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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on  
Social Services**

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Department of Education

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

## **SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Department of Education

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Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Chris Tibbs, MHA

Members: Perry Trimper, MHA  
Lucy Stoyles, MHA  
Jamie Korab, MHA  
James Dinn, MHA  
Paul Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Bobbi Russell

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Appearing:

### **Department of Education**

Hon. Krista Lynn Howell, MHA, Minister

Judith Hearn, 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 Sullivan, Director of Communications

### **Also Present**

Hon. Fred Hutton, MHA, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

John Hogan, MHA

Jack Norman, Government Members' Caucus

Darrell Hynes, Official Opposition Caucus

Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus

Jennifer Peckham, Committee Analyst (A)

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, John Hogan, MHA for Windsor Lake, substitutes for Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

The Committee met at 1 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

**CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh):** Okay, we're going to call the meeting to order.

Today, substituting for Lake Melville, MHA Trimper, we have Windsor Lake, MHA Hogan. Substituting for Mount Pearl North, MHA Stoyles, we have Conception Bay East - Bell Island, Minister Hutton.

So we normally take a break about halfway through, about 10 minutes. Just a few reminders. Please wave to identify yourself and wait for your tally lights to come on. Say your name and position each time. However, sometimes they have a tendency to leave the lights on, so that's okay. Water coolers are back here. Please don't adjust the chairs.

I'm going to ask the Committee Members and substitutes and the caucus employees to introduce themselves. Then I will ask the departmental reps to introduce themselves, starting with the minister. Then when we get in after the approval and we start, then the minister can do introductory remarks.

All right, we'll start over here with MHA Dinn.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Welcome, everyone, a lovely Friday afternoon. It's Paul Dinn, the Member for Topsail - Paradise and shadow critic for Education.

**D. HYNES:** Hi, I'm Darrell Hynes. I'm the Director of Research and Legislative Affairs for the Opposition Office.

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

**S. FLEMMING:** Scott Flemming, Researcher, NDP.

**J. KORAB:** Jamie Korab, MHA, Waterford Valley.

**F. HUTTON:** Fred Hutton, MHA, Conception Bay East - Bell Island, and Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, and Rural Economic Development.

**J. HOGAN:** John Hogan, MHA, Windsor Lake.

**J. NORMAN:** Jack Norman, Government Members' Office.

**CHAIR:** Okay, Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

Hello, everyone. Krista Howell, MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows, and Minister of Education.

**J. HEARN:** Judith Hearn, Deputy Minister.

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

**T. STAMP:** Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller.

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

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

**T. HALL:** Hi, Terry Hall, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education Operations and Superintendent of Schools.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Lisa Baker-Worthman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development.

**CHAIR:** Angela Sullivan.

**A. SULLIVAN:** Angela Sullivan, Director of Communications.

**CHAIR:** Okay, before we start, I'm just going to ask the Committee, do you have the minutes from the last meeting? If there are no errors or omissions, I ask for someone to move the minutes.

**J. KORAB:** Moved.

**CHAIR:** MHA Korab, moved.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** Okay, so we'll now proceed with the Estimates review process. Once I ask the Clerk to ask the first subhead, then I'll move to the minister.

I'll ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

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

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

Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

Hello, everyone. What a way to spend your Friday afternoon. Thank you very much to our staff here who have done an awesome

job keeping me in line and agreeing to show up on a Friday afternoon.

We've got a very extensive budget and a lot of good things. I don't have a lot to say, other than I'm very appreciative of the support of the staff in the Department of Education who hold all things together and deal with me at the same time. So they've done an outstanding job again this year and I look forward to taking your questions.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

MHA Paul Dinn.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Again, thank you everyone on a lovely Friday afternoon for being in here. But where else would you rather be than here? I just want to start with the Budget Speech and looking at some items that were outlined in the Budget Speech.

I note in the speech that it talked about increasing spaces for child care, and we always hear the number of spaces that are created. Do we have any estimates or any numbers on spaces that are actually vacant?

**K. HOWELL:** In terms of not yet functional or as if the place is not full because they didn't need to use all their space?

**P. DINN:** The latter it would be, yes.

**K. HOWELL:** I don't think so. I do believe that most of our sites are at capacity, but I will ask the ADM responsible if she can fact check me on that.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Yes, we regularly check the homerooms and ensure that they're filled to capacity and there has been no issues flagged for me around that.

**P. DINN:** Okay, thank you for that.

I'm looking at the Budget Speech and it says: "We have also taken progressive steps to support the child care needs of health care workers." In recognition of that, there were sites that were developed.

I know in last year's budget and last year's Estimates, I asked the question then as well. There were four locations that were looked upon to be open for those health care workers: St. John's, Corner Brook, Bonavista and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Wabush. There were several noted. They were slated to be open in May past and I think one was indicated, because of construction, it was going to be September past.

My question is for those four or five sites that were noted in the last budget, in the last Estimates, are they open now?

**K. HOWELL:** Right now, we're still in the construction phase of some of those sites, but there are various sites across the province where we've been able to identify specific seats or allocate specific seats for health care providers so they would get a priority seating for a certain amount of reserved seats in different child care centres.

It's my understanding that there was some hiccups with the operations or the construction of some of the health care sites here in the city, but still working to get those open and operational as quickly as possible.

Again, I'll ask the ADM responsible to fact check me on that.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** That is accurate, we do have spaces that are allocated.

St. John's has opened the child care service in St. Michaels as well in Goose Bay. We have a Goose Bay site where we have health care professionals prioritized, as well as in Lab West, actually. Correct.

**P. DINN:** There are two questions: Out of those, how many are at capacity; and secondly, out of the ones that are not quite open yet that were announced last year, what's the timeline on those?

**CHAIR:** Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** ASAP is the timeline for service – as soon as possible on the timeline.

It was situation beyond anybody's control and we couldn't have predicted some of the things that happened. So as soon as possible is the answer that we're giving. I'd like to say that they'll be open before the next school year, but again, the situation that we find ourselves in with procurement and construction in this time in the province.

**P. DINN:** So just along those lines as well, because you mention that there were seats able to be made available for health care workers at other locations, and correct me if I'm wrong because when this was brought in it was under the premise that health care workers work odd hours, so has that been accommodated with these other sites that have been able to take them in, just to confirm?

**K. HOWELL:** Most of the accommodations have been able to be made in home settings. So they've been able to juggle their hours. In the sites that are operationalized then, yes, we've had some that were able to accommodate longer hours.

Still a work in progress because we do know that there are overnight shifts for a lot of our health care providers. We're not there yet. We haven't got any operating overnight, but we're working to make sure that that's a reality in the new sites that we're opening.

**P. DINN:** So along those lines as well, because it's twofold when you look at dealing with our health care professionals, you also have to come up with child care workers to work those shifts as well. Do you

perceive that to be a problem or has there been a problem?

**K. HOWELL:** Right now, we're working with our partners at AECENL to talk through these things to see if there's any anticipated or unintended consequences of pursuing that, but as far as I know, in the conversations that we've been having, they seem open to making it a reality.

**P. DINN:** Okay.

Again, following along the Budget Speech here and looking at the Investing in K-12 Education, "This year, we are increasing teaching services by \$20 million, rising to \$44 million next year. This will result in the addition of more than 400 educators and learning assistants."

I know last year there was an announcement of 104 full-time equivalents so, firstly with last year's 104 full-time equivalents, were they all filled and how many actual individuals were hired?

**K. HOWELL:** I think the 104 was student assistants that you're referencing?

**P. DINN:** There were 104 full-time equivalent teacher assistants in the budget last year.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, that was student assistants. They were all hired – 104 of them, they were all hired, whatever the equivalent was for that.

**P. DINN:** Okay, that's where I was going with that.

When I'm looking at this year, we're looking at \$20 million and we're looking at 400 positions and, I think, you commented on some breakout there, but can I get a breakout of those 400 educators and learning assistants? What are we looking at and what's going to be the makeup of that 400?

**K. HOWELL:** The additional 400 will be on top of the commitment that we made last year for student assistants. We'll be continuing that again this year and, in addition to that, the teaching services, we will add 245 teachers or guidance counsellors or administrators, and 175 of those will be teaching and learning assistants.

**P. DINN:** Okay.

When I look at the budget, the \$20 million and rising to \$44 million next year, is that \$20 million there to cover the 400 this year? Would I be correct in saying that?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll defer to the ADM of Corporate Services.

**CHAIR:** ADM Hayes.

**R. HAYES:** The amount moves from \$20 million to \$44 million next fiscal to account for the annualization of those positions.

In '25-'26, those positions won't start until September – until the new school year. We're only capturing seven months of the salary. Next year, we'll account for the full 12 months for the salary for those positions.

**P. DINN:** I understand what you're saying, the expectation is that you will be able to come up with 400 positions this year whether it's six months, seven months.

**CHAIR:** Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**P. DINN:** Perfect.

I'm just continuing on with the budget here. The budget talks about healthy food during school and a commitment to expand the school food programming. I know last year we talked about cafeterias in schools or designated cafeteria areas, with more than half of the schools not having a designated area.

So when we talk about providing – and I agree with the healthy food process, no doubt about it. Have we improved any of our schools in terms of cafeteria space or space where children can go and actually sit down and eat?

**K. HOWELL:** That's the intention of the commitment. The financial commitment is certainly to invest in space, in kitchen upgrades, in any of the schools that need that work to make sure that it's operationalized to run a school food program. Some of the money that is budgeted along with some of the contributions from the federal commitment will be utilized for that.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Continuing on with the K-12 because we're introducing pre-K, and when I looked at the charts and that, it uses the term – and I stand to be corrected – this site is operational.

Operational can mean many things. It can mean it's open or is it at full capacity or where it is in the scheme of things. So out of the 30-plus pre-K areas that were announced last year, how many of those are at capacity?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have the number at capacity but I do know that there were 162 spaces created in pre-K last year.

You and I would, I think, have the same definition of operational. It certainly means to me that you can walk in the front door, it's appropriately staffed, it's appropriately equipped and it is full with kids or has the ability to be full. I would hope that's everybody's definition of operational and that's what we're working towards when we say that.

I will defer to the ADM to see if the numbers that are at capacity are available and, if not, we can get those for you.

**J. DINN:** And to your point –

**K. HOWELL:** She'll answer you.

**J. DINN:** Oh you're going to go, Lisa.

Okay, sorry. Always nice to hear from you.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** So yes, they are operational and full to capacity as needed. In some of those areas, they may be smaller communities who may not have filled the entire 18 to 20 seats. That's just based on the number of the children in the community.

**P. DINN:** So in relation to that when we talk capacity, I've gone down through the different locations, the 30-odd, and looked at the demographics for preschool-aged children over the last couple of years and doing just a quick look at what would be projected in terms of the age group. To be at capacity and knowing that you require an ECE in the classroom, and for any classroom over 20 you require another and also one of those has to be a Level 3, have we experienced any issues around getting the right staff or the qualified staff in these facilities, because that may be an issue with getting to capacity?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, absolutely.

I do recognize that there are challenges in some of the more rural parts of the province in recruiting ECEs. That's why we've been able to partner with the YMCA, and we've offered an online program for ECEs in rural areas or for those who wish to become ECEs. There is very little cost associated with that for many of the folks in the most rural parts of the province but, yes, we would have experienced, in some areas, difficulty recruiting ECEs.

**P. DINN:** So just related to recruitment of ECEs, we know a lot of them left the profession for numerous reasons and I

would hope some are coming back. Do we have any indication in terms of figures of how many who had left the profession have come back because of measures that have been taken?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have a number of those who would have come back who were previously ECEs, but I do have a number that have entered the workforce this year, and it's 790.

**P. DINN:** Okay, thank you. I've got four seconds. I'll leave that.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time has expired.

The Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the staff for being here this afternoon to answer the questions. I appreciate it, Minister.

How many people are currently employed in the department and how many positions are vacant?

**K. HOWELL:** Within the department, we have 531 people employed and 98 vacancies and that's not if we include teachers who would be captured under the NL Schools branch. That number grows.

**CHAIR:** Member for St. John's Centre, could you just move your book back a bit so I can see your light to make sure –

**J. DINN:** Sure thing.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**J. DINN:** That's 98 within the department itself, correct?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** And would it be possible to have a breakdown of those vacancies?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Would it be possible also to have the numbers of teachers currently employed in the province, not necessarily the full-time equivalents, but the actual bodies with a breakdown to region, and I'd certainly look at maybe even a specialty in grade. What I'm more interested in, if it can be captured, the number of retired teachers who are currently substituting in the system, again by region.

When I'm looking for the actual bodies, I'm also looking for those that are part time. They're not full units, they're either working at a half unit, 25 per cent, 0.25, whatever else; I'm looking for that breakdown. More importantly, how many of those positions are unfilled?

I've had one school this week where one position has been unfilled since October. That's within the metro region so those are the numbers I'm looking for, if I could. Whether you have them now or send them over later, it would be fine.

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, I do have them. There are 5,473 bodies – teachers – associated with the system, 946 student assistants and 262 school secretaries, for a total employment of 7,212.

There is an additional list for substitutes for each of those three categories and we can certainly provide you with a breakdown per region of what you're looking for there. I do have that information as well.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

The 5,473, just making sure that's not full-time equivalent. That captures the teachers who are teaching full-time and those that may be at a 0.75, 0.25, 0.5 position, correct?

**K. HOWELL:** Correct.

**J. DINN:** Okay, perfect. Thank you.

How is work advancing on the Education Accord and when can we expect it to be made public?

**K. HOWELL:** Very soon. It's going through the final stages of design and preparation for public distribution right now.

I've had a chance to chat with the co-chairs and see where their heads were and what the final product should look like. I'm very encouraged to see that a lot of the things that are reflected in the Education Accord already were actioned, a lot of it in this budget. It's conversations that we've been having for quite some time and we now actually have a road map that gets us to where we feel we need to be.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Can we have an update on the work of the Provincial Advisory Council on Education?

**K. HOWELL:** Right now, we're still finalizing the members for that. We've put a call out to the school councils to appoint their representatives, and I expect that will also be in short order.

**J. DINN:** This will replace the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Will this council have the same ability as the federation to publicly advocate on education?

In other words, right now this committee advises you. I would assume that the Minister of Education then is the spokesperson for that committee?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, and we have a great working relationship with the Federation of Schools. We've been collaborative back and forth on many issues and we anticipate that that's the way the PACE committee will unfold as well. I'm expecting to see some of

the same faces show up in that conversation as well. They always have an open line directly to the minister so that's certainly something that we're interested in maintaining.

**J. DINN:** Will the council then have the ability, if it provides advice to the minister and the minister or the department choose not to follow that advice, to go public and very clearly state where they stand on a particular issue or are they bound by a duty of fidelity to the minister?

**K. HOWELL:** I do believe there would be a general consensus between the department and the advisory council on many of the issues and, in the event that there's something that we can't work through them, I certainly believe there'll be an avenue that we can discuss that.

I always want to hear the feedback of the schools and the communities and the folks on the ground. We'll definitely be willing to have those conversations.

**J. DINN:** I'm seeking clarity then: The federation right now, currently, it's independent; it would be able to issue its own press releases and make its own statements.

I'm just wondering then, are you saying that the PACE would still have the ability, to do what the federation currently does? They're collaborative but, at the same time, they're very much able to speak on their own without going through whatever channels if they feel at that point that it's needed to do so. Would they have that freedom and authority, that ability to do so? In other words to publicly advocate?

**K. HOWELL:** Well I would hope that there's a way that we could reach a consensus before it came to that point, and there'll certainly be a method in place by which we have to exhaust all possible avenues of reaching a collective decision before that happens but there would certainly be – I

can't stop people from speaking their mind. And if that is to be the case, then I've always been very open and clear that I want to hear if something is going wrong. I don't ever want teachers, families or students to feel like they can't speak about issues that are happening. And this council would be no different.

**J. DINN:** So I'm still no clearer, but that's fair enough. It sounds like right now the – and I guess this is what I'm trying to get at. Because, to me, it sounds like what's happened in some ways is that boy's parents have been publicly muzzled. That would be my fear, that the Federation of School Councils is an autonomous body that can operate on it's own. It can give advice, but it can also issue its own comments on whether the changes in curriculum and so on and so forth.

So that's what I'm looking for. You haven't given me a clear yes or no, but it seems we're hoping we would not go through that. I'm not sure what that means. But that's fair enough. I'll have follow-up questions.

**K. HOWELL:** Well, I'll answer that in that the expectation is never that a professional advisory council is out ranting and roaring against the group that they are advising to. We would hope that there is a professional ability to reach some type of consensus. But, in the event that that can't happen, then I do want to know if there's an issue that hasn't been resolved or if there's something that's happening in our system that doesn't meet the needs of students.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Given the recent cyberattack on PowerSchool, is the department doing an evaluation of other software it currently uses for vulnerabilities and developing strategies to improve cybersecurity?

**K. HOWELL:** We've been working with our partners in the OCIO on the PowerSchool issue. And as we move forward and as

we've amalgamated the school district into the department, the IT requirements are something that we've been very keen to monitor and continue to watch. It's always on our radar. Cybersecurity is a huge issue for everybody right now and will continue to be a priority in the department.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Chair, schools have been told that desktops that can't support Windows 11 will no longer be supported by Window security updates as of October this year. I'm trying to figure out, and I guess from what I gather I'm not sure if it's now left to the schools to replace these devices, which represents a significant outlay of cash. I'm just wondering what is the plan to help schools – in light of this cyberattack – replace these devices that are no longer going to be supported by Windows security – funding especially.

**K. HOWELL:** We're very pleased to see an infusion in this budget of \$5 million for IT and tech support. And I'm sure there'll be an allocation of that for upgrades to any existing software that needs to happen, as well as additional allocation of resources and staff to actually follow up on some of these things. Because we know that we have heard that there are devices that remain in repair state for a little too long, because the support wasn't there to get it back on track.

To speak to the specifics of the Windows issue, I'll defer to the ADM of NLSchools.

**CHAIR:** Terry Hall.

**T. HALL:** We're actually still working with Microsoft to extend the life – they've been working on a solution to be able to extend the use, which gives us the opportunity to utilize some of the budget, as Minister Howell said, to start to support schools to replenish their devices so they're not left without any devices for the students.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

The Member's time has expired.

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** You were going to say Cartwright.

**CHAIR:** No.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Just to follow up, continuing on that issue, and I don't think we're going to be here five hours because we seem to be hitting everyone's list here, so that's all good. In the budget document, it talked about we navigate increasingly in a digital world, and to facilitate this initiative, they're putting, as the minister mentioned, \$5 million towards additional technology services and related infrastructure.

I don't know if that's enough. I say that because of my own participation on school councils and I know how much school councils and parents put in every year – every year – raising money to purchase IT equipment for their schools. A tremendous amount of time and effort, and I know the cost that it takes and decisions that are made, do we staple our tickets or do we not do that because we can save money to get another half a laptop. Those are true discussions that happen.

So my question here, talking about the IT and the \$5 million, do you expect there to be a time when parents and students and school councils will not have to be out raising money for infrastructure and devices that should be provided?

**K. HOWELL:** That is absolutely our intention. To be clear and honest, it burns me to my soul when I hear that fundraisers for schools are going to pay for technology or infrastructure in schools. So that was the reason why we started down this road of submitting a budget ask and we will continue down that road. Right now, we have a commitment of \$5 million for this

year, growing to \$10 million next year, and to your point, this is expensive stuff.

So we'll continue to advocate for an increasing budget, because the needs are going to increase. New students coming in, new technologies, access and continued online learning and the development of AI and the world in which we live, it is going to require additional resources. For right now, we have a two-year plan, but we're working on what that looks like beyond those two years.

**P. DINN:** So related to that, and I think it was touched on, what is the expectation that this \$5 million will address in terms of numbers of schools? How many schools will benefit from this \$5 million.

**K. HOWELL:** I can't say right upfront, because we don't know what we don't know, if there's a drastic device malfunction or something of that nature, but we're hoping that this money will get us additional access to Wi-Fi in some schools, additional resources, additional devices to replace some of the devices that have been aged out or to provide additional staff to look at these devices so that they're not out of service for extended periods of time.

**P. DINN:** With any budget preparation, I mean, you can't just throw \$5 million here, \$10 million here. There would have been certain lenses put on this dollar amount. I would expect there should be some indication of what was intended in this \$5 million, in terms of we need this many of this or this many of that. And that's basically what I'm asking.

I'm trying to get a sense of what kind of effect will this \$5 million have. Will it be a little chip in the iceberg, or will it roll the iceberg over? I don't know, and that's what I'm getting at. And I think when you prepare for budgets, that information is usually provided when you put a dollar figure forward. And I'm just curious as to what was the case put forward for this \$5 million.

**K. HOWELL:** Absolutely, and we work closely with our IT specialists and our colleagues in OCIO to determine what the need may look like and built a plan that landed us on our budget ask this year.

**P. DINN:** So there's nothing that you can provide that tells me where that \$5 million is intended to go, \$1 million here, \$2 million here, \$3 million here?

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

**P. DINN:** Okay.

I can't believe I skipped this and I didn't go back to this, but talk about new schools, and in particular the four that were mentioned, I think, in last year's budget. It spoke to – and I stand to be corrected – I think \$147 million was noted last year for four new schools or renovations to one.

This year, there's \$50 million allocated. It might be \$50 million, it might be a little more than \$50 million, but it was around that number. Is that new money – because I think the \$147 million was noted as over a year or two – on top of that \$147 million or is it part of that \$147 million? Is it just the same money announced again?

**K. HOWELL:** The specific breakdown of that would be in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. But, for my own purposes, I know that schools that have been announced and budgeted for, we move on from them. They're already baked into a budget years out, so we wouldn't have to account for money that would be spent if the school is already announced and we've moved through a specific stage.

**P. DINN:** So the \$147 million that was announced last year is already accounted for; am I correct in saying that?

**K. HOWELL:** I would have to defer you to the Department of TI to be clear on that.

**P. DINN:** Okay.

So the additional \$50 million for this year – I say additional; it may not be. That's what I'm trying to determine, if that's new, on top of that \$147 million, or if it's part of that \$147 million.

**K. HOWELL:** Again, I'll have to defer you to TI, but it's my understanding that what has been announced has already been baked in past certain stages. In out-years, we wouldn't have to account for that.

**P. DINN:** You have Paradise, you have Kenmount Terrace, Cartwright and Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, and it was only last month, I guess, the shovel went in the ground for Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. There's not a shovel in the ground for Kenmount Terrace, nor Paradise, and I can understand that.

So if I'm looking at it, I'm just wondering is the lion's share of this \$50 million towards the Portugal Cove-St. Philip's school construction. That, I guess, is the question.

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, and operational questions like that would have to come out of TI.

**P. DINN:** Out of TI, okay.

Moving along, just looking at post-secondary, and you turn on the radio and you hear everyone talking about post-secondary, good, bad and the other. I know back in 2017 when there were cutbacks to the university, I believe Minister Byrne was the responsible minister at the time and spoke at that time about greater transparency and all that was needed. So that's eight years ago.

I'm curious when we allocate the \$400 million or whatever it was this year, has government pursued being more actively involved in the budgeting or where that money goes, especially given the Auditor General reports and given the state of mind of a lot of people out there?

Have we taken steps to be more involved in and looking at more transparency of where, I say our money goes, the public money goes, into that institution? I'm not arguing that it's needed to go in there; I'm arguing, what's the accountability there?

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, absolutely. I think the Auditor General's report gave everybody a good place to start where we can recognize some of the challenges and things that needed to change. Some of the things – there are more, of course, beyond what was just presented in that report. But I think through that process we were able to have more of a guideline of things that they can move forward and I'm very confident that they are taking this report seriously.

The accountability measures at MUN I would say now to government have increased, because we do meet monthly with the president of the university, as well as the chair of the Board of Regents to discuss the progress that's been made on some of these things.

They have been very public with the progress that they're making as well. They publicized all of their advancements and how they're moving through the report of the AG. They've also received a facilities management report now and their intention is to move forward on that in the same fashion.

The AG herself has been clear that she'll be checking in to make sure that things are moving in the right direction. So I think that the measures around accountability have certainly tightened and our relationship with the university, we've been able to strengthen it in terms of our collaboration together on working on issues that matter to the students, the faculty, the staff and in the best interest of the people of the province.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

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

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

So just to clarify, barring that Microsoft is unable to extend the devices, what is the estimated cost of replacing all desktops that can't support Windows 11 and will have to be replaced? What is the estimated cost? If you cannot extend them and these have to be replaced, I guess what I'm looking for, what is the estimated cost of doing so?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have that information in front of me. I'm sure it's built into the plan of our technology ask. Maybe the ADM for the NLSchools branch might have the information in front of him. But if not, we can get it for you.

**CHAIR:** ADM Terry Hall.

**T. HALL:** Thank you.

I don't have that number. I can get it for you. But I just wanted to make sure everyone remembers we provided all teachers with a laptop, and we do give all new teachers a laptop to reduce the reliance on the desktops that they had, and all 7 to 12 are issued Chromebooks. The new grade 7's coming in this year will be all issued Chromebooks.

We've worked over the last few years to reduce the reliance on school set sub-devices, especially in that large group, and we continue to support schools where we can when they do need a new whiteboard or team board or something like that for the other technology.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Again, I'm just looking at what is the replacement cost.

Can we have an update from the department on how you're working with MUN and the Board of Regents to find a replacement for Dr. Timmons?

**CHAIR:** Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** Thank you.

That's a process that's unfolding at the university, and I know that the Board of Regents are working through their selection process. They have a hybrid model that's in place, and it's my understanding that they are in the final stages of candidate selection.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

When amending the MUN act, would it be possible to add an amendment somewhere that would enshrine the principle of collegial governments in legislation with regard to how the administration makes decisions?

**K. HOWELL:** When we open up the MUN act, we will definitely have conversations about what should and shouldn't be included, and it will be important then to hear all perspectives and find a solution that works and that is always in the best interest of the students and the faculty and the staff.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Just to the budget, and the \$20 million to increase teaching services, which adds more than 400 educators and learning assistants to the classroom, and this will grow to \$44 million next year – I believe my colleague from Topsail - Paradise, you gave him a breakdown there, but here's a question I have to ask: Is this actual new teachers or is it basically to replace the teachers and the units who are declared redundant this year?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't know that anybody was declared redundant in our system but the 400 will be for new hires.

**J. DINN:** If I may, I'll give an example.

So as principal told me – I had a call. He said on the day that this budget announced this: He lost two units in his school. A small

reduction in the overall allocation lost two units. He's a teaching principal. He has a Grade 5 class of 30. They have one TLA which is basically in his class. The reading specialist, which was full-time, was then reduced to 50 per cent and has other duties. So I guess, the question he would ask then, and I would say others because he lost two units, will he get those back?

Here's my point: are these actual new teachers? On the same day, and I would assume he's not the only one, this school lost two teachers, they went elsewhere. I'm trying to figure out if indeed, when we talk about the language about new teachers and units, it looks like we've made a step forward and two steps back.

I'm trying to get on – are we just playing with numbers here? For this school, it's an actual loss of teaching units and it's going to have a severe impact on the success of the students there.

**K. HOWELL:** I would say that in any instance where teachers were required, then they certainly wouldn't have been cut and the 400 positions will be new hires. There's a process that unfolds that determines what the most appropriate allocation of resources would be. That specific instance, I'm not aware of it, particularly of all the specifics, but certainly would be interested to find out why that happened. We'll ask the ADM responsible for school operations to add a bit more information.

**CHAIR:** ADM Hall.

**T. HALL:** Every year, a redundancy and replacement process unfolds. It's a known process. It's clearly based on what the projected enrolment is for September compared to the teaching staff and the enrolment they had this year.

If, based on that, there's a requirement for one less of a unit, that's the redundancy. However, I can tell you, and I'm pretty

certain and I'll confirm it for you, that all of the redundancies that happened in this process before we started our recruitment were actually assigned to another school. That's the way it works.

So there's a replacement and, to Minister Howell's point, the announcement in the budget was an additional injection of \$20 million that we will fill once we look at it. I understand you're saying the timing of when the budget was announced, but the budget was announced and now we have to determine the use of that \$20 million and the best use of it.

**J. DINN:** Chair, in the words of this teacher and other teachers, simply basing it on a numbers model, a formula, which is what I've been railing against, is actually – that's where the resources are going. It's hard to take and it's ironic that on the same day that new units are being announced, schools are losing units and they're being moved elsewhere, but in a school where there are high needs as well, that's the point. So it's great to announce this but we're seeing that schools are losing units.

If it's based on numbers, well, fine then, we're not talking about education, we're talking about budget, simple as that.

Okay, that's really what I need to know. I don't know if we were actually making improvements or not, but this teacher is frustrated.

**K. HOWELL:** So if I might respond to that, we've been clear that we're moving towards an allocation that looks at the needs of the classroom as opposed to simply a numbers base, but you have to give consideration to the numbers as well.

To determine how many students will be in any particular school, you do need to know the numbers. On top of that then, you'd add an additional layer that would be responsive to some of the needs of the school and of the particular students in those numbers. A

lot of that you don't really know until you see who's in the class and how many students may actually be there that would require additional support.

So initially building the plan, it's built on a numbers basis, but there's always an additional lens, an additional layer, that gives account for specific needs or resources that may need to be placed in the school.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

I'll end with this comment: This is the same government that brought us combined grades and increased class caps in the 2016 budget, so it's been strictly about numbers and budget. I don't know when we're going to move to a point where it's going to look at the needs in the classroom. That's what the point here is, that it's not addressing the needs, it's based on, first, the numbers and that's strictly what it was, but to make full-day kindergarten work, resources were taken from the rest of this system and that's the part.

I'm hoping that when we see this movement, that it's actually going to be reflective of the needs in the classroom, because this teacher, at least 12 have identified exceptionalities and there are more to come, so I will tell you that the numbers system is not working.

**K. HOWELL:** So if I might have a chance to –

**J. DINN:** Anyway, I'm finished with that – I'm finished with that section.

**K. HOWELL:** I'm going to respond to that given that the research that has been done in this field does suggest that multi-grade classrooms are successful, and that they do provide beneficial learning environments for their students.

That might not be the case for every individual class based on, again, the

specific needs of a classroom, but when those decisions are made, they are made based on best evidence practice. That would be why that was the case when we decided to do combined grades.

The addition to 400 staff into the system is in direct response to the increased needs in our classrooms. So if we didn't need the teachers, we certainly wouldn't be advocating for them in budget. We recognize that the classrooms do need the additional supports, and we now have 400 new additional resources to place in them to address these issues.

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

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

I just want to follow up on some of the initial questions around the search for the university president. I'm surprised at the question and response. I can appreciate we're all busy but, of course, there was a new president put in place yesterday. So there is a president in place, and congratulations to her, but I do have a concern, and I have a question for government on this.

We did talk about transparency and we did talk about more involvement, but does government have any concerns over the fact that the new president that was put in place yesterday was also part of the executive team during the time of the AG report, and also was part of the team when they removed the "Ode to Newfoundland." Are there any concerns from government in that respect.

**K. HOWELL:** So the president that's in place now is an interim president until the presidential search comes to completion.

In terms of the "Ode to Newfoundland," that was a decision that went through a significant process and the Senate had high-level involvement in that. I congratulate

them on their work and finding a solution to the question that was presented to them and look forward to working with them on whatever other things they may have identified that allows all students in the university to feel like they are represented or that there's something meaningful for them in the convocation ceremony. A huge piece of work undertaken by that committee, so thank you very much to them.

In terms of our concerns, we have made significant strides over the last two years working with the team at Memorial University. I do believe that they've done an excellent job of responding to what was a very difficult time in their history and things that were largely beyond the control of many of the folks who work there.

Unfortunate events, in some cases, led to publicity that was probably not warranted but, given the situation that they've had to deal with and significant turnover that's occurred at the university, we're confident that they're on a pathway in collaboration with the Department of Education to finding the new president at the end of their selection process and moving forward so that the university is the institution that we expect it to be here in our province and we can build on it for the future so that we continue to educate high-quality graduates out of that university.

**P. DINN:** Thank you for that.

Just in relation to the Ode – we all have our own views on that and I've heard from many – an ad hoc committee was put in place. This committee met 35 times plus other consultations. Do we have any or does government have any indication of what that cost? What the cost was involved in removing the Ode and then reinstating it?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have that in front of me but, certainly, we'll add to the list of discussion items for our next meeting with the university.

**P. DINN:** Okay, appreciate that.

Going back to my string before I stopped the last phase, we were talking about the transparency and the involvement in the university. You mentioned about the last two years, that you've been more involved. A big piece, of course, that we're hearing on the news is around the deferred maintenance and the infrastructure. I mean, we've all seen the pictures.

It's terrible, and look, we do hear that it's happening everywhere and that's fine but what I'm concerned about here, and it's not something we didn't know was coming, we have \$480-odd million in deferred maintenance. There's \$70 million over eight years, I believe, that has been put in there to help, which really and truly is a drop in the bucket when it comes to dealing with that. So outside of that, how is government going to address the declining infrastructure in our post-secondary – well, in our one and only university, really?

**K. HOWELL:** The university is responsible for its own deferred maintenance plan. We've given them some very strict guidelines as to how we expect them to move forward and what we would expect a university of that caliber to look like.

Given the reality that they face, it's not something that's going to be accomplished overnight. It didn't get in a mess overnight so it's not going to be fixed overnight. We know that \$70 million won't fix it all, but it's certainly intended to be a measure that's in place in the interim given the fact that they had such a turnover. There has been a lot of things happening at the university.

They've had a couple of difficult years and we do acknowledge that. Now that we feel they're on a path to stabilizing things, this infusion of cash or this budget item was intended to support them through a period of transition while they now figure out what it is they want to do moving forward to manage their deferred maintenance and

how they intend to fund that as part of their operational budget.

**P. DINN:** So related to that, when we're looking at what they're doing, and you were saying you're saying you're having closer eyes on that, what are the implications if they're not doing the right thing?

I ask that because when we saw the AG report, there was a lot of calls for change in management in the university and lots of calls saying it was mismanaged and so on. What role does government play when and if this university is not doing what they should be doing with the \$400-million-plus of our money to maintain a proper post-secondary university that gives the best education to our young adults?

That's the problem with this. It's the checks and balances. What specifically is government doing to ensure that the money that's invested is utilized in a proper way?

**K. HOWELL:** You'll know when we get there, because I'll be very clear about it if the expectations are not met.

I think, as I said before, they're at a transitional time. We've had a really good working relationship with the leaders at Memorial University and I think it's appropriate to give them and a new president time – they have a fairly new Board of Regents chair as well. I think it's important to give them time to get their footing and figure out what their plans look like as the university and as an organization.

In the event that they are not meeting our expectations, then, as I said, we have our monthly check-ins where there are very clearly identified expectations and timelines on many of the things that are happening at the university. They have, thus far, been able to meet most of the things to my satisfaction, to our department's satisfaction, so we'll continue to work on that relationship and give them the space

they need in the interim to figure out what that looks like for them.

If that's not the case, as I said, you'll know.

**P. DINN:** Yes.

Related to that – I mean, that's good to know – I would hope to see or I would like to see some reporting on that, some measures of timelines and deadlines and targets that have been met on that because that's what people want to see now, transparency.

No one argues that the university over there could have academic autonomy. I mean, I don't think there's an argument on that, but I think there is an argument when it comes to the administration of it when 70 per cent of their revenue is coming from government on that. We really need to be not waiting for the next Auditor General's report to come out but looking for quarterly reports or something that tells us that there's a pathway and there's progress being made. Is there anything like that proposed?

**K. HOWELL:** I get monthly reports on their status updates and what it is that they're doing. They publicize those to the public as well. They use the AG's report as their guideline. That clearly identified the challenges and the timelines that she felt were expected to meet these things and has offered or informed them that she will come back and make sure that the timelines and the expectations that she's identified are being met.

So right now, we're using that as a template. Until that doesn't work for us, I think that's a process that we're willing to continue working with given that the AG has clearly outlined what the expectations are and the timelines, and Memorial has largely been compliant.

**P. DINN:** I ask that because we hear from other previous AG reports where nothing was done and none of the recommendations were looked at and so

on, for whatever reason, but I think there was a greater lens and greater attention paid to it now given the amount of money that goes there.

So that's my point, to make sure that there is some method or some process that we are keeping a close rein on what's happening there given the latest reports.

**K. HOWELL:** I would agree. It is a very significant investment of taxpayer dollars that the university must be accountable for. I believe that the process we have in place right now is working for us. As a department, we are satisfied with their efforts to be accountable, to be transparent and to move the dial on some of the issues that were identified.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time has expired.

I just want to confirm that the Member for St. John's Centre has no more questions on this subhead?

**J. DINN:** Not for that section, no.

**CHAIR:** Does the Member for Topsail - Paradise have any additional questions for this subhead?

**P. DINN:** Yeah, if I can, I'll continue on.

I'm still on the university and I'm looking at and again talking about the contribution that's been made, investment that's been made and talking about the faculty of medicine.

In the budget document, in the Budget Speech, it talked about close to \$7 million has been given for more medical school seats, clerkships, expansions and internal medicine. Last year, there was a contribution made to increase with 10 additional seats. The budget document speaks to more medical school seats. I listened to the interim president in media

this morning, and she indicated there are 10 seats; there are no more seats this year.

I just want to confirm, is it the same 10 seats or are there additional seats being put in the med school this year?

**K. HOWELL:** For the specifics, I'll defer you to the Department of Health because they're more familiar with the med school. It isn't managed by us as much as by them, but I do know that there are 84 seats at the medical school right now designated for Newfoundland and Labrador students which is up from 67 or 66 seats just a few years ago.

I think there's an effort made in instances where seats that are designated for other students aren't utilized, then those would automatically go to Newfoundland and Labrador students as well, and there's also an increased emphasis on clerkships and residencies which is where some of that funding may also be utilized.

For the exact specifics, I think the Department of Health can answer that question.

**P. DINN:** Still continuing with Post-Secondary, it's actually an area near and dear to my heart. When I worked in the department, we were looking at the Atlantic Veterinary College trying to increase seats. We were trying to get from two to four then. I think it's three right now; I stand to be corrected. I know my daughter had to go far and away to finish her veterinary degree.

You're talking about increasing those seats. What's it going to be increased to? Is it six?

**K. HOWELL:** Six.

**P. DINN:** It is six seats.

**K. HOWELL:** So an increase of three.

**P. DINN:** What's that?

**K. HOWELL:** Six in total, an increase of three.

**P. DINN:** Yes, double of the three. That's right.

So where are we getting those seats in the college? Are they additional seats in the college or is there another province who are renegeing on three seats? How are we coming about the additional three seats?

**K. HOWELL:** I'm uncertain of the process, I just know that we're paying for them. I'll defer to the ADM of Post-Secondary to add any information to that.

**CHAIR:** ADM Noseworthy.

**T. NOSEWORTHY:** Those seats come out of an international allocation that the college has. Every year there are the seats that are purchased by the provinces plus an international. We have to give notice, though, so it will be a year before it comes in play but what they'll do is reduce the international seats and allow more for our province.

**P. DINN:** Okay. I appreciate that. That's where I was going with this because the vet college only has so many seats, but it is something I applaud. I know there's a huge shortage of veterinarians in this province and to get in there you need a note from God. I'm glad to see that.

I'm just moving along to – last year, there was funding provided to child care centres for 15 quality inclusivity, diversity, equity and accessibility coordinators to be hired throughout the province. I'm just wondering what's the status of that. Do we have 15 hired or are we lacking?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll ask the ADM responsible to answer that question.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Hello.

We have 14 hired. One service actually didn't go ahead with it in the end, but we're getting a lot of really great results.

So yes, we did hire them – well, the child care services, sorry, hired them.

**P. DINN:** That's a good news story; we never saw it in the media. Good on that.

Just keeping with that, back in August past, there was an announcement that a newly developed position, student services teaching and learning assistant, that will be introduced to K-to-12 schools this September. Has that happened and how many?

**CHAIR:** Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** Is that the – you said student services teaching and learning assistants?

**P. DINN:** Yeah, I'm reading right from your press release, actually.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, we were able to implement 20 in this school year throughout the province in various locations and continue commitment to work on that for the next school year and look at what schools might best utilize them.

**P. DINN:** Okay.

I'm also looking at – well, this was a request now that was made this past January; I don't know what your deadline is. It's for the request for proposals to look at the certification process for early childhood. Has the deadline passed on that? I'm not sure. It was announced a little while ago.

**K. HOWELL:** I'm not sure either. I'll ask Lisa Baker-Worthman

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Yes, we actually are just closing in on the RFP in the next

coming weeks. We just finished scoring, so we should have that started very, very soon.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Going back – I apologize for jumping around and looking at different documents here, but you got the expertise over there and the knowledge that can handle it.

**K. HOWELL:** They wrote the book.

**P. DINN:** Yeah.

I'm just going back to the Paradise school and when it was announced, the site selection, Minister, you were noted in the media at that time saying it will accommodate all high school students in Paradise. You also made a comment about it not affecting the neighbouring high schools in terms of programming. I just want to confirm. Is that still the case?

**K. HOWELL:** I think what I said in the media was that the feeder school would be the intermediate school, but we've had some further discussions on that and I don't think my statement may have been correct. We're still trying to figure out if I'm right or not, but a work in progress.

I do believe that I was incorrect and that there will be additional students at that school; but to that end, every effort will be made to support the surrounding schools and maintain the programming in the schools that may or may not be affected.

**P. DINN:** Yes, and I ask that because as you well know, and the Member behind me, there are very anxious parents in terms of trying to see this school come through. You know, it has sat on a shelf or whatever for 10 years for whatever reasons –

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, you're welcome.

**P. DINN:** – you know, and here we are.

So every announcement, regardless of how big or small it is, especially with regards to this school, creates a lot of anxiety or interest, and people want to know where, when and how. Every word we say is magnified, so I thank you for that.

I'm just going to jump to busing. Last budget, there was \$30 million allocated to revitalizing the busing fleet. I know the minister is behind me that may deal with that but I know you have a close relationship, education and infrastructure, with this. I'm just curious as to whether that money was spent and what was it spent on? How many buses or what did we do with that?

**K. HOWELL:** Well to your point, that's a question that's better suited for the Department of TI, but our commitment in that was that we were able to reduce the 1.6-kilometre-busing rule and ensure that students have arrived to and from their homes to schools all across the province, eliminating one of the barriers that was identified as to why students may choose not to go to school.

I'm very proud to say that that's no longer a reason in Newfoundland and Labrador. Students do have a ride to and from their homes to school.

**P. DINN:** You don't have to sell me on that, I rose in the House many times on that.

So when we're talking about eliminating the 1.6-kilometre rule, which I think is great, especially out in some of the areas where the pick-up zones and that are not really conducive to having kids hanging around by the side of the road.

With that, and I know I've spoken with you before on this and the other minister that would be responsible, when we look at these pick-up and drop-off zones and, yes, they're on a map and, yes, they show stops and maybe it is done, but is there any move to go out and actually look at the physical

drop-off, pick-up point; because, some of these drop-off, pick-up points – and it's not many; I mean I'm only talking to my district right now that was brought up – there are some where young kids, and I'm talking young kids, on the side of a shoulder or road that partially exists, and in the winter it's even more.

Can we, moving forward – and this would not cost much money; it's moving a pick-up zone, but it's a real safety issue – in terms of preparing for next year, consider what the physical attributes of that pick-up and drop-off zone are, because there are one or two I know up in my district that are terrible locations that parents have advocated on. I'd hate to see something tragic happen there for the simple movement of a bus stop, right?

So is there any consideration of that?

**K. HOWELL:** Likewise, there are bus stops in my district that I just don't understand why it can't be moved up or down the hill, but that's my naïve eye looking at it.

When somebody actually explains it to me, it makes a little more sense. You know, the turn radius or the line of sight from the hill or all of those things that are considered, but we do endeavour to speak to those on the ground because, again, no disillusion here that I know everything about every road in every part of the province.

My colleague in TI might have a better stake to that claim, but we're certainly working with individual schools and with the principals and the administration at the schools to determine what would be most appropriate. If there's a solution that we can reach, then we're certainly willing to do that, but again, a conversation between the Department of TI is largely required there. There may be reasons that I don't even know of, why they can't make that change, but in any instance where it's possible, then I certainly would support that.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time is expired. I ask the Member does he have any additional questions for this subhead.

**P. DINN:** I do.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

I'm listening to the minister talk and my wife always tells me how I hear this and hear that, so I'm hearing the minister behind me, TI and them have a chat, and it's not lost on me when you look at these locations, there are issues that you've got to look at, site lines and all that. I understand that – double lane, triple lane, whatever. I understand that.

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have to worry about triple lanes in my district.

**P. DINN:** But my point being, we really need to truly look at – and I know you think of the best location but sometimes the best location may not be the safest location in looking at that.

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, absolutely.

**P. DINN:** I know I discussed with the minister as well on one drop off and the possibility of picking up on a cul-de-sac, and we talked about measuring the distance of the cul-de-sac and all this, but my point is to ensure that, going forward, we do have – and I'm not saying it's not done now, but when you're listening to the parents and you look at the age of the kids that are being picked up, it's a determining factor as well just for the safety point of that.

Related to that, where we eliminated the 1.6-kilometre requirement, what we've opened up is, we have a lot of child care centres. Most child care centres opening up close to schools. I heard from many parents this year who – okay, it was eliminated and little Billy can go to school, but little Billy gets dropped off at ABC Daycare and, for

some reason, no we can't drop you off. You've got to be dropped off here.

My father would say common sense is not so common, but a little bit of common sense there, when you look at the drop-off zones and you can drop off multiple kids or pick them up at a child care centre, to me, makes more sense. We're talking about working parents. We're talking about mainly women who are trying to get to work and they're held up because they've got to wait at home for their child to be picked up, whereas they could be dropping them off to their child care centre and picked up there and vice versa.

So I do hope that – and I will say there have been adjustments made. There have been adjustments made, no doubt about it. There are some child care centres that have embraced that and I thank the department who have done it as well, but again, to go back to the issue of busing and that, it's those little things that are really big things for families that we need to be looking at.

There's no real question there, it's just saying it's something that should be considered and I hope that it will be done as we go forward.

**K. HOWELL:** It's always a consideration and, as you've said, we work with centres on a case-by-case basis to see if there's a solution to that issue.

I'm sure you can appreciate that there may be times in the middle of a school year where a student no longer attends this child care centre and now they're going somewhere else, or they've changed their mind and they don't want to go there, they're going to hockey. So it's fairly impossible to decipher where that child may end up at the end of the day so it would be a fool's errand to try and accommodate everybody's after school program or wherever they need to go or wherever they choose to go today, because we would not be able to tell you.

To your point, where there is a large degree of confidence that, yes, we know they're going to be leaving here and showing up here, we do make every effort to work with the child care centres to accommodate.

**P. DINN:** I totally agree with you. The discussions I've had with parents, and I've had town halls on this, is that when you apply at the start of the year, here's Billy Jean lives at this address, but Junior is going to be picked up at this address and dropped off at this address. That's it; I totally understand – oh, well, hang on now, next week he's going to hockey. No, I totally understand with that, but in terms of starting the school year, this is where any other adjustments becomes the responsibility of the parent. So there is a little tweaking that can happen there.

I do also want to talk about hard of hearing. We talked about that last year, and we talked about getting American Sign Language and that in some of these classrooms to accommodate children that are hard of hearing. Have we made any progress with that in terms of individuals?

I know we talked about last year, and I don't know the number but we talked about so many that would be available. Have we done anything to improve that?

**K. HOWELL:** So we have significant staffing to support the deaf and hard of hearing community. Right now, we have 25 deaf and hard of hearing itinerant teachers who are working throughout the province. There's one educational audiologist, an audio-verbal therapist. There are 18 teaching and learning assistants who are associated with the DHH supports and 14 student assistants who are using ASL.

We have 19 students of the 342 who would say ASL is their primary form of communication, so we're including as many as possible in weekly ASL classes and professional learning sessions to build the skillset that's required to meet the needs.

We also have three immersion classrooms, deaf and hard of hearing immersion classrooms, that allow students to follow this consistent educational path and students from outside the city do get an opportunity to interact with those classes where possible.

So continuing to build; by no means claim that we have reached the end goal. Certainly room for improvements, but we do believe that we've made some significant steps forward and we'll continue to do that.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Last year at this time, I was asking questions around the teacher recruitment and retention plan which was a year late at that point in time. The response last year was around – well, there was some more tweaking to do to it and you were going back to the think tank and the NLTA to look at that.

That was this time last year. I'm just wondering where are we? Is there now a teacher recruitment and retention plan?

**K. HOWELL:** There is a significant amount of money attached to recruitment and retention, as well as an ongoing conversation. I would say the plan is a living document because some of the things that we think may work didn't or some of the things that might have come up in side conversations would be more lucrative or more successful.

I think the efforts that we've made over the last number of years to fill some of these hard-to-fill positions have given us some very strong answers in terms of what may and may not work. We've been very successful in hiring staff in the hard-to-fill positions, particularly in Labrador. On the Northern Peninsula, I know I can speak for my district, these measures have had significant impact.

Again, not something that I think we can say we've got completely figured out or a definite answer as to what will and will not work, but something that we continue to work on with our partners at the NLTA.

**P. DINN:** Okay.

I thought you might say is coming in the Education Accord. I'm glad you didn't because it's been something that's been going on for a while.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**P. DINN:** So with the Education Accord, of course the announcement was made last year had spoke to the accord being released December past. It came out as an interim report, and there was supposed to then be the report last month. You know, we're not counting days here. I can appreciate there are delays.

With regard to the Education Accord, is there any money allotted in this year's budget that is there to address anything upcoming in the Education Accord?

**K. HOWELL:** We've been very keen to work on some of the things that are coming out of the Education Accord before we got the Education Accord and, from most accounts, the things that are identified are things that the wheels have already started to move on in our department.

In the event that there's something that we completely could not have foreseen or foreshadowed that they come up with, then there is a way to resource that, but looking at the broad strokes, and certainly in alignment with what was released in the interim report, we do believe that the efforts in the department capture that largely.

**P. DINN:** I'm almost to the end.

Inclusivity: I just want to go back to that. We all know the importance of child care and that. I know I get calls on inclusivity with

child care and parents saying well, you know, I can't go in the classroom because they don't have an inclusivity worker or someone to do that.

Just like our schools, child care has become more complex. What have we done or what are we doing or what results can you give me in terms of numbers and that that address inclusivity in child care?

**K. HOWELL:** I think we spoke to it earlier.

**P. DINN:** Yeah, you touched on it. Yeah.

**K. HOWELL:** We have the 15 itinerants that are the specialized workforce who are working on diversity and inclusion measures in our child care centres – or 14, sorry. We have additional funding that was allocated for centres that wished to participate in this. We actually made it that you couldn't opt out of being a centre that accepted inclusion support.

So we've placed an increased importance on that, recognizing that there are so many challenges in the system right now and we want to be able to capture many of these things upfront, because the earlier they're identified the earlier we can put supports in place. Then we have a benchmark or a head start on what may be needed when the child enters the K-to-12 system. We certainly made some improvements on the ability to assess upfront.

I'm sure the ADM responsible can add some additional information to that.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Absolutely.

We have increased our inclusion supports over this last year, but a big piece of what we're actually doing is related to the QIDEA Coordinators and building out that concept of supporting the ECEs and supporting to do a mentoring model to help with how they

can connect with the children and support them in the environment.

The other thing that we've done this year is universal design for learning. It was a significant lift in that we provided regulated services with resources around universal design. All of the classrooms have Time Timers, which are visual supports, as well as iPads for augmentative and alternative communications. So what that actually does is allows for language and communication, and so this is something we're looking around for this upcoming year around universal design as well.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time has expired.

Does the Member have additional questions for subhead 1?

**P. DINN:** I do.

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

**P. DINN:** I'm close to the end. Thank you.

Something that's been in the news as of late – well, it's not of late; we've talked about violence in our schools. It's becoming more and more prevalent. Can the minister give us an update on reported issues or incidents of violence in the schools and what additional measures have been put in place to address that? I ask that more along the lines of, you know, protocol for when a violent action happens in our schools.

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have the updated number of incidents in front of me, but that's something that we can work on.

In terms of what we're doing to make a change or to make an improvement, we do have a *Safe & Caring Schools Policy* that we recognize needs to be updated. We've made that a priority in the department, to get a handle on what needs to change there

and how we can put that in place to better support our teachers and administrators and staff, as well as protecting the safety of students and everybody involved.

That's a piece of work that's taken priority now. We're looking forward to having feedback and conversation with our School Safety Coalition. There are several members of that committee who have a lot of information that they can add on how we can make a process that's more streamlined and more appropriate for protocols or whatever that might be required in the event of a violent incident, but I think the biggest thing that we've been able to do over the last year, that we've seen bear fruit or be successful, was the implementation of our student service teaching and learning assistants.

The infusion of those individuals into our system has been a gamechanger in some schools; in particular, I think Corner Brook Intermediate. We had great conversation with them about what impact that had, what they feel was an appropriate measure to remediate anybody involved in an incident or support a teacher or staff who was involved. They have a very good plan that we're interested in hearing more about and building on as a measure to implement in all of our schools.

I think the biggest take-away from it is that there is a relationship that has to be built with students and allowing individuals to have these individuals in the school allows that to happen. It often allows them to be upfront and recognize when something is about to spiral out of control, instead of being reactive or punitive after something happens.

That is one of the biggest take-aways from the last 20 TLAs that we've been able to introduce. That's where our intention lies as we move forward, to build the plan that revolves around intervention before it becomes an issue. TLAs who know these students, who can identify when somebody

is having an off day or there might be the potential for a dysregulation, they can intervene before it becomes a major blow-up in a school or an issue that they can't get the handle on.

I can't talk about that enough because we've seen how much change has come in many of our schools through that.

**P. DINN:** Yeah.

**K. HOWELL:** I would add that this is not an issue that we expect teachers, schools or the Department of Education to be able to solve alone. When we look at violence in our schools, as I've said before, it's usually a reflection of where society has taken us. It's going to take more than just teachers in classrooms to fix this problem.

We're looking at the whole spectrum of supports for students. If a student is hungry, then they're more likely to be hangry which could lead to an incident that might have been avoided if we were able to provide a good lunch to that child, in some of the most simple instances we'll say. If a child didn't have a place to sleep last night, an additional support in the classroom may not be the solution that's going to fix that problem. It's going to take a very multi-pronged approach to fix this but the call is certainly out there across departments and across all of our stakeholders to work together to find a meaningful solution and just to be better.

**P. DINN:** Yes. I certainly understand that these incidences of violence are the result of many things outside, but I also have to recognize that it is our teachers and administrators who are the ones on our front line –

**K. HOWELL:** Bearing the brunt.

**P. DINN:** – to deal with it and bear the brunt. So having more resources available to them is a plus and having more facilities, like quiet rooms, is a plus.

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**P. DINN:** This leads me to an incident that happened last year, most are familiar, where a young girl lost the tops of her fingers. Not being there, you can only go by what you hear and that, but coming out of an instance like that, you do a checklist. You say, okay, what could we have done better or if we could do anything at all? I know there are people out there who the sight of blood – you know.

One thing that's come out of that has been the questions around first aid. I stand to be corrected; because of it being a workplace, there are so many of the employees, the employed teachers and that, have to have first aid, I think that's the standard. I stand to be corrected there but, when you're looking at dealing with a school of 900 students, maybe that's something we should be revisiting in terms of first aid for more than, you know, the employed crowd.

Have you taken any measures or have you considered first aid being expanded in schools?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes. In progress and, given my particular background, I understand probably better than many how important first response would be in some instances where you don't have time to wait. That is certainly something that the department is looking at and will be coming forward with a plan in the very near future.

**P. DINN:** I'm down to two quick questions.

The new Waterford hospital – I don't know if it's going to be called that or whatever – and the new hospital out in Corner Brook, do they have child care centres in them? It's just for curiosity, you know? In this new world and health care professionals and that, were they equipped with child care centres?

**K. HOWELL:** I stand to be corrected and, again, I'll ask you to defer to TI for a more

concrete answer but I do believe when the procurement was done for those, we weren't at the place we're at now in terms of the focus and the emphasis on our child care centres. I do know that there's a commitment that any new centres that will be built under this recent mandate would have that, but I don't know for sure about the Mental Health and Addiction Centre or the Corner Brook hospital.

**P. DINN:** Okay.

Last but not least here, we went through the 8,600 books that were tossed out, costing about \$200,000, and, you know, things happen. So what measures are in place to ensure that something like that doesn't happen again?

I mean, I know we're all human. I understand having worked with the department many years ago that you would review curriculum, how this happened is something else, but what measures are in place ensure that something like this doesn't happen again?

**K. HOWELL:** There is a very concrete process in place now to be followed in the determination of appropriateness of our curriculum and our resources.

As you mentioned, this was a very unfortunate incident that happened. As soon as we were aware that it was inappropriate, we made every effort to remove the resource from the school systems. I think it's important to recognize that while there wasn't a process in place always, there is now. This is going to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

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

**CLERK:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive Services.

**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:** We're now going to take a break until 2:50, I guess? Yeah, let's restart at 2:50.

### Recess

**CHAIR:** Order, please!

Okay, we're going to restart. Just a note, we have a new system downstairs in the – what?

**CLERK:** Broadcast.

**CHAIR:** In Broadcast. Therefore, it's touch screen. Sometimes the lights are a little bit delayed coming on, so that's why it's taking a bit of time after I continually say your names.

All right, so I'm going to ask the Clerk to call the next subheads.

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive, Corporate Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive, Corporate Services, carry?

The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

I have one question. I'm looking at 2.1.03 and looking at Purchased Services in which we see a \$3-million increase. Can I get some accounting for that amount?

**K. HOWELL:** 2.2.01 is additional funding to allow for a 2 per cent salary increase.

**P. DINN:** Just for clarification, that's under Purchased Services, correct?

**K. HOWELL:** No, sorry. Say your number again, sorry.

**P. DINN:** 2.1.03, Purchased Services. The \$3-million increase.

**K. HOWELL:** Right. That's additional funding related to the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure Fund.

**P. DINN:** Okay. Thank you. Good.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

Under 2.1.01, Administrative Support, what is the current rate of chronic absenteeism in the school system and how does that compare with previous years?

**K. HOWELL:** I'm sorry, I didn't hear the Member. Can you repeat the question?

**J. DINN:** Sure thing. I said what is the rate of chronic absenteeism in the school system and how does it compare with previous years?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have that information in front of me right now, but I will get it for the Member.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How is the department addressing the 90 recommendations from the Teacher Allocation Review Committee, and is the

department committing to implementing these recommendations?

**K. HOWELL:** So as I've said before when I get the chance to speak about it, I do believe that there has been a large amount of work done in the Department of Education over the past number of years with reports and recommendations. The Education Accord is intended to amalgamate all of those reports, look at the most reasonable approach to meeting the requests and recommendations and building the 10-year road map so that we can plan moving forward.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

With regard then to allocation if I look at here the teacher allocation model, "Grades 4-6 – 28," but I know from the school I referenced earlier are over 30. Again, that's not a class that also has almost half –

**K. HOWELL:** I'm sorry, MHA Dinn.

Can I get an earbud? I can't hear.

**J. DINN:** I asked, because the example I referenced earlier, if you look at the allocation, it's based on numbers. Grades 4 to 6 is 28 in a class and that's strictly on numbers. Yet, this teacher who is a teaching principal has 30 in this elementary class and almost half who are diagnosed with or have some learning disability and more to be assessed. So even with 28 I would say that's a challenge. I would suggest that they're probably more over the cap than anything else.

I'm just wondering when teachers can expect some relief from just the sheer numbers? This class has a TLA but still, when you look at the challenges in that class, it's significant. I'm just wondering at what point, I know we've talked about it, we can see these recommendations at least to address the class composition and class size?

**K. HOWELL:** Well, that's certainly the intention of the additional resources that will be put into the system this year. We committed after the teachers' think tank to having a better view of what the class composition is and what some of the specific needs in each classroom would be. That is definitely the intention of the additional resources that are infused this year, to address some of those issues.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Just as a personal story, I taught basic English at the high school level and the academic classes as well. In my basic English class, on a good day when all of them showed up, it was 15. That was the number in the class. In that class, I had a learning resource teacher. We worked hand in glove; we co-taught. We worked on lesson plans together and we had a student assistant, and I can tell you that at the end of an hour class after all the modeling, whatever measures I put in place, I was probably more exhausted at the end of that hour than I would be at the end of the two classes of academic English 3201, so it's a significant challenge.

I don't know what I would have done if I had 30 in the class, but I guess it's important to understand that with each student in the class, it means less time that that teacher has to spend with that student. That's why it's so important.

With 2.2.01, are there any plans to provide the board with the funding to implement the service delivery standards as outlined in the Ernst & Young report? They estimate it would cost nearly \$10 million.

**K. HOWELL:** We're pleased to see an increase to the funding for the libraries this year, continue to work with them on their operational plans and certainly do look forward to hearing what it is that they envision and how they can help move the mark on some of those issues, but definitely conversations that we will continue to have.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, and that's it.

**CHAIR:** Okay. I just want to confirm that the Member for Topsail - Paradise doesn't have any additional questions.

I'll ask the Clerk to recall the subheads.

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive, Corporate Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive, Corporate Services, 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:** I ask the Clerk to call the next subheads.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development, carry?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** I acknowledge Calvin downstairs; he got my light on well in advance, well done.

I have one question in here. I'm looking at 3.1.01.01, under Professional Services I see \$2.8 million last year. You only spent \$326,000 after but now it's back up to \$2.8 million, what's the explanation there?

**K. HOWELL:** Last year, we had expenditures that were related to the first phase of the Early Learning Gateway that were covered by the OCIO but moving

forward we will be requiring the funds to do that.

**P. DINN:** Okay. I'm good.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

Under 3.1.01, could you explain how the new parent resource kit program will operate? Will it be provided to all new parents or certain demographics? How will you know you're targeting those demographics effectively?

**K. HOWELL:** The parent resource kits will be funnelled through our Family Resource Centres; am I correct in saying that?

**OFFICIAL:** (Inaudible.)

**K. HOWELL:** Yeah, and they will be available to all parents. Anybody who participates in our Family Resource Centre will have access to those kits.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

What is the estimated cost of the new parent resource kit program?

**K. HOWELL:** It is \$80,000 less than we anticipated.

**J. DINN:** What did you anticipate?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll defer to the ADM for Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** We are just finalizing the RFP on that actually. We do know that the RFP that was successful is much less, but we can't give a firm until we finalize that contract.

**J. DINN:** Okay. Thank you.

I would assume you mean as much less than what you anticipated then?

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Correct.

**J. DINN:** Okay then, let me ask that question: What did you anticipate it to be?

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Approximately \$500,000.

**J. DINN:** Okay. Thank you.

How long is the wait-list on the Early Learning Gateway and how have these numbers changed since its launch last May?

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Minister of Education.

**K. HOWELL:** The wait-list would be dependent on the specific child care centre. Some may have a longer list than others, but we have seen a significant reduction in the number of required spaces, simply because now we have rostered the children.

So instead of a child being placed on 10 different wait-lists and giving the indication that we need 10 spaces or that we have 10 children requiring a space, we now know that there is one child requiring a space and they have indicated their preferences to what child care centre they would like to be part of.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

This has sort of been touched on. The question we had here is: Can you tell us the steps that have been taken to improve inclusion in early learning?

I know you've mentioned mentoring, model and so on and so forth, I'm just wondering what the challenges are that you're hearing from early childhood centres and the challenges they're facing with inclusion. I would assume it has to do with violence as well and, maybe, children who are still learning to self-regulate.

I'm just curious as to what kind of stats or what kind of reports you're getting from the centres and from early childhood educators on injuries and so on and so forth.

**K. HOWELL:** So I can speak anecdotally to what we hear; to have real documented numbers, we'll have to get back you on that.

The challenges that we're hearing in our early learning and child care spaces are very similar to what we're hearing in our early K-to-12 years; similar issues that are present in preschool or even before. The resourcing of ECEs is also related. You know, we have to have an additional support in instances where those children would be in the child care centres. We're continuing to work on how we best meet the needs of those kids because, as you've mentioned, some of it may be self-regulation issues, some of it may be developmental issues, some of it may be above and beyond any of that so this is not necessarily one size fits all. We'd have to evaluate the specific child's needs.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Is it possible to have an update on how the pre-kindergarten pilot is working? Are we still on track for a full implementation by 2026? What are the greatest challenges so far?

**K. HOWELL:** Since we've entered our pre-K agreements, we do have 162 spaces that are now operationalized.

As I mentioned earlier, some of the challenges that we faced primarily revolve around our role in remote centres. Finding the appropriate staff in some of those centres has been a challenge but we've made some progress on that as well.

Then, working with our partners at the YMCA, we have been able to offer programming for individuals who would like to participate in that type of learning and may not have otherwise had the chance, but

we are on target to achieve the goals that we've set out in the Canada-wide Early Learning Child Care Agreement.

**J. DINN:** If I may with regard to that, I'm assuming then that the pre-K is probably and for the most part going to be tied to the community. One of the things we talk about is tying it to schools.

I remember from my days as NLTA president visiting most of the schools on the Northern Peninsula, and Conche, if I remember correctly, there were 11 students there in a school that was probably built for almost 300, so plenty of space. A lot of schools are closed now but is the plan here in the remote areas then to attach them to the school or have them in the community? I would assume that if they're pre-K, if there's any busing, I guess that would be all part of that.

I understand the challenge of getting people at that point but I'm assuming that rather than rent space or lease space, you're going to use the space available in schools, correct?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes, absolutely. That's a correct assumption.

Where possible and where the sites are appropriate, we would wish to take advantage of sites that we already have access to.

**J. DINN:** Okay. That would make sense. Thank you.

How far along are you in implementing the Early Learning Action Plan?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll defer to the ADM for Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Yeah, we've completed our action plan for 2021 to 2023. We have all of the actions for 2023

completed, as well, from the Canada-wide agreement.

We also have our provincial action plan. We are on track and have completed all of the actions to date in that one as well.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

So how many early childhood education students are there currently across the system and how many do we need in order to meet the demand?

**K. HOWELL:** I can't tell you how many are actually in the system right now, but we can certainly reach out to our post-secondary institutions and get those numbers.

I do know that we have 7,222 certified ECEs in the province; 790 of those had entered the system in the last year and 1,950 of them are on the wage grid.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Where are we then with regard to – because talking to early childhood educators, they love the job. It's the work conditions that a lot of them end up leaving and going elsewhere, because the money is not enough. I'm just looking in terms of benefits, health and pension benefits and sick leave, things like that that would make their lives or the work-life balance significantly more balanced.

**K. HOWELL:** If I may, I'd like to return to the previous question because I do have the numbers of students who are enrolled. Right now, we have 538 students enrolled in either certificate, diploma or degree programming across three of our sites at the CNA, Academy Canada and Keyin.

It's always our goal to work towards more professionalized, more valued and increased supports for the workforce. To that end, we were very pleased to be able to support, in the last year, a number of interventions for supports for students to

make access to the programming a little easier, as well as medical benefits that were made available to the current licensed ECEs. That includes life insurances and extended health care which covers 80 per cent of the prescription drugs, vision care, out-of-country emergency services, as well as employee assistance programming.

We believe that the program that the ECEs identified was the best one that they had chosen amongst those who submitted applications or plans that they investigated. They settled on a plan that's very meaningful for them, and we'll continue to work with them to build on how we can better support and professionalize the industry and work with the licensees, the centres, to make sure that they are treated appropriately in their workplace.

**J. DINN:** I would assume then that the medical plan is not through the provincial plan, correct?

**K. HOWELL:** No.

**J. DINN:** With regard to a pension plan, I would assume that if there was anything in the way of a pension plan we're looking at a money purchase plan, such as an RRSP or something like that?

**K. HOWELL:** Many of the centres do have pension plans associated with them. That would be work within their purview to determine and, again, conversations that we are still having with the ECE workforce.

**J. DINN:** Okay. (Inaudible.)

**K. HOWELL:** I believe there were provisions in the last round of discussions that gave sick leave. I'll defer to the ADM.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Yes, we've just recently increased the MERX an additional 2 per cent, which gives the employers the ability to provide more leave. In addition, we

do have in our Operating Grant Program our two-week mandatory closure for the child care services for time off.

We also have on our Early Learning Gateway and a substitute list, which we have heard from the sector that they were looking for in terms of medical appointments and those types of things, that they would need someone to come in. That is active right now and has been positively received by the sector.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time has expired.

I just want to check back with the Member for Topsail- Paradise to see if you have any questions? No.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Just to understand with regard to the sick leave that's available to them, or leave, is it paid fully and how much? When we're looking at the sick leave that's available to them, how much would that be? Is it standardized? Is it like six sick leave days in the run of a year and maybe family leave? I'm just trying to get an idea of the actual numbers.

**K. HOWELL:** I do believe that different centres may have different requirements, but I'll ask the ADM to comment if she has anything to add.

**CHAIR:** ADM Baker-Worthman.

**L. BAKER-WORTHMAN:** Yes, the centres themselves actually can use the MERX for what they would need it. There isn't any standardization across the whole sector because they are private employers who would make those determinations.

**J. DINN:** I guess I would encourage that, maybe, we look for standardization and put the appropriate funding. Because it's kind of hard that if you have one area and, oh, we have sick leave and the other one, no, we're not getting any; two days here, three days

here, I think you're asking people to work in – anyone with children and they are breeding grounds for disease.

I know this from my own wife who taught at primary grades, because they want to be up in your face, so it's a special job, there's no two ways about it. I think looking towards standardized sick leave and other personal leave plus would, in some cases, attract more people and retain them than just their salary alone. Just a thought, a recommendation.

How many of the 6,000 affordable child care spaces are currently available and how does government plan on closing the gap in the next year?

**K. HOWELL:** Right now, we have close to 11,200 spaces that are operating at \$10 a day or less here in the province and continuing to work on what would have been our goals to reach 5,000 – I can't remember off the top of my head. But we have a total of 2,378 spaces created in this agreement for children under the age of six and 1,032 spaces for school-aged children and 1,574 of those spaces have been created in the '24-'25 year.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Although an agreement for the funding of \$10-a-day child care beyond 2026 was just signed, is there the potential that if a Conservative federal government comes into power that they could decide to cancel it as part of their cost-cutting measures?

**K. HOWELL:** Sorry, if I could return to the previous question.

**J. DINN:** Yes.

**K. HOWELL:** By the time I read down through emails, I find the answer. The target was 5,895 spaces. That was set out in our plan from '21-'25 and we have 3,419 spaces to be created by March '25. Right now we

have 3,381 spaces identified in the current planning process.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**K. HOWELL:** In terms of your second question, I think it's important to recognize that this is good public policy and I don't believe it's going to be something that's easily walked back – the \$10-a-day daycare. I do believe that both parties have committed to looking at a version of this. That's not to say that it will be exactly what we've agreed upon already, but we've taken steps to try and figure out what that looks like in the event that this doesn't happen.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

3.2.01, Students Support Services: The question here, I guess there is a few related to this – one of the questions that we had originally has sort of been touched on. What changes have been made for students with special needs since the Churchill case and what resources have been allocated? I think we touched on that already.

I'll go on to something else. This has to do with, again, Student Support Services and I'm looking at, in this case, violence in the schools. I note that certainly we have the Safe and Caring Schools Policy. I also noticed that in the Education Accord it talks about the reported levels of violence and bullying in schools, incidents requiring police intervention and so on and so forth.

I would say that this came out, at the time, a substitute teacher retired and a substitute teacher, Michael Walsh, had made it very clear in the media about the violence in the schools. Something that, as a high school teacher, I wouldn't have witnessed as much as I would as the primary teachers which is here most of the problems seem to be. Certainly something I encountered as NLTA president at the time.

Back at that time too, there was a school in the city where a teacher had had her jaw

broken when a child slammed her with a full water bottle. Only last week and this week, actually, I was speaking to a teacher at another city school where a primary student who has well over 150 accounts on PowerSchool basically threw a chair at a teacher. The teacher has ended up unable to speak, for part of it, severely injured. I don't think they're back to work right now.

I'm looking here in terms of what's being done. I'll ask it in this context. I don't know if you're aware of in New Brunswick it's the grievance between the New Brunswick Teachers Federation and the government and the Department of Finance and Education which talks about the inclusive education versus the right to safety. Because what I find when I was reading through this, so much of what is said in this can be applied to many of the cases that we have encountered here.

In this case, the teachers who spoke to me said the staff are done with not being supported by the district. They are fed up, burnt out, injured and they're at the wit's end. The amount being dedicated to a student is taking services away from others. Secure schools are a regular occurrence. Other students are mimicking the behaviour. They're at their wit's end.

If you look at this report, I will say this. It's interesting here and it's important to read this because I'm more or less at the stage as what measures are you taking to protect the teachers in the school system before you end up with a case like this? Very clearly it says here, "... I am satisfied the Employer could have taken additional steps to prevent and/or significantly reduce the frequency and intensity of the harm suffered by the Resource Teacher and the Principal."

The arbitrator ruled: "Under these circumstances, I conclude that the harm experienced significantly outweighs the societal value." That's of inclusive education. "Therefore, I believe that the harm suffered cannot be justified and

certainly cannot be outweighed by the value derived from the Student's learning experience....

"Children are entitled to an education, and school employees deserve to work in a safe environment."

In this, the arbitrator decided against the employer because – I'm looking here – everything is about keeping the student in the school system itself and not providing the necessary supports, and also here, the feeling that teachers were being blamed for the situation.

I don't know if you are aware of this, but I'm looking, there are lessons here. What are the lessons here? Where are we going with regard to – since the end of 2023, that's three examples that I'm personally aware of, and I'm sure there are more. This teacher here was severely hurt. I don't know if she's going to be able to go back to her job. I've brought up similar cases when I was NLTA president. To me, it seems here that we've got inclusive education, perfect, but as in New Brunswick Teachers Federation, the problem is not with inclusive education, but how it's implemented and resourced.

So I need to know what are you going to do to make sure that teachers are not injured in this way. Because it's been ongoing long enough. When there were several boards, when there was a large board and now when it's a part of the Department of Education where we're supposed to find efficiencies. I would like to know what is the commitment to make sure that the teachers who you are asking to do this, to make the inclusive education system work, what are you going to do to protect them?

**K. HOWELL:** I think you bring up a very interesting and very important point. It's the balance of students deserving an education balanced with the safety of the employees. I don't think we can say inclusion at all costs because it's certainly not the intention to put any teachers in harms way.

That said, there's an ability to recognize the challenges, but you can't predict how a lot of this will unfold. So that's why we're working closely with our partners at the NLTA, and all stakeholders in this process, to figure out what the most reasonable approach would be. We've got input from a lot of the groups that represent folks who may find themselves having children in the school system that require the additional supports. We have input from teachers. We have input from the Restorative Justice Principals.

We have input from the RNC. We have input from teachers and students that are all building into how we look at a plan moving forward. I can't tell you right now that we have all of the answers, but we're certainly committed to working towards safer environments for our students and our teachers. I think, by the addition of additional resources, will allow us to do a better job at supporting the inclusion principals, and 400 teachers will make a difference on some of these issues.

As I said before, I don't expect that it will be a cure-all pill, but it is going to take a concentrated effort on all parties to make sure that we don't find ourselves in a more serious incident. To be clear, there's never a time when violence in our schools is acceptable, but there are sometimes we definitely could have done better and there are sometimes where you can have all the supports in place, you could have all of the right protocols, but it still might not lead to the most appropriate outcome.

It's those instances that cause us extra grief or extra concern and take the extra time to focus on what a right-sized solution would be for that particular case. It's not a case of a blanket approach is going solve everybody's issues. These are very specific cases with some very creative solutions required in order to support both students and teachers.

That's kind of the place we find ourselves now is having to take a one-off approach in many instances and that was taxing when we don't have the right the supports. So we believe that an additional 400 resources will allow us to do better in that avenue.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time has expired.

Does the Member have additional questions?

**J. DINN:** I sure do.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** It took a human right's case to get the supports for Carter Churchill that he needed, despite many areas of advocacy for those needs. That's what it took. I sat through the testimony where basically the department said well, we didn't know about it. The district was saying well, we were under the clear assumption don't ask because you're not getting it. We don't have the resources so don't ask. That was very clearly laid out.

What troubles me here is how eerily similar this case is to just the case here. I'm just wondering is it going to take this kind of a case to get the action required because, in this case, the teachers were awarded damages, significant.

So, I guess, it's great I'm hearing all this and how the 400 teachers and so on and so forth. Any teacher goes in there, you don't know, something easily could happen out of the ordinary; but when you have a consistent behaviour, well documented, and teachers get to the point where they feel they have been abandoned by the district – as the teacher said, basically the staff are done with it. They do not feel supported.

I think maybe it is more than just the teachers, it's about how the district and supports actually have that conversation in schools, or if they even take what the

principals and the teachers are saying seriously. Or if, indeed, the objective is to make inclusive education work regardless because in the end it's gong to be – and this is the amazing thing. Not one teacher have I heard of blames the child – not one. But they do blame the system because in many cases they want to help that child, but they should not have to go to school and say well, you need to wear body armor, or as in this case, don't flinch, in the case of this arbitration here.

I want to take this time to stress just how important this is. You need to look at again, class size, and sometimes it's a 20-1 ratio, it's down to that level. I hate to say, maybe there is some sort of alternate approach, but I never saw this level of violence at the high school, as a high school teacher – never did. Most of the violence was students that used to go up to the parking lot and take it on. I've never had to worry about a student assaulting me, ever – ever.

But we're talking about early childhood educators as well. It's the same thing. It's why I cannot stress the need that you've got to get a handle on this or – because I did send a copy of this to the teacher – you're going to have a case like this here, maybe multiple, and I'll be the one there saying I told you so.

I would like to see a constructive plan so by the time we ask this next year, we can see that we have all these violent issues dealt with.

**CHAIR:** Minister Howell.

**K. HOWELL:** I wish – I hope that by this time next year, we can all these violence issues addressed but I think that would be naive of me to say because it is a much bigger issue than the school system is going to be able to fix in and of itself.

I think there are a number of things that we've been able to do that will help the situation, not the least of which is bringing

the school district into government. I think since we've integrated that part of the school system, we have a better line of communication. We do get the day-to-day updates on what's happening. I know that the ADM responsible is in constant communication with staff, directors of schools and staff on the ground to hear the concerns and the issues.

As I said before, I don't want any teacher to ever think that they cannot bring forward their issue. I've never been in those situations, so I do not pretend to understand what happens in the day-to-day operations of a classroom, but I do want to know what's happening and if there are ways that we can improve that.

So I certainly do feel that we've made some improvements in the lines of communications over the past little while, but do take your point that there may be ways that we can improve that. We have heard these stories. When the Premier and I had the opportunity to sit with the teachers on the Teachers Think Tank, you could see how passionate they were about their jobs and how devastated they were when they felt like they weren't able to do them to the best of their abilities because of whatever the reason.

That was certainly made clear to us and looking at solutions, of course, we want to work with the NLTA because, again, we can propose things but making sure that it works on the front lines is certainly important. In some instances, I don't even know how you can reach a possible solution in some of these cases, they seem to be so difficult. But our teachers are figuring it out and they have the best information, and that's certainly what we want to hear is the solutions that are being proposed by the folks who deal with this day in, day out.

If there's anything that you can take away from this last spiel is that, please, teachers should not feel like their voices are stifled or that they don't have an avenue to bring

forward concerns. I don't ever want that to be the impression that comes from the department.

**J. DINN:** Minister, I believe you do know, and I think this is a positive thing because of your own profession as a nurse. Because I would assume, again, it's a profession where you're dealing with the care of those who are vulnerable, sick and who may be violent. I like to believe and I do believe that I'm speaking to someone who may not be in the teaching profession but also very much understands the threat of that violence, often not intentional –

**K. HOWELL:** Right.

**J. DINN:** – but which nevertheless you're going to feel.

I need to stress that here and how important it is to solve this problem. It's not a matter of excluding children but making sure the right to that inclusive education doesn't come at the expense of that personal safety. That gives me some hope.

**K. HOWELL:** Absolutely agree.

**J. DINN:** I threw you a bone. I want you to make note of it.

Anyway, EALs – where's the budget line for English as an Additional Language in here? Where can I find that?

**K. HOWELL:** That would be in the Teaching Services portion.

**J. DINN:** How much of that would be dedicated to English EAL?

**K. HOWELL:** I will defer to the ADM of Corporate Services.

**R. HAYES:** Right now, for the '25-'26 school year, there are 86 units dedicated for English as an Additional Language.

**J. DINN:** And there's a dedicated budget then for software and things like this for travel as well?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** How much would that be?

**K. HOWELL:** It would be built into the overall services.

**J. DINN:** I ask this because at the beginning of the year, a number of itinerants with the department and schools have been told quite clearly that don't expect to do your job the way you've done it in the past. When it came to the software, that wasn't going to be available. I know after several letters, by the time October came around, that we had some.

I am trying to get an idea to make sure that English as an Additional Language, especially where we've got an increasing newcomer population and that's going to be given a priority. I understand after that, after we wrote letters, there were a number of people that were hired. I'm just trying to understand and make sure that this is going to be properly resourced.

**K. HOWELL:** It's my understanding that the services that are required, the technology assistive devices and the staffing would all be captured in the general allotments.

**J. DINN:** Excellent, thank you.

That's it, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development.

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.2.01 inclusive, Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.2.01 carried.

**CHAIR:** I just want to just let everyone know that 4:15 p.m. will mark the three-hour mark.

So I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

**CLERK:** 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive, Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education.

**CHAIR:** Shall 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive, Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education, carry?

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Before I forget it, can I get a copy of your binder afterwards?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**P. DINN:** I appreciate that, thank you.

I think it was asked earlier but two things I'd like to request is the data on absenteeism, if we can get the last three years. One year means nothing.

**K. HOWELL:** Right, you've got nothing to compare it to.

**P. DINN:** You have to have a tread. So the last three years on that would be nice to have.

I guess in relation to what my colleague spoke about when talking about violence and teachers, what they put up with it, can we also get the recent three years on teacher sick leave/absenteeism? Because I

think that's an indicator as well to how they're dealing with it. So that's three things I'd like to have and I thank you for that.

One thing that was announced last year in the Estimates, we talked about putting air purifiers and the like in the schools. At that time, there was no data or no indication on how many are equipped, nor was there information on how many have had their air tested in these schools.

Can you provide that information now?

**K. HOWELL:** I was adamant when I left here last year that I wanted this answered. Apparently, I was informed that my line of thinking was incorrect, because you have to know what you're looking for. It was explained to me very simply that you can't just go in and stick something up in the air and say, is the air good? You have to know what it is that you're testing for.

In any case where there is something to test for, then can provide that information. But to simply go in and say is the air good, that's not a measure that you could be successful in capturing. If there is specific information or cases that you would like to hear, then let us know.

**P. DINN:** Well, I guess my question goes along with the air purification and installation. It's put in there for a reason. It's purifying the air and purifying the air of something. By the instance of putting it in there, you're putting it in there to take something out of the air, so that's why I asked the question.

The air purifiers going in these schools, are they doing the job they were put in to do?

**K. HOWELL:** The answer would be if they're tested for something specific to determine the presence or absence of, then you would know, but I guess I'll defer to the ADM of School Operations to provide a little more information to that.

**CHAIR:** ADM Hall.

**T. HALL:** I won't step too far over the bounds of our colleagues in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure where our facility staff reside, but what I can say is when we put these air purifiers in and made this large investment, at that time it was for a specific purpose of COVID, if you recall, and we were trying to make sure that we had these filters in there as we were starting to come back into the school environment after COVID.

It wasn't necessarily that we thought that there was big problems in our air quality and we had to use these; it was for a specific purpose but then we left them, obviously, because any little thing helps. If it's cleaning dust particles out, anything that will help because flus are flus, sniffles, it will help with all of that.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

I've heard inquiries, complaints, call them what they are, of schools that are dusty, dirty, mould, all this. Am I out of line or wouldn't air purifiers and the like help in that instance? How many schools would that be helping in?

**K. HOWELL:** Certainly if there are instances of anybody identifying mould in their schools, then they need to let us know and every effort is made to remedy that situation. Right now, I'm not aware of any on our radar that we've been informed that have that particular problem.

To your point about some of the general upkeep and cleanliness in schools, that's something that we've been focused on as well. Even my colleague in the Department of TI and I have had that conversation about just general maintenance of our buildings. We want to see them regularly painted and updated and so there are efforts been made on that front as well.

In some cases, we have some new schools that were just not taken care of and they're not in as good of shape as some of the buildings that have existed long before. So we're making efforts to have pride of place in those buildings and ensure that they are appropriately maintained.

**P. DINN:** In relation to one of the answers, talking about the air purifiers going in as a result of COVID, can I assume that every school has air purifiers?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll ask the ADM of Education Operations to answer.

**CHAIR:** ADM Heart.

**T. HALL:** Yes, at the time, we made sure every classroom and every common learning area, such as a library, had an air purifier. We made a significant investment at the time for every school and every learning environment.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** I apologize to ADM Hall; I called you ADM Heart.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, do you have additional questions?

**J. DINN:** On the first section?

**CHAIR:** We're in 4.1.

**J. DINN:** Yes, I still have more to do there, but just to follow up on the air purifier and the ventilation. I'm assuming you go get a blood test, tick, tick, tick, here are the ones you're testing for. Wouldn't it be appropriate then to be testing for things like whether it's mould – I don't know if it can be done that way – or CO<sub>2</sub> levels, radon, so on and so forth? A standard battery of things that you're looking for, even spot testing, because as opposed to well, you need to tell us what we're looking for, there might be specific ones but even as preventative measure.

I taught at Holy Heart, big windows for the most part, you could open them up and now they've gotten windows that aren't quite as open there, so you don't have that same ability. A lot of the newer schools have HVAC systems, so obviously they're filtering out something. As my colleague from Paradise would say, you know it seems to me a rather prudent or proactive way, like here are the things that we know, too much CO<sub>2</sub>, people get drowsy, can affect their health whatever but at least there are certain things that we test for.

Would it not be appropriate then to have a program like that?

**K. HOWELL:** I guess in some of these situations, these tests can be – I don't want to say false tests or negative or false negatives, but even something as simple as a sandwich that's left on the counter too long could give a reading that might cause mass panic or alarm. It's a situation where we don't want to add additional stress or pressure to folks in the school system for something as simple as a sandwich sitting on a desk.

In cases where we do believe that there are reasons to test, then we will absolutely test, but we haven't undertaken mass random testing of air quality in our schools. I'll defer to the ADM of Education Operations if there is any additional information.

**CHAIR:** ADM Hall.

**T. HALL:** No, Minister, at this time, I think you have it captured. To get into the real details, we would have to work with our colleagues in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure with the facilities division, who are well more versed than me at least, I'll admit. But we work close, and they advise us.

So if there is something specific, then we know we go out and test for a specific item if there is a concern.

**J. DINN:** I would like to know, will the district or the department be putting capacity orders or notices on classroom doors? I was at the university recently and they had here's the total capacity of this room, as a fire capacity.

I'm just wondering when you consider that the number of classrooms, I would say, there are quite a few that are probably over the safety capacity, but I'm just wondering if there's any intent, I think, as a safety measure, an OHS measure, to put notice of what is the maximum capacity in the classroom.

**K. HOWELL:** I think our schools do have their max capacities, but the requirements in the gym versus the classroom would be different. So I'm not aware of identifiable caps on each classroom, but I do know that the building itself and fire code regulations would be upheld and maintained.

**J. DINN:** I would argue that that's not always the case. I know in my own case that's basically how I had to resort to getting the class size reduced, because it was over the fire capacity and safety. What I'm saying, and it would depend too – I agree – whether you have fixed seating or moveable desks, but that can be assessed, at least in here is the maximum capacity in this class of people 25, 30, whatever it is, which is what they did in the classrooms in Memorial there. So it can be done.

I think it would be prudent to do it here so we can at least let people know that if they're actually teaching in a classroom that it's not only within the student-teacher allocation, but also one that is actually within the fire code as well. So that's something I would like to see.

**K. HOWELL:** Certainly, we'll take that away, and I do know that administrators make every effort to – classes that they know are bigger classes, they assign a bigger space where it's possible, and every effort is made to provide adequate learning

space but certainly we'll take your point away.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

How are efforts coming along to roll out the anti-racist curriculum for secondary school students?

**K. HOWELL:** Can you repeat that question?

**J. DINN:** Yes.

How are efforts coming along to roll out the anti-racist curriculum for secondary school students?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll turn to the ADM for our K-to-12 branch.

**CHAIR:** ADM Linehan.

**S. LINEHAN:** We have developed in the Department of Education a multi-cultural framework and within that framework, with all our local partners, is addressing anti-racism. So with the work of that committee and with our consultant for anti-racism, all our new curricula and curriculum renewal is through the lens of anti-racism through our consultant.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

And are there any new related to tolerance and acceptance education, especially given the rise of the anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate?

**K. HOWELL:** We're always in talks of how we can improve the environments in our schools. As I referenced earlier, the Safe and Caring Schools Policy will be a reflection of that. It's not just about physical buildings and space; it's also about how students are behaving and the expectations within that space. So we'll certainly be including that as part of our review.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Could we have an update on the activities and work done by the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee?

**K. HOWELL:** The Indigenous Education Advisory Committee continues to be an important resource in the department. I know that just about every week I get a report of somewhere, some meeting or some adventure that they've been undertaking. They continue to inform a lot of the decision-making process in the department as it relates to Indigenous education, making upgrades to our curriculum and as we move forward on the path of Truth and Reconciliation.

I'll turn to the ADM of the K-to-12 branch if he has any additional information.

**CHAIR:** ADM Linehan.

**S. LINEHAN:** As the minister said, the IEAC meets regularly. Our last meeting, I personally attended as well and that was in February. So they continue to be a large part of our curriculum renewal going forward.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Related to them, I'm just curious as to how the textbooks for the French Immersion get approved? Because they were introduced one year and barely a year later, it was an oops moment. There was information there that's not right. It's not like they were five years old or 10 years old but purchased at a significant cost and then teachers are told to destroy four of them.

So obviously, when they went out, this information was known. But who's responsible for approving it and where was the vetting process?

**K. HOWELL:** I think we do have a very succinct process now that can be followed and a policy that's in place to ensure that any resource is appropriate. In terms of the investment, I think once we recognized

there was a problem, it was immediate that we remove these books. We acted immediately to remove these resources from our schools. I don't think there's a price tag attached with ensuring we're not continuing to perpetuate stereotypes or to do harm to our Indigenous communities.

That said, I do recognize that the path to Truth and Reconciliation is not likely going to be a straight line. There are going to be times when we may misstep. But it's never the intention to have a mistake of this nature.

When you know better, you do better, is how I would like to think we're operating. Any time that we know something is inappropriate or inaccurate, then the same measure will apply. If it is wrong and if it is harming to Indigenous populations, we will remove it from our curriculum or our circulation.

**J. DINN:** I agree.

My question is, though, how did they get out there in the first place and who vetted them? It would indicate to me that no one looked through them at first. In a year and a half or less, you find the mistake. So I'm questioning, did anyone read them beforehand? Did they go through a process? Who signed off on it? Who made that decision, yes, these are appropriate?

So I agree with everything you said, I'm not denying it. But I'm trying to figure out how did they get out there in the first place.

**K. HOWELL:** I guess the important thing is that doesn't happen again. It does nobody any favours to try and place blame on who was responsible for it. The important thing is that we recognized it was inappropriate and removed it immediately.

Recognizing that there was a fault in the process, that the process was faulty and we have shored up the process and the policy now to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

**CHAIR:** The Member's time is expired.

Does the Member for St. John's Centre have additional questions?

**J. DINN:** Sure.

If the process was faulty, what exactly was faulty about the process and what has changed exactly to make sure this doesn't happen again?

**K. HOWELL:** The fault was that somehow resources containing information that was inaccurate made its way into our French school system and that cannot happen again.

**J. DINN:** So any new curriculum that would have come in prior to this or textbooks and the decision to spend them, what would have happened? What would have been the process? I guess I'm trying to understand because you learn from this mistake, but I want to be confident in fact that the process has changed.

What was the process? What's the new process?

**K. HOWELL:** We do have a process a place. I can't speak to what happened before this process. I'll turn to the ADM to add any additional information.

From my perspective, we do now have a check-by-check, step-by-step process in place to ensure that resources are vetted appropriately and a large part of that will be making sure that our Indigenous Education Advisory Committee has a role to play. I know that we've certainly stepped up their involvement in this process over the last little while and we'll continue to do so because, as I said, we don't want this to happen again.

**J. DINN:** Could I have then the step-by-step process, is what I'm asking?

**CHAIR:** ADM Linehan.

**S. LINEHAN:** Step-by-step process, unfortunately, on the vetting through the French side of the resources, a group of expert teachers come in and review the resources and the next step would be to pass along to our Indigenous consultant and our multicultural consultants but because they were in a second language, that step got dropped.

However, when the resources were vetted on the English side, they went to these consultants who brought it to the IEAC and immediately addressed it and we responded accordingly.

**J. DINN:** Excellent, thank you.

That gives me some clarity, I appreciate that.

That's it for that section.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

**CLERK:** 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive, Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education.

**CHAIR:** Shall 4.1.01 to 4.2.01 inclusive, Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education 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 ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

**CLERK:** 5.1.01 to 5.2.01 inclusive, Education Operations.

**CHAIR:** 5.1.01 to 5.2.01 inclusive, Education Operations.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

I'm looking at 5.1.01, Teaching Services, and the unbudgeted increase there that was there in '24-'25 in Salaries. Can we get an explanation of that? It looks like about an \$8-million increase.

**K. HOWELL:** Those were funding pressures due to additional units deployed for increased enrolment and increased substitute time.

**P. DINN:** Thank you for that.

And moving along to 5.1.03, I'm looking at School Services, and we're looking at an increase of \$3.7 million for Property, Furnishings and Equipment. Can I get an explanation on that?

**K. HOWELL:** The vast majority of that refers to IT purchases for schools. During the school year, the biggest pressure was related to software licences and subscriptions as opposed to hardware purchases, but the budget was transferred for these supplies.

**P. DINN:** Okay, thank you for that.

I know I touched on this earlier, 5.1.04, School Food Programs, and the amount that's gone into that to increase that. We talked about kitchen facilities, cafeterias. But I do have a question on who will provide those services. Are we looking at a private operator? Who provides the school food program?

**K. HOWELL:** In some instances, it may be a private operator. In other instances, it may be the school lunch program, the breakfast program or some of the organizations that are already established in school food. But in other instances, there may be private

businesses that would be required to meet the requirements in some of the areas that these other organizations don't operate in.

**P. DINN:** So with regard to the private, I assume there's an RFP goes out, they apply for that and in different regions of the province, there's different suppliers. Am I correct in assuming that?

**K. HOWELL:** Yes.

**P. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

That would be it for me.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Yes, under 5.1.01, Teaching Services, a question around shortages. I'm just looking at something that would have been unheard of when I was teaching here in town and even back 10 – is the predominance of a lot more retired teachers. In some cases, teachers who are older than I am, in their 70s, who have gone back because they can't get substitute teachers. Or a teacher who retired last year is now pretty well subbing full-time in the Metro area because the position could not be filled.

I know there's money been put aside, extra money for the hiring and the additional resources. So I'm trying to figure out where are they coming from. This goes back to my original question about the vacancies as well because it indicates to me a significant problem here in finding qualified teachers who aren't retired.

I am not trying to say we should cut out the retired teachers. I think the system would collapse at this point in time. But I don't know how we're going to address that, if we're going to have to find out why people aren't going into the profession, why they're not staying there but it's a significant problem.

**K. HOWELL:** I would agree.

We do have heavy reliance on our retired teachers and looking at some of the numbers of teachers that are retiring, I think we're retiring 250 a year where we're infusing 130 into the system of new teachers. Ongoing conversations with the NLTA, with the Faculty of Education on how we can build that resource pool and a lot of the recruitment, retention efforts, some of the recruitment for the additional funding that's been provided, the new collective agreement which sees us contribute almost half a billion dollars right now to salaries and paying for teachers which goes to three-quarters of a billion dollars by the time this collective agreement reaches fruition, that does help.

We also want to work with the Faculty of Education on developing – we're talking about a rural cohort, so even taking a class outside of the city where that programming has traditionally been offered may give other students an opportunity to enrol in the program so we can increase the number of teachers that are venturing into the system.

I think it's a collective effort on all parts to focus on the positive things that are part of this profession, and I know that the NLTA has done some great job with some of the communications, some of the commercials that they've put out talking about the impact that teachers have in people's lives and how students speak so highly of their teachers and promoting this profession in terms of the value that it adds to our society is paramount and we have to continue to work on that with our stakeholders and with the NLTA.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

What would it cost to expand the school lunch program to the high school? Has there been a cost analysis done on that? How much would you anticipate?

**K. HOWELL:** I don't have that number right now, but we can certainly look into that.

**J. DINN:** I'm trying to understand why the department wouldn't have extended that to the high school level. If you can't afford food at Grade 9, you can't afford it in high school either. I'm just thinking that it would be beneficial there as well.

**K. HOWELL:** We would certainly take that point. I guess some of the consideration to the ability of students to leave school or not leave school for their lunch hour has played into that and recognizing that a lot of the senior students would choose to leave, and whereas the younger ones can't, may be a part of the equation. But it's certainly the intention to have it available over the course of time, we just had to start somewhere, and this is where we started.

**J. DINN:** And high school students will leave, I agree, if they've got a car and if they've got money to eat out at a restaurant, but for the most part, there are a lot there who don't. Anyway, I understand where you're coming from, but I think it would be worthwhile to move that into the high school as well.

**K. HOWELL:** Point taken.

**J. DINN:** That's it.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

**CLERK:** 5.1.01 to 5.2.01 inclusive, Education Operations.

**CHAIR:** Shall 5.1.01 to 5.2.01 inclusive, Education Operations, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 5.1.01 through 5.2.01 carried.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

**CLERK:** 6.1.01 to 6.4.02 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education.

**CHAIR:** 6.1.01 to 6.4.02 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Let's see if we can get this done in 11 minutes. Take it home.

**J. DINN:** (Inaudible.)

**K. HOWELL:** Listen now, no brotherly scraps over here.

**P. DINN:** I'm just looking at 6.2.02.10, Grants and Subsidies, we see a huge drop. A cut from \$15 million to \$2.4 million. Can we explain that?

**K. HOWELL:** That's the reallocation of the campus renewal fee is offset by funding from – the conclusion of the Canada Games infrastructure funding, sorry.

**P. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Just moving along here. I'm looking at 6.3.02, Physical Plant and Equipment. I'm just wondering, what deferred maintenance does the college have, or do they have deferred maintenance?

**K. HOWELL:** Some of the CNA campuses are encompassed in the Department of TI, so I'd have to defer you to our colleagues in TI.

**P. DINN:** Thank you.

Just moving along, I'm looking at 6.4.01, Grants and Subsidies, and I see a \$5-million drop previously for '24-'25 and now it's back up to \$14.7 million. Can you explain that?

**K. HOWELL:** So there were savings as a result of the federal budget changes not materializing and there was a lower than expected uptake on our Tuition Relief Grant Program but this year the additional funding is based on an anticipated federal budget changes and looking for the additional support.

**P. DINN:** Okay, thank you for that.

I'm looking at 6.4.02.08, Loans, Advances and Investments. We see a forecast growth there from the revised of about \$6.4 million. What are we basing that on?

**K. HOWELL:** I'll defer to the ADM for Corporate Services.

**CHAIR:** ADM Hayes.

**R. HAYES:** It will be similar to the grants up in the current section. The budget was put back up based on what we anticipate the federal budget changes to be. They did not materialize in '24-'25.

**P. DINN:** Okay, perfect.

I'm good.

**CHAIR:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

On 6.1.01, will there be a new adult literacy action plan released soon?

**K. HOWELL:** I turn to the ADM of Post-Secondary.

**CHAIR:** ADM Noseworthy:

**T. NOSEWORTHY:** What we've actually done is incorporated considerations for the

adult literacy component into the Education Accord instead of doing it in a separate plan. So you'll see components in there related to that.

**J. DINN:** Thank you very much.

On 6.4.01 and 6.4.02, how many students are currently receiving financial assistance and how many of them are currently repaying student loans?

**K. HOWELL:** I will put out there that anybody who has a Newfoundland and Labrador student loan who completes their program on time, in the time allotment, is eligible for loan forgiveness. So I don't think that that's talked about enough. So, please, do go tell all your constituents about that piece of work.

In terms of these specific numbers, I'll turn to the ADM responsible for post-secondary.

**CHAIR:** ADM Noseworthy.

**T. NOSEWORTHY:** So the number of students who are receiving student financial assistance that are in study for '24-'25 is 8,423.

**J. DINN:** And how many are currently repaying loans?

**T. NOSEWORTHY:** So it would be that number, for the number that are in currently in study and then the number that are into repayment. I may not have that number here.

**J. DINN:** And is there any indication of the total amount that is owed or outstanding student debt?

**T. NOSEWORTHY:** So the total amount owed?

**J. DINN:** Yes.

**T. NOSEWORTHY:** The value of loans for students who are still currently studying is

\$23.3 million. That's for the NL portion. For the federal portion, it's \$148 million. Students who are just in repayment, who are not in study right now, the NL component is \$17.3 million, and the federal component is \$213.9 million.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

That's it.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

**CLERK:** 6.1.01 to 6.4.02 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education.

**CHAIR:** Shall 6.1.01 to 6.4.02 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 6.1.01 through 6.4.02 carried.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

**CLERK:** 7.1.01, Education Transformation.

**CHAIR:** 7.1.01, Education Transformation.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**P. DINN:** I have no questions.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Topsail - Paradise has no questions.

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre –

**J. DINN:** No.

**CHAIR:** – has no questions.

I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

**CLERK:** 7.1.01, Education Transformation.

**CHAIR:** Shall 7.1.01, Education Transformation, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 7.1.01 carried.

**CLERK:** Total.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total 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 Estimates of the Department of Education have been reported.

I'd like to thank the minister, the departmental staff and the Committee for

attending and the next meeting is Monday, April 14 at 6 p.m. to consider the Estimates of Health and Community Services.

I'll ask for a mover for adjournment.

**P. DINN:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** The Member for Topsail - Paradise.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The meeting is adjourned.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.