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Social Services**

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Department of Education

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Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Education

Chair: Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA

Vice-Chair: Joedy Wall, MHA

Members: James Dinn, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Paul Pike, MHA
Scott Reid, MHA
Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Kimberley Hammond

Appearing:

Department of Education

Hon. Tom Osborne, MHA, Minister

Eldred Barnes, Associate Deputy Minister

Brad Clarke, Director, Programs and Services

Candice Ennis-Williams, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education

Rob Feaver, Director, Student Financial Services

Mary Goss-Prowse, Director, Early Learning and Child Development

Robyn Hayes, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services

Greg O'Leary, Deputy Minister

Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller

Also Present

Barry Petten, MHA

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

Hon. Derrick Bragg, MHA, Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

Perry Trimper, MHA

Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Caucus

Darrell Hynes, Director of Legislation and Policy Affairs, Official Opposition Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Barry Petten, MHA for Conception Bay South, substitutes for Joedy Wall, MHA for Cape St. Francis.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Gerry Byrne, MHA for Corner Brook, substitutes for Paul Pike, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Derrick Bragg, MHA for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, substitutes for Lucy Stoyles, MHA for Mount Pearl North.

The Committee met at 6:04 p.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Gambin-Walsh): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

The previous minutes are here; I'd ask if there are any revisions or amendments and ask for a mover.

MHA Petten has moved the minutes.

The minutes for June 2 have been moved by MHA Petten.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: What we'll do – it's 6:04 – is we'll probably go until around 6:30, take or give, we'll see where we are with the Estimates at the time and take a short 10-minute break at that time.

The substitutes for tonight are: Mount Pearl North, we have Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Minister Bragg substituting for MHA Stoyles; MHA Pike, Burin - Grand Bank, Minister Byrne is substituting for him; and for Cape St. Francis, MHA Wall, MHA Petten is substituting for him.

Just a reminder for everyone to please identify yourself for Hansard. You can take your mask down when you are speaking and just wait for your light to go on. If your light doesn't go on, just wave and if it still doesn't go on, I'll identify you. That's pretty much it.

We're going to ask you to introduce yourself, we'll start with the minister and then we'll start with the subheadings.

CLERK (Hammond): (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Oh right, I have to ask. I forgot about that.

In Committee, we've been doing 15, 10, 10 and then the independent Member to a total of 20. This morning they did 15, 10, 10, 10 and then the independent Member and then they went 10, 10 and checked with the independent Member to see if he had a question, but he still had a total of 20 for the entire time. Everyone is okay with that? All right, we'll proceed with that.

We'll start with introductions. We'll start here to my left with introductions.

E. BARNES: Eldred Barnes, Associate Deputy Minister.

T. OSBORNE: Tom Osborne, Minister.

G. O'LEARY: Greg O'Leary, Deputy Minister.

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

R. FEAVER: Robert Feaver, Director of Student Financial Services.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Hi, everyone. It is Candice Ennis-Williams, ADM, Post-Secondary Education.

T. STAMP: Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller.

M. GOSS-PROWSE: Mary Goss-Prowse, Director of Early Learning and Child Development.

B. CLARKE: Brad Clarke, Director of Programs and Services.

CHAIR: Okay. We'll start over here.

D. HYNES: Darrell Hynes, Director of Legislation and Policy Affairs.

B. PETTEN: Barry Petten, MHA for Conception Bay South.

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

P. TRIMPER: Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

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

S. REID: Scott Reid, MHA, St. George's - Humber.

G. BYRNE: Gerry Byrne, MHA, Corner Brook.

D. BRAGG: Derrick Brag, MHA, Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

CHAIR: Thank you.

I ask the minister if he has some comments.

T. OSBORNE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to be brief because I know we have three hours and the Committee Members would like to ask questions, so I'm not going to take up a lot of time. I will say that it has been probably an unprecedented year in education. The addition of the post-secondary education, the COVID and the challenges that has brought – we brought in \$25-a-day child care and now working with the federal government to bring it to \$10 a day and, as Members know, the announcements in the budget regarding the English School District and Memorial University in particular.

It is an interesting time, a very busy time, in the Department of Education. Before we start, just to thank my executive team for being here tonight, but as well for meeting the challenges of this unprecedented year. I know that it hasn't been easy on anybody, especially the staff in the department.

With that, I'll open it up for questions. One thing, I know my critic, Mr. Petten, had asked if we could open it up for questions outside of Estimates and I'm okay with that as long as we keep it respectful.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Osborne.

First, I'll ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping, please.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 carry?

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

I'll take the paraphernalia off me. I'm tangled up in my glasses and microphone.

Good evening, everyone.

As we spoke earlier, Minister, I have a series of questions that I'll start off with and I will get into some of the more detailed stuff as we move along.

First of all, your briefing binder, would we be able to get a copy of that?

T. OSBORNE: No, no way.

B. PETTEN: I'll take that as a yes.

T. OSBORNE: Of course, yes. We can get those sent over, I guess, tomorrow morning, Barry.

B. PETTEN: Okay, perfect.

First, is the attrition plan still being followed? If so, what changes are there from last year to this year?

T. OSBORNE: As I did last year and whatever portfolio I was in, if the question is really political I'll take it on, or if it's political at all, I guess, but in this regard I'll ask Robyn to step in.

Yes, the attrition plan is there. In terms of the targets, I guess, Robyn.

R. HAYES: We did have an attrition target for '20-'21 and '21-'22, and it was about \$18,000, roughly. Our attrition target was about – \$35,636 is the position we had identified. It was \$18,200 for '20-'21 and in '21-'22 it's another \$18,100 for a total of \$36,300, and we've met this target.

B. PETTEN: Okay, thank you.

How many people are presently employed in the department?

R. HAYES: In the department, in the Salary Details, as of March 31 there were 167 positions filled out of a total of just over 200.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Many retirements in this past year?

R. HAYES: There were seven.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Any vacancies that have been filled?

R. HAYES: Currently?

B. PETTEN: Yeah.

R. HAYES: We do have vacancies, as we do every year. About 30 or 40 I believe right now, but they're a mixture across a large department.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

No positions have been eliminated, have they?

R. HAYES: Just the one for the attrition.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

No layoffs, obviously.

R. HAYES: No.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

How many new hires in the past year?

R. HAYES: The report we have just shows people that were brand new to government. There were four of those.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

In those contractual and short-term employees, how many of those are in the department, do you know?

R. HAYES: Short-term contractual employees? I'm not a hundred per cent sure. I know that there is at least one in my branch. In the other branches, I'm not a hundred per cent sure, but there would be some that are currently working through the EAP. We can get that figure for you.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

From the COVID fund, did the department receive any funds? If so, what for?

T. OSBORNE: Go ahead, Robyn.

R. HAYES: You're talking about the COVID fund from Finance, that COVID contingency fund?

B. PETTEN: Yes.

R. HAYES: As you're aware, we received \$20.3 million for the Chromebooks for students in Grades 7 to 12 and funding for teacher laptops.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

How has the COVID fund impacted service delivery?

R. HAYES: In the K-to-12 system?

B. PETTEN: Yes, in the K-to-12 system.

R. HAYES: As the minister alluded, it's been an unprecedented year for K-to-12 in general. With every industry, there have been shutdowns throughout K-to-12. We've moved to online learning in post-secondary. There have been outages in the child care sector, so it has impacted operations in the whole department.

B. PETTEN: Right on, okay.

Cost analysis on the English School District coming into the department. Has there been any analysis done on cost savings or job cuts yet?

T. OSBORNE: As I had indicated in the budget lock-in for the media – I don't know if they carried it or not – and partially indicated, as much as I could fit in 45 seconds, in Question Period, there are short-term, medium-term and long-term goals that we're hoping to achieve. We should have those identified in the very near future in terms of what we hope to accomplish in the short term, medium term and long term.

As the transition progresses, based on what we identify as short-term goals we'll have some idea what we identify as medium-term goals in

terms of transition. We'll have a full picture once the transition is complete and we can identify what the operational efficiencies are and what the fiscal efficiencies are.

I'm always hesitant to take a guess because best guesses, in the history of government, never pan out to be accurate. I'd rather be accurate and say, as we identify the short-term goals we can give some indication, but the accurate numbers will come once the transition is fully complete.

B. PETTEN: I can imagine that it must be causing anxiety among the –

T. OSBORNE: Pardon me?

B. PETTEN: It must be causing anxiety among a lot of the staff with the eastern school district. It has been causing anxiety if they're –

T. OSBORNE: Well, any time there's change there's anxiety. I can say quite honestly, there was anxiety with educators this year because of COVID. There was anxiety with students this year because of COVID. There were no job losses with educators; in fact, there were more educators, guidance, administrators and even custodians hired. With any change, there's anxiety. Undoubtedly, yes, there is and will be anxiety until people know what the future is going to look like.

As the Premier and Minister of Finance had indicated and as I had indicated in the media, the department and the English School District are going to take a good, strong focus on attrition over the next 12 to 18 months as the transition takes place. If we can identify that there's a position in the English School District to replace a position of somebody who's retiring in the department, maybe we don't need to hire that person in the department, as there is a retirement. If we can focus on attrition and those numbers, it will lessen the impact of whatever the impact may look like once the transition is complete.

The intention is that there are no mass layoffs. Will there be positions affected? There may be. That's as honest an answer as you can get. There may be positions affected, but there will not be mass layoffs. We hope to accomplish through attrition over the next year, year and a half, and

then, based on the number of people that are eligible to retire, both at the English School District and within the department once the transition is complete, over the course of the next year or two, step up the attrition to an even greater degree.

B. PETTEN: Any savings that come as a result of this, are there plans to reinvest them into the classroom? I know it's been asked, but we never got a clear answer on it.

T. OSBORNE: Yes, absolutely. We've been clear about that as well.

I don't know if we should call them savings versus efficiencies, because savings would mean that you actually save the money. There's no intention here of putting the money into general revenue. If we can save or find fiscal efficiencies through the transition, that money will be reinvested into educators, into students and into the classroom.

Currently, we rank second or third lowest in the country in terms of academic performance. We obviously need to improve that and that will come not by investing in administration or people who run the system, but it will come through investments in the classroom.

B. PETTEN: The next question – I'll probably combine it for you, because it's probably going to be two parts, anyway – has to do with the francophone school board.

The two questions: Why wasn't the board combined as well? Part two of that question is, will the CEO be returning to the province after July 1 when our lockdown is lifted?

T. OSBORNE: Yes.

I should ask, Chair, the person doing most of the answering and the person doing most of the questioning, maybe we should just keep our masks off until it moves on to the next person, because it is a little bit cumbersome.

B. PETTEN: Thanks. It is very cumbersome.

T. OSBORNE: Barry, in terms of that, there is some unclarity, if I can call it that, in terms of constitutional obligation and whether or not –

within the department some people are saying they interpret the act to say as long as parents have a say; some people say I'm not sure; maybe constitutionally we have to. That's a tangled web.

We've had some very frank discussions with the francophone district and said they need to find operational and fiscal efficiencies. They service 350 students. The English School District services 65,000. Whether it's worth the complex and complicated process of determining whether or not there will be a constitutional challenge, we haven't ruled it out. If efficiencies can't be found, we'll investigate further and get legal advice on whether or not we have the ability to do the same with the francophone district. But I don't think there's a need to if we can get the fiscal and financial efficiencies. You are looking at a fraction of a fraction of a percentage of the cost of operating the English School District.

B. PETTEN: Will she be returning to the province, do you think?

T. OSBORNE: Oh, sorry. Yes, you did ask that.

Yes, I have been given assurances by both Ms. Christianson and the francophone school district that she will be returning to the province.

B. PETTEN: I guess a part of that too – I know it's been talked about; both of us have spoken about it publicly. What additional measures are you taking to ensure the Finance and Treasury Board compliance? I know you have already asked the Comptroller General. So are there any other measures being taken or is it worth that?

T. OSBORNE: Pending the outcome of the Comptroller General's investigation as to whether or not proper procedures, protocols were followed and whether or not the expenditures follow Treasury Board guidelines, the answer to that investigation will determine whether or not there are next steps.

B. PETTEN: Okay. Fair enough.

Air quality testing in schools: Is that still being carried out? Is it regular or is it only sporadic?

T. OSBORNE: That would be Robyn, I think.

R. HAYES: Yes, the English School District does do regular testing of the ventilation systems in the schools.

B. PETTEN: But not the French, is it? Just the English?

R. HAYES: Oh no, the French would as well, sorry.

B. PETTEN: Oh, both of them do.

R. HAYES: They would do testing.

B. PETTEN: Regular. Okay.

I guess the minister may be answering this one. Has your department done any analysis on the Greene report, Minister? Because there is a lot of things in there that pertains to your department.

T. OSBORNE: It is still very early days. We have had discussions and we have had meetings on the Greene report. To be quite honest, I don't even think there was a briefing note done on the Greene report. If it is, you'll be getting it.

We have had meetings and discussions through the Treasury Board process leading into budget and the evolution of that process. Decisions were made and incorporated within my department and, I imagine, in other departments. Some of the recommendations that we saw in the Greene report, some of those, whether it is my department or other departments, may have been things that were being considered in any event. We will do a deeper dive into the other recommendations of the Greene report.

With the staff in the department and the budget decisions on the English School District and with Memorial, I can honestly say staff are not under worked. Once we get through the budget decisions, I think we'll have time to analyze and probably take a deeper dive on some of the other recommendations.

B. PETTEN: There were a couple of findings in that report. One of the ones – and I guess tied to MUN too – was about K-to-6 graduates and not being able to basically teach the curriculum, which were pretty pointed remarks.

T. OSBORNE: I'll ask my deputy to speak to that.

G. O'LEARY: Yeah, I will just say that we've been doing some analysis, MHA Petten, both at the post-secondary level in the department as well as in the K-to-12 level. Preliminary, as it might have been, we've had several meetings where we've looked at it and brought it back to staff and looked at it.

To your question, on the K to 6, I've had a conversation with the acting dean at Memorial University, followed up from the Greene report, to ask some of those questions. One of the things that we would like to see is – well, first of all, we'd like to see a little bit more teachers in the K-to-6 area having to do more courses in math themselves, coming into the program.

Do I agree that the teachers are not qualified? Absolutely not. I do believe that we have some very, very strong teachers in those areas, but could we shore it up a little bit more by asking students to have a couple of math courses in advance of entering the program or to have some pure math courses as a part of the program, those are discussions that I started with the dean there, that I would be in favour with.

I taught at the faculty of education for 10 years myself. I taught methods for English. All of this is near and dear to my heart. Can we get better? Absolutely. Have those discussions begun? Absolutely, but are our teachers coming out unqualified? That's probably taking it a little bit too far.

B. PETTEN: Okay, thanks.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Deputy Minister, I am glad to hear you say that and be totally unequivocal about it. I would concur with that. I found that part to be insulting. Maybe a little bit uninformed.

Some general questions starting off. I'm looking at the timeline for the NLESD and department integration. I think, Minister, you mentioned –

over the next 12 to 18 months, I thought there was an actual timeline. Here are a few questions around this in a general way.

In 2013, the four districts were amalgamated into one. That was announced in the spring of the year and implemented in the fall of the year. All I can tell you is that it created an awful lot of havoc and confusion and chaos. I can think of it just in terms of trying to mesh the four boards with their differing approaches to things into one. I would say that it created an awful lot of problems down the road in terms of keeping track of things fiscally and financially so on and so forth.

Two parts to that: Was there ever an analysis done of that as to the savings or the efficiencies or the effectiveness of it from a person who was on the inside, I guess – sounds rather ominous in some ways – and who dealt with it as the president of the association? I can't say that there were inefficiencies. I think in some ways the board probably grew beyond. I somehow think that the four boards before that probably wouldn't have grown as much that you wouldn't have seen the staff grow, but that's an observation. That's the first thing: Was there ever a study?

Secondly, in terms of just the timeline because you mentioned short-, medium- and long-term goals. I guess I'm looking at it in terms of how do we see this play out. I'm assuming that you're not planning to simply integrate it into in September. What you're saying here is this is not going to like be, as of September, the board vanishes. That's a good thing if that's the case.

T. OSBORNE: No, you're correct, Jim. It won't be rushed. I think when you act in haste, you repent at leisure. I take your point on the four boards, the fact that that was rushed. I don't know if there was an analysis done of that or not, Jim. I honestly don't know. But we do have officials within the department and the discussions have started with the NLESD.

As you know, this is a very busy time with the Legislature open. There will be some meetings through the course of June, but I think while the work has started, the real work in taking a deeper dive will start the first week of July once the Legislature closes.

The departments and officials in the department and myself, as minister, are really preoccupied with the Legislature at this particular point. The work is started. There are discussions. There are officials looking at what can be done, very smoothly, in a short-term time frame and then the more complex, medium-term time frames and then the more difficult to transition.

I won't say today what those are. I'll wait to get feedback from officials on what the short-term, medium-term and long-term achievable goals are, but there are back-office functions. Whether or not they are considered short-term or medium-term, I'm not sure.

I mean, there's certainly payroll, which is done in the Department of Finance now. But there is still some 30 or 40 payroll staff within the English School District. Even though teacher payroll is done in the department, there is 30 or 40 staff at the English School District. Do they all get amalgamated into the department? I'm not sure. I know there are some vacancies. There are five or six vacancies, I think, there. Whether those vacancies are filled or not, whether they need to be filled or whether we need all those positions, those are the types of things we're asking for the advice on. For example, what are the short-term, medium-term and long-term expectations for a transition?

J. DINN: A quick question: For the next school year, the district stays in place.

T. OSBORNE: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, no, and that to me will –

T. OSBORNE: Yes, and I'd agree with you, Jim. You said you felt it would wreak havoc or it wreaked havoc in the past.

If we were to try to do this in time for September and have a smooth opening of school in September, I think it would be foolhardy. I think whether or not some of the transition can happen by September, look, as long as it doesn't impact the opening of school in September. I mean, once school is open and things are up and running, there are other things you can focus on, but there may be things that won't affect or have any impact on school doors opening, desks being filled and educators in front of a

classroom. We want to do this in as methodical a way as we can.

As a former educator, my office door is open. If you want to come over, sit down and give me some ideas in terms of your experiences as a former educator and what you think the short, medium and long term – without any politics attached –

J. DINN: No.

T. OSBORNE: – I'd welcome you over.

J. DINN: Minister, I'll say this clearly: I'm not being a champion of the school district or wishing to see its demise or anything like that. And you're right: In September, it's chaotic to begin with. I don't want to see a third – it's going to be chaotic with COVID this September, still. To me, one of the things that teachers are looking for in September is clear guidance and clear channels of communication as to what – getting mixed messages. That is a good thing. If possible then, as we start to identify them, keep us informed.

The jury is still out with me on this. I just know that when it was done in 2013, I think it created a lot of unnecessary confusion. Whether it was a good idea, I don't know, but I think it could have been planned out better at that time. I don't know if it every really saved the money or made the efficiencies. I wish we had done some follow-up analysis.

That is my only comment with this, and I'm glad to see at least – like I said, I haven't made up my mind one way or the other on this. I really haven't. But I hope that if we're doing it methodically and we're going to look at what works and what doesn't – and I am assuming you'll also be talking to teachers, certainly the Teachers' Association and maybe NAPE as well, because they can give you the ins and outs of it as well.

T. OSBORNE: Absolutely.

I know that there has been some discussion with the NLTA executive already; it is very preliminary. I haven't reached out to NAPE at this particular point, but we intend to and to speak to all stakeholders. You are correct in

saying that if we rush this we will regret it. If we do it in a methodical and very planned way, I think it would best serve everybody involved and, most importantly, what happens in the classroom. At the end of the day, if there are efficiencies, that's where they are going to be directed. The focus has to be what happens in the classroom.

J. DINN: I appreciate that.

I'm assuming this is going to be part of your goals, whether they're short-, medium- or long-term. I'm just looking at the office infrastructure. You have the head office here, but you also have satellite offices throughout. I'm just wondering: Will we see a movement of staff to these or will it be centralized here? In terms of how you see that unfolding.

T. OSBORNE: In fairness, I think it is too early, really, to comment on that.

J. DINN: Yes, okay.

T. OSBORNE: Will we need satellite offices still? I believe we will. I'm open to suggestion on what is best, but I believe we do and will require satellite offices. There is lots of empty space in the East and West Blocks, so are we able to bring some of the staff in here? I believe so.

I can't say definitively today, but if I was thinking at first blush, we could probably bring some staff within the East and West Block. The NLESD in the city of St. John's have two buildings. Do we still need two buildings? I don't know, but maybe we can reduce that to one external building, which, right then and there, is a savings.

Those are the types of things that have to be analyzed. I can't give you an answer as to whether they'll need one building or two buildings, whether we can get staff in yet or not, but those are the types of things that we're looking at for sure. If there are efficiencies by reducing it to one building in St. John's – obviously, maintenance, you can't have them coming in and hanging their tool bag on the side of a desk in Confederation Building. There's still a great deal of analysis and planning to ensure we get it right.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

I have more questions. I'm just going to go to a couple of questions I have there on the subheadings and I'll go back to some other questions as time permits.

Under 1.1.01, Minister's Office, I guess the first question is on Salaries. What was the increase last year from budget to revised?

T. OSBORNE: Did you want to answer that, Greg?

G. O'LEARY: I can answer that because it was very intentional. It was intended as a COVID measure to add an additional liaison in the minister's office. That was a recommendation at the executive level. It's important to note here that post-secondary was brought into the department in August.

We essentially right now have a department and a half, to give you an analogy. We have a huge department right now. If you just get some sense through a pandemic now, through inquires from MHA, inquires from families, from schools. That liaison is in charge of helping with K-to-12 as well as early learning, which has gone to a \$25 a day and a new federal \$30-billion announcement that we are trying to decipher through right now as a government.

It was initially thought of as a COVID measure, but quite frankly, I think it's something that's quite needed post-pandemic because we have a perfect storm going on right now in the Department of Education. We have to do the work that we just talked about in terms of bringing the district in. We have quite a number of initiatives to help transform education in the province over the next three to four years and to get those outcomes up, to get a higher ranking. We have the national federal goal of attaining \$10 a day in early child care and I don't need to even say what we have going on in post-secondary right now in this province.

That's the reason that the salary went up. It's for that liaison. I can tell you, she is working; we need her badly.

B. PETTEN: Under Transportation and Communications, why the increase? Are we expecting to see normal travel this year coming? Is that what's anticipated?

T. OSBORNE: Robyn.

R. HAYES: If you notice, the Transportation and Communications line is actually down by \$8,000, and not increased.

B. PETTEN: Yes.

R. HAYES: That's to account for – ministers have an option of receiving either car allowance or to be reimbursed for their travel. Minister Osborne has the car allowance, which is paid out through salaries. Part of the increase in Salaries, besides the liaison, is for the minister's car allowance. The travel budget then was reduced by \$8,000 for that.

B. PETTEN: We're expecting to get back to normal travel this year. Is that the plan with the ...?

R. HAYES: That's what's in the budget. Whether or not that unfolds is yet to be determined. We do a close monitoring of this every month and report to the Department of Finance monthly on what we're saving there and what we're anticipating for travel during the year.

B. PETTEN: Okay, thanks.

T. OSBORNE: If I could add to that, Robyn.

Post-COVID, we're not sure but I think we've learned from COVID a lot of meetings, for example, can happen by Skype; a lot of meetings can happen by Zoom. I think instead of leaving the Transportation line items short and having a department not function or having to transfer money from somewhere else, just in case. I think across government, certainly in our department, there will be a greater focus on having Zoom meetings as opposed to having people travel from one location to another. We probably will

see efficiencies in these areas, but the budgets return to normal and we'll see what happens.

B. PETTEN: I agree.

Under 1.2.01, Executive Support: Salary increase of \$532,800 last year from budgeted to revised.

R. HAYES: The difference there in the actuals versus the budget reflects severance and leave payouts for two retiring employees. Two of the employees that retired this year were under this subheading.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

I guess Transportation and Communications stays the same as per the previous.

That's the question I had on that, so I'll go back to my general questions now for my remaining minutes.

Minister, this is a political question: Do you agree that teachers should work longer than five hours as proposed by Madam Greene?

J. DINN: And I'm listening to this.

B. PETTEN: And Jim Dinn is listening very closely. This is a twofer.

T. OSBORNE: Thanks for that.

B. PETTEN: He was going to ask it anyway.

T. OSBORNE: I'm checking for hand grenades now.

B. PETTEN: He was going to ask the question.

T. OSBORNE: At this particular point, I can tell you there are no plans to implement that particular recommendation. I think we will undertake some analysis of that particular recommendation, but we don't have plans at this particular point to implement that.

With any report, I think if – we saw, well, long before your time – I think I am the only MHA sitting in the House now that went through the original Green report on House spending. We accepted the recommendations there wholesale

and the Management Commission has, ever since, been cleaning up the wholesale acceptance of those recommendations. No matter what the report is, I don't think you'd be wise to say we agree with everything and we are implementing everything 100 per cent. That is one of the ones that are definitely on the back burner.

B. PETTEN: While, I suppose, on the same theme, what about the idea of principals and other admin staff not being members of the NLTA?

T. OSBORNE: Again, I mean, officials in the department absolutely have their plates full now with the transition of the English School District and the changes at Memorial University. When you had asked at the outset if we had done analysis of all of the Greene recommendations, for example, those are two that we have not yet done an analysis on. They are not what I would consider top of priority for us. The transitioning of the English School District into the department would be and the changes at MUN and the *Memorial University Act* would be. Those are the things we're acting on immediately.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Nursing School, Minister: Do you have any analysis done on one nursing school and the cost-benefit analysis of having one nursing school?

T. OSBORNE: That is more in the Department of Health than it is in Education. Education does have some impact. I'll ask Candice to speak to that a little bit more. That is one that I know Health are taking a look at now and it's one that I think is actively being reviewed to determine what the outcome should be.

Candice?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: I think, just picking up on the minister's earlier point, really, the last number of weeks, it's just been a matter of prioritization. I can honestly say we have not considered the nursing consolidation piece. With that said, I can tell you that that issue dates back as early as 2010, if not earlier. It will require a lot of discussion with stakeholders, led by the

Department of Health and Community Services. We'll contribute our piece as needed.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

I guess this is twofold. It's kind of Greene and it's kind of budget. It's not said in the budget, but Greene is more direct about MUN's cutting costs. She states 30 per cent; I know that might be very aspirational. I remember there was a 3 per cent cut requested when we were back in the previous administration and that was painful.

What's your view on a 30 per cent cut at MUN? I know we're giving them autonomy. Is that something you consider to be realistic or something to be reasonable?

T. OSBORNE: We're working on the details with Memorial. I think in fairness to the president and the Board of Regents and the Senate over there, it's my understanding that in the very near future, they're going to be announcing what they are doing in terms of tuition.

It's only the tuition freeze funding that we've looked at. We haven't looked at their operating grant, or their maintenance budget or the medical school budget, for example. It's the tuition freeze funding that we've looked at. We've consulted with Memorial and we've had a number of discussions and meetings with Memorial in that regard. I know Memorial is looking at efficiencies within their own operation, because I believe there are efficiencies to be found and I know your standpoint on that. I know you believe there are efficiencies to be found at Memorial.

They're looking at other sources of revenue and I know other universities across the country and around the world are creative in terms of revenue. Our funding of Memorial is – I think 79 per cent of their grant comes from government versus the national average of about 50 or 55 per cent. They get considerably more money from us than other universities.

I think that through discussion and consultation with MUN, they are looking for greater autonomy. They are looking for changes to the tuition freeze and they're looking to changes to the *Memorial University Act*. I think the

president has spoken publicly after the budget and, for the most part, her comments were positive, I thought, in terms of what changes are happening.

B. PETTEN: Thanks.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

One comment I was going to make at the end of it had to do with satellite offices, what we're talking about. I really think, if we're going down this road, you cannot run this province's education system unless you have offices in the areas. Whether it's Labrador, West Coast, I think teachers, administrators in the area schools need that contact. I just have to say that.

As you're assessing it and maybe putting the staff out there, I think you need those boots on the ground and I think there has to be that more – I was talking to my colleague from the Southern Shore. When I was teaching with the Ferryland school district, it was in a bungalow. I could walk in and I could see all consultants, including the superintendent, Mr. Galgay, who would come around to every school in the fall and speak to every class.

There are limitations with small school boards, but that hands on was very important. All I'm going to say is don't centralize it too much, look at staff in these areas and I think you'll find that kind of interaction is essential. Make it less corporate and more a collegial model, if I may. That's my one comment on that.

T. OSBORNE: I unequivocally agree that we need regional staff and regional representation. For all five or six people throughout the province who are tuned in and listening to this tonight, I can assure them that there will be regional representation in areas of the province. You can't operate everything out of St. John's.

J. DINN: Perfect.

I'll give you a heads-up now; I will be asking in the House of Assembly during Question Period about what your thoughts are on teacher hours

and the preparation so we have this new sense of co-operation and new era. I'm going to give you a heads-up; that will come next week.

I do want to say about teacher hours. I'm looking at my colleague from Bonavista, Minister O'Leary, Minister Byrne, and I don't know who else taught in the classroom. I can tell you right now – I'm married to a primary teacher – you just don't want to go into a school and say you're only working five hours a day. You may not make it out alive. I can tell you, supervision alone, those four out of five days a week, you're on supervision.

The biggest joy I had when I took on the role of president – and in here – is I can get up at any time I want and go to the bathroom. That doesn't sound like much but I tell you, depending on the class – that needs to be said. I could go in most schools, primary schools and elementary schools especially, and I would find teachers there until 5. They are there anyway. So that needs to be said.

As for the administrators, I know it may not be the best relationship (inaudible) – whether they're in the union. But I can tell you it's a more collegial model. I know that in Ontario and other areas it's become more adversarial. I never did look upon the administrator in the school as the supervisor; I looked upon them as the instructional leader in the school and as a colleague. I think if we head down any other way, there is a real possibility we'll end up doing more damage. So I'll leave it at that. I'll get off my soapbox now.

Just out of curiosity, with regard to money for allocation review, is that in the budget anywhere?

T. OSBORNE: The teacher allocation, is that what you're referring to?

J. DINN: Yes.

T. OSBORNE: The process on that has started, Jim. We are going to the Independent Appointments Commission to appoint a group of people to do an independent review of the teacher allocation model. I felt that was best because it's not the department reviewing it, it's not the NLTA reviewing it, you know, it's

completely independent. So that process has started.

In terms of whether or not they'll recommend that we have just the right number of teachers, or we need more educators or if we have too many, I'm not going to presuppose what comes out of that because it is an independent review. But what comes out of it, we'll review the recommendations and move forward.

J. DINN: No, excellent. As long as people who are appointed have some background in education as well. Okay, no that's fine; that's what has been asked for.

Substitute positions – there are term substitute positions, I think, that were hired for each school, at certain schools; will they be maintained for next year at least until we get through the final round of vaccines?

T. OSBORNE: Yes, we had the 70 term substitutes. I mean, it was largely a COVID measure, but without calling it a pilot project, it was a pilot project. I think it has worked well. I think that it served our schools well. We increased that number; it was 70 and I think it's 88 term contracts now – or, actually, 87½ full-time equivalent. So 87½ full-time term contracts, so we actually increased it from the original 70. We were able to find the funding to do that. I think it's worked well. Robyn or Greg, did you want to speak to –?

G. O'LEARY: I think it's worked well as well. I want to say that we had a meeting with the NLTA and we had a meeting with the school district. Both said their first priority was the retention of the extra administrative and guidance units. They said, in terms of a pecking order, we need those to operate. As a former principal, I would agree with that.

Our minister actually was able to find that money provincially. That money came federally last year and we were able to find it provincially, so we've guaranteed that for this year. I actually think the term substitutes work as well. Even though they cost a little bit more, I actually think they save money in the long run. What ends up happening in a school is, as you know yourself having been an educator, you need someone for one period or two periods or an afternoon or

whatever, when you have that term substitute in the building, you don't have to get two and three people in there, you can get the same person. That happened quite a bit when I was principal.

We had this conversation yesterday that we're in favour of that. That's something that we're looking at right now. I'll pass it over to Robyn as well for a final comment, if there is anything else.

R. HAYES: Obviously, with any analysis that's done, the benefit of them, we do have to make sure that we do have the sufficient budget there to cover those. So we will take that into account when we do consider whether or not we will continue with these, but it will definitely be considered, given the envelope we have.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is there a reduction in student assistant hours for this year?

R. HAYES: So are you referring to the student assistant hours that were added from the COVID fund?

J. DINN: Yes.

R. HAYES: Again, they were a COVID measure. Any continuation of those would be a budgetary item that we'd have to explore further. As of now, there is no budget for them, but we'll have to consider that, if there is any room in the budget for that. I can't say for sure that there is.

J. DINN: I understand, from Dr. Haggie, that by the fall, we'll probably have schools, students and teachers, but I still think there's going to be a few blips at least. It will be less bumpy than last year, hopefully, but still there's going to be a few hiccups I guess.

T. OSBORNE: No doubt, Jim. When you asked, I was thinking from the provincial budget. I mean, Robyn is correct; we did add, through the federal COVID funding, some student assistants. We're being told by Public Health that, by and large, school should return to generally normal in September. I'm guarded with my words when I say that because you don't know what twists and turns or what new

variants. By and large, school should return to generally normal in September is what we are being told by Public Health. I believe Dr. Fitzgerald indicated very much the same yesterday.

We are also being told that school busing should – for the age groups that are vaccinated, which right now is 12 and older. Whether by September we see 10 and older, I don't know. For the age groups that are vaccinated, busing should by and large return to normal as well.

With that in mind, if there are cases where it is viewed that a student assistant is required over what would have been normal pre-COVID, that is something that we work on currently with the NLESD and with administrators at the school level.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Trimper.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you for the opportunity. It is good to see the department folks. Thanks to the Committee for a chance to ask some questions.

Some of my questions, I'm not sure; a lot of them are dealing with early childhood education. Do we want to wait for that or will we tackle some of them now?

T. OSBORNE: No, if they are general questions, go ahead.

P. TRIMPER: Okay.

Well, they are specific, of course, to my district and some of the challenges that we have. I appreciate the moves that we have seen from the department to support, I think, Lab West and Lake Melville. We have had some particular situations where the demand for early childhood education spaces is so high.

Leading up to these Estimates I have just been checking with folks, for example, at Pumpkin House. Everybody is familiar; it's certainly one of the larger facilities. The wait-list there now is anywhere from 100 to 200 per cent. The

estimates on the board – I met with them a few days ago. They are saying anywhere from 75 to 85 per cent of the staff they have right now are not certified. They are operating only on the generosity of your exemption to allow them to operate.

This is always like orchestra conducting because I feel like myself – I know the minister and others – we have worked really hard on putting up these buildings, on investing on these things and now we have this acute shortage of trained folks to go in there, and our provincial government has just sunk \$11.7 million into a new YMCA. We have 60 spaces there. Well, guess what's happening? They're luring in whatever is left in Pumpkin House over to there, so now we have a little bit of a bidding war and Pumpkin House has no ability.

I'm not sure what the question is, but that is my situation.

T. OSBORNE: I can speak generally and I can ask Mary to step in as well.

We've had a strong focus on Labrador and as you've indicated with Pumpkin House, we put a huge investment into Pumpkin House provincially. But the issue you raised is real and you're correct in saying that it has been challenging with early childhood educators, particularly in the Labrador region. We have taken some measures there that have allowed people who aren't trained because of the shortage. Mary can speak a little more about that, where she's dealing with it on a day-to-day basis, the success of that or the outstanding challenges.

One of the things with Minister Hussen federally: We've had some discussions at the minister-to-minister level. I know there have been telephone calls and discussions between officials provincially and federally.

There have been preliminary details around the \$10-a-day child care put out publicly and announced in the budget. We are waiting on greater details. We understand, once the budget is passed federally, they will be communicating publicly greater details. One of the things that I'm assured is a part of that package is greater incentive to get more ECEs into the system.

What that looks like exactly, while we have had some preliminary discussions, I guess will be announced by the federal government once the budget is passed.

Mary?

M. GOSS-PROWSE: Yes, we're currently negotiating. The federal government has given us a template to extend our current bilateral agreement. There is a workforce annex that allows some funding for this particular fiscal year. We had a call today with all of the provinces and territories with the federal government officials at my level, and there is still very little information about what will be covered for workforce in the bigger budget items that are going to be outside that.

In order for us to plan for this one-year funding – and this is every province and territory. Nobody has signed that yet. We can't enter into something that would have long-term impact if it were not going to be covered under the larger budget item.

As the minister indicated, we should have information about that larger budget that they've made some general announcements about in the coming weeks, I would think. We certainly have a lot of things on the burner around that federal piece. We are ready to go as soon as we know what we have to deal with.

In terms of Labrador, just to let you know, the ECE shortage is a pan-Canadian issue; it is not just here. Areas like Labrador; it is exacerbated by the cost of living, by the competition with high-paying industries that will offer jobs that you don't need to be certified for at higher rate of pay.

Earlier this year, we introduced a 15 per cent increase in the Operating Grant for centres in Labrador to be used specifically on hiring and incentives for their staff. We also introduced a casual caregiver policy to allow short-term substitutes for emergency situations, that kind of thing, so that they can have someone who doesn't meet what we require. Ultimately, we don't, as a sector, want to see that continue. Just as with schools, you have to have your education degree in order to teach. We want to move to a place where all of our staff have that

qualification that we need around early childhood in order to do good, quality programming.

The federal government's words have been very specific to wanting that quality and wanting those qualified people, so we're just waiting on getting some better specifics so that we'll know what we're negotiating.

P. TRIMPER: It is a bit of a societal value challenge, I think as well. Here are trained people with degrees, lots of experience, academic credentials and the salary rate is just, wow. You really challenge yourself to think about it.

This is as much a Health and Community Services question: We are losing doctors. My neighbours, they are leaving, but a few years ago could not find a space for their three children. We almost lost two doctors until we finally got – you're just going around. I keep coming back to early childhood education. It is almost a least common denominator in so many of the problems that we are dealing with. I appreciate all of your efforts.

That 15 per cent, by the way, when that came in on the OGP, was so well received. The timing couldn't have been better.

Also, for the record, when there was an application process in March and something was missed on the deadline, I remember reaching out to the department and you responded right away. I want to thank you for that. There was some confusion over timing and so on. Anyway, there is a really dedicated group of people working on the board and the folks that are there. Thank goodness for that.

What about the in-person training? I raised this with the minister recently. We think that this could be a possibility to get this back at the college. I think it was stopped about eight years ago. Where are we on possibly getting that reinstated for the ECEs?

T. OSBORNE: Mary may want to expand, as well.

I think COVID presented some challenges, but we have had discussions with the College of the

North Atlantic. In fact, one of the private colleges has raised the issue with me as well.

Either Candice, I guess, in terms of the College of the North Atlantic, or Mary can expand on that a little bit.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Yes, just to further support what the minister has said, we've had some discussions with the college very recently. There's a commitment for some robust discussion on this in the coming months, particularly as we get closer to a post-pandemic. As well, we will be having some discussions with the private training institution to see about what sort of innovative models we can pursue collectively. I think now the opportunity for post-secondary in the same department as K-to-12 is going to provide some really interesting opportunities to think differently about some of these issues.

P. TRIMPER: Candice, that's about a 16-month course or something like that, is it?

M. GOSS-PROWSE: The diploma is actually four full semesters and an intersession, so it's two and a bit years. The certificate level is two semesters, so that would be a one-year program.

I believe they're introducing, as well, in the fall a post-diploma certificate in administration, which is sorely needed because many of the people that are also running the child care centres really don't have an administrative background; they have an early learning background. That extra year for those that are doing administration will also be helpful in making sure the centres are viable and are run appropriately. Yes, there's a whole lot going on and we're really hopeful that we'll see a little bit of movement this year around that.

On the side of that, we also offer numerous bursaries. We have bursaries for people doing the distance program on a per-course basis. We pay \$250 per course. We pay a bursary for if they have to do a field placement at the college, up to \$2,500, to cover some of their expenses. We also have a graduate bursary for those that finished the full diploma: \$7,500 with a three-year return in service in the sector. There are things we're doing as well on the side of that that are hopefully encouraging people.

In terms of wages, we do an ELCC Supplement, which is an income supplement that's paid directly to the ECEs on top of what their employer pays. It doesn't matter what the employer pays; anyone Level 1 or up to Level 4 can get between \$12,900 a year, up to \$16,900 a year, depending on their qualifications and the job they hold. That does impact salaries for those that are qualified.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: I guess we can move past this subheading now or right to the next one or ...?

CHAIR: Are you finished in that section?

B. PETTEN: I asked my question on that subheading. I have lots of other questions.

CHAIR: But you're done with this section?

B. PETTEN: What's that?

CHAIR: Are you done with this section?

B. PETTEN: Yes.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Dinn, are you finished with this?

J. DINN: I have one question, but a number of general questions that will tie into others. I'll ask the one question on 1.1.01 as long as I can come back to some of the other questions after we move on if that's all right.

CHAIR: Yes.

J. DINN: Just under 1.2.01, Executive Support, I'm just wondering what actions are being taken to ensure that changing demographics are being integrated into the department's strategic plan and long-term strategy and that revenues are being spent accordingly?

T. OSBORNE: Changing demographics, you mean in the K-to-12 population?

J. DINN: Yes. We know that we have an aging population and we heard in the debate today that our population is projected to decline. I'm looking at schools I visited, even like La Poile, where you had three students. So I'm just looking at overall –

T. OSBORNE: One second. I apologize, if you could take off your mask because it's a little hard to hear you.

J. DINN: I forget to put it on when I'm supposed to and take it off when I'm – come September, please.

That's what I'm basically looking at: the changing population. Will we see an increasing number of people in large urban areas, that kind of thing? I'm just wondering if there is some planning for that as well.

T. OSBORNE: I can probably ask Robyn to step in, but it is a topic of discussion in the department. I mean, you see some schools with shrinking populations within the school. COVID has taught us a lot, whether or not if there's a population of two or three students in a school that you can combine the education of that class with another. I'm not saying that there's a decision made, but it's something worth looking at.

Those are some of the discussions in areas where it is becoming more and more difficult to provide a solid education because of the shrinking population. If you get down to two or three or five students in a school, are you able to have somebody go to that school one or two days a week but have them learn online the remainder of the time? Do they get a better education? I'm not prepared to provide you with an answer to that yet because we don't know. Those are the types of questions in the future that I think you need an analysis around.

Outside of that, Robyn, did you want to –?

J. DINN: To that point, I'm thinking of schools in town that, by the time they were built, were already over capacity. I'm thinking in Torbay and these places.

T. OSBORNE: It is urbanization, and you're right. When the school was planned, it was

probably planned for a certain population, but because of urbanization, people are moving to the metro areas.

J. DINN: Yes, and that is where my question is going with that one.

R. HAYES: One of the things we do each year is the teacher allocations. That involves looking at the enrolment from this school year and determining where the students reside, the makeup of the students, the grades that they're in and the teachers that are required. We figure out what the declining enrolment is and, coinciding with that, the decline in the number of teachers we need to deploy.

We also look at things when we are planning for schools and where new schools need to be built and given the infrastructure that we have. All of that is taken into account yearly and on our yearly planning for future years. That is one of the examples of how the changing demographics factor in every year into our calculations.

I'm sure there are a great many other things on the post-secondary side, Candice, I guess looking at who is enrolling in the university and the different campuses they attend, those sorts of things. Those are always being considered as per the changing demographics.

J. DINN: Okay.

I will just go and pick out a few of the other questions that I have there, but that's the last of my questions on that section.

CHAIR: Okay, are you finished with that section?

J. DINN: I am. Like I said, I have general questions.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping, please.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next group of subheads, please.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.1.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.1.02 carry?

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

I just have a couple of questions on this section and then I’m going to ask some general ones.

Under Administrative Support, 2.1.01, under Salaries, it’s \$145,000 less than budgeted in ’20-’21 and it went back up; can you explain why that’s the case?

R. HAYES: We did have some vacancies in this area during the year. Some have been filled during the year; others have become vacant. Currently, we may have one or two positions vacant, but those are in the recruitment stages. Also impacting this budget last year was we didn’t hire any summer students. We were just at the start of the pandemic so we didn’t bring in summer students, as a lot of us were still working at home at that point, and we didn’t hire a co-op student during the summer semester last year as well.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Under Professional Services, there was a large drop balance and I guess my question what’s included in those professional services – why was it dropped last year? Is that something we can save this year as well?

R. HAYES: We had a planned legislative review that we were planning to do last fiscal year, but because of COVID, it really put us behind in recruiting someone to take on that legislative review. We’re hoping to move forward with that this year. There was a small professional service required on an actuarial

calculation for a pension and that was the only professional services we required. But we are looking at those legislative reviews this year, so we will require the budget and that’s why it was back in.

B. PETTEN: This amount is only going to be short term? This \$112,000, once that review is done that will go back down again.

R. HAYES: Well, every year we do zero-based budgeting, so it really gets factored in then what the plans are for the department in the coming year. It’s not just for legislative reviews; it’s for any professional services under the purview of what we may need done, any reviews that may need to be carried out or any other professional services. It’s really determined during each budget cycle, when we do the zero-based, what’s going to be required.

B. PETTEN: That \$112,000 should stay pretty constant according to that.

R. HAYES: Depending on what the plan is for future years, it could roughly be around \$100,000 each year depending on what’s planned.

B. PETTEN: I don’t really have a question, but I have to ask a question – general.

2.1.02, Assistance to Educational Agencies and Advisory Committees: Those Grants and Subsidies, what are they basically?

R. HAYES: That’s a pretty standard line item every budget. In here, you will see the money for the T. I. Murphy Centre, so that’s the greatest portion of this budget. Each year we give them approximately \$866,000.

B. PETTEN: What group is that again?

R. HAYES: T. I. Murphy Centre.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

R. HAYES: We also have a Cultural Connection Strategy that has about \$415,600. The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training receives \$119,000. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada also receive an amount, as well as the Federation of School

Councils, the Learning Disabilities Association, and Encounters with Canada. There is a set amount every year.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Can I get a list of those later?

R. HAYES: They'll be in the binder when you –

B. PETTEN: Okay, perfect, thank you.

T. OSBORNE: There is a private name here; we should probably redact that, for pension purposes.

B. PETTEN: No sweat. No problem.

T. OSBORNE: A person we paid a pension out to, probably – you'll know what the redaction is when you get the book.

B. PETTEN: That's fair enough, makes sense.

Minister, this is probably a question I already know, but it's good to have it on record. I think you and the Premier maybe said it. I know you did. Whether it was a conversation, you said it during the House.

MUN would be expected to appear before Public Accounts on a go-forward basis, correct?

T. OSBORNE: Yes, exactly.

B. PETTEN: So the legislation will have to be changed obviously. That will come when the MUN Act is reviewed. When the new MUN Act is in place that will be part of the MUN Act.

T. OSBORNE: Yes, once they're given the autonomy that they're looking for and they want, part of that will be expanded access to the Auditor General and part of it will be the fact that they will come and appear before the House for Estimates. In terms of the 75 hours or whatever, the House, the Management Commission or somebody is going to have to work out how they fit in. I'm just promising to deliver them here. You can figure out what the hours look like.

B. PETTEN: Figure it out from there, yeah.

For the AG, there will be no way of denying access to the AG as well under this new set up, right?

T. OSBORNE: No, that's correct.

B. PETTEN: Okay, that's good to hear.

Under this autonomy that MUN may get, are there any safeguards in place that tuition don't – that's my fear. Actually, I probably said that publicly. I'm fearful sometimes with giving too much autonomy to institutions that have so much input and so much investment from public money. If tuition were to increase double or triple – we don't know that. The president is after making a reference that it could triple. What assurances – the protection I should say are in place that we can get some relative – especially for the Newfoundland students?

T. OSBORNE: I'll ask Candice to expand a little bit, once I provide some comments. There are other institutions that have their academic autonomy as well as fiscal autonomy in the country. One of the things in our discussions – because MUN does set the tuition, not government. Government set the tuition freeze. Once we remove the tuition freeze, it is up to Memorial to determine what their tuitions are.

One of the things we'd asked them to be cognizant of is remaining competitive. My understanding is when they announce what they are going to announce that they will be competitive, not only with Atlantic but across the country.

One of the safeguards we have is the tuitions have to be realistic or competitive or they won't attract students. In terms of Newfoundland and Labrador students, we have indicated in the budget and the details are being worked on and will coincide with MUN figuring out what their tuition is, but we will put in place an expanded access to grants for local Newfoundland and Labrador students.

One of the benefits of government pulling out of the tuition-freeze game is the fact that regardless of where you came from, the tuition freeze kept tuition cheap. Taxpayers in this province, regardless of where you came from, subsidized your education. Now, to a certain degree,

Canadian students, regardless of what province they go to, receive the benefit of being subsidized by taxpayers in that province. International students are generally treated differently and generally pay for the cost of their education.

I'm not presuming what MUN is going to come out with; I'll leave that up to them. We're not dictating what they should put in place in terms of tuition. Our response will be instead of taxpayers in this province guaranteeing the lowest tuitions in the country for everybody, we're going to put a plan in place to ensure that local Newfoundland and Labrador students have access to enhanced, increased, expanded grants.

B. PETTEN: Okay, thank you very much.

T. OSBORNE: Candice, did you want to add to that?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: I think what I would add is Dr. Timmons is on record in reaction to the budget this week of speaking to three principles. I don't recall specifically the wording she used, but I think it talked about what the minister just addressed, which is remaining competitive, ensuring that students are not negatively impacted and also make sure that current students will have an opportunity to be grandparented in.

Certainly, the decision around tuition is Memorial's decision. For us to be able to say to you specifically what the impact will be, we will need to see exactly how they plan to model that out over the next number of years in terms of increment and in terms of sequence.

We have, I would say, the most progressive student aid package in all of Canada. That has set us up really well. I would also suggest to you that in raising tuition, there are lots of examples across Canada. Rob may be able to speak to that quickly. But where we can draw upon the best practices and the lessons learned, more importantly, of how we can ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador students are treated in the way that we would want to see them treated as they pursue their post-secondary education.

Rob, anything further to add?

R. FEAVER: There are hundreds of examples I can come of the top of my head on targeted needs-based grants that flourish across the country. Building a model in response to the tuition increase at Memorial will not be an onerous task whatsoever. We have a lot to go on. The federal program has needs-based grants now that target low-income families. They're progressive: They decline as family income goes up. The maximum beneficiaries are those with the highest level need. We have lots of examples to build on from that.

B. PETTEN: Thanks.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Under section 2.1.01, the payout for Employee Benefits was lower than expected last year. Why? Please.

R. HAYES: The majority of this budget is for our WorkplaceNL premiums. Those costs fluctuate yearly. We never know what exactly they're going to be. We've had them be as low as \$13,000; we've had them as high as \$89,000. It's really a juggling act of what the right mix is there. Last year there was less requirement on the worker's compensation.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Also under that section, expenses on Purchased Services and Property, Furnishings and Equipment were lower than expected as well. What purchases were anticipated but didn't get made, didn't happen?

R. HAYES: The majority of those costs there are the Xerox costs for the department. With so many of us working from home for portions of the year, there were less requirements on the printing from the Xerox machines. That's what accounted for the discrepancy there.

J. DINN: Thank you.

You want to get a new perspective on photocopiers, go to a school. It's one of the sources of stress.

Under 2.1.02, Assistance to Educational Agencies and Advisory Committees, I'm just curious, with regard to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils, has their operating grant been bumped up to \$50,000? I think that was one recommendation we had talked about when I was first elected. I'm just wondering what the grant is that's provided to them now. Is it \$50,000? I think there was a move towards that.

R. HAYES: It's currently at \$40,000.

J. DINN: Okay.

R. HAYES: But it's something that can certainly be explored further, if the minister so wishes. We can do some analysis on that to see what it should be set at.

J. DINN: No, and I appreciate that. The fact is I think, Minister, when you and I first talked about this way back they had been cut. I'm glad to see that it's moving in the right direction, and especially now as we move towards a system where the district is integrated into the – I think they'll provide a valuable body to consult with as well.

If I may, can we have an update on the hiring of 10 teachers for immunocompromised students? I'm assuming all these positions have been filled. What are the plans for those in September? Like I said, I know many of us will be vaccinated, but I'm just wondering for those immunocompromised students who may not be fully integrated back into the system at that time.

R. HAYES: Yes, the 10 teachers were hired this year for that. I guess it would really be an analysis of what school looks like in September as we do move forward in the pandemic and if they will be required to that level. We do a teacher allocation, as we said, every year, so we do allocate the teachers. How they are deployed is really determined at the district level. It would be for them to determine if the enrolment in virtual learning is required for the teachers to be hired.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is there any information yet on how the adult literacy pilot program is working and how many

people were helped by it? Or implementing the literacy action plan in general, any information on that?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: We're in year three of the Adult Literacy Action Plan. Certainly, there is significant progress that's occurring. We did experience, like most departments, some interruptions due to COVID in terms of the workflow. Actually, what we ended up doing was looking at a reprioritization of some of those actions to focus more specifically on employer needs and learner needs in the advent of online, and also look at what has changed. The plan itself was actually created to be fluid and to adapt, because we know that the circumstances for adult learners are changing consistently.

One of the things that I can report is that we have looked at a foundational literacy program, which we launched this past year in The Gathering Place. We actually have 13 clients currently enrolled, availing of foundational literacy including basic digital literacy and numeracy skills. We know that there is interest from three additional clients. We have seen some really great wins in terms of some of the new approaches we are taking to some of our literacy programming.

J. DINN: How many in the pilot program all together? I don't know if you said that.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Thirteen students. Sorry, the update as of this past month, it has been 13 clients. We launched this program just before Christmas. We have interest right now from three additional. We are hoping that we will see anywhere from 16 to 20 clients in this program by the fall.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you. Perfect.

So that 13, those are the 13 at The Gathering Place.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Thirteen clients at The Gathering Place have been confirmed as actively engaged in the foundational pilot for this literacy program.

J. DINN: Okay. Perfect, appreciate that.

Can we have an update –?

T. OSBORNE: Jim, I'll just add to that.

This program, even now, is a huge success. The clients at The Gathering Place would ordinarily not make their way to the Murphy Centre. This is reaching out to them directly. If we get even one of them – improve their life and develop the confidence because they've attained a high school equivalency and get gainful employment, through the course of their life, this program pays for itself.

J. DINN: You'll get no argument from me, Minister. I can tell you, colleagues of mine who teach at Brother T. I. who had students when they were in school and it is only then at the Brother T. I. Murphy Centre that they realize that they unburdened and let them know what they were going through while they were at school. You catch them where you can. The public school system is not meant for everyone at that one time. No, you won't get any argument that they are contributing members of society.

I can think of one constituent of mine: She has gone back to upgrade and she is now looking at becoming an assistant in an office. And that's just getting her eyesight back. It is fantastic.

Could we have an update on how work is progressing on the new francophone school? I think last year's budget included \$2.5 million to site development. Has this been completed yet? If so, what are the next steps?

T. OSBORNE: At this particular stage, there's nothing concrete, Jim.

The school they were looking for would accommodate about 500 students; we only have 350 province-wide. One of the facilities that I think may suit the purposes – there's been some discussion – is the School for the Deaf. It's a good building. It's very conveniently located close to Pitts Memorial Drive, to Team Gushue and to the Harbour Arterial, so no matter where you are in the region you'll have quick access to that facility.

The initial estimate on a new school for the francophone school district is \$44 million. Based

on my time here in the Legislature, if the estimate is \$44 million, you're \$50 million, \$55 million or maybe \$60 million by the time it's done. I'd rather focus on available infrastructure if it suits the needs, and I think, one example, the School for the Deaf could.

J. DINN: Even where they are right now, the second school.

I will say this, and I'll put it on the record: I would not support the building of a new school out in Galway. The problem with the francophone school is when it comes to programming. It's not about the building that's keeping people from there, but the lack – and if you look at the studies that they provided, by the time they get to Grade 8 or 9 the enrolment drops off because a lot of the students are going to the English School District, where there's programming offered. I agree with that, at least until the numbers are up and then you can look at it. I think we have the School for the Deaf and even the current facility right now, which used to be Holy Cross. To me, I think there are other priorities, for sure.

Can we have an update to, I guess, the Inuit Bachelor of Education? It's an exemplar and I had a chance to visit some of the students many years ago. A true partnership between the Nunatsiavut Government and the MUN faculty of education. Does the department plan, then, to create programs similar to the IBED program for other Indigenous groups to promote reconciliation and empowerment? If I remember correctly, there might have been some talk about this in the last Estimates meeting.

T. OSBORNE: (Inaudible.)

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

T. OSBORNE: Candice?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: We're going to have to get some information on that because it's not something that I'm familiar with.

J. DINN: Okay.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: You're speaking specifically around the Bachelor of Education?

J. DINN: I think it was up in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, but anyway, that these are graduates who then go back to the communities.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Right.

J. DINN: That was for the Inuit, but I'm thinking of other Indigenous groups.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Okay.

J. DINN: Will there be a similar program offered for other Indigenous groups? That's what I was after.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Okay.

I am familiar with the program that you're referencing. Certainly, we have not engaged with Memorial specifically around the pursuit of a similar type of programming with other communities, but it is something we'll take back to certainly consider. If there are opportunities there to have that discussion with Memorial, we'll pursue it.

CHAIR: Okay.

The Member's time has expired.

MHA Trimper.

P. TRIMPER: I'm going to wait until we get into the post-secondary and I'll take my opportunity then. Thanks.

CHAIR: All right.

MHA Petten, do you have any more questions?

B. PETTEN: I have some general ones. I have no more on the headings, but I have general questions.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn, do you have any more on this section?

J. DINN: This section, no, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.1.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.1.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.1.02 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next grouping.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.6.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.6.01 carry?

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

I have a few questions on this here.

Under 3.1.01, Teaching Services, under the Grants and Subsidies, why the additional \$10 million for Regular Teachers? Do we expect to see an increase this year?

R. HAYES: Are you talking about the budget '21-'22 increase? Or are you talking about the actuals, where we went from a budget in 2021 of –

B. PETTEN: Well, it is kind of relative, because it went up \$10 million and it is kind of staying up there.

R. HAYES: Okay.

B. PETTEN: It's gone up again. It's gone up two amounts, really.

R. HAYES: I'll explain both. As you're aware, we had some federal restart funding, so there we added extra resources into the school system for COVID. We added in money for additional guidance counsellors, additional admin, those virtual teachers that were referred to, as well as some terms substitutes. That accounts for the increase in 2020-21.

The big thing happening in '21-'22, as the school year has not yet ended, a portion of those salaries will be reflected in the remainder of the school year. Also happening next year is a 27th pay period. The way the calendar falls and the pay periods, how they fall, there's a 27th pay period for teachers in '21-'22. There's been an increase put in there to cover that additional pay period.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Under Substitute Teachers, it's approximately \$15.8 million and it looks to me like a drop balance. Where were these savings directed? I understand that Substitute Teachers dropped because schools were closed.

R. HAYES: Exactly.

B. PETTEN: I'm answering my own question, yes. That's why, was it? Schools were closed and the teachers were home, okay.

R. HAYES: Yes, schools were closed and we didn't need substitutes.

B. PETTEN: You don't do that very often in here.

Substitute Teachers, does the same thing apply there with the \$3.5 million?

R. HAYES: Sorry, which line?

B. PETTEN: Substitute Teachers.

R. HAYES: Substitute Teachers, so there was the decrease in the actuals because the schools were closed, but we're anticipating that the schools will hopefully be open.

B. PETTEN: It's all COVID-related with the schools, the same thing.

R. HAYES: Yes, it's all COVID.

B. PETTEN: Okay, I figured that.

3.1.02, under School Board Operations, Purchased Services: There was an increase of \$627,000 last year. Can you explain that?

R. HAYES: Yes. That is for property and liability insurance on school buildings. The premium went up in '20-'21.

B. PETTEN: Really?

R. HAYES: Yes.

B. PETTEN: So basically the insurance, wow.

R. HAYES: Went up.

B. PETTEN: Everyone gets dinged by insurance. It's not just us, Jim.

Grants and Subsidies, the Operating Grant: Why is there approximately \$6 million additional amount in that?

R. HAYES: That is some of the COVID funding that was in there. In this line item, you would see the custodial extra hours that were put in there for the extra cleaning in the buildings and the extra hours for the custodians. They would be accounted for in that line item there. The laptops would also be in there as well.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

3.1.04, under School Supplies, Operating Accounts: It was less, \$372,000, so is that again less requirements post-COVID or ...?

R. HAYES: Under the School Supplies line?

B. PETTEN: Yes, 3.1.04, it's a decrease of \$372,000 from what it was.

R. HAYES: One of the things that are accounted for here is the parent resource kits that are sent out. When you take your child for their immunizations at the Public Health office, you usually leave with this parent resource kit with resources; there is a book in there and some educational material for children at various stages. Because of COVID, these kits were not given out during this fiscal year. We didn't have to mail out the kits to the various Public Health organizations to keep them stocked with the kits because they weren't allowed to give them out.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

3.2.01, under Curriculum Development, Transportation and Communications – I know we talked about this earlier. Is the plan to keep Transportation and Communications as it is with the hope that an adjustment can be made next year? Am I correct (inaudible)?

So we're going to see this right through – we see this amount, the dip and then it staying stable. Is this just kind of a trial run this year to see if you can function in a normal world with less travel? Okay. Good.

Professional Services, an additional \$66,500 spent from last year. Can you explain what that is about? Or where that went?

B. CLARKE: Normally, the departments work inside curriculum and other related curriculum policies and programs would occur through working groups in the school year, which by the department would supply substitutes and travel or online virtual. With the shutdown, the departments will continue, but there was an increased emphasis on summer work. Teachers are off then and you don't provide them a substitute, so you give them a daily stipend to work for us for two or three days. So that would be the significant increase for last summer.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Purchased Services went from \$70,000 to \$5,600 and back up to \$70,000. Really, I suppose, what wasn't spent last year? What did that cover? What was that involved with?

R. HAYES: Because a lot of these meetings couldn't occur face to face, there was no requirement for room rentals or meeting costs, which would be charged to Purchased Services. So while we have seen the increase during the summer work for the virtual in the teacher pay, we also had an offsetting savings because we couldn't meet face to face.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

3.2.02, under Language Programs, Operating Accounts: Professional Services have returned to pre-COVID levels. So what's included in that, I should say?

B. CLARKE: Professional Services in that budget line is associated with translations. As I alluded to in the previous answer, COVID made our work kind of shift forward. So what was planned for some French translations of curriculum (inaudible) guides, policy work, the new responsive teaching and learning didn't occur in a timely way. So we would anticipate that returning.

B. PETTEN: I guess more of a general question. It would make you wonder when we get a year under us, and hopefully COVID is a thing of the past, there may be a lot of things changed right through government with all departments and budget lines if I am not –

T. OSBORNE: Yeah, no doubt about it.

B. PETTEN: That seems to be a theme here.

T. OSBORNE: Yeah, I think we've learned a lot from COVID and I think you'll see some adaptations as a result.

B. PETTEN: And savings.

T. OSBORNE: The only thing we're not saving here tonight – I thought when Elizabeth Gallagher retired the heat would –

B. PETTEN: I know.

T. OSBORNE: We used to honestly think that Elizabeth Gallagher used to turn the heat up later into the evening to drive us home. Get us tired instead of – but anyway, I think the ghost of Elizabeth is in the building.

B. PETTEN: Yeah, they can never get that right over here, can they.

Under 3.2.02, Allowances and Assistance, it's dropped to \$28,000 from \$1,070,000. So can you explain that, please?

B. CLARKE: That's associated with programming to support teacher and student travel, largely. I mean, there are several programs in there, but they're all sort of related by getting students and teachers in what we call French milieu. Getting them to Quebec, to Saint Pierre and New Brunswick, places like that. Of course, all travel ceased. So that being a

significant part of that budget line, it was a significant decrease.

B. PETTEN: Grants and Subsidies: Was that why they're under budget this year as well?

B. CLARKE: Yeah, I should've probably, based on the next line, mentioned that one. Of course, what we did as a department, we wanted to hold – I mean having students learn French and their francophone identity for French-first language it's really important that they have these experiences. Of course, in Newfoundland and Labrador, largely surrounded by a very large anglophone population. What we did as a department, we sought out new opportunities to provide more resources, more reading. We partnered with several NGOs to provide local, virtual and by producing resources for when we do get back to normal they'll still be there and useful, en français, in French.

B. PETTEN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

With regard to school counsellors, I know we had hired on some extra this year, a part of COVID. I'm just wondering: Are there any plans to increase the number or maintain the number of school counsellors in the school?

T. OSBORNE: We've increased the provincial budget, so administration and guidance we increased last year as a result of COVID. But the provincial budget we've increased for the administration and guidance. That increased, so we're going to maintain it and we found the money within the department to maintain it. So, yes, those numbers, the increase that you saw last year in guidance will stay.

J. DINN: That's positive news, Minister. I'll say that. It's a good start.

Is there anything in the budget here to accommodate counsellors in terms of their increased workload and the fact that they may have to travel between schools? Maybe not a problem or so much an issue in St. John's, but

I'm thinking even on the Northern Peninsula where you might have one counsellor responsible for several schools that are geographically dispersed. They may have a lower total number of students on their caseload, but there's travelling. Is there any attempt to address those challenges?

T. OSBORNE: I'm thinking that would be a Robyn question.

R. HAYES: Again, that would be determined during the teacher allocation, so how the district would deploy those guidance counsellors would be at their purview. We would give the allocation, but how they are deployed would be up to the district to determine.

J. DINN: You realize, of course, once the district and the NLESD are integrated you won't be able to give me that answer, right? I'm just saying.

Last fall we had problems with the hiring of custodians. I'm just wondering how the situation is now. Do we have a full slate of custodial employees in the schools? Are there any regions in particular where we're having trouble finding staff? Just what are the plans for, really, the upcoming school year with regard to custodians?

R. HAYES: To my knowledge, all of the additional custodians that were put in for COVID, hours were topped up and temporary employees were added in. Those were all, to my knowledge, hired. We will have to see what the school reopening plan will look like for September and where we are with COVID to determine what the requirements will be there.

J. DINN: Thank you very much for that.

Under 3.1.01, is it possible to have the breakdown of teachers who are – you're not going to be able to give this to me now, but is it possible to have a breakdown of the number of teachers employed in the province by region and maybe the grade and specialty, if possible. Specialty may be a bit more difficult, but grade level and leave and so on and so forth.

I know that in the plans last year when the district had its task force, it did have that breakdown. I'm looking for something along

those lines for this year and for upcoming, if possible.

T. OSBORNE: We can request that from the English School District.

J. DINN: Excellent. Thank you.

Do we have any idea of the number of teachers who retired last year – because I think it would have been a good year to retire in many ways – and maybe the number of teacher retirements for this year? Do you have any indication of that?

T. OSBORNE: Again, Robyn, that would have to come from the district? Yeah.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

T. OSBORNE: You're premature on your questions.

J. DINN: Oh, I know.

T. OSBORNE: Eighteen months from now, you can ask us.

J. DINN: Good.

Like I said, if I were teaching at this time, my last year, it might have been a good time to get out of Dodge. In changes in enrolment since last year, do we have any data on this and maybe a breakdown?

T. OSBORNE: Again, I think (inaudible).

R. HAYES: Based on the AGR, the difference from the 2019-20 school year to '20-'21 is down about 212 students.

J. DINN: Okay, is that consistent then? Two hundred and twelve doesn't seem to be a lot, but is –

R. HAYES: No.

J. DINN: So it's probably less than what happened before, is it?

R. HAYES: It is probably a lower year for declining enrolment this year.

J. DINN: Is it plateauing at all?

R. HAYES: I don't have any future year's data; we usually base it on every year's AGR and what comes in under that.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

Under 3.1.02, has there been any feedback on the logistics and the challenges of cleaning and disinfecting school buses? If there were any, how were they resolved?

T. OSBORNE: Robyn, do you have any – I mean, I haven't heard any complaints or concerns.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

You've heard me ask this one before: Have we looked at the purchase of fogging machines to disinfect schools? I'm asking this knowing that some of the research now suggests that COVID-19 is primarily aerosol and that touch is probably the least way it's going to be transmitted.

I notice we still haven't used a fogging machine here. I'm just wondering, are there any plans to have those in place for schools?

T. OSBORNE: Not that I know of, Jim. I mean, in discussions with Public Health, they didn't seem to put a great deal of credence in the fogging machines. In discussions that I've had, the focus was on cleaning high-touch areas.

Having said that, we're now learning that it is more aerosol than it is – less risk of picking it up by touching. So I think the information continues to evolve on this, but the latest understanding we have is it is more aerosol.

J. DINN: Yeah.

A question I meant to ask earlier: I think in the budget there's \$1 million allocated for improving of ventilation, if I read it correctly. How's that to be spent? That's for the schools, I take it, but what will that be used for? Is that to upgrade existing or to start looking at putting mechanical ventilation in –?

T. OSBORNE: Robyn, you may be able to speak to it to some degree.

I know last year any school with a ventilation system, the system was checked, serviced and they were operating. The other thing, through the All-Party Committee, we had the identification of screens on windows. We ensured that windows in classrooms were operational and a minimal of one window per classroom had to be screened. The district set out to ensure that at least one window was screened.

In terms of what's happening this year – Robyn?

R. HAYES: With regard to what would be happening this year, the alterations and improvement budget for the school actually resides with Transportation and Infrastructure, so any of the details would be with them. The department would act as a liaison between the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and the two school districts to get a listing of their priorities and where the needs would be. But, ultimately, TI would have the details on where it would be required.

J. DINN: A question, then, and this goes back to many years ago. Depending on the project – renovation, building construction, whatever – it could be under TI, the Department of Education or the school district. Is it now under one department, like TI? So anything to do with school maintenance, building construction: all of that would be under Transportation?

R. HAYES: The maintenance of the buildings would be under the school districts, your general maintenance and your small stuff. But any larger alterations and improvements or new builds would all be within TI and not the department.

J. DINN: Excellent.

What accounts for the increased spending last year on Purchased Services? Why has this item gone up in this year's budget? You may have said that already but I don't have it here.

R. HAYES: Yes, MHA Petten asked that. That was for increased property and liability insurance. For this year, we did get a little bit extra on that. The premiums actually have RST on them that were being mistreated as HST. We have been given the budget to cover off that expense under this line item.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

The department actually overspent last year on Transportation of School Children by about \$9 million. Was this money used to purchase new buses? Is this part of the \$26 million from the federal government?

T. OSBORNE: Any of the federal funding that came in to the province; we still have to show where we spend it. The district didn't purchase all the buses; they purchased some, they contracted others. The increase, Robyn –

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

T. OSBORNE: Yeah, it's a show through. The revenue would have gone to general revenue, but it shows here as an expense.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

Do we want to take a break now for 10 minutes? Is everyone okay with that?

T. OSBORNE: If you guys want to try to get out 10 minutes early or whatever, I'm cool to go, but I am cool to break if you want to.

B. PETTEN: I could keep going. It doesn't matter to me.

CHAIR: Okay. Keep going.

The Member's time has expired.

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to Transportation of School Children. Some would know – maybe all know – it's one of my biggest crusades. I was talking to a lady this morning. I said, well, I'll continue on, I suppose, one of these days. I won't stop until I leave politics and hopefully one day someone will agree with me.

The 1.6 busing policy: I know this is probably a bit hard to answer right now because you're looking at busing as a provincial issue, where a 1.6 busing is more of a metro area, even a

suburban more area than even the heart of St. John's. What is the cost of providing busing, I guess, to those metro schools? They're all in that area that requires – the demand for 1.6 busing is more than other places. Is there any analysis on that?

T. OSBORNE: The last time I spoke with Mr. Stack on it, I don't know if they have a definitive cost, but they did say it was in the multi-millions.

B. PETTEN: That's the overall cost of the busing.

T. OSBORNE: No, no, of eliminating the 1.6.

B. PETTEN: Multi-millions.

I guess there's no provision for going from five to seven, or seven to 10 or three to – do you know what I'm saying? That's all the number –

T. OSBORNE: Yeah, we didn't break it down. We just looked at it overall. Like I said, I don't know if they had an actual definitive cost, but Mr. Stack did indicate that you'd be talking multi-millions if you were to eliminate the 1.6.

B. PETTEN: Would that be something that you could request or ask to get, that they could provide, or is there any –?

T. OSBORNE: I think there's a fair bit of work actually involved, because you have to GPS where the pickups would be, where students live and the routes.

Right now, if you're within the 1.6, they haven't routed the streets, other than courtesy runs, and courtesy runs are generally a stop. Children will walk to a particular area and get picked up if there's room available on the bus. But I think there's a fair bit of work involved with that because they'd have to map where the students actually live and determine what streets the buses would have to go on. So it's really a guess until they actually do the work to determine where every student lives.

B. PETTEN: This appears to be a question that's always asked and no one ever really gives a definitive answer.

T. OSBORNE: Yeah, because it's difficult to give a definitive answer unless they – you know, if the policy decision was made that we were going to pay the multi-millions we'd figure out then based on them mapping every student. They'd have to figure out every student address and build a map for the bus. If a bus is full, you obviously can't go down – so it would change the configuration of busing routes as well because at present you'd have to add additional buses. But it is really a change in mapping configuration if you were to build that in. They could probably guess but it would be a guess.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Another area too – and this is in my own district as well, and I realize the financial situation we are in, obviously. I don't know if any of your officials are aware of or if there has been anything made to the department on this or not. It is probably at the school district level. Frank Roberts has no cafeteria. It is an old school – it was my high school, actually, but now it is junior high. We did have a cafeteria when we were there but now that is converted to class space. It is a room up there. I seen it myself last year, I believe, before COVID.

I think in this day and age, we're looking at all of the healthy eating and trying to improve things, so I think it is a big void. I don't know if you're aware of that, or your officials were aware of that, or if there are any plans to address that. I think that is something that was alarming to me when I found out. It is a busy school, as you know. There is a high population.

T. OSBORNE: I'm sure the district is aware, but I wasn't aware of that. We could engage and I could – you're welcome to give Mr. Stack a call on your own, or I could arrange a call with Mr. Stack on that. I don't know the logistics, what the student population is, or whether or not there is ability to – if the capacity of the school would allow to find space for a cafeteria. I honestly don't know; I think that is something we'd have to engage the district on.

B. PETTEN: Fair enough.

I still have some more questions, but I'll continue on to the line by line.

Under 3.3.01, Student Support Services, not too much there. I notice Professional Services went from \$92,000 to zero, back up to \$63,500. Again, I'm sure it is probably COVID related – that seems to be the rationale but the two amounts are different. It was at \$92,000, went down, and now it has not gone back up to where it was. Is there an explanation on that?

B. CLARKE: That was very specific to the new positions in the department called teaching and learning assistants. That didn't happen in the summer, it was targeted – that's not to imply that professional learning didn't occur. We did that throughout the school in the early fall throughout the school year, but obviously we'd like to return to that model because it really decreases the impact on the classroom.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Under 3.3.02, Grants and Subsidies, we noticed there's no savings last year and it's the same number of students. Did we send the same number of students as we did in the past years? The budget increased by \$150,000; can you explain that?

T. STAMP: That was basically a reprofiling of funding. We pay \$150,000 for autism and orientation and mobility specialists. In prior years that expense, which is paid to APSEA, was paid out of Purchased Services up in 3.3.01, Student Support Services. What we've done this year is we reprofiled it down to APSEA to align it with the APSEA payments.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

3.4.01, Evaluation, Research and Certification, Salaries dropped by a little less than \$100,000.

R. HAYES: There were some vacancies there during the year at various times. There were five, but not all at the one time.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Professional Services, I guess, Robyn, you might answer that one, too, the drop there.

R. HAYES: The Professional Services here, that's where we charged the marking boards for

the public exams, and because that didn't occur last June we didn't require that.

B. PETTEN: Makes perfect sense.

3.5.01, Early Learning and Child Development, I see Supplies – again, I'm assuming that's another COVID blip on the radar.

R. HAYES: Yes, it would be, similar to those parent resource kits, there are KinderStart bags as well, so those would be charged here and that's what would've made up that savings.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Allowances and Assistance dropped by \$9 million last year as well.

R. HAYES: That's primarily the Child Care Services Subsidy Program. It's application based and it does fluctuate yearly. Some of the things that occurred with this one this year was the introduction of the \$25 a day, so there's less requirement to pay a subsidy; it is picked up in another area. Also, during some of the COVID shutdowns, the department paid compensation grants to the centres. We paid the centres directly as opposed to having the parents pay; therefore, they didn't have to get their subsidy, basically.

B. PETTEN: So the Grants and Subsidies, \$28 million budgeted and now it is back up to \$41 million. Would that be tied to the \$25 daycare?

R. HAYES: It is, yes.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

B. PETTEN: Thank you.

CHAIR: MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to go back to the section 3.1.02, I don't really have specific questions but they are connected to each of the departments.

I was going to ask a question about retirement of older school buses, but I am just wondering with the 1.6-kilometre rule. If I remember correctly in an earlier discussion, the amount projected was

\$30 million to eliminate the – in an early debate when I was first elected, which is an exorbitant amount of money in some ways. I am just wondering, within the metro area, especially the area serviced by the Metrobus, if indeed there could be some arrangement with Metrobus to take care of busing services.

When I was growing up – and I'm not going to tell you the story of walking uphill both ways in a snowstorm. Nevertheless, I lived on Shaw Street; not much different from where I live now and I did go to Holy Cross and I did go to Brother Rice. Brother Rice is roughly about 3 kilometres away when I look at it. So if there had been busing at that time, I would have been bused but we walked. We did take the city bus at that time.

There was a pilot project – I forget which Ontario township – where they had a combination Uber public service where people could say hey, I need a bus for tomorrow and the bus would change its route according to who called in. Instead of waiting, the bus picked them up.

I am just wondering then, with Metrobus, rather than having both the yellow buses and the Metrobus, why not look at using a system, within the metro area, where there are bus services. Obviously, that may not work out in further areas but maybe. That is an idea I am putting out there to maybe have that conversation, because good luck when you take on the role of busing because that will become – I'm sure, as Greg knows, busing is probably the biggest headache even in a non-COVID year. So I'll throw that out there now as to maybe look at somehow using the Metrobus system that's here and seeing how that can be integrated into it, just a thought.

I'm just wondering: How has the pandemic affected the schedule to retire older buses? That's the question of where I was going. What extra safety measures are being taken to ensure that older units in the fleet are road safe and ready? That may change, if I understand what we said, that come the new year we're probably going to see an alleviation of that anyway.

T. OSBORNE: Yes, so a couple of thoughts to share with you, Jim.

One is we increased the allowable age of school buses by two years – I believe it was two years, Robyn? Yeah.

We increased the allowable age of school buses by two years. This year, if we go back to normal, a number of those buses would not ordinarily be permitted to be used anyway. But because we needed the buses, we made an allowance and if they passed inspection, we allow them to be an additional two years older than we would normally allow, which I believe is 12 years, a 12-year-old bus. Many of them will come out of service in any event.

The federal government provided us the funding for the additional buses. As we had outlined earlier, the funding came in through the federal government because of the pandemic and the need for the additional buses. The money went into general revenue and then showed as an expense in the department. The buses that went beyond by the extra two years, they'll come out of service this year.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

What is the source of the federal revenue? I guess that's for the buses, then, correct, in that section?

T. OSBORNE: Yes.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you very much.

Under section 3.2.01, Curriculum Development: Is it possible to have an update on the expansion of the Brilliant Labs program? There was additional money announced for this just before the election; what will this go toward?

B. CLARKE: Brilliant Labs has been a really good partner in helping us progress our technology program, in particular in the Grades K to 6. So we've actually partnered with them on a couple of initiatives. One is to get coding and technology into the hands of kids and help teachers deliver that programming. As well, we've engaged them to increase experiential learning opportunities for secondary students where they will help partner students with Verafin and high-tech companies and getting them that face to face, which unfortunately right

now is still virtual, with actual people using it in their everyday lives.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Would the minister provide us with an update on the development of the Technology Career Pathway program that is to be rolled out in the 2021-22 school year?

T. OSBORNE: Certainly. We announced the schools that we had identified across the province. We set out initially to identify eight schools and I believe, Brad, we are up to 15, maybe.

B. CLARKE: It is definitely in the mid-teens, Minister, 14 or 15.

T. OSBORNE: Fourteen or 15. So we wanted to have representation across the province so that the peninsulas – there are a couple of schools in Labrador, there is one in Cape St. Francis I know, one in St. John's and one in CBS and then outside of the Avalon I think the next closest one would be Carbonear. We look at the four peninsulas, Labrador and tried to get representation across the province. Some larger schools, some smaller schools, one of the schools in Labrador we have arranged through the Centre for Distance Learning to ensure that we tried out that model as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Have there been any moves to develop and roll out anti-racism educational material at any level of the K-to-12 system? Is there a plan to look at high school history courses to adapt them to deal with the legacy of colonialism in this province and in Canada, particularly in light of the recent discovery?

T. OSBORNE: I'm going to ask Eldred to speak to part of that but my mandate letter looks at – so, right now, I think there are five social studies courses where we talk about the schools within the province. The Grade 7 social studies program goes most in-depth with the residential schools. There is some opportunity within the English language arts program to give flexibility to educators to talk about that as well. But, most importantly, if you look at a decade ago we didn't have that information. I'm hesitant to say

we've come a long way. We've improved, but we have a long way to go.

So in the mandate letter that I received from the Premier, there's direction to increase and enhance Indigenous culture into existing curriculum and to develop new curriculum that looks at the history, traditions and culture of our Indigenous populations.

J. DINN: Thank you.

T. OSBORNE: Eldred (inaudible).

E. BARNES: I'll just defer to Brad Clarke in a moment on some of the specifics, but this is also related to the Education Action Plan and the Indigenous education piece where we have developed a framework to allow us to work in partnership with the five Indigenous groups in the province to look at ways and means of ensuring that they take the lead role in developing the content for this.

So we made some progress but many miles to go. Brad, if you want to add anything to that?

B. CLARKE: Yes, we work with all the identified Indigenous communities within the province in what we call an IEAC: an Indigenous Education Advisory Committee. We've been meeting them for quite some time. I really echo the minister's words that we've started on a great path, but we have lots to do there.

Some of the early agenda items by that committee were helping each individual community with their specific educational needs. So there's been a lot of growth there. We had a meeting as early as two weeks ago with that group where we certainly shared our desire to have more of a provincial lens and bring some Indigenous culture, history and language to have that opportunity for all the students of Newfoundland and Labrador. So it's certainly in the plan.

I'll just really quickly, while I have the mic, speak to the racism piece. That wouldn't be targeted in one course, one grade level. It would be a lengthy paper for me to show you the curricula and, of course, developmentally appropriate grades that it would be. It starts in

primary about acceptance and people being different and grows right into struggles we've had that have caused wars and the like up in the secondary program.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Member's time is expired.

I just want to confirm if MHA Trimper wishes to speak now or wait until post-secondary education?

P. TRIMPER: Post-secondary, are you ready?

CHAIR: No, do you want to wait until post-secondary?

P. TRIMPER: I still would like to wait, yeah. Might as well.

CHAIR: Okay, MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: This is getting old. You wouldn't believe how many times I do that in the run of a day. I get my earpiece caught up every time.

3.6.01, under Grants and Subsidies, Library Resources Board: Why the \$230,000 in savings, I guess, is the question?

T. OSBORNE: Don't tell him. Don't tell him.

Go ahead.

R. HAYES: That \$230,000 is for the lease of the CBS library that we're still waiting to be completed.

B. PETTEN: Oh, still waiting. Yeah, I know. I hear about that every now and then. It will happen one of these days.

T. OSBORNE: I should reach out to the MHA for that area.

B. PETTEN: Yeah, he's not doing his job. True enough.

A couple of general questions now. The Genesis Centre: Is the Genesis Centre revenue neutral? Are you aware if it is or if it isn't?

T. OSBORNE: I'm going to ask Candice to speak to that. I can't say whether or not. I know they generate revenue.

I will say that when Memorial initially bought the Battery I thought they were out of their minds, to be quite honest with you. I have become more of a fan of the Genesis Centre when you look at – whether their rentals generate a revenue or not, what we've seen in terms of the incubation centre, in particular for the IT sector, that's something that I didn't envision when they bought the Battery and I thought: Holy smokes, what the heck are they doing? I remember speaking about it here in the Legislature.

The incubation centre, the start-ups and the support that they provide to local businesses I think has paid for the Genesis Centre, in my opinion.

Candice, are you familiar in terms of whether they actually make a profit or whether it's –?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: (Inaudible.)

T. OSBORNE: Yeah.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: I can't speak specifically to the Genesis Centre. We can get that information for you.

B. PETTEN: Okay, thanks.

These are analysis questions; I know that might shock the minister from our line of questioning. Analysis on MUN taking over the Geo Centre – and I guess I'll double it up, because it's also any analysis done on the proposed new law school. Has there been any analysis done on either one of those items?

T. OSBORNE: In terms of the Geo Centre, I haven't yet become a fan of the fact that is operated by MUN as I have with the Genesis Centre. I see the connection, to a certain degree, with MUN.

In terms of the law school, in this year's budget, during the transition – I mean, Memorial has always had to come to government and ask for sign off on acquisitions of real property or increasing their footprint. In this year's budget,

during the transition phase, we're not saying that they can never increase the size of their footprint but we're talking months before we get changes to the *Memorial University Act*.

In the transition phase, we've indicated that government will not be signing off on any further acquisitions, which would include a law school for example.

B. PETTEN: Increasing footprint, so to speak, in the budget.

T. OSBORNE: So they can't increase their footprint during the transition. Once they have fiscal autonomy and they need to do the analysis and the business case and determine whether or not it fits into their model and whether or not it makes business sense, it is up to them to make the case. The decisions that they make, there is no additional government funding going to chase that. If a law school covers its costs, it covers its cost. If not, MUN needs to figure out what else they cut to pay for the law school.

B. PETTEN: What is the status of junior kindergarten? Is there any as to where that is?

T. OSBORNE: There is. So it was put on hold during COVID, for obvious reasons. It was just an additional pressure on the school system if we were to proceed. It is in my mandate letter and it is part of the discussions that I am having with Minister Hussen in terms of early learning and child care. We would like to see some federal involvement if we are going to introduce junior kindergarten because it is still early learning. Whether or not you could call it early learning and child care, it is early learning. I think it is a very important step.

We started having some level of discussion with the federal government months ago, still in the height of the pandemic and knew that they were coming with something on early learning and child care. Quite honestly, we were anticipating they were going to land somewhere in the \$15-a-day mark, but they're at \$10 a day. I think that's significantly better for young families.

Again, part of that discussion will be early learning and child care. I wouldn't want to jump the gun on it, announce it, put it in place and realize we've lost out on federal funding because

we announced something before we negotiated with the feds.

B. PETTEN: Fair enough.

T. OSBORNE: So that's a very honest answer.

B. PETTEN: I appreciate that.

On that topic, I have a child care operator in my district that offers a level of junior kindergarten. It's in a private setting, but the problem is she has to maintain – to get any subsidies, to be considered, she has to become like a daycare where she actually offers somewhat of a curriculum. It's something that was kicked around. They came to me and everything happened of course, COVID-related – the election was actually what happened and everything was put on the back burner.

If we're going to proceed with junior kindergarten, would groups like that be considered in the full model of providing junior kindergarten? Because it doesn't always have to be in the school. This person is operating with qualified – just as you would with a daycare operator, you would have certain requirements. These people are more than qualified to do the job, but under our program, they struggle to survive because they have to operate as a daycare in order to – they have to offer a lesser service to get a subsidy, to get help, if you know what I'm trying to say. She has a big building up there, but she's struggling.

Would groups like that be considered? It's more than her, too. Would groups like that be considered a junior kindergarten program? Do you anticipate that? Or would it all be school-based, is what I'm asking.

T. OSBORNE: I'd like to learn more about this particular operator. Mary may know the information. Again, without putting the cart before the horse –

B. PETTEN: Fair enough.

T. OSBORNE: – because we're in discussion with the federal government, I think the initial concept of this would've been school-based. So whether or not there's room to accommodate

that sort of operation, I'm not sure, but, again, I'd want to learn some more about it.

I think Eldred might have more to say on junior kindergarten as well. I know that it's a part of the *Education Action Plan*. While he's not privy to the discussions that I've had with Minister Hussen, I know he's done a considerable amount of work on it.

E. BARNES: Yes, it is Recommendation 65 of the *Education Action Plan*. It called for a foundational document and a phase-in of junior kindergarten. In responding to that, of course, we went through a series of public consultations and research and so on. There has been a lot of foundational work done and a look at where it has been implemented in Ontario, Northwest Territories and, most recently, in Nova Scotia.

We have some models that have been mapped and some costing that has been done, but I think the minister has done an excellent job in saying at this juncture I think it's very important that we see where the federal negotiations take us by way of the cost of the initial implementation, shall we say, over a three- to five-year period. After that, the cost is not as great, but where there is JLP involved and so on, there's a need to see what can come from federal funding.

B. PETTEN: I have a quick one out before my six seconds goes – I need more than that. Have the Chromebooks been delivered yet? Have they all been delivered to their schools yet, the Chromebooks?

T. OSBORNE: My understanding from the English School District, every student who requested a Chromebook, identified the need for a Chromebook, has received one. The vast majority of them have arrived and are either configured and delivered or in the process of being configured. I think we were waiting on maybe 4,000, was it? There are 4,000 remaining out of the 30,000 that we ordered.

B. PETTEN: Okay. A long wait.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I'm glad the Member for CBS made that last comment. I won't be the bad guy this time. A long wait.

I'll pick up on that. I wasn't planning on asking anything on it, but since the Member has brought it up, what are the plans then to upgrade Internet connectivity? As I may have mentioned earlier today, one school contacted me from just outside the city. All the students have their Chromebooks but right now the internet capacity, the Wi-Fi or whatever, can't support it, so it's going to cost \$20,000 or so to upgrade that.

I did support the whole notion of Chromebooks and laptops. Certainly, I think there is a similar project in New Brunswick, but now I think we need to take the next step. Are there any plans to look at it so that students can use it? Down the road I would like to see – even for that matter, maybe we don't need textbooks, but maybe all textbooks are on a tablet or along those lines.

Anyway, just a thought. Any thoughts on that?

T. OSBORNE: Yeah. The interesting thing is I would've thought we would've saved a ton of money by putting textbooks on the Chromebooks, but that's not the case. You still pay for the textbook, even though it's on the Chromebook and you don't have a hard copy.

We've learned a lot through COVID and one of it is the extra demand. You're right, Jim, not everywhere. The vast majority of schools have enough connectivity, but some of the schools have – we've found out that it's very slow or there have been some issues because of the additional demand because of every student having a Chromebook. I know the English School District has looked at that. If it's online learning, which hopefully we won't have to go back to, the English School District has made arrangements for if a family doesn't have Internet or devices that would allow Internet within the household or other measures.

There are some schools that we do need to focus on in terms of improved connectivity. Again, that's something that could only really be learned through COVID. If a school had connectivity, you figured they were okay, but when you put 180 or 200 Chromebooks in the

school and they're all on, you realize that there's a bit of a drain on that connectivity. It is something that the English School District is looking at with hopes of addressing.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under section 3.2.02, federal revenue was down slightly in the actuals for last year. Any reason for that? 3.2.02, federal revenue.

R. HAYES: That federal funding is under Official Languages in Education, our OLE agreement. It was deferred, actually, to '21-'22 due to spending limitations in '20-'21 resulting from COVID.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

Under section 3.5.01, Early Learning and Child Development: We've heard from many early childhood educators and child care providers, who weren't eligible for the subsidies to provide \$25-a-day daycare, that the government's plan put them at risk of closure. Would the minister be able to provide us with an update on plans either to help these providers directly or to find a way to bring them into the regulated system? Is there an estimated price tag, if you are thinking about that, to doing so?

T. OSBORNE: We've had a big uptake from a number of providers that were unregulated who became regulated and likewise from family-based operations an uptake into the Operating Grant Program as well. There are some that haven't. They are charging a higher amount than through the Operating Grant Program. That's difficult because unless they're under the Operating Grant Program and providing that \$25 a day – if we provided different subsidies to different operations, it wouldn't be long before every operation was at the top subsidy and they intended to increase to the higher rate.

So it's a difficult issue to resolve. Mary, did you want to speak a little more to that?

M. GOSS-PROWSE: The regulated sector is very well represented now on the \$25 a day. Since we brought it in, about 85 per cent of the regulated spaces are now at \$25 a day. We have almost 90 per cent of child care centres and

about 75 per cent of family child care homes the last time I checked.

We do have in place – we also launched at the same time – a Child Care Capacity Initiative for family child care providers to help them out with some of the costs that they saw as a block to becoming regulated. Things like putting in a fence or putting in an interconnected smoke detector in their home, that kind of thing, which were fairly costly as an initial business expense. Again, don't quote me on the number, but the last time I saw the number – and that's just since January – we've had about eight or nine receive that grant and become regulated.

So we're starting to see an improvement there. I defer to, again, we're not sure what we're going to see under the federal money, so we may be able to do some more sweeping of that pot, depending on what we see available under there.

J. DINN: Thank you.

T. OSBORNE: We are launching, in the very near future, a consultation process as well. We'd announced that last year that the consultation process was coming. So it will give some of the unregulated – and as Mary said, 90 per cent of centres are now regulated. So we've been very successful with the program. Family centres who were never under the operating grant were at 75 per cent – again, very successfully.

The consultation process will allow some of the regulated centres – and even unregulated centres or home-based centres – an opportunity to look at whether or not regulations can be amended without compromising the safety of children, of course. Whether or not there are changes to regulations, whether or not there are other measures that government can look at that can attract them. But even with the regulated, what are some of the pressures or stresses that they're facing and what improvements can be made.

Without a formal consultation process, we've had consultations with some of the providers in recent months. Out of those consultations came improvements that answered some of the concerns that they had. So I think the consultation process will be good as well.

J. DINN: Perfect, thank you.

In that section. 3.5.01, spending on Salaries last year was significantly less than budgeted. Are there any vacancies currently?

R. HAYES: The reduction last year would have been due to vacancies. I'm assuming yes, there would be some vacancies now, but we are working towards filling those. I think most recently, Mary, we did just fill a number of positions, so we're getting there with this division on being fully staffed.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I have one final question on this section. What's been the uptake on the rate escalator for child care services operating in the Labrador region, and has the increase led to better recruitment and retention figures for early childhood educators there?

M. GOSS- PROWSE: At this point, we wouldn't be able to give you that kind of an answer because it's such a recent initiative. Many of the centres really just received their first piece of money around that. So they wouldn't have had time yet to even – I would think – go out and get that resolved. But I know that the centres themselves, when they were contacting us, were very positive about the move and very pleased that they were able to look at some different things that they might be able to do to recruit and retain.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I think that's it.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: We're done with this section.

CHAIR: Finished?

All right, I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.6.01.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.6.01 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.6.01 carried.

CHAIR: I ask the Clerk to call the next subhead or group of subheads.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.4.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.4.02 carry?

We should start probably with MHA Trimper.

P. TRIMPER: Thank you very much.

One question: On page 26 of the Budget Speech, there is one line – it probably was the strongest negative reaction I've felt in the last few days from back in the district – "... temporary freeze on any expansion of its physical footprint," referring to Memorial University. I do believe, I say to the minister and to the team, that we have inadvertently caught up the transfer of the Pye farmhouse associated with the School of Arctic and Subarctic Studies.

This one is pretty close to me because I was with Mr. Pye on his deathbed four or five years ago. We've been trying to move it through. It's just about done and I believe the purchase is relating to external funds from Memorial University. I think because of the freeze it's caught – at least an interpretation on MUN's part that that would not be able to proceed as per what's in this Budget Speech. I just wondered if there is any opportunity to do something about it.

The project itself – just for everybody who's listening – there's everything from food self-sufficiency; all the Indigenous organizations in Labrador are involved. It's a massive community event and the farmhouse is caught in this freeze.

T. OSBORNE: I can speak to that, Perry. The Pye farm was considered when we looked at this, but we are in a period of transition of providing Memorial more autonomy. I don't anticipate that the time frame will be

unnecessarily extended in terms of transitioning to changes to the *Memorial University Act*. It's certainly my hope that we're looking at months only. Once we conclude the transition, provide the changes to the *Memorial University Act*, Memorial can certainly make that acquisition if they feel it's in their best interest.

I understand the farm itself has already been acquired by Memorial. I believe that was a donation from the Pye family. What we're talking about is the farmhouse, a greenhouse and a garage. Those acquisitions are several hundred thousand dollars. At the end of the day, if Memorial believes that that acquisition is in the best interest of continued programming or continued studies or the advancement of cold climate studies or whatever the case may be, they have the ability, once the transition is concluded, to conclude that transaction as well.

It's not a no to the transaction, but if we're going to transition, instead of government taking the time to analyze whether this is the right fit for Memorial and whether or not we should sign off on it, we'll transition to greater autonomy for Memorial and they can do that analysis and make that decision themselves.

P. TRIMPER: I understand and I appreciate the position.

One has to be very careful with any kind of precedence; it's just that this project has so much regional support from so many different players, so many levels of government. There also is an element: I referred to the gentleman. His wife is trying to leave – his widow – and this is now sort of an emotional, personal situation.

I expect that perhaps the School of Arctic and Subarctic Studies will be reaching out, and perhaps on a one-on-one, and sitting down to see if there's a strategy.

I appreciate the answer and I thank you for that. That'll be it for me.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Okay.

MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: I'll start off at the back going forward.

4.4.01, Student Financial Services, Administration. Question: Why drop balance of \$4.68 million from last year? Under Grants and Subsidies.

R. FEAVER: Because of the increase in terms of how student loans are disbursed in the province with interaction with the federal program, the federal student loans program doubled all grants for '20-'21 and increased weekly loan limits by – from \$210 a week – \$140 a week; therefore, the demand, then, for the provincial program – sorry, the need for students was being met by the federal program, so there was less of a demand on the provincial program.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

So it's because of federal money?

R. FEAVER: Yes, it's an increase in the federal grants. I'll add, those increases in federal grants are continuing in '21-'22 and '22-'23 as well, so yes.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

4.4.02, Administration: Why the increase of \$496,000?

R. FEAVER: Sorry, Barry (inaudible) –

B. PETTEN: 4.4.02, in Administration, there was an increase of \$496,000.

R. FEAVER: The province increased the weekly loan in this in 2021 in response to COVID. Again, in terms of the stacking order of how loans and grants are disbursed. While students would have received a significant increase in funding through the federal grants program, once their needs were tipped over into the provincial program, a higher loan limit then would have been issued at that point in time.

B. PETTEN: Okay, thanks.

Under 4.1.01, Literacy and Institutional Services, Salaries increased. Is there any explanation for that?

R. HAYES: The increase there in the actuals for 2021 reflects the cost associated with the Public Post-Secondary Education Review.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Professional Services: It was unbudgeted; it was a one-time cost \$186,000.

R. HAYES: That would be the board members associated with the Public Post-Secondary Education Review. They were employees but the board members would be captured under Professional Services.

B. PETTEN: Purchased Services would fall under the same thing I would think, would it?

R. HAYES: Related to that review, yes.

B. PETTEN: Grants and Subsidies: \$1.2 million was cut from last year – reduced.

R. HAYES: The funding was allotted for a number of pilot projects under the Adult Literacy Action Plan, which were delayed because of COVID-19 lockdowns and those are expected to occur this fiscal year.

B. PETTEN: COVID is after causing us a lot of grief, hasn't it?

R. HAYES: It has.

B. PETTEN: 4.2.01 under MUN Operations, Revenue - Federal – I should say Regular Operating Grant first, with additional \$10 million. Where did that come from? Or I should say why is it?

T. OSBORNE: What number was that, Barry?

B. PETTEN: 4.2.01, under Grants and Subsidies, the Regular Operating Grant.

It went up \$10 million in the revised.

R. HAYES: That's reflective of early severance payouts. We provided funding to Memorial to cover those payments, and they are in turn paying us back over a number of years for that.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

The Revenue - Federal there, that one-time \$1.4 million.

T. STAMP: Yes, that's federal revenue related to the Animal Resource Centre and it's actually budgeted down under the Capital. We have reflected that. We've requested an adjustment in Public Accounts to reflect that appropriately under Capital.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

4.2.02, Physical Plant and Equipment, under Loans, Advances and Investments: It looks like \$10.5 million was cut from last year and it looks like \$16.5 million less again this year.

R. HAYES: The \$10.5 million that you see in '21-'22 was actually supposed to be paid out during '20-'21. It relates to the Holyrood Marine Base project. The project was delayed in 2020-21, so we've just moved the funding into '21-'22.

B. PETTEN: There seems to be a lot of that stuff here.

R. HAYES: Yes.

B. PETTEN: Any idea what the cumulative deferred maintenance cost at MUN is? Are there any figures on that?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Your question is around the deferred maintenance, so I was looking and I think as of April 2021, Memorial's reporting \$500 million to fully address the degradation of their facilities. The previous number was \$460 million in deferred maintenance.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

The Core Science building, is that on time and budget? Is there any (inaudible)?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: The Core Science building will actually open in September of this year. Construction began, of course, in 2015. Yes, to our knowledge, it's – I mean, there have been delays, specifically because of weather events. They're trying to maximize, but right now, it looks like everything's a go for September 2021.

B. PETTEN: Good.

Revenue - Federal under the same, there's nothing budgeted for this year. It went up, actually. It looks like it went up by \$700,000, but it's eliminated this year.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: The revenue we would've seen federally would've been related to the Strategic Infrastructure Fund through the federal government. We were anticipating a reveal of a new federal infrastructure program through their recent budget; however, we did not see it and the federal government is currently contemplating how it's going to move forward in that regard.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Under 4.3.01, under CNA, Operations, Grants and Subsidies, it looks to be \$790,000 less.

R. HAYES: That reduction is related to a mixture of attrition and operating reductions for this fiscal year.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

Physical Plant and Equipment under 4.3.02. Basically, the question is: What is CNA's total value required repairs by the campus. It looks to be only \$1 million. That's not a lot for 17 campuses. That is a generally combined question there.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: What you are seeing is our contribution to the college for construction and alteration. However, renovations to the college campuses are coordinated through Transportation and Infrastructure, not the Department of Education.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

There is more money comes from, you're saying, TI towards any possible repairs, more than that \$1 million. That is just your share towards any repairs?

It is not a lot of money, is what I am saying, for 17 campuses. That's the question I guess.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Right.

B. PETTEN: So there must be more money coming from other sources within the government. Is that ...?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: In terms of general maintenance of campuses, that would be coordinated through Transportation and Infrastructure. The money here is more intended in terms of upgrades to help support programming. It could be technological upgrades.

B. PETTEN: Okay.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Anything that a faculty or staff member would indicate would help enhance the learning experience for the college student.

B. PETTEN: Okay. No, that's fair enough.

It might take longer than 50 seconds but any update on the \$25-a-day daycare? How that's going and how it's proceeding.

T. OSBORNE: As Mary had indicated earlier, the uptake has been phenomenal. Ninety per cent of operations are now under the operating grant.

Mary?

M. GOSS-PROWSE: Yeah, about an average of 85 per cent of spaces in the province right now are at \$25 a day or less. After-school and before-school spaces are a little bit less – have always been less than that, because they're only a couple of hours a day.

The infant, toddler, and preschool spaces are now at \$25 a day and 85 per cent of spaces. It represents almost 90 per cent of child care centres and about 75 per cent of family child care homes at this point in time. We're still getting applications.

B. PETTEN: Good.

T. OSBORNE: Barry, prior to the \$25 a day, family-based operations were not part of the Operating Grant Program. The child care centres were 70 per cent, Mary, (inaudible)?

M. GOSS-PROWSE: There were between 65 and 70 per cent before.

T. OSBORNE: They've gone from less than 70 to 90 per cent of those are now on the Operating Grant Program and from zero to 75 of the family-based centres.

B. PETTEN: Good. Thanks.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Under section 4.1.01, provincial revenues, why were they lower than expected? They were \$138,000 budgeted and \$93,600 actual.

R. HAYES: Revenues come from several sources, including annual registration of private training institutions, site registration for Adult Basic Education and student record requests. Registration fees for the private training institutes vary from year to year due to fluctuations in the enrolment.

J. DINN: Thank you.

4.2.01: We've heard that a lot of people have used their time in the pandemic to go back to university or to do retraining, especially given the economic downturn and the associated layoffs. Is it possible to provide us with enrolment figures for MUN for the past few years? If enrolment figures are indeed rising, does the government plan to increase spending on our post-secondary institutions to reflect that rise? Probably premature in light of the budget.

T. OSBORNE: No, we can get you those numbers. Enrolment has increased this year at both Memorial and the College of the North Atlantic. It's probably largely due to the fact that people were able to register online. Overall, local student enrolment has dropped slightly over the past number of years; I think Canadian has dropped slightly and international student has gone up.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Just to clarify, the year-to-year change, 2020 to 2019, is actually just 4 per cent at Memorial University in terms

of enrolment increase. What we tend to hear, often pushed by the institutions, is the excitement about increasing applications, but what we as a department tend to look at is past the drop-and-add date.

Typically, we do a snapshot at the end of September to see how that translated into actual numbers. I can tell you, for total undergraduate and graduate enrolment, we did see a 4 per cent increase at Memorial University and similarly, as the minister referenced, we saw an increase at the College of the North Atlantic.

In terms of the origins of students, as the minister has indicated, we have seen from '20-'21, in terms of year-to-year change, a 5.2 per cent increase for Newfoundland and Labrador students. In terms of the Maritimes – and, again, I think this reflects the COVID experience and the travel restrictions – we've seen a 0.6 per cent decrease. For other Canadians, we have seen an 8.8 per cent year-to-year increase. For international students, we saw just a 0.4 per cent increase.

Again, the enrolment, I think, reflects circumstances of the time, but we can certainly provide – you've asked for two years, MHA Dinn?

J. DINN: Yes.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: We can provide that for you.

J. DINN: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Under that same section, 4.2.01, as the Tuition Offset Grant is eliminated, how much money is the department willing to roll into grants for students needing financial assistance? I know that there are – you've said this – some of the most progressive grants in the country, especially for local students. Have there been discussions regarding a dollar figure or revamping the criteria used to determine eligibility so that more people can avail of them?

T. OSBORNE: Yes. I think we have certainly one of the lowest, if not the lowest, loan levels and highest grant levels for Memorial for our students.

The dollar amount, Jim, I think it's a little too early to say. We are working with Memorial. Based on what their tuition levels will be, we will respond with a corresponding grant program for local Newfoundland and Labrador students.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 4.2.02, Physical Plant and Equipment: The square footage of the new Core Science building compared to the buildings it's replacing, the same, increased or less? They look impressive.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: I think I have everything except the square footage for the Core Science, but we can easily get that for you.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What will happen to the old buildings then? I mean, I drive by the Chemistry Building and it looks in rough shape. I'm just wondering: What's the plan for the old buildings? Will they be demolished or repurposed?

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: I think, based on discussions we've had with Memorial, the jury is still out on that.

J. DINN: Okay.

C. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: That's something that I think is going to be, as the minister spoke earlier, part of their consideration as they determine how they proceed forward in terms of their infrastructure planning in relation to their core operating grant.

J. DINN: Before I got into this realm of politics I remember when they were looking at building the new mental health facility, there was some concern at that time that if the mitigation measures weren't taken it could actually flood the new Core Science building. I'm just wondering: Has that been addressed? I know, at that time, the representative of MUN said that's something we'd have to look at. I'm just wondering if that has been addressed. I can see that they have berms around there now. I am just curious about that.

T. OSBORNE: Yes, I'm privy to the same, I guess, media and so on, Jim, that you would be.

I think that question is better directed to Transportation and Infrastructure; it's not something that our department deals with at all.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you very much.

I was going to ask about current enrolment figures for CNA, but we already have that done. Under section 4.4.01, the actuals for Purchased Services were lower than expected. What was the reason for that?

R. FEAVER: Purchased Services, there was a little over a \$50,000 drop – we pay an administration fee to the federal government to handle the disbursement of loans and grants to all students both federal and provincial. Because of COVID and some of the things responsible for JLPr that, those fees dropped down. There are some fees that are associated with an event driven; for example, we have a provision for death or disability. Those things just didn't occur during the year, so that would be some examples of why that would be dropped down.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Grants and Subsidies were down by half. Would that be the same reason then?

R. FEAVER: As the previous answer on that one, it's the mechanism in terms of how loans and grants are disbursed. Because the federal program increased their grants by double – they doubled them this year and increased their federal loan from \$210 to \$140 – there was a less of a demand on the provincial program. Students did not receive any less money, by the way; they just got it from a different source.

J. DINN: Why did we receive no federal revenue last year even though we appear to have been expecting it?

R. FEAVER: That was an accounting issue. The cheque actually came; it just came on April 1. That will be restated back through Public Accounts.

J. DINN: Okay. It came late, but it came.

How many students are currently receiving financial assistance and do all of them receive repayable loans?

R. FEAVER: I have exact figures, MHA Dinn, on 2019-20. We quantify and track our data on program year, as opposed to fiscal year. For 2019-20, there were 3,085 students attending Memorial University who received loans. About 6,500 in total – all Newfoundland and Labrador residents – received loans in 2019-20. That will be for any eligible student who is attending any designated post-secondary institution, both in the province, country or around the world. We are open to any designated school in that. So it is about 6,500 in '19-'20.

Could you repeat the second part of your question?

J. DINN: And do all of them receive repayable loans?

R. FEAVER: No. Again, it is how the funding is stacked when it is disbursed. The first order for eligible students, for example, would be the Canada Student Grant for full-time students. That is a grant that gets issued, first, based on \$1 of need and would give a low-income student for the '20-'21 year access to \$6,000 in non-repayable grant just based on \$1 of need. In '19-'20 it was \$3,000. That may cover their need, based on a standard calculation of cost minus resources equals need. So then, how the stacking would work, you would work your way up then. Some would get loans as you move up the chain in terms of how loans and grants would be disbursed.

The other important thing on a question that was answered earlier. The increase in weekly loan limits for the Newfoundland program this past year, that increase is eligible for full debt reduction – so full elimination through the debt reduction grants program upon graduation. So the loans may be carried while they are going to school but once they graduate, we would determine eligibility then if that full amount of loan, the increased loan value, or the previous loan values would be decreased or written off altogether.

J. DINN: Madam Chair, I have one last question and then I am done. Can I ask that now and turn it over to my colleague.

CHAIR: Yes, go ahead.

J. DINN: How many people are currently repaying student loans and what is the total amount owed to government on the outstanding student debt. That is under 4.4.02, Administration, Capital.

R. FEAVER: The exact number as of March 31 – MHA Dinn, I can give you a full breakdown of the exact numbers, but roughly it is about 17,671, approximately, students who are in repayment right now. They owe a little over \$19 million in provincial loans. The average amount of federal and provincial loan currently in repayment, as of March 31, of all those students – regardless of the program they've graduated from, regardless of how long ago they started paying – it's an average of just over \$11,000. So \$10,000 is federal; \$1,000 is provincial. That's as of March 31, 2021.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

I'm done, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: MHA Petten.

B. PETTEN: I am done as well.

I just want to thank the minister for being cooperative and answering all the questions. I really do appreciate that. I know that's not required and I do acknowledge that. And all your staff, great job by everyone. Excellent job.

I don't normally do this, but my assistant sings the praises of Rob Feaver. I've never met him, but she knows him, Tracey. Tracey works with me. I have to give you credit. You're pretty sharp on your numbers, so I guess I know why she sings your praises. You've all done a great job, and, Rob, you handled a lot, too.

Thank you, everyone. I appreciate it all. I'm getting ready now to go and watch the Bruins.

J. DINN: Thank you very much, too, folks. I appreciate the answers. Very informative.

CHAIR: All right.

I ask the Clerk to recall the grouping.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.4.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.4.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.4.02 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 complete?

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 time of the next meeting is Monday, June 7, at 9 a.m., considering the Estimates of the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs.

I ask for a mover to adjourn, please.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Are you substitute? No.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: No.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: You can't either.

Motion to adjourn moved by the Member for the District of Conception Bay South.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

The meeting has adjourned.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.