

I ask the Clerk to recall the subheads.

CLERK: Corporate Services, 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall Corporate Services 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: We'll just take five minutes.

Recess

CHAIR: Okay, we're going to start again.

Just a note, according to Standing Order 74(3), anything over the three hours comes off the 75, minus the breaks, of course.

The Clerk has asked me to ensure that I reminded everybody.

J. DINN: So, Chair, if I understand you correctly, we might as well just carry on until 11 o'clock then, to make it worthwhile.

CHAIR: Go for it. I'm good; I can stay up.

Okay, let's see, I ask the Clerk to call the next subhead, please.

CLERK: Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education and Early Childhood Development, 3.1.01 to 3.4.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education and Early Childhood Development, 3.1.01 to 3.4.01, carry?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Again, I'll try to be quick here.

I'm looking at the increase in Supplies of \$925,000. Can you explain that, please?

K. HOWELL: This reflects the department's investment in a digital teacher resource so we moved the savings from Professional Services to Supplies.

P. DINN: Perfect. That answers my second question, thank you.

I'm looking at the Grants and Subsidies, we see a decrease of \$1.8 million. No, sorry, that's in 3.1.02. Grants and Subsidies, 10, decrease of \$1.8 million.

K. HOWELL: So that was the removal of the one-time French second language funding provided by the federal government in 2023-24.

P. DINN: In that same section, I'm looking at the federal revenue, I see an increase to \$11 million. Can you explain that as well?

K. HOWELL: That's revenue from the '23-'24 anticipated to be received in the '24-'25 year.

P. DINN: Moving right along, I see a decrease there as well in the Allowances under Language Programs of \$176,000. Can you explain that?

K. HOWELL: Sorry what item number?

P. DINN: 3.1.02.09, Allowances and Assistance, there's a decrease there of about \$176,000.

K. HOWELL: That's funding reprofiled to Allowances and Assistance for increased accessibility to attend summer institutes in French Canada.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Moving right along, I'm looking at 3.3.01, Salaries, I see an increase there of \$480,000. What's the purpose of that?

K. HOWELL: The increase was with the integration of Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, marking board

expenses will be processed through Salaries as opposed through Professional Services.

P. DINN: I see Professional Services have decreased. I assume it's part of that and Purchased Services I'm seeing an increase of \$250,000. What's the purpose of that?

K. HOWELL: Yes, the revisions and savings would be due to no requirement for the marking board in the Professional Services.

Sorry, what was the second part of your question?

P. DINN: Purchased Services.

K. HOWELL: Purchased Services was savings related to a delay in some of the aspects of the development of the computer-based testing platform.

P. DINN: Okay.

Moving right along, I'm looking at 3.4.01, I see a salary increase of just over a million dollars, an explanation for that please.

K. HOWELL: So there was increased funding for salaries for union and management staff as well as funding for two new internal auditor positions.

P. DINN: Okay. I see Professional Services has also increased by about \$2.4 million.

K. HOWELL: So that was a – sorry, say that again?

P. DINN: Yeah, under Salaries, I see an increase in the Professional Services of about \$2.4 million.

K. HOWELL: That was a decrease in the budget since the early learning and development instrumentation is not required in '24-'25 and the next anticipated will be in '25-'26.

P. DINN: I'm looking at the Allowances, 09 there, seeing a decrease of \$2.1 million.

K. HOWELL: There's an anticipated further decrease in the requirement for subsidy programs because our \$10-a-day child care has been implemented over more sites and more children can take advantage of that, the requirement for subsidies to that program is anticipated to dry up.

P. DINN: I'm looking at Grants and Subsidies, I see an increase of \$35 million.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, that was an allocation under the '24-'25 Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, a carry forward of unspent funds from previous years.

P. DINN: I'm looking as well at the revenue there, federal revenue, an increase of \$136 million.

K. HOWELL: Again, an increase in the allocation under the federal agreement and it was a carry forward.

P. DINN: I've got a question on the agreement: What happens when the federal funding runs out?

K. HOWELL: We continue to hope that does not happen.

P. DINN: So how long is that funding available for now?

K. HOWELL: Up until 2026. Make hay while the sun shines is what we're doing with that.

P. DINN: That's it for me on that section.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

3.1.01, is it possible to have an update on the activities and work done by the

Indigenous Education Advisory Committee treetop, and if there are more details.

K. HOWELL: The ADM for K to 12 can provide an update on that.

J. DINN: Thank you.

S. LINEHAN: The IEAC met back in, if I'm not mistaken, January. We did have a quorum. Not all of our Indigenous community members were there but we did have a quorum. It was just an update on the curriculum, curriculum renewal and where we are with Indigenizing the curriculum. So that was a couple of months ago, but ongoing discussions with respect to education and Indigenous partners.

J. DINN: If I may, where are we within Indigenizing the curriculum then?

S. LINEHAN: Sorry, what was that?

J. DINN: I said, where are we with Indigenizing the curriculum?

S. LINEHAN: So any new resources, any new curriculum, we sit down and we forward that to our IEAC committee and we welcome feedback and we incorporate that feedback into our curriculum.

J. DINN: Okay.

And when can we expect to see, I guess, a finished product, as such, or is that just ongoing?

S. LINEHAN: It is ongoing. So any new curricula or new resources goes through that table, and we wait and we welcome further feedback. It is a process, but it is one that is ongoing.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

In last year's Estimates, it was mentioned that our K-12 students rate very highly in content knowledge but need more practice with higher order thinking, critical thinking

and the like. Is the department currently working on strategies to narrow that gap?

K. HOWELL: Yes, that is very much part of the transformation aspect that has been introduced here in the department and they are working to modernize learning outcomes and provide opportunities to evaluate some of the higher order thinking curriculum.

J. DINN: Thank you.

And what is the next step towards the development of a new evaluation and assessment model for high school students after consultations are completed?

K. HOWELL: I will defer to the ADM for K to 12 to give an update on that process.

S. LINEHAN: So we had an RFP issued to vendors and they did a presentation to our team to evaluate our needs to implement a new assessment that is an online platform. We are currently in the process of evaluating that and making a decision very soon with respect to the successful vendor.

J. DINN: Are you hearing from teachers about the need to bring back public exams or something from an accountability point of view. I certainly hear it. I'm just wondering where ...

K. HOWELL: So we have certainly had consultations on our public exam process and how we can evaluate our students. We went out for feedback on our proposal. We haven't finalized that decision yet, but we've moved towards more computer-based testing, basing it on a modular assessment as opposed to a high-stakes testing but still providing examinations that give a percentage of a final grade that is meaningful and that would then incentivize the students to study.

As we mentioned before, we're looking at how we can capitalize on some of the higher order thinking aspects instead of

straight recall or memorization, because we have a number of students who can tell you word for word what an answer is on page 67 of their history textbook, but they have no idea how to apply that knowledge. So we want to capture that aspect of evaluation as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I am going to jump to 3.4.01, Early Learning and Child Development. Now that the operating grant review is completed, and hopefully you had time to digest it, is it possible to tell us which elements of it we can expect to be addressed this year and when do you expect all of the recommendations or whatever to be completed?

K. HOWELL: So those would be the four items that I referenced earlier. We had a look at the tiered approach for inclusivity, and we've requested now that all centres do provide inclusivity services. We looked at professional development days, giving two paid days for our ECEs to participate in areas of professional development.

We looked at standardizing statutory holidays so that we now have 12 paid statutory holidays, as well as five closure days that can be allocated based on a centre's needs, be it storm days or some type of utility issue that has to be addressed. And I can't remember what the fourth one is still!

OFFICIAL: The infant spaces.

K. HOWELL: Oh, the infant spaces – it's the introduction of an additional supplemental of \$30 a day per space for those centres who are offering infant spaces.

J. DINN: Thank you.

So how are we addressing, I guess, when it comes to inclusive education, inclusivity in

these childhood centres? I know that's been an issue for a number.

K. HOWELL: So that's part of the inclusion review, and we've committed to ensuring that the recommendations that are sensible for our early learning centres are applied to them.

I'll defer to the ADM of Early Learning to add further information.

J. DINN: I'm looking for specific recommendations, I guess, that would be appropriate.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yes, we have a subcommittee, actually, of key stakeholders who have helped us with respect to the inclusion review. We have started some initiatives already. There is a joint initiative with Health and Community Services for children, specifically for children with autism. We are looking at actually adding additional supports and revising our entire inclusion model, and we will have a further announcement coming in the next few months; by the summer, we start the process for that.

It will be specific changes based on individualized supports as well as universal designs for learning for the child care services themselves.

J. DINN: So when you were talking about additional and individualized supports, what are we talking about?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Depending on the child's needs. So, of course, that would depend on what the child would require. Right now what we have is ratio enhancement, but this will be more specific to what the child may require from an individualized need.

J. DINN: So providing another early childhood educator, another person as such?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: That is certainly within the realm of what we're considering.

J. DINN: Well, see, it can be done by adding bodies to the system; it's amazing. That same principle can be applied to classrooms – great.

K. HOWELL: But it's not the only principle that's applicable.

J. DINN: No, no, but I like the –

K. HOWELL: The supports that are included in that could be something like a mobility aid. It could be an assistive device to toileting. It could be an early childhood educator and we've had opportunity to evaluate that and to really do a review of that process. So that's kind of what the same intention is to accomplish that in K to 12.

J. DINN: I appreciate that, Minister, but all I heard is that we're looking at actually human beings in the classroom. That's a good thing. That's what I'm going to take away from this now. Thank you. Don't ruin it for me. It gives me hope.

So when can we expect to see the Early Learning Action Plan and any accompanied changes to the *Child Care Act* and regulations?

K. HOWELL: As soon as possible.

J. DINN: Stay tuned, okay.

And that's it.

CHAIR: Okay.

G. BYRNE: Don't stop there.

J. DINN: Do you know what, Chair? The minister has inspired me to go on.

CHAIR: Does the Member for Topsail - Paradise have any more questions for this section?

P. DINN: Just one quick one.

CHAIR: One question, okay.

P. DINN: It may not fall under the Language Programs, but it's been a question that's come to me a few times from individuals who have children enrolled in French Immersion programs. They may not be offered in the school in their catchment area so they're going elsewhere to do that, but they don't have transportation. Has there been any thought to that? Providing transportation for those who cannot access French Immersion in their own catchment area?

K. HOWELL: Right now our focus has been on ensuring that there's appropriate travel accommodations for students to the schools to which they are allocated and that was part of our commitment to eliminate the 1.6.

Moving forward, as we look at some of the barriers that students may be facing, of course, we're always looking at ways that we can improve that, but for right now our specific focus is to ensure that whatever catchment area you are assigned to, you have a bus that can take you to your specific school.

P. DINN: Okay. I'm done.

CHAIR: Okay.

I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education and Early Childhood Development, 3.1.01 to 3.4.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education and Early Childhood Development, 3.1.01 to 3.4.01 inclusive, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.4.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: Education Operations, 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Education Operations, 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive.

The MHA for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I've got a whole list of questions here, but I believe they've already been answered, you'll be happy to know. But I do have a couple.

Salaries, I see an increase in this section of about \$23 million. Can you explain that increase?

K. HOWELL: Yeah. That's funding provided for the NLTA salary increases, as well as additional teaching units.

P. DINN: Do you know how many teaching units are included in that increase?

K. HOWELL: Twelve additional teaching units.

P. DINN: Twelve teaching units, okay.

So 12 teaching units and negotiated wage increases.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

P. DINN: Okay.

I'm looking at the revenue there as well, federal revenue, I see an increase of \$400,000. Can you explain that?

K. HOWELL: Yeah. That's revenue from fee-paying international students used to fund teacher recruitment and retention initiatives.

P. DINN: Okay.

I'm looking at School Operations, Salaries, I see an increase of \$3.4 million.

K. HOWELL: Yeah, that's, again, funding for increased student assistant hours, as well as funding for salary increases.

P. DINN: So that's the 104 positions you were talking about, correct?

K. HOWELL: Yes.

P. DINN: Okay.

I'm looking at 4.1.03, School Services, Purchased Services under that section, I see an increase of \$1.5 million. Can you explain that as well?

K. HOWELL: That's an increase in funding for the next phase of the implementation of the NLSchools financial systems. That's our Cayenta system, our HR payroll system.

P. DINN: Okay.

I also seen an increase under Property, Furnishings and Equipment of about – no, sorry, I see a decrease of \$1.8 million. Can you explain that?

K. HOWELL: I can. That was funding for Chromebooks that were provided to all students. So last year we had an allocation –

P. DINN: Yeah, now I understand, I think I heard earlier where you're working on some programs to keep them.

K. HOWELL: Yeah.

P. DINN: Okay.

Just bear with me, I'm moving up. Done. Simple.

On to you, Sir.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

On that thing with regards to Chromebooks – actually, before I get to that, 4.1.01, Teaching Services, 12 teaching units increase. Am I to understand that's, basically, what we references there earlier, EAL and LEARN teachers and so on and so forth? So 12 teaching units.

K. HOWELL: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay.

Thank you.

With regards to Chromebooks, I'm assuming, right now, the students and teachers are using the devices that they've been given already. So are there any plans to retire Chromebooks after a certain period and then replace them with new devices or once they wear out, that's it?

K. HOWELL: No, certainly, there is a plan to replace the devices and any student who has a dysfunctional device or something that has an issue, we endeavour to replace that as soon as possible, but we did make a significant investment this year from funding that we found in savings to replace some of the aged pieces of equipment.

J. DINN: And are there plans to provide Chromebooks or similar technology more broadly for K-to-6 students?

K. HOWELL: Right now, our focus is primarily on the higher grades who would use this device more readily, but we're continuing to build that into our plans.

J. DINN: Minister, I've got three grandchildren who can use the devices

better than I can. I can tell you right now, at the primary level, the use of Chromebooks – it's something to consider, I think from the get-go, and also to make sure that it's equitable. I just want to put that in your head.

In the aftermath of last year's brutal attack at PWC in St. John's, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District stated that it always reviews incidents involving schools, even those outside of Newfoundland and Labrador, to enhance procedures, processes and policies. The current incident will be no different.

Is it possible to give us an update on the changes to safety protocols that have come about from that review?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the AMD for Operations.

T. HALL: We have engaged our Student Services Division and a lot of our safe and inclusive itinerants that are working a lot closer with schools, helping them with strategies and working with students as well, trying to help them understand the environment and safety and respect and those types of things.

We do take every incident serious and review to determine any targeted intervention we need in a specific incident, but overall educating students and staff to deal with these things and to mitigate them.

J. DINN: Is it possibly to be more specific as to exactly what is being done with students to mitigate it? I'm just trying to get – and who would be responsible for that? Is that something that's now on the shoulders of the teacher, too?

We've had a Safe & Caring Schools Policy in place as well, but I'm just trying to figure out what specifically has been done since that attack.

T. HALL: As I said, we have our safe and inclusive itinerants and a team of student services support staff that are in there, so it's not being shouldered by the teachers. These support staff are in counselling and helping them understand techniques and identifying when they need to raise concerns before it gets to a certain point. So it's all about education by our support staff that's wrapped around the school.

J. DINN: So those support staff then take individual students out who might be at risk? Are they speaking to classes? I'm just trying to get exactly – if I'm in the school what am I seeing?

T. HALL: They would be speaking to classes. They would be available to any students that want to speak one on one, when they're there to be able to help them if they identify that they feel unsafe or reasons for that and, also, chatting with any teachers who need to discuss, or as a full staff, to talk to those as well.

J. DINN: So what are teachers telling you?

T. HALL: What are teachers saying?

J. DINN: I've heard plenty, but I'm just trying to get an idea of what teachers are saying and maybe even the teachers at the school of PWC. I'm just trying to think what are teachers saying about making school safer.

CHAIR: Minister.

K. HOWELL: That was feedback that we garnered largely in our Think Tank, was some of the issues that have been identified in our school system, how we can better support these types of schools where there may be increased risk or any identified challenges that are specific. So, again, certainly a measure that we are continuing to evaluate and work on with our partners at the NLTA.

J. DINN: Perfect.

What did the teachers in the Think Tank identify as a solution? I know you've talked to them but what did you hear as to what they need?

K. HOWELL: Many of the measures that we've talked about already, including professionals that can meet the needs of the students in the form of counsellors, in the form of individuals who can take them out of the class and speak to them, if necessary. They wanted to ensure that it's built into a curriculum by which students understand the implications of their actions at age-appropriate levels and continue to build on respect.

Again, the primary issue that was identified was our class compositions and allocations, and there would be a solution to some of the issues there.

J. DINN: I heard it again: human resources. Excellent, I love it.

4.2.01 – actually, I don't need to ask that. Oh, actually, no – 4.2.01, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terre-Neuve et Labrador – I got to keep up with my grandchildren who are there. Why is the grant set to increase?

K. HOWELL: Those are salary increases for union and management staff.

J. DINN: Can I ask a question, then, with attracting francophone teachers – and it's not just always about the language but it's about the culture. Has the district expressed concern about recruiting and retaining teachers?

It's a small board and mobility is limited – I'm just wondering what the particular challenges are and how government is addressing it or helping to address it.

K. HOWELL: They've actually identified that challenge, similar to our English school district – or now our NLSchools. Attracting and retaining these professionals has been

a challenge, so we continue to work with them on more of an instance-based approach. So if they need immediate responses or immediate resources because they have such a small pool to pull from.

We also had the opportunity to provide two additional resources for their rural schools, in floating positions, as a result of our Think Tank.

J. DINN: A lot of students – I know there was a proposal years ago to build a new school out in Galway, but the problem that was pointed out, that I could see, is that by the time students got to Grade 9, the enrolment dropped significantly. They were going to the English school system for the course offerings.

So a small student body, fewer teachers, fewer resources or fewer programs. I'm just wondering, is there any attempt to compensate for that, to make sure that even though they have a low enrolment that they can offer the full range of services, especially at the high school level.

K. HOWELL: We continue to work with the CSFP on many of these issues and, actually, recently had a meeting with representatives from the Francophone community, and some of the issues that they identified, areas that we could be of any assistance. Myself and the Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs did commit to having further conversations with that and working with our federal counterparts to see if there was some availability to build on the current resource model.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it for section 4 for me.

CHAIR: Okay.

I'll ask the Clerk to recall the sections.

CLERK: Education Operations, 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall Education Operations, 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: Post-Secondary Education, 5.1.01 to 5.4.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Post-Secondary Education, 5.1.01 to 5.4.02 inclusive.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

So I'm looking at 5.1.01. In Grants and Subsidies, I see a decrease of \$870,000. What are we looking at there?

K. HOWELL: Grants and Subsidies: This was funding that was included for an adult career exploration program.

P. DINN: And I'm looking at the federal revenue in particular. I see a decrease of \$1.5 million.

K. HOWELL: So this is revenue from the adult learning program that we were anticipated to receive in '23-'24.

P. DINN: So it wasn't received, or it was received?

K. HOWELL: No, it wasn't received. The 2024-2025 budget was reduced based on –

actually, it was received and the budget was reduced by the amount to reflect that.

P. DINN: Okay.

I'm looking at 5.2.01, Tuition Offset Grant. I see a decrease of over \$13 million. What's the explanation there, please?

K. HOWELL: Sorry, say again.

P. DINN: Oh, 5.2.01.

K. HOWELL: Okay.

P. DINN: Yes, looking at the Tuition Offset Grant, a decrease of over \$13 million.

K. HOWELL: As previously announced, it's the elimination of the Tuition Offset Grant over the next few years.

P. DINN: And just related to that, in the Budget Speech, Memorial received over \$370 million in a core operating grant. It also included the faculty of medicine, as well as continuation of satellite sites for the faculty of nursing. What portions of that funding went to the faculty of medicine and what portion of that went to the faculty of nursing satellite sites?

K. HOWELL: So \$70 million of that went to the med school and about \$2 million of it went to the satellite sites.

P. DINN: How successful have the satellite sites been?

K. HOWELL: There are various sites throughout the province, some of them more successful than others, but we do have enrolment in all sites.

P. DINN: Okay, thanks for that.

I'm looking at 5.2.02.10, Grants and Subsidies. I see a decrease of \$4.5 million. Can you explain that as well?

K. HOWELL: So that was the campus renewal fund. We've allocated \$6.5 million in the budget this year because that was the amount that was realized as actual funding required last year.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I am looking at 5.3.01. It is the operating grants for the College of the North Atlantic and I see a decrease of \$1.9 million. Can we explain that as well?

K. HOWELL: I'll defer to the ADM for Corporate Services because I don't see it.

R. HAYES: So the revised number in '23-'24 included additional funding related to the comprehensive arts and science university transfer program, as well as additional funding for the TV and film. In '24-'25, compared to the budget, we've increased it by \$1.4 million for salary increases, and that would be offset by the removal of those one-time fundings in '23-'24.

P. DINN: Okay, thank you.

And let me see, where are we? Okay, 5.4.01, I am looking at Grants and Subsidies as well there, and I see an increase of over \$8 million. What's that attributed to?

K. HOWELL: There's an increased budget due to projected increase in demand for student financial assistance.

P. DINN: So that increase in financial student assistance, is it due to more individuals requesting it or is it due to more demand per individual?

K. HOWELL: More demand would be more people asking for it, but as more people fall into the new funding agreement with Memorial University, we anticipate that there'll be more people applying for the student assistance.

P. DINN: Okay, so it's more individuals as opposed to greater cost to individuals?

K. HOWELL: And then that's always considered in the budget as well. There are allowances for that given that the allocations per student are based on the current climate, whatever the normal values would be for the city at the time.

P. DINN: I'm looking at the 5.4.02, Loans, Advances and Investments, I see an increase of \$4.8 million there as well.

K. HOWELL: Again, the same, increased demand for student financial assistance.

P. DINN: Again, that's not necessarily individuals – a combination?

K. HOWELL: Projected, yes.

P. DINN: I think that's it for me, that section.

CHAIR: The Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

We are in 5.1.01, Literacy and Institutional Services: How many people are currently enrolled in the programs offered under this subheading?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM for Post-Secondary to speak to that.

T. NOSEWORTHY: Right now, we deliver ABE in about 37 locations and there are about 2,000 students for that. For one-to-one literacy tutoring, there are about 100 learners per year. There are additional students as well that are funded through IPGS and they're funded under the LMDA program through IPGS. So they would have the numbers related to those.

J. DINN: Thank you for that answer.

With regard to people receiving, I guess, help here, if they're on income support, do they maintain benefits such as their drug

cards and that now? I know in some cases that two people that's exactly what happened, a few years ago. I'm just wondering.

K. HOWELL: That's a question that I would defer to the Department of Health to answer.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Are there plans to expand programming offered in the next year or so? If not, why not?

K. HOWELL: We're continuing to look at these programs and evaluate them, to see where they are most effective and where the need for them exists, again, making sure that we meet the needs where they are. So if there's a certain need for it, then we'd be responsive to that.

J. DINN: Thank you, Minister.

Now that we're reaching the end of the adult literacy action plan from 2019, will there be a review of the results and a new plan coming? I think more or less looking at evaluating. I'm assuming that there were recent consultations for that subject as well.

What's the plan going forward?

K. HOWELL: Yes, certainly we'll look at the merits of the program, what lessons we've learned and how we can implement any of the lessons that we have learned.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In 5.2.01, I just want to tie it in to 5.2.02, I think you said that the campus renewal fee was down to \$6.5 million so that was a decrease. I missed a part, you budgeted that because that was the amount that was required, if I heard that correctly?

K. HOWELL: Yeah. So last year we had committed up to \$10 million, but the funding was based on a per-student model. So each

student that registered received a \$250-per-term relief of this campus renewal fee, and when all was said and done, there was only \$6.5 million required based on the enrolment. So we've committed that much for the coming year, but, again, with the opportunity to make adjustments to that, if needed, based on the enrolment at Memorial.

J. DINN: Okay, so if it goes up, you can adjust quickly and then – okay, that's fair enough. So it's not frozen at this, it just looks at the numbers. Okay. Perfect.

5.4.01, I thought we'd talk about the increased number of students who are receiving financial assistance, and that's been increasing for what, recently, or is it in the last year since cuts to the operating grant? Is that what we're looking at?

K. HOWELL: So since the elimination of the tuition freeze, we've taken resources and increased the Student Financial Assistance money to make sure that those resources were still available to students, in an effort to maintain an affordable and accessible post-secondary education.

J. DINN: And how many students are currently receiving financial assistance?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM Post-Secondary for that.

T. NOSEWORTHY: For 23-24, the number is 7,556. Those are students that are in study, that are receiving financial assistance. That's up from 7,463 last year.

CHAIR: Minister.

K. HOWELL: If I may add to that, we have about 30 per cent of the students that attend Memorial University who are actually accessing our financial assistance. So we've taken that message to the Students' Union and taken it upon ourselves to make sure that students know this is available to eliminate some of the barriers that they may

encounter when applying for some of these student assistance programs and, again, making sure that they have access to affordable education.

J. DINN: Okay.

In 5.4.02, Administration, Capital: How many people are currently repaying student loans and what's the total amount owed to government on outstanding student debt?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM of Post-Secondary.

T. NOSEWORTHY: So the full year's data we have, the number in repayment is 17,808 students and the value of repayment for Newfoundland loans are \$16 million and for federal loans, it's \$194.5 million.

J. DINN: I guess when it comes to paying it off, are there any that are written off? What would be the number of loans that are written off or ...?

K. HOWELL: I'll turn to the ADM.

T. NOSEWORTHY: There are a number of default accounts that are written off each year. For the amounts that are less than \$1,000, the Department of Education would write those off. For the previous year, there were 138 default accounts and that totalled \$5,118. For the amounts that are over \$1,000, DGSNL would do the write-off for that. For the current year, there were 209 accounts totalling \$1.7 million.

J. DINN: So \$1.7 million.

What was the other one? 138, did I hear you correctly on that?

T. NOSEWORTHY: Yes, the total is \$5,118 for the 138.

J. DINN: Perfect.

Basically, one last question: Why was spending on Loans, Advances and

Investments under budget last year? Could this money have been profiled in other ways to help those with repayable loans?

K. HOWELL: There was savings realized due to federal budget announcements regarding student financial assistance that were more beneficial than anticipated, resulting in savings in the Provincial Student Financial Assistance.

J. DINN: Okay.

That's it for that section.

CHAIR: Okay.

Does the Member for Topsail - Paradise – no?

I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: Post-Secondary Education, 5.1.01 to 5.4.02, inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall Post-Secondary Education, 5.1.01 to 5.4.02 inclusive, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 5.1.01 through 5.4.02 carried.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: Education Transformation, 6.1.01.

CHAIR: Education Transformation, 6.1.01.

The MHA for Topsail - Paradise.

P. DINN: Thank you.

I'm looking at this last section, and I'm assuming these are all new budget lines for Education Transformation. So when we're looking at Transportation and Communications, and Supplies, what's included in those amounts?

K. HOWELL: So there is some anticipated transportation that will be required, and certainly communications expenses as they move forward with their transformation plan. The branch will be in place for an entire year, so we have budgeted for supplies that they may need to conduct their business as well.

P. DINN: And that branch will be located where?

K. HOWELL: It's housed in the Department of Education.

P. DINN: Here in the West Block, East Block?

K. HOWELL: Yes, in the West Block.

P. DINN: Okay.

I'm looking at the Salaries – and I think we touched on that earlier and talked about some of the positions, but what are we looking at in terms of staff out of that \$309,000?

K. HOWELL: So there were increased expenses because of collective bargaining salary increases. There are teachers who are working as part of this transformation plan, and they would be still under the NLTA collective agreement.

P. DINN: So how many actual positions are we talking?

K. HOWELL: There are three.

P. DINN: Three.

One last comment on the – I'm looking at the total here for the department; I see a

decrease in \$82 million, and I look at how important education is in the province and that. Do you look at that as being a good thing, or a bad thing for education, especially when I look at infrastructure that's needed and staffing that's needed, and we see a decrease of \$82 million?

K. HOWELL: I believe that that is the amount that was transferred to TI as a result of the integration, but I'll turn to the Corporate Services ADM.

R. HAYES: So that results from the revenue that we did not receive in '23-'24 that got transferred to '24-'25, especially under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. So if we switch back there, there was an increase there of about \$80 million. So that would be the bulk of the difference in –

P. DINN: So if I recall, that was somewhere around \$136 million, so the difference year over year was – okay, gotcha.

R. HAYES: Yeah, so the spend is actually up; it's because of the revenue that it looks like we're down.

P. DINN: Okay.

That's all for me there.

CHAIR: Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Just one question with regard to the transfer to TI, with the \$82 million. I'm just wondering, anything to do with, I guess, school construction is now the responsibility of Transportation and Infrastructure. At one time, depending on the contract, it could be the department, it might be the district, it might be the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, depends on what it was.

I'm just wondering – so anything to do with new construction additions, anything along those lines that are now the responsibility of TI?

K. HOWELL: So, firstly, I'd just like to let the record reflect that I made a mistake when I spoke about that \$82-million transfer. That was an error on my part.

J. DINN: No problem.

K. HOWELL: Thank you to the ADM for correcting that.

In terms of the decisions and all the allocations that are still part of the conversations in the Department of Education, as I mentioned earlier, we do work collaboratively with our partners in TI to ensure that the needs of the students, that the communities – that the infrastructure is met. Then they are responsible for carrying out what it is, the actual work that needs to be done.

J. DINN: Okay.

So any decisions made to renovate, whatever, that it would still be coming to TI?

K. HOWELL: It would still be collaboration between the Department of Education and the Department of TI.

J. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

That's it. Thank you very much for enduring it.

CHAIR: I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subheads.

CLERK: Education Transformation, 6.1.01.

CHAIR: Shall Education Transformation, 6.1 01, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 6.1.01 carried.

CHAIR: Can I ask the Clerk to call the total?

CLERK: Total: Department of Education.

CHAIR: Shall the total of the Department of Education carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Education, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Education carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Education carried without amendment.

CHAIR: The next meeting for the Social Services Committee is on April 25 at 9 a.m. to consider the Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

Does the minister have anything additional to add?

K. HOWELL: I was just going to start reading through some of the educational agencies and advisory committees that we do funding for, but I guess I'll wait for that for another day.

Thank you very much to everybody for your contributions here. Thank you for the good conversation and, again, a very hearty

thank you to the staff in the Department of Education who I believe are second-to-none in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and they are the reason that I sleep most nights.

So I'm very thankful for their expertise and their knowledge. There's never a time when I ask questions about their portfolio that they don't know. So thank you very much to them. Thank you to all the House staff who've hung around and seen us through tonight.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: All right.

J. DINN: Thank you, guys. I consider Education to be one of the most important, if not the most important division.

CHAIR: I'll ask for a mover to adjourn the meeting, please.

Moved by Minister Dempster, Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair.

Meeting adjourned.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.