



**PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

First Session
Fifty-First General Assembly

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

May 21, 2026 - Issue 5

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Assembly
Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Chair: Joseph Power, MHA

Members: Paul Pike, MHA
Jim McKenna, MHA
Jeff Dwyer, MHA
Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA
Hal Cormier, MHA
James Dinn, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Evan Beazley (A)

Appearing:

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Hon. Paul Dinn, Minister

Judith Hearn, Deputy Minister, Advanced Education and Skills

Greg Clarke, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services

Heather Craniford, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post Secondary Education

Lisa Baker-Worthman, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development

Terry Hall, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education Operations

Scott Linehan, Assistant Deputy Minister, K-12 Education

Clifford Smith, Assistant Deputy Minister, Apprenticeship and Trades

Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller

Brian Scott, Director of Communications

Lynn Robinson, Manager of Communications

Walt Mavin, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Bernard Davis, MHA

Dave Hamlyn, Official Opposition Caucus (for subheads 1.1.01 to 5.2.01)

Angelica Hill, Official Opposition Caucus

Meghan Parsons, Official Opposition Caucus (for subheads 6.1.01 to 7.1.01)

Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Bernard Davis, MHA for Virginia Park - Pleasantville, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

The Committee met at 6:02 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

First, what I'll do is I'll announce the Committee Members that were substituted. The Placentia - St. Mary's MHA is being substituted by the MHA for Virginia Waters, Bernie Davis – Virginia Waters - Pleasantville. Sorry, I apologize for that.

B. DAVIS: It's okay.

CHAIR: Mr. Davis is here in that capacity.

Usually about halfway through, we do a break, so let's look at 7:30. It doesn't matter if we're in the middle of a head of expenditure or anything like that, we'll just take a 10-minute break at this time, because we just had proceedings today. We don't want people to get hungry again this evening. That'll be on their side, not yours.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: I was talking about the Committee in the back.

A reminder for Members and departmental officials, each time that you're asked to speak, all you need to do is just wave your hand in front of your microphone to identify yourself and then wait for the red tally light to come on, on your desk, before proceeding. The red tally light indicates that Broadcast is picking up your voice. Say your name and position each time you speak, just for the transcription purposes.

Do not make adjustments to the chairs, unless you're in Jamie Korab's chair. Watercoolers are located in each corner of the Chamber. There are two down on this end and two up here on each side of the

Speaker's Chair. There are no unaffiliated Members.

Now I ask the Committee Members, substitutions and caucus employees to introduce themselves, starting in the front row, closest to the Chair.

P. PIKE: Paul Pike, Education Critic and MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

D. HAMLYN: Dave Hamlyn, Opposition Office, Researcher.

B. DAVIS: Bernie Davis, MHA for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

A. HILL: Angelica Hill, Director of Research for the Official Opposition.

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

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Researcher, NDP Caucus Office.

J. POWER: Joe Power, Labrador West.

CHAIR: As you can tell, that's the reason why I'm in the Chair tonight. Joe was supposed to be in the Chair, but he spared us all.

H. CORMIER: MHA Hal Cormier from the beautiful District of St. George's - Humber.

J. MCKENNA: Jim McKenna, MHA, Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

CHAIR: That's great. Thank you, folks, for being here.

I now ask the departmental officials to introduce themselves, starting with the minister.

P. DINN: Good day.

Paul Dinn, Minister of Education.

J. HEARN: Good evening.

Judith Hearn, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

G. CLARKE: I'm Greg Clarke, ADM, Corporate Services.

T. STAMP: Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller.

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

T. HALL: Good evening.

Terry Hall, Assistant Deputy Minister of Education Operations.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Hello everybody.

Lisa Baker-Worthman, ADM of Early Learning, Inclusion and Child Development.

H. CRANIFORD: Hi.

Heather Craniford, Assistant Deputy Minister of Post Secondary Education.

C. SMITH: Clifford Smith, ADM of Apprenticeship and Trades.

B. SCOTT: Brian Scott, Director of Communications.

L. ROBINSON: Lynn Robinson, Media Relations Manager.

W. MAVIN: Walt Mavin, EA to Minister Dinn.

CHAIR: Should we call Broadcast now? The same thing with that mic last night. It goes really loud. Yeah, there's no – no, the gentleman in the back. If we can have him moved. I don't know what the deal is. There's a lot of interference.

CLERK (Beazley): (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Yeah, okay. Sure, let's do that.

Just because of the mic that is in that seat, and we had the same issue with it last night. Do you just want to move over to this side and then that way we'll get Broadcast to identify you from that seat.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your understanding.

It's Clifford Smith, right? I'm just saying this to Broadcast that Clifford Smith has now moved into MHA Cormier's seat for St. George's - Humber. So that's just for Broadcast so that we can acknowledge him in that seat.

Just wave your hand and introduce yourself.

C. SMITH: Hello.

Clifford Smith, ADM of Apprenticeship and Trades.

CHAIR: Perfect, thank you, Clifford.

Before we start the Estimates review process, the Committee will now consider the minutes of the previous meeting. If there are no errors or omissions, I ask for a mover for those minutes.

J. POWER: So moved.

CHAIR: The minutes have been moved by the Member for Labrador West.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: We'll now proceed with the Estimates review process. Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subhead grouping for this head of expenditure, I'll proceed to recognize the minister who will have 15

minutes for opening remarks. Then I will proceed to introduce the first responder/questioner from the Committee, who will get 15 minutes for questions in the first round.

After the first round, questions will proceed in rounds of 10 minutes each, alternating between Members of the Committee.

I now ask the Clerk to call the first subhead.

CLERK: For the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive Services.

CHAIR: The head of expenditure is Education and Early Childhood Development; the subhead is 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive Services.

I now call on the minister for opening remarks.

P. DINN: Thank you.

It's great to be here. I'm on the other side again now. I've been back here, over there and here in my career, so I've been everywhere.

We're here to talk about the budget and take questions on the Estimates and I have a few minutes just to give an overview of what we're talking about here today. Of course, this year's budget was \$1.5 billion in the Education budget, not a small amount at all. In fact, the second largest expenditure in government behind Health and Community Services.

There are reasons for so much money to Education, because it's so important. We look at this and we see that teachers are vital to all the work, especially when it comes to K-to-12, and especially our TLAs and our student assistants.

The total budget for educators and learning assistants has increased in this budget. It has increased from \$594.7 million to \$623.6

million. That's a \$28.9-million increase. I will say that over 42 per cent of the department's budget is teachers' salaries. I say that because it shows the importance of teachers to us. It's money well spent, no doubt about it.

We also know there are shortages, and we need to deal with some issues as well. There's funding in the budget that will support an additional 94 teachers and 20 teaching and learning assistants in the system. Budget '26 also includes \$2 million in student assistance supports through *Budget 2026*.

Our investments in Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic support a tuition freeze and ensure resources are in place. As we said in our blue book, we will not allow the university to balance the books on the backs of students. We understand and realize that MUN is facing significant financial challenges, and they continue to work on addressing these challenges and implementing recommendations from the Auditor General's report.

We also realize that MUN, the university, is an independent institution. While we will continue to monitor how it addresses its challenges, I will say that we have a good rapport with them with the new president. Again, they run their shop, but they have been open to having discussions with us and ensuring that we're aware, not intimately, but aware of some of the issues they're working towards.

Budget 2026 includes a significant investment in the university. More than \$400 million is being invested in the university; \$331.1 million is being invested in MUN's core operations, and this includes \$45.6 million to help support its financial stability.

We have made a commitment, the Premier has made a commitment, that graduates who stay, work and live in this province will receive tuition back. *Budget 2026* includes \$300,000 to begin the design and

development of the Graduate Tuition Refund Program. We anticipate that consultations will begin this summer to help determine the next steps in developing that program. Our tuition refund will help ensure that graduates stay, work and live in the province and will receive a tuition refund.

There are numerous challenges also facing the child care sector in our province. Creating child care spaces is a top priority. Since forming government, we've already opened an additional 200 spaces and work is underway for another 1,200 that we hope will help the system. More than \$32.6 million has been invested this year. We support \$10-a-day child care and we recognize there are significant challenges facing this sector.

Our investments will help with the continuation of the child care space creation and to hopefully operate them all at \$10 a day. There has been \$29.3 million for the previously announced 1,400 child care spaces. *Budget 2026* also includes \$3.3 million for an additional 418 child care spaces.

Our work here is not done; we anticipate more investments in the future in budget years. I will say, I've had the opportunity earlier in the year to meet my counterparts from across the province, in Halifax I believe it was, and I did have discussions with the federal minister one-on-one to talk about the shortcomings of the current program as well as to work with my counterparts on long-term sustainability of the program.

This year as well – to me it's troubling, but it's something we have to deal with – we probably have the highest rate per capita of students requiring inclusion supports. We are investing an additional \$3.6 million in funding to support early learning and inclusion workers.

When we talk about skilled trades in the K-to-12 program, the department is expanding skill trades to six additional rural schools in

the province next year through the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation. The Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation eliminated the wait-list for skilled trades in the next school year, so that all students who registered are now accepted.

In the category of other required credits for high school graduation, the department has eliminated the requirement that it be in two separate areas. The change allows students to focus more on areas such as skilled trades.

Finally, when talking about post-secondary education, our government understands that post-secondary students studying skilled trades are important to the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are strengthening relationships and engaging stakeholders to support a responsive, industry-aligned apprenticeship and skilled trades system in the province. We are closely monitoring skilled trades initiatives in the federal government's spring update and engaging with the federal, provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure our priorities are reflected that way.

There's a lot in our department. The Members across the way have had the opportunity to be in these portfolios in the past. They understand what is covered here. They understand the importance of the portfolio. It's really a portfolio that identifies and secures our future. They've heard me say many times in this House of Assembly that our children and youth are our most valuable resource. No one has jumped up and disagreed with that, so that's a good thing to hear.

We combined two departments, so we have K-to-12 and Early Childhood combined with Advanced Education and Skills. I always look at it and say I'm in the cradle-to-grave education; taking them right from the cradle to their final career, end of their career. It's a huge responsibility, and it's not lost on me, but I have to say, and I'm sure my counterparts across the way will agree, you

don't get there unless you've got fantastic staff behind you and supporting you.

I'm pleased to have this allotment of my top guns here tonight. I will make an attempt to certainly answer any questions, but I realize the importance of getting concise and precise answers, so it will not be unusual that I will defer for more information to my expert people here in the House today.

I'm looking forward to your questions and, look, I'll give you five more minutes, on me.

CHAIR: There you go.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

I guess we'll get right into it. My first question, I guess, we can get a copy of the binder after?

P. DINN: No, unfortunately. I'm not handing it out this year.

No, we can certainly get that to you.

P. PIKE: Sure, thank you.

I'll just pick one out so I can move on. In Employee Benefits, \$1,100 was spent after nothing allocated in 2025 or being noted in this year's budget. That's under Employee Benefits. What accounts for this?

P. DINN: That was conference fees that were associated with the World Anti-Bullying Forum in Germany and the Premier's annual address at the Rotary Clubs of St. John's and the Avalon Northeast.

P. PIKE: Okay. Thank you.

Section 1.2.01, I'm just wondering, have there been any no-fault terminations in the department since you've taken office?

P. DINN: That's a good question. I'll defer that to my appropriate staff.

CHAIR: Judith Hearn.

J. HEARN: My apologies, I didn't hear. I was putting my earbud on.

P. PIKE: Oh, I'm sorry.

Have there been any no-fault terminations in the department since the minister has taken office?

J. HEARN: Not to my knowledge.

P. PIKE: Okay.

Can you provide the number of employees within the department broken down by permanent, temporary and contractual positions?

P. DINN: Yes, we can provide that. We'll pass that information along to you.

P. PIKE: Okay. Thank you.

My next couple of questions are going to be on the Education Accord. Where is the department in respect to the Accord? It was released in August 2025, and we haven't seen a formal statement from this government and minister as to what role, if any, I guess, the Education Accord will play in the direction of education going forward.

P. DINN: That's a good question.

We know some of the trials and tribulations of the Accord going through in terms of AI usage there. The Accord, in my mind, was a good piece of work because there was a lot of discussion with the K-to-12 teachers. They had a big role to play in that, a lot of consultations took on, but because of the uncertainty around the AI references, it puts a little doubt over it.

The process has been taken. I always get this wrong and I think the past minister

would probably know the right one, but that was put out then to a consultant to review. I say brick and Brack, but I think it's brick and Brine. Can someone confirm?

OFFICIAL: Brack and Brine.

P. DINN: Brack and Brine is the company. I apologize to the company. They've done an in-depth review of the report in terms of the citations and ensuring that they are accurate and good for the report.

I believe the authors of the report have also had an opportunity to go over that as well. I'll get it confirmed, but I believe it's with the department for a final review of that.

Timelines – because it is a pretty extensive report and it covers a lot of areas, the expectation is that that review would be completed as soon as possible. Other than seeing the initial report when it came out, I've had no involvement in the process at all. I don't know to what extent the review has devalued some parts of the report. I don't know that.

So when they get through the final process, we'll know exactly. The report may be 100 per cent accurate; it may be 20 per cent accurate. It is to be decided but, in terms of the report itself, it's not something that I see us throwing out. It's something that I see, okay, let's look at what has been confirmed and what has been validated and let's make sure that those issues – because there has been a lot of work that went into this report. A lot of people fed into the consultations and a lot of people are expecting results from that report.

I know we've criticized it over the years, that it's another report saying the same thing, but I hope for it to stop at my desk in terms of trying to take the good out of that and have some action.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Minister.

That's the kind of answer, really, I was hoping I would get, because we all have to be very visionary when it comes to education. We need to be able to take outcomes and so on at some point in time. I was very concerned about the fact that – I haven't asked any questions in the House on it because I was waiting for the Estimates for tonight really. We have met with a fair number of stakeholders and they're concerned around this, because a lot of people that we've met within the last few weeks have had input into the Accord and they haven't been consulted and have no idea what's happening.

I just think that's important, that we get this picked up as quickly as possible and get moving on it, because it is a great document. There were so many people that fed into that. I'm really looking forward to working through with the minister on some of the initiatives.

P. DINN: If I can add, I totally agree with you, there has been a lot of people who put their faith in this report. When you're consulted on reports like these, you want to ensure that there's some value being taken in your comments and input.

Again, the length of time taken for this is not on us; it's on the process, given the questions that were asked on it, we want to make sure what we finalize and come up with at the end is solid.

P. PIKE: Yes. Totally.

It would be great to make that announcement at some point soon for everybody's good and that the idea of the fake citations are addressed and so on. I think it'd be great.

Is it still the intent then, once this has been addressed, that this will be the guiding light for education in the province over the next number of years? Is that the intent?

P. DINN: Well, I guess it was the intent when the first report was compiled. Sitting in Opposition, I raised many issues like, for example, the Premier's task force on Education has a lot of good pieces in that. There have been other pieces of work that came out. At best, I can tell you right now, having not seen what's been completed and what's going to be the final report here, as I said, it may be 100 per cent accurate and validated. It may not, I don't know.

But any reports that are sitting on shelves and that – and that's, again, no reflection on the previous government. Reports do end up on shelves at some point. Our intent is to start looking at what are in those reports, and some of it may have already been done. But also looking at discussing with stakeholders. I mean, this report came from stakeholders in many ways.

Having discussions with the teachers, the NLTA, having discussions with post-secondary. Having those around the report now because we never got to that point. We never got to that point with the initial report because it was held in question.

So again, to my point, we are certainly not intending to throw that report in the garbage, unless they come back and tell us the whole report citations are off, but I very much doubt that's going to happen in this particular case. Any information we take in and that's been covered by individuals with lived experiences, individuals who are on the front line, individuals that are educating our students from early childhood to post-secondary, we value that input and we're going to utilize it.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

Just one more that I think I have, since you mentioned some of the things that we probably should be doing. In your platform, in your blue book, the reference to the Education Accord says: "...– it paints a vivid picture of all the things the Liberal

government should have been doing over the past ten years but failed to do."

I think that's very unfair. I was part of the Liberal team, and I thought that the Education Department was a well-oiled machine and that things were happening. I didn't like it when I saw that because, as a staff, you guys did a lot of great work: the 1.6 kilometres; new key competencies; critical thinking; citizenship; creativity in the curriculum; a building for the system to transition to a remote model to necessary technologies for students during the pandemic; a new digital curriculum; reforming K-to-6 with responsive teaching and learning framework; adding 400 positions; meeting individual needs; and improved numeracy and literacy instruction; student assistants; reducing class size – we added 400 teaching positions.

I was just wondering what failures – and it would be good for all of us to know – do you think that the blue book was talking about?

P. DINN: Can you recite the blue book again for me, please?

P. PIKE: "... paints a vivid picture of all the things the Liberal government should have been doing over the past ten years but failed to do."

P. DINN: That is in response to the Accord, correct? Are you reading that in there?

P. PIKE: That's basically what was in your blue book –

P. DINN: Okay.

P. PIKE: – but I look at what has been done over the past number of years and the last five years, that's how long I've been here – I worked with the Department of Education at one point – I felt that the Department of Education was always moving. It was always full of visionaries. It was always great professionals who had a great handle on what was happening. I see the Accord as

an extension of that. It's plotting further into the future. It's not looking at tomorrow; it's looking to tomorrow and beyond. That's all.

I think it's important that I make this point. I really didn't like that being said. It's no reflection on me, but it is on the government that I represented at the time and it's a reflection on staff. All I heard from the ministers that I know, previous ministers, and Minister Davis would certainly be one that I talked to about that, he said that the best group of people, probably, that he ever worked with are over on that side right now.

P. DINN: I've said the same. You can't run a department unless you've got fantastic staff behind you, which I have the privilege of having and the previous minister did as well. I make no apologies for the term that you've quoted, but I will try to explain it. As we sit in the House every day, we hear comments on the shortcomings of the previous government or governments – you can go back as far as you want.

Yes, there are some things that should have been addressed; some things, for example, with the older reports that had been done. Again, I go back to the Premier's report, *Now is the Time*. There are a lot of things in there that still has not been done. There are other reports out on absenteeism and *By a Thread*; all of these talk to issues around education, issues around children and moving them along to become contributing people in our society.

Also, since being in this role, and I can see it from your side, as to what you're saying, there is a tremendous amount of work to be done. There is. For education, there is so much to be done. You try and do as much as you can with what you have. I think in our budget this year, we've tried to spread it around so that we help education in some ways, but I also realize, and you have to realize, it's part of a four-year mandate. We're not going to do everything in the first year.

I have had multiple meetings with just about every stakeholder group that's invested in education from cradle to grave. I've met with the NLTA many times. In fact, we'll be meeting next week again to discuss that. We have a number of committees in place, or we have rejigged some committees that we're going to talk about. The school violence committee, we're going to start meetings on that soon and we have committees established for the early child care education.

Consultation is what we're going to drive towards and work with them on what we need to do next. This is just a start. This is a start, and I hope to continue moving it forward.

P. PIKE: Certainly we'll work with you on that.

CHAIR: I remind the Member that his time has now expired.

Before I go to the next speaker, I thought about something while you guys were talking back and forth in your 15 minutes to start. All I could think was that I wasn't always the best student and I can just say to my former teachers, look at me now. I'm chairing the Committee that's doing the Estimates for Education. It's a –

P. DINN: You say that like it's a good thing.

CHAIR: It's a full-circle moment, trust me.

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre and Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Unlike my colleague from Burin - Grand Bank, I have absolutely no confidence that this report will see the light of day or the recommendations, especially if it requires government spending money. I just heard again what I heard from every new administration. We're going to strike a

committee. We're going to talk about school violence. We're going to address this. It's almost like Groundhog Day, reset the button.

Come December, it's going to be three years since this teacher, colleague, raised the alarm about school violence, and he wasn't the first teacher to do so. Probably the reason he left the profession. That's three years. The Education Accord was another way, from my point of view, to kick the can down the road and to not take any action. Now we have a committee that is going to look at school violence. We don't know when this is going to be addressed, but I do know that this has been a long-term problem, long before 2023.

I read through the report. Take away the issues around references, the fact is what it says is nothing new; it's all been said before. It comes down to the resourcing of it. I guess what I'm looking at is the implementation of it. I know this is the first year but I think teachers are tired of being subjected to a lack of supports, lack of services. I was certainly tired of speaking about it even when I was president of the NLTA and here we are, 10 years later, and we're still talking about it.

If talking could solve it, we'd have no violence in the classrooms, that's for sure. So what I'm asking here, where is the department in relation to the Accord? Right now, are we just going to wait until the review is done, maybe another seven months, or when? What is actually going to be done to operationalize or implement this Accord?

I'm lost as to how this is going to have any impact right now. Convince me. I remain to be convinced. I'm open to be convinced.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: Well, it's hard to convince someone who comes off as so positive when we're dealing with education.

Education, in my mind, and I've said it, it's crucial to success of our economy, success of our community. Money doesn't solve it, but you do need money. We've invested \$1.5 billion into this budget. The Education Accord is close to being, as I said, finalized, going through the laundry we'll say, for lack of a better word.

As I've said, there are many pieces of that report that are good. As I've said, and I agree with the Member, I mentioned about the reports that have been there, those reports that some have collected dust and some have not, but looking at all that to ensure that we act on this.

We have already made some actions ourselves. I give credit to the previous government in terms of the increase in teachers, the increase in TLAs in the classrooms. The Grades 1 to 9 classrooms have reduced capacity in terms of the student-to-teacher ratio. That's one thing that works towards reducing violence in the classroom and taking the workload off our teachers.

I know that we're working on other initiatives to increase teachers. We'll continue on with the rural cohort with the Department of Education to have teachers train up in their community so that, once complete, they will be able and want to stay in their rural communities.

That's another thing that's being done; we're going to continue with that, outside of all the meetings that we're going to have. These are not going to be once every six months; these are working committees that we're working on and producing action items.

When we talk about things like teacher certification, new regulations were passed not too long ago modernizing teacher

certification, expanding the range of teachable subject areas and the addition of a provisional teacher certification aimed at reducing the barriers to recruiting internationally educated teachers. We know that there are teachers and professionals who come to this province, who can't get a job in what they were trained to do.

We are considering changes to the *Teacher Training Act* to further modernize teacher certification. Fees are charged for applications, which is the bulk of the revenue for this division, and we're looking at certifying a large volume of educated teaching and learning assistants to address the shortage.

The number of applications processed in the last year for teacher applications from Newfoundland and Labrador under this program: 173 applications. For internationally educated teachers under this program, 249 have applied. For TLA applications from Newfoundland under this program, 160; for TLA applications internationally, 88; for retired teacher substitution approvals under this, 720; and there is another bunch of applications that we file under other applications under this program, 370.

These are all teachers that we hope to have in the system. Those teachers and those TLAs will do outstanding work in reducing the ratios in the classrooms; helping address issues in the classrooms, such as inclusivity; and also looking at issues around violence. We also have support for school administrators, requirements for monitoring Level III students in the classroom.

I could go on; there's so much here that has been done. I talked about the NLTA concerns and, yes, you might say that the 94 teachers and the 20 learning assistants that are included in this year's budget, you say that's not enough. Given the numbers that I just gave you, along with those, we are working on increasing those numbers.

Look, it's not lost on us that more teachers means increased individual attention for students. It means fewer disruptions in the classrooms. It means stronger relationships between students and teachers. It means reduced workloads and less teacher turnaround. It means more time for teacher lesson planning.

We're not done. I said earlier, this is the start of a four-year mandate. We anticipate having much more investments in education, and not just K to 12 but throughout. I go back to a meeting that the minister in BC had held, a Zoom meeting, talking about Tumbler Ridge and talking about violence that was generated by that, that could have been prevented if the ChatGPT site was monitored more closely. That led to violence in the classrooms. We have to realize that the classrooms are a smaller representation of community, so we need to address it in the classrooms but also outside the classrooms.

I do believe that the investments that are being made in education are the start of moving forward and, with respect to the Education Accord, I certainly don't see that as being tossed away. I've said it. These are recorded. I just cannot commit to what issues will be verified once we get the final verification done.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'm not sure how 720 retired teachers are going to help reduce the class composition ratio. That would speak more to the fact that we're having problems trying to attract new teachers to the profession. We've seen the increase in retired teachers over the last time and it speaks to the fact that we cannot recruit and retain.

The minister said in his opening remarks that Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest rates of student need supports. Maybe we'll talk a little bit about that because one of the concerns that the NLTA has raised is, more or less, about how the

94 units and 20 TLAs will be operationalized.

The minister admits that there is a major problem. I would say that it is clear that what they put forward is not enough to address it. Clearly not enough to lower class caps as there are roughly 250 schools. So how will the 94 units and 20 TLAs be operationalized?

P. DINN: First of, I think the 720 retired teachers would probably argue that they do have an effect in the classroom, that's why they're applying to be substitutes. They want to be in the classrooms. They want to help the children. I think it's a little disingenuous to write off those 720 retired teachers that are in the classroom.

With regard to inclusivity, that's a big issue. I said it upfront. You can do the math; you can have algorithms. You might have a number in your head of how many actually are going to fit the bill, but you can't create TLAs out of thin air. Everyone is dealing with these issues across the country. We've taken steps, as I already outlined, to look at international teachers, international TLA applications. We've looked at that.

Again, I said, the TLA applications from Newfoundland, 160 have come forward; international application, 88; internationally educated teachers 249. These are actual bodies, individuals who want to come and teach in the classroom. These are resources that can be put in a classroom along with the retired teachers.

Do I want to keep retired teachers out of the classroom? No, if they want to be in the classrooms then be in the classrooms. Is it a reflection that we have a shortage of young teachers coming in? Yes. Are we making attempts to address that? Yes. We're actually following on some of the initiatives that were in place prior to.

If you talk to the university, in terms of the Department of Education, they have

increased enrolment this year – increased enrolment in the Faculty of Education.

I have to say, and I say this collectively, the picture we paint of education or social workers or health care, it doesn't matter, when we paint such a desperate picture of particular professions, are you encouraging people to go to those professions? Are you promoting those professions? No. People are not going to go into those professions.

So I see it as an increase in the enrolment in education as a very positive result – a very positive result that we're seeing more and more individuals than previous years now enrolled in education. Again, with some of our programming on the rural cohorts, I really hope that we'll continue to see more and more teachers enrolled because we need them. We need them in the classrooms.

As I said, we reduced the ratios in the classrooms. It's been a positive, in terms of the teachers. I know in the House it was talked about significant. I wouldn't go so far as significant yet. But it is showing an upward trend in satisfaction by both teachers and students.

So I would say that we are headed in the right direction. Again, this wasn't because I walked in here. This would have been because of some of the late initiatives that were put in by the previous government. So I give credit where it's due. But it's on an upward trend. We're starting to trend upwards and I intend to keep it going that way.

CHAIR: I've been informed by the Official Opposition that they don't have anymore questions in this section, so I ask the Member for St. John's Centre and Leader of the Third Party if he has anymore questions in this section.

J. DINN: Sure do. Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Chair, 720 retired teachers will do nothing to reduce class ratios. It's the replaced teachers that we can't get. That's the first thing. People are not going into the profession, not because of any commentary but because they know that the issues have not been addressed – period.

So \$1 million for social workers to address school violence. I'll give you the exact question here: How will the \$1 million for social workers be used to address school violence? Chair, \$1 million, again, is not going to be much to support 250 schools. What is the plan?

So the \$1 million for social workers, how is this going to be used? How many social workers are we talking about? Are they going to be itinerants, rolling, what?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the minister.

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

I just want to address the preamble in terms of saying so definitively that the 720 retirees will do nothing to address the vacancy and will do nothing to address more people wanting to be in the classrooms.

J. DINN: Class composition.

P. DINN: The class composition.

J. DINN: That's what I'm talking about.

P. DINN: I look at and see the increased enrolment in the Faculty of Education, to me, it's a clear indication that more and more people are looking upon the education profession more favourably. The more people that we get into the education faculty, the greater effect it will have class composition and size. I can't say anything more about that.

This is what the data is showing now. We are moving in the right direction. You cannot create 500 teachers with the click of a hand but we are moving towards having more and more in the system. For those retired teachers who don't want to go in the classroom, they'll have that opportunity to make that decision.

With regard to your other question, I'm going to have the proper person behind me provide some information on that.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: I am just wondering if the Member could explore the \$1 million for social workers. I know we have social work assistance as well.

J. DINN: The \$1 million that was announced for social workers to be used to address school violence, how are they going to be operationalized or used? I think it was announced in the budget.

J. HEARN: I believe that was in the Health and Community Services' budget.

J. DINN: How is that going to be used?

J. HEARN: We would be liaising with Health on how that social work money would be used in the schools.

J. DINN: Are we talking about actual people in the schools, if you're liaising? I'm trying to get something concrete here is to what this means.

J. HEARN: I think at this point as it is not in the Education budget, we couldn't comment on how that \$1 million would be spent but we certainly will be speaking with Health and Community Services on how that will work to address violence in the school system.

J. DINN: Next question, if I may, Chair.

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

J. DINN: Thank you.

How will government work to recruit and retain our teachers? Teachers are already talking about violence and very complex working conditions. We've also got positions that are partial, 0.25, 0.1. I'm just trying to figure out here are we going to have all full-time? And maybe in answering this, how many full-time positions do we have as well?

I'm trying to figure out how you're going to do it, considering the problems in the school system. I know it's great that we have people enroled in education, but as soon as they hit the reality of the classrooms sometimes, they may realize, no, I'm going in for something else.

I'm looking here at recruitment, not just recruitment, but retention, and dealing with the problems that teachers are raising. One of those, certainly, is getting people into difficult-to-fill areas has to do with positions that you'll see, a 0.1, a 0.25, a 0.5 and you're not getting a person to go to a community where they're maybe only working part-time.

P. DINN: Do you have to recognize me?

CHAIR: Usually what I do is I recognize each speaker at the start of their 10 minutes. If you have to recognize somebody to give an answer, then you'll come on the mic and then you'll pass it off to a departmental member.

P. DINN: I'll get the proper staff to elaborate on what I'm going to say, but I've already spoken to the rural cohort piece. Our Premier has committed that there will be no partial positions under a 0.5 going forward so that's one step we're doing. There are also a number of other incentives that are available for teachers who are working in remote and hard-to-fill areas. There's the Labrador subsidy; there's a moving subsidy. There are a couple of other subsidies there.

But what I will do, I'll have the appropriate staff behind me give you a little bit more definitive information on the subsidy because I know I haven't mentioned them all.

T. HALL: Thank you.

I'd be remiss if I didn't note talking with counterparts across Canada. This is a national issue with the shortage of teachers. No matter who we talk to across Canada when I'm with my colleagues, everyone is trying to do different things in order to get the upper hand.

We do have a number of recruitment and retention incentives that we have been engaged in, including a \$5,000 bonus if you go to one of our hard-to-fill locations, of which we have 29 right now on the Island and up through Labrador.

We do also have incentives for additional travel in and out, over and above what was in the base collective agreement that we brought in to allow teachers more travel. The Labrador Benefits Agreement has incentives in there.

Besides the additional rural cohort, which allows individuals to get their education training in the communities they live in and then they ultimately want to stay there to teach, we've also put an additional EAL cohort through, which is English as an Additional Language, to increase those teachers. We also have an additional French speaking cohort that we're putting through right now. We're trying to put additional cohorts through in areas where we know we have shortages.

We've also started sponsoring internships for students. What I mean by that is we're paying for some students to go to hard-to-fill areas to experience those communities. We're paying for their internships to go there. We have had some success this year. We actually have, right now, 13 of the 30 interns that went to these areas who

have actually taken up jobs in those areas. We've also increased our retention and had some success in our international recruiting for some teachers over the last year.

We're looking at every angle. We also subsidized housing to incentivize teachers to go in our hard-to-fill areas. We've done job some fairs to attract as well, to try and get teachers to come here and, not only here, we just recently, actually, have started doing out-of-province, trying to attract students to come here for their internships to experience Newfoundland with the hope that they will want to stay after.

J. DINN: Thank you.

P. DINN: Chair, can I add to that?

CHAIR: Sure.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: Thank you.

Thank you for that because I wouldn't have gone there, but you did leave out one thing. You're perfect other than that.

We also have a Recruitment and Retention Committee in place that involves the NLTA and the university. We're working with all the groups that have a play or have a vested interest in teachers and recruitment and retention. We're trying to ensure that everyone has their say and brings value to the table so that we try and get it right.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Chair.

It's going to be hard for us to follow along if we're not going to follow section by section. We've got seven sections and we've been an hour and we haven't voted on one yet. If we're not going to move in that direction, I'm

just going to speak for policy right across the board.

CHAIR: Well, the impetus is that general questions can be asked in the first round because you're looking at the overall arching subset.

With that being said, yes, if questions can fall under another section, then I would suggest that we move forward because I think it's important that we do get through all the sections.

B. DAVIS: So if we're not going to vote on section 1 now, I think we've got to let us jump in now and just go through sections, policy related questions that we want to ask as well.

P. DINN: I'm good whatever way.

B. DAVIS: Okay, so if we can vote on section 1, I'm fine with that.

CHAIR: Are you ready to vote on section 1?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

CHAIR: Okay.

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

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive, Executive Services.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I'll now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive, Corporate Services.

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

I now call on the Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: I'm going to move right into the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board, if that's okay. If we can get back to some of these, we probably will, but I want to move forward.

Is there a need for growth and expansion of the library system given, especially in rural areas, they provide a myriad of valuable services to communities? I live in rural Newfoundland and the library is one of the – a lot of people use it. The school uses it. It's in the school, as a matter of fact. Adults use it, it's used on weekends. They have branched off into technology. They've branched off into mystery nights and things like that, and things for seniors. So they're fast becoming very important in the communities.

So has there been any discussions of expanding the role of libraries, as well as providing a budget that they can actually buy more materials and so on because, as you know, 25 per cent of our population are our seniors? Seniors in rural Newfoundland and Labrador like to hang out. So it's a great thing if we could just try to increase the numbers that go to libraries. If we increase numbers, that means we'll have to increase budgets, but it's very important in rural Newfoundland.

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

I just had to check; I knew we had 90-odd libraries in the province. It's actually 94.

P. PIKE: Yes.

P. DINN: So, to your question, and as much as I praise the previous administration, I'm going to have to do a downer on you now.

I know there was talk about eliminating libraries a number of years back, which created quite a bit of angst around rural Newfoundland and around those who utilize libraries, but you did see the light. I'll give you that; you did see the light and you saw the importance of the libraries to residents of the province, especially rural Newfoundland, but I would also say for seniors as well, in urban and rural areas, it's a very, very important asset to have and to have to offer for our people in the province that utilize them. Everyone I know that utilizes the library – in fact, we just opened up a new one up in CBS, and it's utilized all the time.

Some of these libraries, you'll see it's not just books you can take out. They have the computers and that there, but also you can take out musical instruments and the like. So the library isn't just books off a shelf; it means a lot more to some of these communities. In a lot of cases, it's the centre of a community.

We work with and we have discussions with the provincial library board all the time. In fact, we're working with them now; there's one library in town that is looking for a new location. So we're certainly working with them, because of the importance – actually, they're looking for a location that becomes a little bit more accessible for those who use it, a library that is on public transportation routes. As I said, the people who utilize some of these libraries are elderly and don't have the transportation available to them.

So to your question, no. We value the public library system. If there are areas that come forward and are thinking about a library, then we'll entertain it and we'll certainly work with them. The 94 libraries across the province are all doing very well, and, b'y, if we can have more, we'll work to have them there.

I don't know if my colleague here needs anything to add.

P. PIKE: We're okay.

P. DINN: Perfect.

P. PIKE: I have a lot of questions.

P. DINN: Let's go.

P. PIKE: Yes.

Can you provide an overview of educational agencies and advisory committees to which the \$5.5 million is allocated. That's under 2.1.02. Are there any that may be different from previous years? We're just wondering about that \$5.5 million.

P. DINN: What was it again?

P. PIKE: 2.1.02.

P. DINN: Okay. 2.1.02.

You're talking about the agencies under Grants and Subsidies?

P. PIKE: Yes.

P. DINN: Under that there are quite a number of agencies that are provided funding there. We have the Atlantic Veterinary College, which I will say we're moving to increase the seats there. They were at three; we're moving to move them to six. That's the only place our residents can do training in veterinarian college. I can give you the amounts for each but that's –

P. PIKE: No.

P. DINN: We have the Atlantic Provinces Special Education –

P. PIKE: I'm just wondering if there are any new ones from previous years, any different?

P. DINN: Not in my mind, but I'll have the appropriate staff – I have the list, but I don't know if there has been anything new since I got here.

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: The answer is no, so the list we have of a number of agencies is consistent with the previous year.

P. PIKE: Okay.

We were just wondering because the \$35,000 is what sparked our interest there.

I have a question for you before I skip this. This is a question that was asked to me a couple of days ago by a rural school. For example, this particular school was going to a robotics event in Canada representing the province. Last year, they did the international one. Are there any grants or anything for these particular schools? Because bake sales and stuff like that are not cutting it, especially if you're taking a big group.

Last year, we managed to get enough money to send the ones from one of the schools. We managed to get some grants and so on, and we're just wondering if there's anything available now through the department – again, this is just off the wall here but it's important.

P. DINN: I agree, it's certainly not off the wall; it is an important question. Actually it's a question I dealt with when I worked on a town council trying to get grants to help kids and their teams go away. There were restrictions around it and the amount you give them was never enough.

I've seen a lot of requests go over my desk, especially when it comes to having teachers attend or go chaperone students going up to these events. One hundred per cent of them have been funded by fundraising or sponsors. I will say – and I'll get staff to clarify if I'm wrong on this – we have a small

amount, as the previous minister would realize, I think it's about \$35,000 discretionary fund that we can utilize for different things.

If I started using that for some of these programs, it would be gone in no time and you would have individual groups out there who would be crying foul in terms of why didn't we get it. As it relates to grants and that, I'm not sure if any other department would offer something for that. Like, for example, you talk about robotics. I don't know if industry and trades or those programs would be offered there but it's something that should be looked at.

P. PIKE: I know last year we were successful in getting \$1,000 from the Department of Education.

P. DINN: So that would just come from that discretionary fund, I would assume, having the past minister there.

P. PIKE: Yes, but in any event, you know, expect a letter.

I don't have any more questions on this section.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Looking here in 2.1.01, what are the rates of chronic absenteeism in the school system and how does this compare to the previous year?

P. DINN: 2.1.01?

J. DINN: Yes, I'm just looking under that subhead, Administrative Support.

P. DINN: That's a good question and it's a question I asked in terms of vacancies. I know you want exact numbers – I can give percentages but I'll have my appropriate staff member speak to that.

S. LINEHAN: MHA Dinn, to your question, the number of unexcused absences for K to 6 this school year is 10 per cent. For 7 to 9 junior high school, the percentage of unexcused absences is 16 per cent and the rate of unexcused for high school, this school year, is 28 per cent.

J. DINN: Twenty-eight?

S. LINEHAN: Yes.

J. DINN: Will we be able to have actual numbers? That would be great.

S. LINEHAN: The actual number of students?

J. DINN: If possible, the number of absentees.

S. LINEHAN: Yes.

J. DINN: So what's being done to address that?

S. LINEHAN: Our department is working on an attendance policy that we have in response to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. We have a draft policy that's in place that we're trying to be proactive in our response to chronic absenteeism. We're piloting that policy in several schools in the province to determine its success and full-scale implementation.

J. DINN: If I may, Chair, how do the rates of absenteeism compare to previous years?

S. LINEHAN: In primary-elementary, it's relatively stable within a couple percentages. In 2021-22, it was at 11 per cent; this year being 10 per cent.

Four years ago in junior high, it was 22 per cent; it's down to 16 per cent this year. Again, I'm referring to chronic absenteeism, unexcused. For high school, it has dropped from 33 per cent to 28 per cent. We're seeing some moderate decreases in absenteeism.

J. DINN: Thank you.

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

P. DINN: What section would that be under, please?

J. DINN: We put that under Administrative Support.

CHAIR: 2.1.01.

P. DINN: Go ahead, yes.

S. LINEHAN: Of the recent Collective Agreement with the NLTA and the government, Letter #13 called for a committee between the NLTA and the employer to review the feasibility of the 90 recommendations of the TARC report that covered five general key areas. We are currently waiting for two summary recommendations.

We've had nine meetings between the NLTA and the employer. The last meeting was with the authors of the report to answer any final questions. The NLTA had said that they had two recommendations they would like to take back and discuss and then submit to government. At that point, we will submit a final report as per Letter #13 of the Collective Agreement.

J. DINN: All right. Thank you.

Under 2.1.02, Assistance to Educational Agencies and Advisory Committees, what's the status of the Federation of School Councils?

P. DINN: When you ask about the status, in what way? I mean, they still continue to meet.

J. DINN: At one time they were their own independent advocacy group and they received funding from government, but there was some attempt that they would be

brought into an advisory committee. They would answer to the minister, not as a separate advisory committee.

So I'm just wondering what is the status? Do they operate independently? Is that the plan or are they going to be brought into an advisory committee where they're under the (inaudible) or control of the department? That's what I'm looking at. What is the status?

P. DINN: So from my point of view, I certainly haven't been made aware of anything in terms of them moving under. There's \$50,000 that's allocated to their operation for them to continue to operate, but I'll have the appropriate person here now give a further update.

S. LINEHAN: Currently, we are reviewing the regulations with respect to Provincial Advisory Council on Education. One of those reviews is looking at where the Newfoundland and Labrador school federation falls within pace, anywhere from seven to 15 members with regional representation across the province. Part of the review that we will undertake, MHA Dinn, is to determine where NL school federation fits within that pace organization.

J. DINN: If I may follow up then. So that's where I'm going with it. If it's brought under the provincial advisory, I guess what I'm looking at, does it have the ability then to advocate independently, publicly like it did before because it operated independently of the NLTA of the department and it was its own voice?

If the process is looking at how it's going to be brought under the Provincial Advisory Council on Education, is it going to have that ability to advocate beyond that as its own independent advocacy group or is it more or less brought under that control? That's where I'm going with this.

It's got \$50,000, but I'm trying to figure out if it's going to be subsumed into this council and have no voice in a public sense.

S. LINEHAN: That will be one of the things that we would review as part of the regulations, because the committee is tasked with providing advice to the minister. But one of the regulations that we would have to look at is their ability to voice publicly their concerns that they would voice to the minister.

J. DINN: Thank you.

One last one, 2.2.01, Provincial Information and Library Resources Board, Operations: Are there any plans to provide the board with the funding to implement the service delivery standards as outlined in the Ernst & Young's report? They estimate it will cost nearly \$10 million.

G. CLARKE: MHA Dinn, the department is aware of that report. It was done some time ago. As a matter of fact, Minister Dinn has asked us to engage with the CEO to look at the future of the Libraries Board and determine what options should be considered over the course of the next four years. But we haven't done anything more definitive than that.

J. DINN: Thank you, I appreciate it.

That's it on that section for me.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: No, I think we're voting on this section, I think?

CHAIR: For the Member of the Third Party, is it okay to go ahead now with the vote on this one, or do you have more questions?

J. DINN: Go ahead.

CHAIR: Okay.

Seeing no more questions, I'll now ask the Clerk to call the subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.2.02 inclusive, Corporate Services.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: Now that we're just getting ready to start a new subhead and we're close to break time, anyway, why don't we take that 10 minutes and gather ourselves and come back for a nice robust hour and a half.

Recess

CHAIR (Dwyer): Order, please!

We are continuing the meeting of the head of expenditure for Education and Early Childhood Development.

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

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

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

I call on the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to do the machine gun approach, I think. I'm going to ask a question and

hopefully we can get answers back in a reasonable time so we can get through the section to make sure we don't run out of time.

Minister, the current wage grid is scheduled to end in 2026 for ECEs. Where are we with respect to a new wage grid and what's the plan when this expires?

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

I think I've said it a number of times in the House of Assembly when we were talking about benefits for early childcare educators

—

P. PIKE: Today.

P. DINN: Yes, it was today as well.

We value the input of early child care educators. I know the report put out by Child Care Now, their national report that recently came out, had a number of recommendations. One was to have a formal committee in place with ECEs and those vested in the child care sector to address benefits, wages and compensation. That's what we're doing with the early child care steering committee. We will be addressing those issues.

As I said today in the House of Assembly, I hope to have that committee announced within the next coming weeks.

CHAIR: The Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

Budget 2026 established the ECE steering committee but allocates no new funding for early childhood educator compensation. When the ECE committee recommends a compensation package, including wage grid increases, pension plans and paid sick leave, where will the funding come from to cover the committee's recommendation? One would assume the committee is going

to make a recommendation in short order, once they're established.

P. DINN: Good question.

I attended a symposium recently within the last month that was put off by the YWCA. Part of that symposium, they had an exercise on rating what's of most importance to them. I believe you were there, as well. I've actually requested that as a benchmark for us. I haven't received it yet; although, I will say, they have reached out and are looking forward to more discussion.

In terms of timing and that around this, it all depends on when we get this committee moving through and what they want to focus on. I say that because if pensions are the first thing they want to focus on, as an example, it's hard to address pensions because they're taking money out of their paycheque without addressing wages. So, in some cases, they might put the cart before the horse. I can't even speculate timing on that but, if it should come to the point of decisions being made, I'm sure we'll have a look and see if there's any available money in the pot.

Again, we would be looking at the next budget for sure. I will say with confidence that that's one area that we would look at in terms of funding, depending on what area they want to look at first.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Minister.

Brighter Futures in the District of Burin - Grand Bank have informed one of my colleagues that they are currently dealing with funding cuts. The organization operates a family resource centre and several Healthy Baby Clubs in the region.

Can you confirm what's happening with their funding? I know it's an individual case, but it's something that came to us very recently.

P. DINN: Where it's so recent, I'll have my appropriate staff behind me.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: I can confirm there has been no provincial funding cuts for any family resource centres for this year.

I do know that there are several, I believe that is one, that actually avails of the federal funding. The federal funding, I believe, has explored changes to how they provide funding to these agencies.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

P. PIKE: That's in Lawn.

B. DAVIS: It's in Lawn? Yes.

What changes are being made or contemplated on how family resource centres are being funded in the province? Are there any changes that you're contemplating with respect to family resource centres?

I think the centre that you're talking about, ADM, was in Lawn. I think that's the federal one, not the one in the Burin - Grand Bank side.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yes. That's a satellite site, I believe, from the Burin - Grand Bank.

They have a pocket of funding provincially and a pocket of funding federally. I would imagine what they're talking about it trying to recoup what they've lost from the federal pocket, looking provincially for additional funding. We've not got an official proposal on that.

B. DAVIS: Thank you very much.

Minister, you mentioned earlier that you thought the former minister saw the light on a topic, which I thought was a great segue into my question right now.

I remember being on the other side and some other individual MHA referring to the Early Learning Gateway as the gateway to hell at news conferences. I see it as a completely different aspect, and I hope that somebody else saw the light with respect to that, because it has been a significant amount of work put into it. Parents have said to me that it's been a saviour to them. I know there have been hiccups, of course, like any new product or service that's provided, but I did want to give you an opportunity to address that concern. I saw the light on something, so I'm hoping my colleague did.

P. DINN: Well, thank you for that.

With your question and how I phrase it, I think of Meat Loaf and "Bat Out of Hell." That's what I have been since I got with the department, I'm a bat out of hell.

Yes, the staff have heard me say it several times that the impressions through a couple of my town halls, it was referred to as the gateway to hell. I think a lot of that had to do with the resource being new, as well with some more changes to be had to it.

I know that now we are making more changes, and I'm going to get Lisa to speak to that, in that program that I think are going to be a godsend, to be quite honest with you. So from hell to heaven; we're going to have a program that's going to really work and give us more definitive numbers and help the parents out there.

I'll ask Lisa just to add to some of the changes that are happening.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yes, we are making improvements and enhancements all the time.

This year, certainly, we've made enhancements or we are making enhancements which will allow us to have a more accurate count of the demand based on area of the province. We're including

enrolment data so we can actually see how many children are enrolled in the child care service themselves.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

I know how fantastic Lisa is at her job on this; I know that's going to be fantastic. So thank you.

Minister, we're hearing from some operators and parents that the change of the 100 per cent capacity rule has negatively impacted their ability to provide consistent care for children who age out of the classrooms. There are also those child care centres that have historically been permitted to prioritize children based on things such as members of the RNC, as an example.

The elimination of this flexibility, has there been some movement in the department on trying to fix some of those issues; because, obviously, when we highlight something that's a problem, it may not have been the intended impact of it, but we maybe have the opportunity to fix it.

I'll throw that back to you, Minister, for that.

P. DINN: Thank you.

The 100 per cent enrolment, actually, was what we were trying to do there. The intent was to ensure or try to ensure that all seats that are vacant could be filled, but when that was proposed, we've also gone back out and verified exactly what we mean by it and also giving time for other operators to respond on not only that change but the other proposed changes we've had.

I'll just ask Lisa to give you the Coles Notes on how we see that working out.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We haven't actually enforced the 100 per cent enrolment yet. We are looking to do that for the next payment, which is in September.

As the minister had spoke to, we are doing pretty intensive consultations over this next six months, but we do know that this something that's in every other jurisdiction in the country, to have 100 per cent enrolment. We are going to work with our child care services to ensure there are no adverse effects. Things like prioritization should not change from that perspective based on how they pick people up from the Gateway wait-list.

In addition, the ability to have an overlap of time, we're going to talk with the child care services around how much that could be, whether that's a one month or a three month time frame where we would expect that. That is something that we'll be working with our child care services on.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

Just a quick one, under the wire. We've spoken many times and we've heard from many people about reducing administrative burden on operators. I know the MHA has talked about this. While many operators are acting in good faith – many, many are – and developing and delivering important services, how is the department going to ensure that efforts to reduce paperwork are not going to be used by operators to exploit use of public funds?

We know we've had significant problems in collecting paperwork from certain operators, and I would hope that the minister is going to be as firm as I was looking to get into this area on operators who are not providing due diligence to the staff, for the safety of the children for one, but also for the use of public funds. If they're not providing paperwork, well then, that's an issue and should be dealt with.

P. DINN: I think the gateway to heaven is going to help solve some of those problems, because it's reducing paperwork and that, but we also are available to go out to some of these child care centres.

Some of those who are focused – I mean they're all focused solely on the welfare of the child, but some of them don't have that administrative background. So we can go out and also provide and help them in that way.

Again, I'll defer to Lisa to give us a little bit more definitive information on that.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yes, that is the intent as the minister indicated.

We actually have auditors right now as well, in terms of increasing accountability. They are able to go out and do random audits and then do a deeper dive as needed. The Early Learning Gateway already has reduced administrative burden. We've had many of our same operators who had expressed concerns that are now really excited about how much more efficient this process has been this year.

P. DINN: If I can add, I mean, our goal is not to force child care centres out. Our goal is to help them in whatever way we can to succeed. At the end of the day, children are the focus, and their families.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

In today's debate on the budget I referenced the Carter Churchill case, specifically the testimony of a former deputy minister and the former CEO of the school district. In that, when it came to the request for extra resources, usually it was the conversation: Well, you have to find what you have within the envelope. In other words, don't ask for the extra allocations or resources because you won't be getting them.

That was back in 2022, I think it was. So I guess this question is for the assistant deputy minister of Education Operations, through the minister. I'm just wondering how many requests have come in to the

superintendent of schools for extra resources over and above and beyond what's allocated? How many times has the superintendent of schools gone to the deputy minister or the minister for those extra resources?

T. HALL: I'm actually going to defer to my colleague, who is the Student Support Services, who would likely have some of those requests. I can tell you, I haven't got any at this point.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We don't have an actual number of how many requests, MHA Dinn, but I can certainly get that for you in terms of a track, because we would be able to get that number for you. I don't have that number here.

J. DINN: All right, thank you. I appreciate it.

I guess I would be even more interested in how many of those requests actually resulted in extra resources being provided.

If I had one other question, maybe two, again through the minister to the superintendent of schools: If the request came in, what would be the approach of the school district and the department? Would it be a case of don't ask, you're not getting it or we're not finding money within the budget, or is there an attempt here to actually try to find the extra resources for people?

T. HALL: Thank you.

For sure, any requests that do come in for services for students for whatever necessity or needs are all evaluated and looked at. We'll work with our professionals in our Student Support services division who would complete assessments with us to determine if there are additional supports required, what type they would be and we would certainly discuss it as a department. It wouldn't just be a perfunctory, no. We have provided services, even throughout the year, when they come in for students as we

review them and we determine that, yes, they are necessary for their programming.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Of course, those questions were in relation to the Carter Churchill case, the human rights case, where the district basically were found at fault for not providing the necessary resources.

What changes then in Student Support services have been made for students with special needs since the Carter Churchill case, even especially in regard to deaf or hard of hearing students, and what additional resources have been allocated?

P. DINN: I'm going to just start that, please.

I've met with just about everyone. The deaf and hard of hearing has been one of the groups I've met with, and I had great discussions and I've learned some things. To the Member for St. John's Centre, I'll show some of what I learned afterwards. I can't do it here now, but it's interesting what I've learned from the deaf and hard of hearing.

I mean, this government is certainly committed to inclusive education and ensuring that the deaf and hard of hearing students have appropriate supports in place to foster. I know in the metro area, we're able to group students for service. There are three deaf and hard of hearing classrooms. East Point Elementary has four students, one teacher and two TLAs, with deaf or hard of hearing areas, and one SA. We have St. Paul's Junior High who has three students, two teachers, two TLAs – DHH, one student assistant. Holy Heart has four students, one teacher, two TLAs – DHH and 1.25 interpreters.

The resources are there and if there are additional resources, we will find them. I will say that finding translators for American Sign Language is difficult. I know that many American Sign Language interpreters have,

sort of, gone out on their own because it's more lucrative to them. So finding those is a challenge but we will certainly do whatever we can.

I'll let my colleague behind add to that.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: That's accurate. So we've progressively increased year over year the number of supports that are for these students. In addition, we actually have a director of deaf and hard of hearing programs within the department who has been an essential resource for us and to support the children and the educational staff, as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to the Safe and Caring Schools Policy, I'm understanding that it's being updated, reviewed. What is the progress of that so far? What changes do you see on the horizon?

P. DINN: The Safe and Caring Schools group has not met in a while. We've had an initial meeting of the group and we're hoping to have more regular meetings starting next month. I told the staff and I told the committee at the time that I'm not looking at one meeting every six months. I'd like to have a working group on this.

They would review the policy. They would review the protocols. Of course, as you may know, within that group, we have representations of the RNC and RCMP. So we have authorities there that are going to help address some of the issues because there are big issues, as we all, know in school. We've already talked about social media. We've already talked about bullying. You've mentioned in the House today a friend of ours that went to school, big guy, big teacher and being assaulted in school and these are things we want to work towards solving.

They may not all be big issues that are required. There's some low-hanging fruit

that we can address either through education or through different promotional programs, but my intent and what I've told staff in this particular case is that we need to have this committee as a working group, as a group that's willing and able to suggest proper changes to policy and proper actions.

They're the experts in the area. They're the ones who are going to give us the solutions that have some merit to them as opposed to throwing things at the wall and seeing what sticks. So it's a very important initiative for us.

J. DINN: Thank you.

In this budget, \$3.6 million is committed to inclusive education. Can you break down what this will get us, how many staff, equipment and so on and so forth. How will this be distributed?

P. DINN: Can you tell me the section, please?

J. DINN: Under 3.1.01. I think you announced there was \$3.6 million committed to inclusive education or inclusion. Maybe it's 3.2.01, anyway.

P. DINN: Well, while I'm looking, I'm going to ask my appropriate staff to respond.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Right now we do know as of March 2026, there are 222 staffing grants in place, and that we are supporting 665 children being through these grants. Much of what you're seeing in terms of the budget is actually in anticipation of the new spaces that are actually being created as well.

We do know that we had additional budget pressures last year for the amount of inclusion supports required. So this was a forecasting method as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

If I can get one under quickly, I'll finish it off.

CHAIR: Quickly.

J. DINN: How many ECEs are currently across the system and how many ECE professionals do we need in order to meet demand?

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We do have right now 2,025 ECEs that are working in child care services throughout the province. For the spaces in development inclusive of should the budget be approved (inaudible), we are estimating an additional 230 ECEs required to work in these new services to support the children.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Looking at the hour of the day, I'm going to try to be short with my questions and equally I'd love the short answer. But I can't control the answers, of course.

P. DINN: Give me the section too, first.

B. DAVIS: It's just going to be general on that.

P. DINN: Okay.

B. DAVIS: Another major initiative the department is working on was around the New Child and Youth Community Health Model. It was announced in September and they haven't heard a thing since then. I know it's a significant piece of work; I know that. But it's going to be life changing for children because of the partnership with what was called CSSD, at that point, and Health and Community Services as well as Education.

So I will throw it back to the minister because I'm anxiously waiting with bated breath to hear what's coming on this next because I can see the difference it's going

to make in the lives of the children. So I'll let you go.

P. DINN: A very important question, and I don't want to give a general answer on this, so I'm going to ask for my expert staff to give you a more technical response.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We have done a lot of internal work since the fall, since we've come on. There's a lot of work, of course, across our partnership with Health and Community Services and SSWB. We've done a fair bit of review of the existing work that happened prior to, and we anticipate further coming soon announcements, I guess that would be fair to say.

B. DAVIS: That's excellent. Exciting news. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can the minister provide an update on the Pre-Kindergarten Program? I'll lead into two: How many pre-kindergarten sites are operating without the required Level III ECE, and how many are below capacity due to staffing shortages? That's sort of a three-parter.

I love the program. My Jessie is in the program, so I think it's a fantastic program. I just think if there's anything we can do to support it, we will.

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

That's a question I would have asked last year, I think. So I could recite the answer I got, but I'll have staff respond.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: There are now 806 pre-kindergarten spaces; 48 centres, and 126 spaces were created in 2025-26. We have 639 pre-kindergarten spaces across 42 sites that are in various stages of development.

With respect to the Level III, I don't have that in front of me but I can certainly get that. I do know that we've been able to have some innovative solutions for those that we

may not have been able to recruit in those areas.

B. DAVIS: Perfect, thank you.

One thing that I forgot to ask earlier, the Grants and Subsidies line within the book, Minister, would you give us a list of all those that were awarded grants and subsidies when we get the booklet? I'm sure we will, but I just wanted to make sure I asked that question.

I know, Minister, you were very much on top of this particular question I'm going to ask. Since the elimination of the 1.6 kilometre rule, some families have raised concerns about children losing transportation. I think we've had many conversations about that at the time. I'm going to make it a short one, I know it lies in Transportation and Infrastructure, but what role does the department play in trying to ensure that this is rectified or at least moving in a positive direction for those families?

P. DINN: Good question.

As you know, the 1.6 kilometres was around safety for children, especially in rural and semi-rural areas where you don't have sidewalks and they're standing on the corner of a street. We have been working closely with my colleague in TI. As you know, we just announced a pilot on busing that will help those in child care centres, but we will take any request and TI will normally go out and look at the potential pick-up/drop-off spot and see if it's doable.

I know from my past experience, some of the cul-de-sacs, buses could not go up because there's a regulated circumference which I'm looking at and I said, b'y, I could turn a transport truck around there, but of course regulation prevents that.

We are open to anyone who comes forward with a request on a particular stop and we'll do whatever we can to do that. Some of those spots may not work because of the

sightlines so we'll do what we can to help them out there.

B. DAVIS: Perfect, thank you.

Minister, you talked about the creation of 200 spaces under your watch. I'm not going to get political on it because I sort of know who announced those spaces, I was there. I think you may have been there at one of them. So of the, I think, close to 2,000 spaces that we announced over the summer of 2025, with the implementation of those over the next number of months, where are we to with those spaces?

I do know that the budget had \$33 million in it, in Grants and Subsidies. I'm assuming that the lion's share of that would be for space creation. How many of those 2,000-ish are done and open now? Is it just the 200 that you mentioned earlier or referenced, or are there more? I know there are multiple ones that will be opening soon.

I know, Lisa, probably knows the answer very quickly.

P. DINN: I don't?

B. DAVIS: No, I'm just saying, I know she probably does because she probably has it at her fingertips.

P. DINN: The number that I was tasked with when I got there was 1,400 that were remaining to be opened.

You're right, I did harp on that in previous years, when is it going to happen? But as you would know, when we allot the money to these facilities, there's setting up the actual facility and it gets held up by either certification or even getting people to do the renos and that. There has been 200 that have been opened, out of that. You've brought us so far, I got us over the line.

Then there are another 1,200 that will be open this year. You probably already know where they're going because they were

already set in stone when I got in. Of course, we have another 418 new funding positions that we're going to look at.

I'll ask Lisa to add anything to that that I've missed.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: I have nothing to add, Minister, that was exactly right.

B. DAVIS: Excellent.

P. DINN: That's in *Hansard*, too, right? Just to be sure.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

Minister, can you provide an update on the overnight pilot for shift workers that was started? Has there been any success with that for early learning centres for shift workers, overnight?

P. DINN: This is the one, again, I've asked this question in the past because the previous government announced four locations. There is one that I believe is partially open. Some of the concerns I had with that – and it's not due to whoever was there, it's just the logics of it – is that you have to come up with someone to cover a shift worker, but then you have those people covering the child care workers, what do they do with their children? As you would appreciate, it's not something simply that can be done.

I'll have Lisa speak to the particular location that is open.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: There is one family child care provider who does overnight supports for health care professionals. We do have a site in St. Michael's here in St. John's. We also have multiple sites that are prioritizing for health professionals; however, we're starting to see a trend of not as much uptake as we had originally anticipated so we are looking to adjust accordingly based on what the

needs are for the families in the communities.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

I think I have one last question on student support services side. I think that's Lisa as well.

The number of high-need students in our schools continue to increase over the last number of years. The budget doesn't include any additional funding increase for the number of student assistants in the system and, I think the MHA for St. John's Centre sort of went down this road a little bit, this is an invaluable service for our students as well as our teachers.

What is the department doing to ensure students with high needs are properly supported going forward? I know it's not an easy answer, so I'll qualify that right up front.

P. DINN: Okay, and I will be passing this to Lisa as well, but I can talk to what we've done already.

The student assistants are hugely important – hugely important – to the classroom. We've had at least one meeting with NAPE on this, because they fall under NAPE. When you talk about those who are on buses and that and have to leave their car parked on the side of the road to get on the bus, things like that deter people from wanting to become a student assistant. So we've already had initial discussion with the union on that to see if there are ways we can work around that to make it more beneficial to those student assistants and also allow more to come into it.

I'll allow Lisa, if she wants to add to that.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: We have more supports in our school system right now for children with additional needs than we've ever had before. It's higher than we've ever had.

We continually look at different ways to provide services and supports within the classroom and also, within our existing resources, looking at continuous improvement on how they support our children.

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

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion is carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.2.01 carried.

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

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

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

I now turn to the Member for Burin - Grand Bank for questions.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

Again, if I look at the time, it's 8:07. We have 53 minutes left and I have a lot of questions.

CHAIR: Okay, 9:16 will be our hard stop.

P. PIKE: I'd like to get as many answers as I can, so I'll pay attention to the length of my questions as well.

The class size for Grade 4 to Grade 6, they're going to be cut down by two students, is it? Is that the way that's going to work?

P. DINN: I believe, by the initiative you brought in last year in terms of the students, the extra teachers and that, there will be two students cut. That's from Grade 1 to Grade 9, I believe.

P. PIKE: Is that correct? Yes.

Is it also correct then that French immersion got missed there? Like, there are class sizes in the city here of 31 students in a class size. Is that something that was missed, because that's what we were – in consultation with some people a while ago, they talked about the fact that class size for French immersion is up to 31 in Grade 4 to Grade 6.

P. DINN: Again, not wanting to be political here, but this came in under the previous administration. It was good; there's nothing wrong with it.

P. PIKE: Oh, yes. I'm looking to fix it.

P. DINN: Yes.

I'm not aware of an issue around French immersion, but I will have Mr. Hall address that.

T. HALL: Thank you for the question.

I wouldn't say it got missed. French immersion is an optional program and there are a lot that want to take it. We didn't want to reduce the class size there starting out because we didn't want to just be turning three or four more kids away. So we left that where it was to be able to allow as many as possible to avail of it.

P. PIKE: Okay, but, as you know, any time you do that, there are always people who are going to complain that the class size is

too big. So I just want you to take a look at it. Be cognizant of it; that's all I'm asking.

T. HALL: Sure.

P. PIKE: When it comes to French immersion, I have a real concern about the fact that French immersion in rural areas seems to be dying.

I know personally of a few schools that are not doing French immersion anymore, and I think that's a real problem for rural Newfoundland. I'm not sure about the urban areas, but in rural Newfoundland because, what happens is, if you take it from a school, most regions only have one French immersion school. So if you take it from the region, then you limit yourself to the number of professionals that you can attract out there because doctors, lawyers, police officers and so on, people who are more transient to the area, don't come, because, hey, no French immersion? We're not going there.

It's just something that I would like to see happen, that we take another look at it. Those schools that we dropped at some point in time, if we could probably try to start up some more at some point in time, you know?

I know for the Deputy Speaker it's a problem as well. We just think that it's time; we might want to take a look at revitalizing that whole thing.

P. DINN: I agree with you. Canada is two languages and we have a large French population in the province, as well as St. Pierre just off our coast.

We've had discussions with the French school board on what we can do to help them expand. They have, I believe, six schools throughout. We're always open to having further discussions, for example, with the Francophone association, on where demand is and how we can address that and promote it.

We have some things, like we talk about the class sizes, and that's something we need to address, but I find with many of the French parents, they just want their child to do French.

P. PIKE: Correct.

P. DINN: There are other things we deal with when we talk about doing French in school. The busing becomes an issue as well, which is something we're discussing with TI to try and address, because you may be outside the catchment area of a French school and you want transportation, how do you get there. These are some of the discussions that are ongoing as well.

P. PIKE: Thank you, Minister.

The 94 extra teachers that you're putting in the system, a question for that. Is that included in the 400 that we brought in or is that 94 extra? We did fill the 400 positions and we have 94 new ones going in, is that correct?

P. DINN: Out of the 400 positions previously, I don't believe we filled them all. We're very close. I mean, I'm only talking single digits we missed on that, but we're still working towards that.

I stand to be corrected, I believe there were 200 teachers and 170 TLAs included in that amount, but the 94 teachers and the 20 TLAs are all in addition to that.

P. PIKE: In addition.

How many actual teachers and TLAs and student assistants and so on? Will we have enough in September to fill all those positions?

P. DINN: Are there individuals out there looking to come into the jobs? I think I'll leave that to Mr. Hall to answer because, of course, we're only starting the process of filling positions now in the schools.

P. PIKE: Yes.

T. HALL: It's a great question. Again, it goes back to our recruitment and retention challenges that everyone is having.

We do have sub lists. What we're finding, as we're rolling out these new positions, we are getting our substitutes applying. So we're filling them, but the Catch-22 then, it can have a little bit of an impact on the available subs.

Again, we're hearing that we're getting a full class, we think, in the education faculty moving forward. There is starting to get more interest in talking with our partners, obviously, in the education faculty. So we're seeing some of that, and we're attracting some international teachers as well that we're bringing in to keep our numbers available for our sub list.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

I read a while ago that New Brunswick just signed their new contract for teachers, and they've built in huge wage increases. They have retention bonuses, new step progressions and so on, and we have to compete with that. Because we're going to lose a lot of our education students to other provinces. They're actively recruiting.

So it's just something that we need. I think our contract, or the teachers' contract – our contract; I haven't been teaching for a while – is up next year?

OFFICIAL: This year.

P. PIKE: This year?

P. DINN: This year now.

P. PIKE: So we really need to start looking at that and putting a plan in place to attract those teachers and keep them at home.

P. DINN: What you are saying is not falling on deaf ears, that's for sure.

When we're talking retention and recruitment, I like to say retention first, because you want to keep what you have before you start looking for new, but we do need new teachers. Moving forward, we have to look at what other provinces are doing, there's no doubt it. Although it helps, it's not always about the dollar; it's about the environment that teachers are put in. As we know, the classrooms have become much, much more complex than they were before.

I know in our promise, as I said earlier, the number of children per capita with special needs is very high in this province. We have to look at everything that's being offered elsewhere and we have to do better and compete with that. When Finance and the like are going through these negotiations, and I believe there are four different negotiations this year with unions, we have to look at every factor and look at the end result of what we agree to. But there's no doubt that we have to compete with others who draw our teachers away.

P. PIKE: Yes.

One of the big things that we've been talking about lately, and you and I brushed on it, was the violence prevention. There's a million dollars in the budget for violence prevention. We've got 256 schools in the province, and a lot of those schools have issues.

Teachers want to feel safe, students want to feel safe, parents want their students in schools that are safe schools and so on. It's like somebody said to me the other day, a doorbell is all right at a school, but it's not protecting students. Once that door is opened, anybody can come in.

I know there are social workers being mentioned and so on, but you got \$1 million and you've got 256 schools, any idea how you're going to spend it?

P. DINN: I mentioned earlier, when it comes to violence and what happens in the

classroom, it's usually a microcosm of the community. There are many players that come into play when you're talking about violence. When someone's in the school or when someone's at the school, you're becoming reactive, even though you have safeguards in place.

One of our goals is to prevent it, be more proactive. There are many options you can do there. As I said earlier, when the incident happened in Tumbler Ridge, which was terrible, we had an emergency meeting with my counterparts across the country. Minister Beare from BC called that meeting. She had a person speak to how you prevent this.

I saw a show, *60 Minutes* I think it was, on TV that, actually, around the same time was talking about violence in schools. They had two parents on – this was in the States now – who had lost their children through violence in schools. They were saying that 95 per cent of those instances could have been prevented if people saw the clues coming up. Most of those clues, again, as we discussed in the House today, is social media.

This was what came out with our discussion with my counterparts on Tumbler Ridge. They talked about the expert they had speaking to it, and it was very simple. I might have mentioned it in the House today as well, was the motto: Report, don't repost. It goes to the fact that in this particular instance, you had an individual on ChatGPT who was searching how to go in and attack a school, and no one did anything about it until he went in. So it's also the responsibility of the provider.

When you talk about the million dollars, some things we're considering is something as simple as a poster campaign, a properly-designed poster that tells kids to report, don't repost. This goes to our PMR the other day on social media. These things sound like a very simple thing, but I

guarantee you it will have results, but that's only one tool in the toolbox.

There are different things we can do with that million dollars. I know when you look at in terms of providing bodies and so on, it may not be much that way but there are other initiatives we can do, and that's one thing we're looking at.

P. PIKE: Thank you.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Under 4.1.01, Curriculum Development and Implementation, how are efforts coming along to roll out anti-racist curriculum for secondary school students and are there any plans in the works about Black History Month, in particular?

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

I believe that question was asked today in the House, something similar, or it might have been a petition actually that I responded to.

Very important question, especially given the makeup of our province now. We have many new Canadians in the province. I think we are very much an acceptable and friendly community, but not all of us. I think a lot of that comes down to education. I know the Association for New Canadians does a lot of great work in that respect. With us in Education, we review our curriculum on a regular basis and that will continue.

I'm going to ask my appropriate staff to speak specifically to that question.

S. LINEHAN: Currently, we have an individual who's leading our file for EDI-AR. We have a working group with this lead person who has lived experience with respect to EDI-AR and the framework is not just for K-to-12 education. The goal of this

committee, the vision of this committee – it meets every two weeks – is to identify EDI-AR across the entire Department of Education, so early learning, K to 12, post-secondary. All the branches of the Department of Education will be reflected in our Equity, Diversion, Inclusion and Anti-Racism.

J. DINN: Thank you.

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

P. DINN: I'm going to ask my appropriate staff to respond to that, but I think it falls under some of the things we've been doing around Safe and Caring School community. It's not always about preventing violence, but it's also about preventing racism and preventing the unwanted activities in the classroom.

But I'll have my appropriate staff speak to that more specifically.

L. BAKER-WORTHMAN: Yeah, our Safe and Caring Schools policy is actually under revision right now. We have a collaborative process underway to get that updated and certainly supporting all of the initiatives that will provide evidence-based support for schools, grounded in today's realities. A big piece of that, of course, is what you referenced, MHA Dinn.

J. DINN: Thank you.

At this point, I do want to lend some support to what my colleague from Burin - Grand Bank spoke about with regard to French immersion. My grandchildren are fortunate that they attend a Francophone school and their mother teaches there.

I will say this, with regard to rural schools and the French immersion, there should be an equal opportunity regardless of where you live. In the metro area, that's easy to do because of the population, but there has got

to be some accommodations in rural districts, especially if we're in a country that is officially bilingual.

So class caps, yes, I know that the numbers are much higher for Francophone or French immersion classes, and that's been a growing trend over the last few years. I really have a problem though, I think, with the director of schools who said it was an optional program. I know he didn't mean it that way, but it should not really be almost like an add-on.

It's something that I think is integral to our country. I grew up in a system where my French was limited to: Tu connais Marcel Martin? Oui, nous sommes de bons copains. That was it. It was rote learning. Yet, at the same time, if you go to Europe, people know not just two languages, but in many cases three or four. Actually, a lot of the students who I taught at Holy Heart, we call it now English as another language or an additional language because many of them know two, three or four in addition to English. They're already well ahead. I will say support for rural areas that really should be, I think, a priority of how do we address that?

The other one though I have a specific question because it was raised about the 400 teaching units last year. I'm looking at the start of the school year, this year, 2025 and maybe by the end of year in December and maybe right now, what are the vacancies? I've got numbers here anywhere from 121 to 161, that maybe includes hard-to-fill positions, maternity leaves and so on and so forth, but I'm trying to get a number, how many exactly were not filled with that?

P. DINN: Let me first talk to the first part of our preamble there on the French Immersion and then I'll defer for the vacancy rate.

I agree, but when we say it's optional, it's not considered an add-on, it's more an option for parents who want to put their child

in French Immersion. We're working on more teachers there. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the French cohort program that we have in place to try and get more French teachers in the system. So that's one thing we're looking at, but I'll defer now for the vacancy piece.

T. HALL: MHA Dinn, you're correct, at any given time we have an average of anywhere from 120 to 140 vacancies you might see on the board, but I just want to be clear, those vacancies include folks who are going on maternity leave, educational leave. So they're not actually positions that haven't been filled, they're just for those types of things that we're backfilling to allow teachers

Right now, I would say we have about 20 that we haven't actually been able to fill, as a true filling. Most of those are educational psychologists that we're currently working to try and attract more educational psychologists to come in, some guidance, of which we came up with some creative solutions for how to work around in terms of hybrid models for that, so guidance can travel in and out so we're not without some expertise in schools. That's the majority.

Anywhere where we would have a classroom teacher in a hard-to-fill area, we would always make sure we have a body there while we're still trying to recruit. It could be an emergency supply or something like that, but we do try to fill those actual teaching services ones while we're still trying to recruit.

Again, the majority we have now are some of our specialists that we're working to try to fill, like some of the cohorts we're putting through with the French cohort and those areas, but around 20 would be what I would say are true vacancies.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Going back then to the 720 retired teachers, and my comment here in relation to the

planned hiring of 94, if we're still short at this time, it's not going to get any easier to fill the 94. I would argue, in my time as a teacher, I've had colleagues who have gone back subbing in the metro area, it would have been almost impossible to find retired teachers subbing. Now they sub on a regular basis and, without them, the system, I would say, would be in a lot worse shape.

My point is, though, there's a recruitment and a retention problem here that must be addressed. I understand we have enrolment going into the university and so on and so forth, all wonderful, but it still comes down to, once you get the teachers there, how are you going to encourage them to stay or even stay beyond the 30 years that they have to teach? A lot of teachers in my generation went beyond the 30 years. Things change and people are getting out as soon as they are able to.

I guess what I'm looking at here is, knowing this, what are the plans really to address the recruitment and the retention, making sure that people want to be in this profession?

P. DINN: Okay, no, we're going to chat about that. I saw the time expired, but I'll get an answer in here.

I've already spoken to some of the –

J. DINN: Thank you.

Before the minister speaks, I would remind the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville that he can go on and on, and I had to put up with him when he was Education minister.

Anyway ...

CHAIR: I believe in keeping all things fair, Mr. Dinn, so we'll move on to the answer from the minister.

P. DINN: With that now, I'm after forgetting what I was going to say.

J. DINN: Recruitment.

P. DINN: What was the last piece?

J. DINN: About the recruitment and the retention and the 94.

P. DINN: No, thank you.

I've mentioned a couple of things we're doing. As I said, it's more retention and recruitment as opposed to the reverse, but we're doing our best to deal with making our classrooms safer, making the school environment what it's supposed to be to nurture and help children learn.

It's a tough, tough call, given our issues around those with special needs in the classrooms; issues around, as we talked about already this week, social media; issues around family environment. There are so many pieces that play into retention and recruitment, but one thing that we find is not helping us is if we continue to speak about what is bad in the system as opposed to what is working.

That's not ignoring what is bad in the system but there's a real value when you can nurture a child and, if there are teachers here, see those individuals later in the years and see what they've come to be.

That's the kind of thing that would keep teachers here and those are the things that I think – well, teachers are a special breed, I think. They really are. Are they born or made? I think they're born to be teachers and I do believe that if we can – and it's not selling, it's just promoting the good things in teaching. I think that will bring more into the faculty.

CHAIR: Seeing no more questions on this section, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: I now ask the Clerk to read the next subhead.

CLERK: 5.1.01 to 5.2.01 inclusive, Education Operations.

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

The Chair now acknowledges the hon. Member for Burin - Grand Bank.

P. PIKE: I'm going to ask some number questions. First of all, how many teaching positions, not necessarily those that are filled, are on the books, how many TLAs and how many student assistants?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: Again, I'll answer that, with the expectation that I'm going to be corrected.

Realizing that teaching is a national shortage around teaching but we have about 5,600 teachers in the system, 360 TLAs and approximately 1,030 substitutes. You had another area you were seeking? You mentioned three?

P. PIKE: Student assistants.

P. DINN: Student assistants. So I'm going to defer that back to my expert to correct my numbers and give you the real ones.

T. HALL: Minister, you're an awesome student. Your two numbers were perfect. I'll just help you with the last one. We have 964 actual student assistants that are working in the system.

P. PIKE: Was the number for those on the substitute list?

T. HALL: Our substitute teaching staff, we have regular substitute teachers, 1,030; retired substitute teachers, just about 700; emergency supply, a little over 200, 210; and our substitute teaching and learning assistants are about 230.

P. PIKE: Okay.

On an average day, how many substitutes would be called in a school?

P. DINN: Now, I could answer that because I remember the figure – or sorry, I did remember the figure. I don't remember it now, so I'm going to defer.

T. HALL: That's a great question.

At any given day, we have, on average, over 600 vacancies in our system. We average a little over 90 per cent on a long-term fill rate.

P. PIKE: Wow, big numbers.

Glad I retired when I did.

CHAIR: Sounds like there's room if you want to go back.

P. PIKE: The only other number that I need is how many retirements do we anticipate this year?

T. HALL: A little over 200. I think around 230 is what we're anticipating to get this year for retirements.

P. PIKE: The additional \$20 million for Jordan's Principle, I was under the impression that that would primarily benefit

student assistants, but we're not seeing that reflected in the numbers under 5.1.02.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: What's the section again?

CHAIR: 5.1.02.

P. PIKE: 5.1.02, we're not seeing the number of student assistants there.

P. DINN: Jordan's Principle was federal revenue, I think, in the \$19-million range. I think it's covered off in two sections here; you'll see the \$12.5 million there as well.

For those who aren't aware, that was federal program to provide student assistants for Indigenous students in the schools and was changed recently that only allowed for that to be given to Indigenous on reserve, which certainly left us with a huge amount of money that we had to come up with to address all the other Indigenous children that were off reserve. So that's the \$19 million that we had to come up with.

There's \$12.5 million there, and I believe in another section you'll see the difference, but to correct me again I'll have the appropriate person speak to it.

T. HALL: Thank you, Minister.

The minister is correct; our Jordan's Principle program is basically in two pieces. About \$7 million of it was revenue covering student assistants that we were putting out to support the Indigenous kids under the program, and the other \$12 million, or a little over \$12 million, is actually in teaching services. It was covering IRTs that were approved under the program, TLAs and some past teachers. It was actual teachers and TLAs. That's why it's in two separate sections.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you so much.

T. HALL: You're welcome.

P. DINN: I just want to add to that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

P. DINN: This may have occurred under your watch, no blame here, it's just that I believe the federal government encouraged us, as a province, to get more into the program and then they made the change and left us with a hole in the bag on this.

Now, I say hole in the bag –

P. PIKE: It's true though, yes.

P. DINN: I mean, we're still helping those in need, but the federal government, I think, did us in on that one a bit.

P. PIKE: I'm just going to ask one more question under 5.1.04.

Overall, we're seeing a decrease in the Estimates for School Food Programs compared with last year. So despite a platform commitment to expand, can you provide some information regarding the decreases?

P. DINN: You will know that when the School Food Program was introduced, it was looking at right from K to 12 across the province. It was introduced in stages.

I think the first stage, under the previous government, addressed some of the larger schools, some of the schools that have facilities in terms of kitchens and that available. There was a smaller amount – we didn't utilize the full amount then. I mean, the full amount is still there and carried forward. As we move forward, we continue to put out RFPs to get more school coverage. Right now, we're working very hard on the K to 9. We'll eventually get to the high school.

The high school age groups present another little fly in the ointment, I'll call it, is that when you get to high school, many of the students are driving Dad's or Mom's car and they are not sticking around for cafeteria food. Although I will say, the food that is provided by the school food program is fantastic. I've been out to some of the openings of these facilities, but just the nature of the older kids, they're getting out and driving a car and going somewhere else.

I'll get the proper person to speak to where we are in terms of the current numbers of RFPs out for this year.

T. HALL: Thank you, Minister.

Right now, we have 80 schools covered and it's almost half of our student population, so we're about 31,000 students who are covered by those 80. Right now, we have an RFP out for another 47 schools that we're going to start to go into over the next school year.

This is a rollout and it's a rollout because when we do it, we want to get it right. The minister alluded to we need to make sure we have the right model for K to 6, 7 to 9 and then high school will probably be even another different model and a model for small schools, so we want to make sure we get it right.

We have 80 schools covered now, another 47 in the current RFP. As we roll it out, you'll see our budget move with the rollout plan that we have.

P. PIKE: Okay, thank you.

I have no more questions.

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

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I don't need an answer to it now, but maybe you can provide this information. You mentioned 360 TLAs, 5,600 teachers, 1,030 subs. I'm assuming that the 720 retired subs are in addition to those?

Would it be possible to have a breakdown in looking at the number of, I guess, partial or part-time positions as well – so like 0.5 and 0.25 and so on and so forth – and the vacancies, especially, if there are any vacancies?

That may be a bit much for now, but I'd certainly appreciate that information, if possible.

OFFICIAL: We can get you that.

P. DINN: Are you sure you don't want the answer now? I can rip that off here now.

No? Okay.

J. DINN: If it means the minister going on, then no.

P. DINN: I'm just asking.

J. DINN: I have few others with that, but I do want to bring attention to the email I got. It had to do with rats, which seems to be a growing problem. I'm sure they're in this building too, any place where there's food; however, they referenced the fact that they're working in spaces with heavy amounts of rodent feces, urine and so on and so forth. They've filed complaints which seem to fall on deaf ears, and there is a lack of sufficient custodial staff.

I guess I'm interested here in what steps the Department of Education or the school district are taking to address the specific custodial staffing shortages that prevent daily deep cleaning of these schools?

I do remember a time, whenever a janitor was out, or custodian, usually it was three days before they were replaced. It was the policy that, if they called in sick, they were

not replaced for three days. That was basically three days that we were without that cleaning. I'm just wondering the policy around that right now.

P. DINN: Well, first of all, having rats or rodents of any sort in a school environment is not something that we promote by any means. It's something that we need to address and address as quickly as possible, especially in this day and age when we talk about the hantavirus that's out there, which is actually carried by such rodents.

With regard to custodial staff, the staff we have do an amazing job. Sometimes it's a job that's not applauded as it should be or recognized as they should be. We do have challenges when it comes to filling all of those gaps.

Again, I'll defer to my appropriate staff to further talk to that.

T. HALL: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, MHA Dinn, for the question.

As the minister said, there's no way, shape or form it's acceptable if people are finding that stuff in schools. Our facility staff are out there and doing their best and trying to keep up with it. These positions, too, across the board, are hard to recruit. We get them and then they end up coming off our casual list and moving on. It is a little struggle for them as well. I'm actually speaking for my colleagues in Transportation and Infrastructure, I should say that as well, because that's where our facilities team resides, but I do know they are working hard.

As for your question on the policy, you're correct, in certain regions that was the policy. Over the last couple of years, though, we've gotten to a point where we're trying to do first day call-in, just for some of this. For example, if we have a school that has two daytime custodians, they may not call in on day one to replace a second one if they still have one, if there's another school

in need that has none. That might happen at times and it might seem like we're not calling in, but I do know they're trying to get first day call-in to replace where and when they can and when they have the available resources on the casual list.

J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to OHS and SIEM reports regarding the vermin, how are they treated when they come in? Are they delayed or are they dismissed? Does it result in immediate professional remediation?

T. HALL: If there is a report, and certainly it should show up on the OHS report, there is immediate response by the facilities team to investigate. We'll reach out to them and, as needed, they will bring in specialists to deal with it, which we've done in a couple of schools, I know off the top of my head, to deal with the problem and do the appropriate approach to getting rid of them.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Would it be possible to have the number of times that professional services have been employed? I don't really need to know where but I would like to know how many times you called in professional services.

T. HALL: I can get you that.

J. DINN: The third question, I guess, is, one thing that some teachers have asked for, will you commit to advocating for a province-wide audit of school sanitation and pest control protocols?

I guess they're looking at what is the –

P. DINN: I can speak to that.

I mean, really, it's TI who does a regular assessment of all schools on a yearly basis, but I also believe that our administrators do periodic assessments as well.

I'll ask Mr. Hall to correct me on that.

T. HALL: Minister, I really wouldn't have a whole lot more to add. You're absolutely correct with the comments that you made. Some admins will do periodic stuff in terms of that as well.

J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to that, I do have, from the teachers, that in many cases they have brought it to the principal's attention who brought it to the district where the comment was that it has fallen on deaf ears. That's where these are coming from, so there is a concern there and that's fair enough. I know that was the procedure when I was a teacher as well, but things didn't always get moved on.

P. DINN: Yes, and I'd just comment on that.

I know the use of falling on deaf ears is, you know, a saying it to that effect, but we're working with two departments here. When it comes in, we work through TI to address those issues as fast as we can. When you have a department that's working with a huge amount of infrastructure in the province but, in addition, 250-plus schools, sometimes you don't get it dealt with immediately.

I can assure you that it's not falling on deaf ears. It is being recorded and it is being actioned when we can. A lot of it gets prioritized but, again, it's a question that, probably, my colleague in TI would have a more fulsome answer on.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I know I can speak to my time in Holy Heart, when school almost shut down – permanently closed – because of a water damage that started with a leak that I had personally been flagging for about 10 years until it finally came down, and then, when it went down through four floors and the school was threatened with being shut down altogether, all of a sudden, action was taken.

So that's the frustration I speak of and why we have that opinion.

With regard to the integration of the school district into the department, I guess one of the selling points was that it was going to find efficiencies. I remember the previous minister I spoke to asked about this; I'm just wondering if the efficiencies have been found? Have the resources been put back into the classroom?

The other question I have is, are there any plans in the future maybe to separate them out and let the district stand on its own, and maybe even come up with a district that deals with Labrador – a stand-alone district for Labrador – so that it can have its needs? I'm just wondering where we're going, because I really have problems with one large board, especially when it's subsumed into the department. I really think they need to be separated, but that's my own personal opinion.

P. DINN: I'd like to defer to the Member across the way, given it was under their mandate that they brought it in.

B. DAVIS: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: No, I won't leave it with you.

I can say, from my own experience in coming into this department, I don't feel the transition is complete yet. It's a big undertaking to bring that in. It's a bit of a culture adjustment too. There's still a lot of work to be done there.

Again, I'm going to have some of my experts speak to it but, to your point, or the points you've raised, we are always open to suggestions on what should be done. You talk about the Labrador area; there are areas within our province that are quite different and have quite different issues that they need to address that maybe an approach like that would be viable, right?

I know that I'm always open to addressing anything that can better the system, but, again, I'll ask Mr. Hall to elaborate on that for me.

T. HALL: Thank you, Minister.

I would agree with the minister. I think we still have some stages of the integration to get through. We integrated in; we are finding increased collaboration. I know it might sound like a long time, but we're still a mere two years into it. It is a big ship, as I call it, that we're trying to manage and we're trying to navigate all of the areas to see how it fully fits in and how the collaboration can happen. We are sharing resources back and forth, so we are making some headway, but still some room to go. Your comments, as the minister said, are noted.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions on this subhead, I ask the Clerk to now recall the subhead.

CLERK: 5.1.01 to 5.2.01 inclusive, Education Operations.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 5.1.01 through 5.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: In the interest of time – we only have 20 minutes left – I'm going to ask the Clerk to call the last two subheads.

Before I do that, we've had a substitution for the researcher on the Official Opposition. I'll just get you to introduce yourself.

M. PARSONS: Meghan Parsons, Opposition Staffer.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Meghan.

I'll now ask the Clerk to call the last two subheads.

CLERK: 6.1.01 to 7.1.01, Post-Secondary Education and Apprenticeship and Trades.

CHAIR: Shall 6.1.01 to 7.1.01 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education and Apprenticeship and Trades, carry?

I will turn it to the Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Thank you, Chair.

Given the federal – the mic is not on.

CHAIR: Okay.

B. DAVIS: I will not be censored.

Given that the Auditor General has confirmed that NL suffered the single largest disproportionate drop to international student visa approvals of any province in Canada, directly impacting Memorial significantly by tuition revenue, through no fault of their own, what is the province doing to account for external failure in funding to Memorial?

It has little to do with the plan that we put in place, or as government put in place, but there was a huge cut to international students. Is there a plan going forward to try to help that progress?

P. DINN: Thank you for that.

You are correct. I'll call it the quotas that the federal government put on us in terms of international students, it was a blanket quota across the country with no consideration for how it has affected different jurisdictions. We've had such a

huge success with the international students coming here and staying here.

I mean, like every province, we're struggling to deal with it, but through our Department of Immigration they're working to try and resolve this issue and get a greater allotment for us. I can't tell you how far it has progressed but it's an issue that we continue to deal with.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

Despite the budget line increase to Memorial University, the fact is domestic enrolment continues to grow year over year. In 2026-2027, all schools at Memorial, or schools, were asked to reduce by 4 per cent.

I'll say right upfront, these questions, we've talked MUNFA and they brought through some of these concerns: What are you doing as a government to, as you've stated many times before, not allow Memorial University to balance the books on the backs of the students? Because this is a 4 per cent cut to academics, essentially.

P. DINN: Yes, thank you for that.

I've had, again, many meetings. We've met with the Faculty Association. We've met the Federation of Students. We've met with many groups. But I do continue to have meetings on a regular basis with the president of the university, and we continue to collaborate on how to address the shortfalls and how to work towards the university – I say righting the ship, but dealing with their financial challenges.

We've committed, as you've said, to not see it done on the backs of students. People say, oh, don't say this, but it's a true fact that the university is an autonomous university. They make their own decisions through the Board of Regents on their finances, their faculty, their programming.

What I can tell you, with some confidence, is that our discussions with the university certainly give us an indication that they're trying their best to work in the right direction and work with the different groups that are involved in that. That's all we can ask of them, given what came out of the Auditor General's report.

So it's very early days for that, but the intent is that it remains a comprehensive university, it remains a university that doesn't affect the student experience and I, at this point in time, feel they are headed in the right direction.

B. DAVIS: Okay, thank you, Minister.

The budget line for Memorial University is increased by just north of \$17 million. How much of this additional funding is going toward maintenance of the tuition freeze at Memorial?

P. DINN: I'm trying to remember. But I'm going to defer to my deputy, who's anxious to –

H. CRANIFORD: There's \$45.6 million in the budget this year for implementing the tuition freeze at Memorial.

B. DAVIS: Okay.

The Budget Speech also mentioned \$8 million to fill existing nursing satellite seats. How exactly do you plan to spend that money and make sure that those seats are filled? Because it is challenging, of course.

P. DINN: Part of that again – okay, my deputy is itching to answer here. We will be working with the Department of Health on this, so I'm going to have my deputy respond.

J. HEARN: Yes, *Budget 2026* allocates \$7.7 million to fully fund and sustain nursing satellite sites in Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The total capacity across the sites is 72 seats.

Enrolment has historically been lower, with a fill rate ranging from 30 per cent to 74 per cent over the past three years.

Enrolment for the upcoming fall is showing a really strong improvement. Happy Valley-Goose Bay is full, Gander is full and Grand Falls-Windsor is 71 per cent, 22 out of 31 seats. Overall, 85 per cent of available seats are now filled. That's a significant increase in uptake. We're excited to see the nursing satellites starting to really deliver.

B. DAVIS: That's promising.

What initiative specifically led to that? Is that something that started over the last seven months or was that prior to that, because I would assume there is some success there on both sides?

P. DINN: From what I understand from all reports that we've heard, I think it was October 15 it started. That's what I hear.

P. PIKE: That's not what we heard.

B. DAVIS: No, good answer – good answer.

Minister, you promised an immediate review of tuition and fees at Memorial, as well as College of the North Atlantic. Where is that? We're just looking for some timelines on when we expect to hear something back on that.

P. DINN: That's ongoing, as we said – immediate. In terms of a timeline, I really can't give you one right now unless someone in more know than me can tell me.

Deputy, do you want to add to that?

J. HEARN: I would add to that, of course, the tuition freeze is not just for Memorial University, but it is for CNA as well as there's an ongoing review of funding and fees charged at both the college and the university.

B. DAVIS: I'm going to jump into 6.3.01.

Are there any discussions ongoing regarding program cuts or changes at the College of the North Atlantic? That can be a quick yes or no, I'm sure.

P. DINN: You're not that sure then.

As you know, the College Act that the college operates under, the courses are under labour demand. That's always changing based on demand. It's a moving target. I can't tell you if there are cuts or not because there will be an analysis on the different courses that are offered at the different locations.

B. DAVIS: Thank you.

Under 7.1.01, it's estimated that over 6,000 construction and trade workers will retire in the next 10 years. How many trade seats are unfilled today and what's the plan to increase enrolment?

I think that's a crossover between a couple of different departments, but I sit in both of those so I figured I'd ask it here. I did ask it in the other one.

P. DINN: Good question.

You'd be well aware of some of the innate challenges when it comes to apprenticeship in terms of finding journeypersons and mentors. I know my colleague back there, who we stuck in the corner just earlier on, he's dying to answer this, so I'll ask him to respond.

B. DAVIS: I can see he's dying to answer it.

C. SMITH: Thank you, Minister.

Yes, a number of things that we would look at to certainly help with the numbers and increase the numbers would be: through stakeholder engagement, we would look at expanding training capacity, which would offer more training as needed in the high-demand trades and support flexible and modular training; we would continue to

strengthen our employer engagement through promotional campaigns, streamlining administration services, going digital with our new ACMS; and, also, we have five new APOs to make deeper partnerships, strengthen our sector partnerships; continue to support the Youth Apprenticeship Summer Program; increase apprentices for underrepresented groups; and support newcomers with the goal to extend the talent pipeline.

Also, we're keeping an eye, and it's still rolling out and we're still gaining information, about the spring economic update, which is an injection of \$6 billion over five years. There are multiple streams there to help encourage and support apprentices to get their journeypersons. As that unfolds, we'll be certainly working into that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Education.

P. DINN: I just want to add to that, the Member across the way would be familiar, when apprentices, and there are many out there, challenge an exam, we have to have invigilators present for that. So we're also looking at finding invigilators that will free up our apprenticeship officers so that they can dedicate more time to promoting the trades, to going out and doing the job that they were hired to do.

That, I think, will be a big step in advancing skilled trades and having a better picture on what's happening.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Under 6.2.01, the minister has talked about not wanting and will not balance the budget or MUN on the back of students; fair enough. It's autonomous, and I thought that I certainly heard the minister and others speak that it is going to remain a

comprehensive university. Yet, I know talking to people in there, they're already facing cuts. They're looking at laying off staff, cutting back on programs and so on and so forth, and they said that won't be enough to ensure that MUN remains a comprehensive university at the rate it's going.

I'm looking at the amount there and I'm assuming, from what I said, the minister does meet with the president of Memorial and others. So how did the department arrive at this amount of funding for MUN? Because, in fact, I guess it's already being balanced on the backs of students if services and programs are not being provided.

When you get together with the president, what do you talk about? I mean is it: Hey, I need more money. No, you're not getting it. You're autonomous, deal with it. They say, okay, that's fine. I'll just cut. If it's an autonomous organization, why even meet?

I'm just trying to get an idea, how did you arrive at this budget and what do you talk about when you meet with the president of the university, about what programs are going to be cut and so on and so forth?

P. DINN: Well, of late, we were talking about Alex Newhook today and how he's doing in the playoffs, but that's just chitter chatter to get into the main topic.

First, let me answer the amount in the budget. Many of our post-secondary institutes would put in their requests, much like departments put in their requests, on what they want or what they think they need and try to defend it. The request from the university was what they put in to us. It's what they said they would need to continue to do what they need to address in the AG report, to be a sustainable university, to continue to be a comprehensive university, to continue to have a student experience that brings students there.

So the amount was what they brought forward and that was the amount that – when we looked at it and listened to their concerns and how they came about it, it was a reasonable ask to help them continue to do what they're doing with the university.

With regard to what we talk about, the university, really, is under no obligation to come in and talk to us at all, but it's a little different change of environment when it comes around, because they realize they are receiving \$400 million of taxpayers' dollars. That's not counting the medical school.

Now that's an investment that we have to make. I mean, this is our only university. This is where we need to offer courses for advancement of our students and hopefully have them stay here. You don't want to be handing them over \$400 million without having some kind of conversation.

We don't influence what they do, but it's a cordial meeting in which they provide us with an update on what they're thinking about doing. It doesn't get down into the weeds on it, but it's just a cordial thing to let us know that tomorrow we're doing this or down the week we're considering this and we offer our opinion, but we certainly have no way of telling them to do this. So far to date our conversations have been very well held.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

B. DAVIS: Two quick ones, Minister, if you don't mind.

Are there going to be any current or planned changes to how the ABE program is working across the province, because I know my friend, Terry Hall, has worked very hard with me on a couple of files and we haven't seen many successes on that one in particular, but has there been any changes?

P. DINN: I can't speak to exact changes but we certainly are reviewing the program and looking at ways – because that program hasn't changed in years. The world has changed in those years and how we provide it and how we look at the outcomes and the successes. It is actually currently being looked at. There are some new contracts that have been drafted up and we're going to continue to work with the sector and hopefully provide an even better program.

B. DAVIS: Minister, you committed to addressing critical maintenance before expansion, what are the current deferred maintenance totals and how much is funding this year?

P. DINN: The images we've seen over the years of the university in terms of maintenance and that is really appalling to my point of view. I've always commented that the main square there, just simple things like the weeds growing up through the patio stones is unreal.

They're behind in maintenance; there's no doubt about it. Some of the money we've put in the budget will help towards that, but I will ask my appropriate colleague behind to give a more detailed assessment of that.

CHAIR: A semi-detailed assessment.

H. CRANFORD: Yes, MUN has indicated that, in the fall, I believe, they had a deferred maintenance of about \$480 million, but they've been putting significant effort behind that. We've been working with MUN on some longer term solutions, including utilizing fully the campus renewal fees that they collect. They're attempting to rightsize their footprint in divesting some of their core properties as well, which should reduce about \$3 million annually in deferred maintenance costs.

CHAIR: I'll allow one short question with a short answer.

B. DAVIS: A quick question, it comes from MUNFA.

There were changes made in 2023 to allow faculty members on the Board of Regents at Memorial. I understand they wrote you to establish how those election processes would be put in place. I know that's not an easy situation. I just wanted to get an update on the status of those requests and to see how that's progressing.

Before you answer, because he's not going to cut you off but he will me, I just want to say a major thank you to some of the most fantastic people I have ever had the pleasure of working with. Thanks for the opportunity to ask questions to a very highly skilled team.

P. DINN: I know Tracy is disappointed, she would have been hoping there would be a question asked that she could answer. I think everyone else, essentially, has answered a question.

OFFICIAL: Let her answer it.

P. DINN: Maybe she can answer it, I don't know.

No, the –

OFFICIAL: (Inaudible.)

P. DINN: No, I can go over. I got 20 minutes; I can go on. Montreal is losing so

CHAIR: Tracy is so efficient in her job, by the way. That's the reason why she got no questions.

P. DINN: Yes, just quickly on that question. As you know, with all of these appointments, it's not a straightforward process, but we are actually trying to fill the vacancies on all our boards and trying to do it as quickly as possible. So I don't see any change in what you've asked.

CHAIR: I'll now get the Clerk to call the last subhead.

CLERK: 6.1.01 to 7.1.01 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education and Apprenticeship and Trades.

CHAIR: Shall 6.1.01 to 7.1.01 inclusive, Post-Secondary Education and Apprenticeship and Trades, carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 6.1.01 through 7.1.01 carried.

CLERK: Total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development head of expenditure?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development carried without amendment.

CHAIR: I just want to say thank you to the minister and departmental officials. I think your answers were fulsome this evening. I appreciate the job of the Committee. Your questions were actually helpful. Being a father of somebody with special needs, it was very enlightening for me as well.

I really do appreciate everybody's time here this evening. We will look at the next meeting for this Committee. It's May 25, 2026, to consider the Estimates of Seniors.

I'll ask for a mover to adjourn.

J. POWER: So moved.

CHAIR: So moved by the Member for Labrador West.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Thanks everybody.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.