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COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

Committee Room 1

Nova Scotia School Boards Association

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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[Hon. Karen Casey was replaced by Ms. Kelly Regan]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Nova Scotia School Boards Association

Mr. Vic Fleury, President
Nova Scotia School Boards Association

Ms. Nancy Pynch-Worthylake, Superintendent
South Shore Regional School Board

Mr. Scott Milner, Director of Education Services
Chignecto-Central Regional School Board

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 8, 2011

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Jim Morton

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon everyone. It's good to have everybody here and good to have folks sitting around and members of the press. My name is Jim Morton and I'm the chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services. We'll begin with some introductions of the committee members and then our typical practice would be to move to introductions of our guests - we call you witnesses but you're really guests. There will be some time for your presentation and then opportunities for members of the committee to ask questions and to have interaction.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just before we go to the introduction of our witnesses, I guess the purpose of the presentation today came about from work that the School Boards Association has done on a call for greater interdepartmental delivery of services to youth and families in Nova Scotia, so I'm assuming that will be the focus. There are many other things that interest education on the agenda more generally, but I'm assuming we'll stay focused on this theme. I'll start with Vic and you can introduce yourselves, please.

MR. VIC FLEURY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, we appreciate your time and appreciate the opportunity to be here to present. My name is Vic Fleury and I'm President of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association. With me, I have two colleagues: Scott Milner from the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, who is the Director of Education Services; and Nancy Pynch-Worthylake, who is the Superintendent of Schools for the South Shore Regional School Board.

We know time is of the essence and we've planned a presentation. I will begin with an introduction and that will be followed up with a presentation from Nancy and Scott.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If I could just make one comment about time. This meeting is designed to run until 3:00 p.m. I know our committee needs maybe 10 minutes to do a bit of business at the end of this, so I'll probably aim at 2:50 p.m. as a stop time, to stop the questions.

MR. FLEURY: We were given tighter time limits than that, so I don't think we'll have any problem complying with those restrictions. The only thing that's bothering me is I have my car parked downstairs and I could only get an hour and a half. Ron, I'll need you to go out and put some money in that meter. (Laughter)

Ladies and gentlemen, I will give an introduction to the issue, and then Scott and Nancy will follow through with some detailed information with respect to our concerns. As Mr. Chairman has said, we're here to talk about this paper, *A Call for Greater Interdepartmental Delivery of Services to Youth and Families in Nova Scotia*.

The Nova Scotia School Boards Association has identified inter-agency issues as one of its key priorities. Last year, the NSSBA's education committee produced a paper on the matter and it is titled, as I've just said: *A Call for Greater Interdepartmental Delivery of Services to Youth and Families in Nova Scotia*.

The NSSBA has lobbied on this issue on behalf of its boards for the last 20 years. Throughout that time period, greater interdepartmental collaboration has regularly been part of the association's policy resolutions forwarded to government. The boards believe, ladies and gentlemen, that a more integrated approach by government agencies would provide a wider variety of options and long-term solutions to school and community-related issues.

While schools are working hard to meet the many diverse needs and social challenges of today's youth, the range of problems encountered in our school system is varied and multi-faceted. Addictions, neglect, child abuse, criminality, families in crisis, absenteeism and cases of chronic misbehaviour are but a few of the issues facing educators in our province's classrooms. The recent debate over the funding of public education in this province highlighted the additional costs associated with the attempt by school districts to address these many and varied social issues.

The NSSBA believes increased collaboration and the sharing of expertise and resources within our social agencies would result in a more effective address of these situations and would increase the chances of achieving long-term solutions. The Nova Scotia Government delivers and supports more than 150 programs and services related to children, youth and families. Some inter-agency networks are firmly in place in some areas but they are not systemic, and consequently there's a lack of province-wide inter-agency affiliations guaranteeing coordinated services for troubled youth and families.

The absence of provincial protocols, guidelines and structures for fastening and supporting inter-agency collaboration are some of the barriers preventing a more coordinated, province-wide, interdepartmental approach. Departmental autonomy is another. We must break down the silos.

The Honourable D. Merlin Nunn said the following in his 2006 Commission of Inquiry: “The Province should immediately begin the development and implementation of a public, comprehensive, collaborate and effective interdepartmental strategy to coordinate its programs, interventions, services, and supports to children and youth at risk and their families . . .”.

Here’s a quote from just one of our boards, we surveyed all the boards on this issue in order to compile that report and this is from the South Shore Regional School Board: “The education system puts a lot of effort into preventive interventions and alternative programs; however, there are long term solutions that require the services and resources of other provincial departments. There is currently a mish-mash of departmental partnerships among the various boards of the Province but there needs to be a more hands-on, well-defined, sustainable, inter-agency model to establish consistency of effort on a provincewide basis.”

The NSSBA paper makes eight recommendations to government that we believe would move the province closer to achieving greater interdepartmental collaboration among four departments: Justice, Health and Wellness, Community Services, and Education. I will comment on those recommendations, ladies and gentlemen, at the end of our presentation. I will now turn things over to Nancy and Scott.

MS. NANCY PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Thanks very much. We will tag-team a little bit. Our role here today is to share with you some of the initiatives that are in place and there are some wonderful, ad hoc initiatives in place, but it’s to support the recommendation that Nova Scotia have a much more articulated, integrated plan for services to children and youth in Nova Scotia.

The first thing that I’m going to do is respectfully share with you the nature of the students who are in our Nova Scotia schools today because the students we serve, the complex needs they have, have increased dramatically year by year. We frankly have all of the students all of the time and we’re very proud of that. My sometimes-saying in terms of suspension now is, unless you bring a weapon to school and use it, we can pretty much keep you in school, but it takes a tremendous amount of support and intervention.

We do have lots of collaborative initiatives as add-ons, but we really don’t have an integrated service model.

Scott has a term which I love now and I’m going to use repeatedly, “Death by initiatives and pilots.” It’s a huge problem that we have because we can all point to an initiative or a pilot that is very successful. I live in fear that we think it’s in place

everywhere, when in actual fact we'll talk about SchoolsPlus and we have four of them in the province.

In some areas of this province, we have incredibly limited service and so if we live in a town centre where families can walk to access services or services can drive quickly to serve schools it may not be too bad, but we have some areas that have virtually no service. The point for us is that we have all of the students all of the time, we have them six hours a day. We're a great place to deliver services and we're at the table ready to collaborate, but we really, really need help.

This is a typical classroom, we continue to offer the services that we would all be accustomed to in our schools. I'm going to go through these quite quickly to give you a flavour. We also have lots of enrichment programs, International Baccalaureate programs, advanced placement, a huge move in the province right now toward skilled trades programs which is really engaging students, keeping them in schools. They look similar but different throughout the province, but it certainly is making a difference.

MR. SCOTT MILNER: There's one thing I would add about the skilled trades centres. What's a great opportunity here is where students are engaged, but they're also earning time toward the apprenticeship while in school and that's an engagement piece for sure.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: I mentioned advanced placement and International Baccalaureate, so while the demands placed on the systems from students continue to increase, we still maintain our focus in responding to our talented, gifted students at the same time.

One example we have is related to alternatives to go to school suspension. This is an old portable that's in place in one of our schools and we are having tremendous success through providing students an alternate place to go to cool off, to give them counselling services, addiction services, sexual health counselling, et cetera. We have a number of these throughout the entire province, but we don't have them in all of our high schools.

MR. MILNER: I think one of the challenges with these centres is that they're locally developed based on need and it's not a systemic initiative across the province, so it's a mishmash.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: One of the things that is in place in our schools is we feed students, we feed a lot of students. We work with our community partners, and teachers and staff volunteer a tremendous number of hours for breakfast programs. We do have some initiatives in the province, some funding to support that, but by and large it's the local communities that are feeding students.

Something you may not be aware of is the number of students we feed out of school. This is an actual photo from one of our high schools running a food bank because students

are going home - if they have a home - or they're going to the street or they're going to their car, they do not have food. We're running food banks in our schools for our students. This is nowhere in the job description of anyone who works in a school, so this is after people work all day, this is what they're doing.

A partnership we do have, which we're proud of, is with our community policing partnership. Depending on the number of municipal units within your county, that determined how many officers you got. If you have multiple municipal units, the service to schools is quite integrated, but if you're in a county like Queens, where it's one municipal unit, there was one officer for the entire country. Where it's working, it's working very well.

MR. MILNER: This is an example of an initiative where the thought might be this is a province-wide experience when it is, as Nancy said, just a piecemeal - but working where it is.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: We have a Restorative Justice Program in working with Justice. The geography of the province is a challenge. The health boards, the school boards and the Justice makeups don't match, and Jim and I sat at a lot of tables together around education and addictions. If schools are located near Justice, it's much easier for Justice to provide services, but if their office is far away and their services are far away, it really is impossible for them to do it. This is typical, these are real items that were collected from students at schools, and we really do work with Justice to keep those students in school in spite of their drug habits.

[1:15 p.m.]

A huge area for us, and I know that you've heard about it, is students with special needs. Assistive technology is making an enormous difference for students in schools but it's very, very expensive. It's quite invisible to people who aren't accustomed to it.

I should interrupt myself to apologize for the fact that if you have the slides we sent, we revised our slides since we sent them so I'm happy to leave these. But that's okay - typical educators, keep changing it until the last moment.

We work very closely with the community college system. Here, this is a young boy who had never been able to communicate, never verbally communicate and he's wearing an iTouch and through the iTouch, he is able to express himself for the first time ever in his life. We have lots of students like that, so you can imagine the cost and the expertise that is required.

These are photos of students who are doing very well in our system. Again they have a tremendous amount of support. It isn't very long ago that these students would not have been anywhere near a public school. We're very proud and pleased that they are with us but, again, we often feel that we're on our own in responding to their needs.

We're offering parenting support. We have some partnerships with Community Services but our teachers have figured out that if they support the whole family through parenting, then that improves students' behaviour at school and it improves students' success rates at school, which then improves the teachers' success at teaching the students. So again, we have education reaching out into areas that typically are the responsibility of other agencies.

More and more, we're looking at the challenges of gay/lesbian/transgender/bisexual students in our schools. Teachers and staff are again making sure that schools are safe places for all of our students and this is one of the examples of what we're doing. Scott is going to talk about SchoolsPlus and this was a specific initiative of SchoolsPlus.

Behaviour is a major issue. The days when if a student didn't follow the rules and a student misbehaved then they were suspended - those days are gone. The responsibility for teaching children and youth how to manage their behaviour rests with the educators and with the partners. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, depression - whatever challenges students bring to schools, it's our responsibility to make sure that they have a safety net at school so that they can meet the learning requirements.

MR. MILNER: There are some statistics that say 20 per cent of our student population have exceptionalities and that we have to attempt to provide supports with. These are just some of the examples but that's a significant portion of our student body.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: One of the most recent changes to staffing in our schools is, hiring teachers who have a specific background in behaviour intervention. I just learned recently about a fabulous program at the Community College Strait Campus, I think, for educational assistants who are behaviour specialists, so this is an area that's growing exponentially.

MR. MILNER: I'd like to talk about SchoolsPlus in particular and you may have heard about that program. I want to describe the program and get specific about the potential that I think this program has. So far Nancy has talked about a variety of initiatives, programs, ideas, that generally came from grassroots. They are organic programs that developed locally from ideas of educators and community members.

The SchoolsPlus program was initiated from this document *Our Kids Are Worth It: Strategy for Children and Youth*. This was a document that came from the Nunn Commission that described some specific initiatives and goals and intentions. One of the frustrating pieces for education is that it seems that this strategy has stalled, the paper seems to be sitting on a shelf someplace. Some of the initiatives are ongoing and SchoolsPlus is one of them; others, we don't know where they are and what occurred. So either there's some work behind the scenes or the communication is not getting out to the field, we're not sure, but there is a bit of frustration in that regard.

I'd like to talk a little bit about some of the essential practices for improved outcomes in education. This speaks to the broader context of education in our province. We have the Education Act and the PSP - the prescribed curriculum - plus all the other things that we do in school to help families and children and youth. One of the things we know is that early support with minimum disruption for students is required. That's from some of the research of Ben Levin.

The other piece is about effective engagement of the broader community. We know that good school systems, excellent schools, encompass the support and professional expertise of other agencies and other groups and support systems within our community; it's not a stand-alone institution any longer. Although Ben Levin doesn't directly quote these last three bullets, he does endorse adequate resources and we feel the pinch in that regard, with the professional expertise. All students healthy and ready to learn - that should be a given, but we see students in school every day who are not healthy and are not ready to learn because of some of the underlying foundation pieces that we try to address through some of the programs that Nancy talked about.

The other piece is a holistic approach addressing priorities for families, children and youth together at once, talking together, working co-operatively and collaboratively, not as individual entities and, as Vic said, breaking down the silos is part of the challenge in that bullet itself.

Let me talk about SchoolsPlus. I want to give you just a bit of background before I go into the particular model that we have in our province. There are different terms you may hear around this idea. You may hear the terms full-service schools, community schools, integrated service delivery, extended schools, they all essentially mean the same thing. In our province we have a particular name, SchoolsPlus, which comes from out west as well - there are some SchoolsPlus schools that have a similar design, so it's not a unique name in that regard. The key piece is what is in italics on your PowerPoint: The school serves as a central point of coordinated delivery of service on education, social services, health, justice. The agencies come to the school to provide those services to children, families and youth at that central point.

Here are some characteristics. Without taking you to a school to show you, which would have been - maybe we should have had a school bus and gone to school, but these are some of the characteristics of SchoolsPlus. One of the key pieces is agencies and professionals working together. It is not just about inter-agency collaboration outside of the school, it means mental health workers coming into the school site, it means Community Services - a social worker - it means Justice coming on to the school site to work there regularly. I'm not talking about the police officer, for example, that may be assigned to the school a day a week or pop in as a shift allows - these are dedicated professionals who come to the school for this explicit purpose. We don't have that in our province yet.

It is not a new idea, by the way, this whole idea of integrated service really in Canada. In Ontario, there is documentation about it being talked about in 1968 so it is an idea that is growing but perhaps not as fast as it should be for proper service delivery.

A key piece, too, like I mentioned, is that the school is the centre of service delivery. Schools are underutilized. We have about four million square feet of excess space in our province. That is spread around the schools, of course, we know that, but schools are not used in the summertime either, perhaps to the extent, or on the weekends. Schools are still used for school activities and events.

One of the points of service delivery is that perhaps schools need extended hours where these professionals are there in the evenings, on the weekends, during summer months, so schools can be used for other reasons. It makes school a friendly place and it just changes that whole delivery of the idea of education.

One of our challenges is sharing information. Each agency now has its own confidentiality agreements and arrangements so one of the challenges between professionals is just the official exchange of information; our rules, regulations and laws don't allow that at this point. If we can develop some type of shared confidentiality agreements or protocols or guidelines, then we can work in, I guess, a more effective and easier manner.

I talked about a comprehensive, seamless delivery that is holistic for the family, supporting the children and families. One of our challenges in education is time and the timely access to services. It's not uncommon for a child to be on a wait list at mental health, for example, for six to eight months. Well, we still have that child in school, every day, there with whatever issue it might be. Eight months in school time is an eternity, it's a school year essentially. As an educator, that's a frustrating piece. I used mental health as an example, I'm sure that mental health workers are concerned about that as well, so that timely access to effective services. With SchoolsPlus, one of the intents is to try to reduce wait times because the professionals are working together to address the issue.

Accountability, too, amongst professionals. When professionals are talking in a collaborative way, sharing ideas, trying to action a plan and meeting timelines and checking in with each other, there is imbedded accountability there. Now there is some frustration from agencies to education, education to agencies, because we don't really know what happens when a child or a youth may go to Community Services or speak with a police officer or be involved in Justice because that exchange of information isn't there.

I talked about service beyond the school day. We see schools as an accessible place for families that should have open doors and provide these services. Capacity building is an important piece as well - capacity building in the youth and children and families on how to advocate for themselves but also capacity building in our agencies. I know that there needs to be better understanding amongst our agencies of what our work is. Now

there is quite a bit of mystery in that regard so as we collaborate, I think capacity amongst the agencies will occur as well.

Probably in your own communities you have heard of teen health centres or youth health centres, depending on what you want to call them. It is interesting to note, however, that we have over 400 schools in our province, but we have only 53 youth health centres. Youth health centres are a good example of an initiative that is well received, well used. In the case of a local high school that I supervise, in one year over 2,500 referrals went to the youth health centre of a school of 700. They provide services of sexual health, health screening for female students - I guess we should have spelled that correctly (Interruptions) that's ironic.

We have some limited counselling services through our health centres as well, but I bring up this point because this started as a program add-on that has grown at grass roots, it has really caught on. In some instances it is funded by the health authorities, but in many instances they have to find their own funding.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Health centres are examples that I've worked in a couple of areas of the province. The volunteers run out of steam so we see youth health centres, they start, they build, they build, it doesn't become systemic and the volunteers drop off, so that's why we see them rise and fall, I believe, around the province is we just can't build a system on the backs of volunteers.

MR. MILNER: What happens is that these end up being open one day a week and we say we have a health centre, but it's really just a few hours of service.

Now I tried to give a little bit of background, but I'd like to talk about SchoolsPlus in particular. We have four sites around the province currently: Halifax, the Strait, South Shore and Chignecto-Central. These sites have different configurations. In one example the configuration has four elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. The configurations vary across the province and rightly so because these started off as pilots in kind of a test to see how this inter-agency work would pan out.

Once again, education has taken the lead on this and doing their best to try to get other agencies to work with us. The SchoolsPlus model has an advisory committee, the advisory committee has representatives from agencies that are involved in the community. They are local staff, they tend to know each other and the relationships are strong. The advisory committee meets monthly and problems, issues and challenges come to that committee for problem-solving, so it's a very inclusive and collaborative approach in that regard.

At each SchoolsPlus site, there is a facilitator. In a couple of instances, this is a social worker actually who has come from that field to work in education. That person acts as a link between the school and the community and the agencies involved and essentially receives referrals and tries to work through these cases with the other agencies to try to

address the needs that are identified. Their job is to advocate and coordinate and expand services where they can; once again, that's a challenge in the rural areas.

[1:30 p.m.]

The other key piece here is that this person is an advocate for the families and children and youth. They help families navigate the systems that we have in our province. Many of the systems are not coordinated so it is tricky and difficult for families just to get around and understand where they need to go to get assistance.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: I just want to make a comment. We've had great success with our pilot, we have a fabulous facilitator. Just a tiny indicator of one of the issues in inter-agency collaboration are hours of work, so we're committed to making sure students are in class during the day and a lot of the services can be somewhat integrated, but after, for some of our partners at 4:30 their workday is done and that's for most of our families, that's when they're available to come to the site, that's when teachers are done teaching for the day can voluntarily stay. So it seems like a small thing but when 4:30 rolls around and somebody has already put in a full day and they are out the door, that is a barrier for us.

MR. MILNER: When you talk about hours of work, though, in the area where I am in Chignecto-Central, on monthly reports, the SchoolsPlus facilitator regularly put in 45 extra hours a month beyond the regular work month - the highest I've seen is 72 - just to provide the services.

So how does SchoolsPlus work? Well, first of all, a student is referred primarily through a school planning team, but it can come from other agencies, so through the school planning team there is a referral made. The facilitator receives the information and determines how intense the support needs to be. Sometimes the information is simply talking with the family and guiding them to the proper service or agency. As you'll see later on with some of the statistics I have, in many cases we have to start a comprehensive service plan or a service agreement to try to encompass all the needs and bring the other agencies on board.

After that plan is made, the facilitator then has a responsibility of coordinating the services. That means calling other professionals and saying, hey, did you remember, we have a planning meeting today, or we're going to have an update meeting, how did you make out with that commitment that you made for Sally? So it's that type of work, sometimes I'd say coercion, just because we're not used to that type of work yet but the relationships are getting better.

One of the challenges is developing solutions. We have to try to think outside the box in addressing many of the needs that we have. The needs in our schools now are different than they were when you went to school.

Here are some of the findings in our report from 2009 and 2010. Across the province, there were 372 referrals and these referrals are not kids who forgot their pencil or didn't do their homework - not that we don't want to address that either. These are cases that are significant, that are extreme in some instances. I have a case I'm going to show you - these are cases where school staff could no longer cope or address the needs that are presented. That year we had almost 150 what I would call comprehensive service agreements where agencies have to get together on a regular basis to try to address the needs that are identified.

Through SchoolsPlus new programs have been developed; services decrease, however, the farther we get from Halifax, from the centres. We have mostly a rural province. We have services where children have to travel to the IWK, for example, and they physically can't get there so they don't get the service, whereas if you were close, the service would be available. We have an extreme transportation barrier across the province and even in our local counties there are transportation barriers. We regularly support families with gas coupons, just to try to get the services, so we're using our budget just to provide some basic service in that regard.

There are gaps in service. Many of the gaps - some of the problems that we see in our local communities - are resolved locally because the staff amongst the agencies know each other. They co-operate, they do the best they can to flex their responsibilities to address the needs. One of the challenges we face is it's not a systemic approach, that we're okay locally to try to address the needs, through a lot of effort, but we do hit some barriers when we start seeing these ideas try to become part of our system and that's when we get into confidentiality agreements, for example.

In one of the surveys that we conducted amongst the other agencies, more than 75 per cent of them said that this integrated approach helps them provide better service. So through the work of SchoolsPlus we have some recommendations and after the recommendations, I'd like to challenge you with a case study. This is a real situation that occurred in one of the SchoolsPlus programs.

So recommendations - of course, it's obvious that we feel an integrated service delivery model would serve our province in the best fashion that we can. We really feel that we're doing our best to serve our students and families, but we're not there yet because of these barriers.

For information sharing and communication, our protocols and mandates don't allow this to happen right now. We need to make sure that departments at the most senior level understand what's occurring and are able to share information, it's just not occurring. I did talk about programs happening locally - they are doing well, but just because of relationship building at that site.

I'm using the term "community outreach workers" but generally in our province we have a challenge with finding mentors for youth. We are hiring some community outreach workers that essentially act for mentors, mostly for young boys by the way, and

these youth see these mentors as an important part of their lives. If you ask them, they would identify the community outreach workers and mentors as a significant piece of being successful.

One of the recommendations is this co-location of service. I go back to say, providing these services at school and it doesn't mean these professionals just being there, it means working together and perhaps changing some job descriptions and some responsibilities so that the co-location of services is seamless and the co-operation is just part of what we do.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: In some ways it's as simple as Education is already transporting the students from the most rural areas to a central location for school, so we get them to the school, the same students who can't get back to that same centre for service after school, as a concrete example.

MR. MILNER: In that regard, one thing I thought of is the bus is running anyway, so why can't mom get on it to come with the student, if they're coming anyway, but that's an aside.

On expanding SchoolsPlus widely, we have four sites now, there's talk about perhaps adding another one or two sites. Well, those are just more pilots. We see SchoolsPlus as something that needs to be expanded in every school, in every community, in every board so widely; not just six or seven sites. That's really not providing an integrated service delivery model.

I did talk about some change at the senior levels. It will be interesting to see if we start talking about sharing budgets because that's where the rubber hits the roads often. But for an adjustment in policies, mandates and scopes of practice, we need to start talking about how we work co-operatively and collaboratively to provide the service. One of the challenges is when we start talking about budgets, we think - although, quite frankly, I don't have any quantitative data or observations to say that this probably would be a cheaper way to provide service all around for some of these complicated situations.

We're talking about a cultural shift and not just in education, but in other agencies as well - it's a change in the way we do things. In education, we know that cultural change takes a long time. Many of the changes we make, we always say it takes at least five years to become ingrained in a school. Our recommendation would be to be patient and stay the course with regard to integrated service delivery.

I did talk about communication at the senior level before. One of our challenges is just the jurisdictional boundaries. Health boards, school boards, Justice, they all have different areas geographically of responsibility and that makes some of the co-operation and collaboration difficult just because of that reason.

I did mention that the SchoolsPlus model was really started a long time ago in certain areas of Canada. There is evidence for success, we're just not making this up as we go. The model is based on research. We know that a comprehensive model that works well improves attendance, improves dropout rates, reduces discipline and serves the family well. It also has an impact on crime rates and some other measurements of drug use and sexual activity, homelessness as well. We have a lot of students who couch-surf, it does decrease instances of that. This is based on research.

Like I mentioned, I have a case in front of me - I have something I want to share with you just as an aside. We've been talking about programs and initiatives in adults mostly. I'd like to bring this back to some of the students that we serve.

The description that I have here is about Sally. Sally is a real-life case, I know it well. This was a situation that occurred and I'd just like to challenge you as I read some of this information. I'd like you to think about what you would do if you were the facilitator or the SchoolsPlus staff receiving this information from a school - what would you do? By the way, this is just one of the 174 active cases that were in 2009-10.

Sally is a 14-year-old female youth in Grade 8. She stopped attending school in October of this year. Last year when she was in Grade 7, she attended a different junior high school and her attendance was a concern there as well. Efforts were made in her previous school to contact her mom and provide support to the family, so she has at least two years of poor attendance and efforts to contact mom.

Sally came to school in September and her attendance began to decrease in October. Sally may have issues with anxiety and Mental Health is involved in assessing and providing counselling. In an effort to improve her attendance from October until January, the school has made several efforts to engage her. Sally's sister - her name is Allie - is aged 12 and is in Grade 7 at the same school and her attendance has been better than Sally's for some reason.

The school psychologist and guidance counsellor were involved and developed a desensitization plan involving Sally and her sister in an attempt to get them back to school. There are no learning disabilities or issues with the girls' ability to do any of the school work that's provided to them. The problem is they're missing time, so time on task and missed learning opportunities are starting to catch up to them. The girls did not show up for school to utilize any plans that have been outlined so far and the mother does not show up to discuss any plans that the school staff designed.

Sally and Allie reside with their mom and their stepdad. The stepfather works away and is only home on weekends; there is no extended family around. The mother works two to three days a week and leaves for work at 6:00 a.m. and gets home at 8:00 p.m. Sally and Allie have increasingly been getting into trouble at home and in the community. They have damaged property at school and at home, they have taken cigarettes from their mom and having started smoking. They both admit to occasional use of marijuana and their closest

friends are in trouble with the law. They have an older male friend that seems to be significant that they associate with and has been in and out of youth detention centres for theft, mischief and damage to property.

On January 6th of this year, the SchoolsPlus facilitator receives a referral from the school about Sally and Allie. The referral was made following a joint Mental Health and education team meeting pertaining to Sally, originally. Community Services is not yet involved, the police know Sally and Allie. Obviously, this is an extreme case and it's a case where an inter-agency approach . . .

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: It's not really, it's common . . .

MR. MILNER: Well, it's not really, it's more common - it's extreme but common. This is obviously a case where more adults at the table with professional expertise could address the needs of engagement and attendance, drug use, perhaps some health issues, mental health issues, perhaps some neglect, we don't know yet. So you can see the issues that we're getting in school are multi-faceted - I guess I flippantly mentioned earlier that it's just not forgetting your pencil anymore. These are the types of cases that if you were a facilitator at SchoolsPlus you would receive on your desk.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: So what are we saying? The PSP, which is the Public School Program, most teachers who signed up for education signed up to deal with the Public School Program and it is our responsibility - but, as I started with, we have all of the students all of the time. The increased funding that we did have - when I wrote this actually in the Spring - per pupil is a help. The main focus in the minister's report to parents is on the Public School Program. So what does that mean?

The difficult part for education - and I hear very few complaints from teachers - is that while they are engaging in a tremendous number of related services to children, at the end of the day what gets reported to the media from education are test scores. We don't do a lot about reporting all of the feeding the children, sending the food home, the intervention. Those things don't seem to count publicly in terms of what teachers are doing, which is why there is a cry for help for inter-agency collaboration.

[1:45 p.m.]

Services that were and are the responsibility of other agencies are increasingly expected of schools. We're not arguing against schools as centres for care, because it's the logical place to do it, but the educators really, really need help with this.

One example we have which is very common is we have students with medical health needs who, after school and on the weekend, are serviced by VONs who come to the home. While they're in school we get no nursing service from VON. We are training para-professionals to do tube feeds, to give injections, to provide a number of medical interventions that are delivered by health care professionals when the students aren't at

school. So it seems that we have people who have the training and the expertise are not the people who are delivering the services while the students are at school.

The examples we have where that is changing, we have a fabulous initiative on the South Shore with Mental Health but it's in four schools in the entire province where mental health providers are doing the service.

I have to put this in - the demands from other departments are placing incredible strain on our schools. That's not direct service but it's things like fire safety, which is important; the handling and sorting of garbage, et cetera, which is putting a lot of strain on our schools; playground safety; and that list goes on. Those are some of the invisible strains that schools are dealing with while they're trying to focus on the needs of our children and youth. Mr. Fleury.

MR. FLEURY: Thank you very much, Nancy and Scott. So, ladies and gentlemen, that gives you a little preview of what's happening in one area and the impact it is having on the lives of some of the students who are facing difficulties.

What are the challenges facing greater inter-agency collaboration? Well, there are many and let me cite some of them. There appears to be regional disparity in the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration. In some areas it's working well but not in others. Agencies often do not understand the exact mandate and the culture and the operational guidelines of other agencies. Privacy - you've heard Scott talk about this - and confidentiality issues have become major barriers where trying to obtain information often becomes a lengthy, complex process. There's a mishmash of departmental partnerships among the various regions in the province. Not all agencies and services are accessible throughout the province because of boundary issues or distances involved, and Scott referenced that.

Funding and resource issues are often impediments to establishing and maintaining inter-agency partnerships. There's an absence of protocols, guidelines and structures for fostering and supporting inter-agency collaboration. Inter-agency networks are firmly in place in some areas but there's a lack of province-based inter-agency affiliations guaranteeing coordinated services for youth and families everywhere. Scott indicated with SchoolsPlus, it only exists in four of the eight school boards. A hands-on, well-defined, sustainable inter-agency model to establish consistency of effort on a province-wide basis does not exist.

Breaking down the silos - you've heard that term by us. Individual departments offering services to a common client still resist any challenge to their operating autonomy. Determining how the different programs and services can be interwoven is a daunting challenge. There are many programs but communication and flow of information is problematic. The goal must be to emulate inter-agency programs that work well, notably those based on personal relationships with the youth and those that are on-site where the youth are. Ministers and deputy ministers need to be on board. There are many good

relationships in place at a case management level but a strong, more clearly-defined interdepartmental approach is not systemic in this province.

To ensure consistency of inter-agency effort and structure, there's a pressing need to formally establish provincial and regional committees, define their relationship to one another, articulate their mandate, specify their composition, and provide adequate budget and resources. When inter-agency meetings happen, there must be clear agendas, recognition of time constraints and timely sharing of information throughout the process.

I'll conclude, ladies and gentlemen, by reading the eight recommendations that finalized this report. This is why we're here and this is what we're hoping there will be some action on. I should say initially, we recognize there is a child and youth strategy division in the Department of Community Services and additionally there are interdepartmental child and youth social policy committees representing - I say five departments, it's now four because Health has been amalgamated and those are: Justice, Health and Wellness, Community Services, Justice and Education.

Here are the eight recommendations, ladies and gentlemen:

Enhance Nova Scotia's Child and Youth Strategy with the formal establishment of a ministerial committee to lead and oversee the various agencies and programs for children, youth and families;

1. Conduct an inventory, by region, of services and programs currently offered so that overlap and redundancy can be reduced;
2. Establish provincially the service delivery for children and youth by government agencies and departments in community schools;
3. Convene a symposium for professionals working in the field on youth and family issues, to generate discussion and ideas on how best to integrate those services;
4. Appoint an interdepartmental commission to develop the organizational framework for integrating programs and services on a province-wide basis;
5. Investigate privacy issues and other existing roadblocks with the aim of making inter-agency co-operation and coordination more tenable;
6. Ensure long-term stability of inter-agency co-operation through adequate budget and resource allocations; and

7. Review and study Healthy Child Manitoba because they have an inter-agency model there, and other delivery models, for ensuring inter-agency collaboration throughout Nova Scotia.

In summary, Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen, establish through policy and action, effective interdepartmental delivery of integrated services to children, youth and families in Nova Scotia.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you all. I know there will be some questions but before we go to those, I'd like to welcome Mr. Keith Bain to the committee. He didn't have a chance to introduce himself at the beginning. You were only a moment late but this was the first opportunity to recognize your presence.

I have one name on the speakers list so that is where we will begin. Ms. Regan.

MS. KELLY REGAN: So it has been a year since you released your report. Has there been any response from government?

MR. FLEURY: I understand from the previous Minister of Education, Marilyn More, that it was under discussion. That's as much as I've heard. I believe it's being looked at. I hope it's being looked at.

MS. REGAN: One of the things that I noticed when I first was named Education Critic was when we started looking into the details of what various programs were being offered there was a lot of ad hocery and so your line about death by initiatives and pilots really resonated with me because I remember just being completely stunned by the number of different programs. They would start up and they would be fabulous and then it was like they might limp on, on their own, but they wouldn't be instituted across the province. So you might have a really fabulous program to help kids learn, who were behind in reading, for example, but it would go nowhere.

I was just wondering if you could comment on that, like what happens with all these pilot projects?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Well, we'd probably say the same thing. They typically start by a group of local people who identify a problem and they create a locally generated fit to what they see as a solution. It then gets picked up and it is tried to be replicated elsewhere, so that's one of the issues and it doesn't always fit. So there is this balance between a systemic approach and avoiding "the same thing fits exactly everywhere you do it." (Interruption) Yes, cookie cutter.

The other issue we have with pilots is, we tend to actually support them and SchoolsPlus would be a good example. There actually is a facilitator to do the work so you can say to the folks from the Department of Community Services, I'm not just giving you

a list of 23 things you need to do, I'm actually here to help with it. We're very good at that with pilots, but we're very poor at it in this province with implementation.

We can afford four facilitators, for example, but in our system alone we have one high school feeder system with the SchoolsPlus; none of the others has it. We're not very good at providing the support. We tend to give tremendous support to the pilot, we take the lessons learned and the recommendations and we ask the rest of the schools and communities to implement it without the resources. Then we wonder why it worked in the pilot and it didn't work anywhere else.

MS. REGAN: I was interested when you spoke about the possibility of keeping schools open during the summer to offer reading support, that kind of thing. It seems to me that - well, in fact, we know from studies that children from disadvantaged homes aren't dumber than kids from homes with lots of opportunities. What happens is, during the summer, they backslide because they don't have the opportunities for enrichment during the summer. I'm looking at that and thinking, there's a place, but of course, that requires money, doesn't it?

I guess I'm taking this to segue into the issue of Reading Recovery and do we have any particular programs out there that can do the kind of work and get the kind of results that Reading Recovery currently gets? For the cost, I guess, it's about \$3,000 per student, is that correct?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: I guess, if I understand your question, I would give two answers. Probably the best example we have in addition to Reading Recovery - which is in every school and serves 20 per cent of the children - another example we would have would be Options and Opportunities. That's an example - I would say an exception - where we did design a framework that was research-based, that is actually engaging students in most of our schools in keeping them in school. So we do have a couple of examples where that works.

In terms of Reading Recovery, I would say it is an example where if the school system is supported to do what it was originally created to do - which is to focus on learning outcomes - the benefits for the agencies are tremendous. When students are successful at school we know it is a key determinant of health so they put less strain on the health care system, we know that they have less engagement with Justice - there's a whole list of other agencies. They don't tend to become involved with Family and Children's Services or Community Services, so that engagement piece in terms of students being successful. Those are two examples I can think of, Reading Recovery and Options and Opportunities.

MR. MILNER: I think on the early intervention side, Reading Recovery is a key piece at early intervention. We know if kids don't read at grade level by about Grade 3, they are in trouble to finish the rest of their school career.

MS. REGAN: What is it, something like 75 per cent? If they're not reading at that point, they're not going to finish high school.

MR. MILNER: That's a significant tipping point, yes. That's why you hear educators talk about early intervention in that young P to Grade 3 time.

MS. REGAN: We don't have any other pilot out there at this time that is supported by research that does the same job that Reading Recovery does?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: No, not that we're aware of.

MS. REGAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Burrill.

MR. GARY BURRILL: I wanted to ask you, Mr. Milner, about the co-location aspect in SchoolsPlus. In rural communities with viable but small schools with lots of unused physical capacity, word of SchoolsPlus has been exciting as a potential road out of the mess that a lot of communities are in. Their schools are viable, their enrolment is holding steady, but the cost pressures from the unused capacities have the boards down their neck and there's this constant war. Maybe SchoolsPlus can find a way out of this.

One difficulty is when you think about co-location, typically the buildings, the communities that would benefit in the way I've described, are places of widely spread-out population and very difficult demographics, places where the population is sparse enough that it's hard to see how you would effectively organize the co-location of a service at this much distance from the rest of the places that would be required by the person providing such a service. This must be a problem that has been in front of people thinking about SchoolsPlus a lot. I was wondering if you could just speak to it a little.

[2:00 p.m.]

MR. MILNER: You've identified a significant problem. Many of our smaller rural schools face exactly as you've described. I don't think the solution is easy or immediate. We do see SchoolsPlus as a vehicle to establish schools that are multi-centred, so it's not just about education. Families would see it as a place to go to at almost any time. We see it as a better service, even though as you talked about families being diverse and spread out, still if there is a central spot of a community it is often the school, the church or some of those longstanding facilities. As you say, the school is there, there is floor space, we know it, we should use it. How do you get the people there? I don't have the answer to that. We think if we can offer the service that is appropriate and necessary, people will come and families will get there.

We had an idea at the very early part of this about the school bus system; we have to change as well. Right now we put students on the bus to get them there and get them

home. If the buses are there, maybe we need to talk about using that transportation network in some of those communities. So thinking outside the box is really what SchoolsPlus is doing, it's pushing some of those boundaries to try to find those solutions. You've identified a significant challenge all around. The solution probably is as difficult as the situation.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Could I add a comment?

MR. BURRILL: Yes.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: It's an excellent point. What I would add is that there are some schools that are not filled to capacity, that the buildings are very logical centres for multiple service and we can all think of them, I'm sure, in our own areas. So it's a community where we are going to maintain a school, people already go near that site for services, but you've got different agencies spending money for different spaces for cleaners, for snow plowing, for everything, they make perfect sense.

Where I think it would fall down is if we think that every small rural school is a logical place for a multi-service centre because if in that community our population is already travelling to a different centre for their services and that's their habit, they're really not looking for multi-service. They may want to keep their small rural school, but they may not be looking for all of those other services in that site. Sometimes it would work and I think sometimes people wouldn't access the service.

MR. MILNER: The solution is in context really of the community.

MR. BURRILL: The problem that I haven't been able to think my way around is, the greater the demographic challenge - which is at the root of the school's problem to begin with - the less practical sense it makes to do actual co-location of service provision. I was hoping that this grim calculus, you had a solution to.

MR. MILNER: I wouldn't argue your point.

MR. BURRILL: That's the key problem, thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The notion of co-location is really interesting, however, if I could just make this comment. I remember visiting an elementary school in Regina a number of years ago that also housed a family service agency. The agency kind of kicked into gear sometime in the afternoon and offered counselling and what they called family life education programming in the evening. The physical plant of the school and its geographical location were organized for those two purposes, so there are creative possibilities.

That is going to take us to Mr. Bain and just so the speakers know where they're at, followed by Mr. Smith and Mr. MacLellan.

MR. KEITH BAIN: I have a few questions I would like to ask and first of all, thank you for your presentation. I think in your overall report to us today you've identified some of the problems that are out there, the lack of resources, you say that the networks are in place but the dedicated services aren't. There's a question of sustainability, confidentiality is one of the biggest problems. You referenced also the fact that schools should be used more on evenings and weekends. Are there any roadblocks out there now stopping that from happening within the school system? Is it an open door policy, I guess is what I'm asking, so that they are encouraging stuff like that?

MR. MILNER: I think one of the points I would make is that we haven't constructed schools physically to do that all of the time. Some of the new school construction, they do have itinerant spaces but generally speaking, no, the physical plant, the design does not have perhaps a separate entrance or enough parking or just some of those logistical matters, so there is just the physical aspect.

Schools and school boards have facility-use policies and practices where anybody in the community can apply.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: There are barriers, that's the short answer, but I'll go to the good-news answer first. When it is built into the design - most communities are very anxious to get a new school and what we have learned is that if it's going to be a community-use school, that has to be in the design of everything before construction starts. In the physical design of the building, in the partnership design, in who's buying the toilet paper design, in everything that we look at.

We have Forest Heights Community School just outside Chester and it was built and designed for that and that has lasted and is very successful. It doesn't have every service and every usage, but what is in the agreement has been respected by all of the partners. The people come to the table, there is a steering group, and people come with the funding to support their usage. I would say it is a Nova Scotia success story - there are others, but that's in our area.

I talked about toilet paper and I'm not being facetious. The province did make some significant changes in terms of supporting issues like liability a number of years ago, so that we could have not-for-profit groups accessing our schools whenever they needed to. But there are some very fundamental pieces that were not covered: custodial services, our respect for the hours of work for custodial services; who is paying the overtime; the increase in the heating costs that the school boards are expected to pick up and now with the cost of fuel going up, that's a significant issue when people are in and out of the school and the gym doors are open and the air handling units are running.

Who is actually cleaning the bathrooms after the community use in the evenings? The custodians do their cleaning when they're supposed to, the community groups come in, which we welcome, and there's nothing built in for who re-cleans before the children

come in the morning. If you're the parent of young children and every day when you get to school the bathrooms have been soiled by community use the night before.

That sounds quite mundane I expect in the greater scheme of things, but those are fundamental issues that end up with the system having to say, until we figure that out we can't keep the doors open every night.

MR. BAIN: I'm interested in the SchoolsPlus program and I guess my question will go to you concerning Chignecto-Central. You say there are four sites within your board.

MR. MILNER: Across the province.

MR. BAIN: Explain to me what happens. Students are referred - are they referred from schools across the board? Are they referred from that particular school, the site?

MR. MILNER: Yes, that's the challenge with the pilots. In the case of Chignecto-Central there are four elementary schools, a middle school and a high school, so there are about 2,200 students and the SchoolsPlus program serves those 2,200 only. In my whole school board there are 22,000, so in the case of these pilots, the pilots are only serving the specific schools that are identified.

MR. BAIN: So you are serving all age and grade groups within that pilot?

MR. MILNER: Yes, in this case.

MR. BAIN: I guess my question now is, with the recent budget cuts that school boards are facing, are programs like SchoolsPlus and Youth Navigation Services going to be able to survive?

MR. MILNER: We understand at this point that targeted funding, which SchoolsPlus would be, is safe. That's what we understand at this point.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: For SchoolsPlus perhaps because they're pilots, the funding does not come through the school board, it's not on our regular funding sheet, it's off the sheet. So far the cuts we've had have been to items that are on our profile sheet and SchoolsPlus is not. We understand that it is protected.

MR. BAIN: I'll allow some time for others, but I do have other questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, hopefully there will be time for another round. That takes us to Mr. Smith.

MR. MAURICE SMITH: Maybe this will help, I'm going to follow up a little bit on that question. I'm interested in the SchoolsPlus system as well because my area has one. Now you were saying that there's targeted funding now for the school-plus program, so if

you've been told that that's not going to go away then we're okay with that, but you're also talking about expanding it. Is there a figure for each school board that was allowed a certain amount of money for SchoolsPlus? Did all four get the same amount or is it depending on what they do? Do you know how that funding comes through?

MR. MILNER: I don't know what other sites received. I'll say that the Chignecto-Central site is \$150,000; that pays salaries and operating costs and service to students. I'm not sure about the other sites, I don't have access to their budget.

MR. SMITH: But your position is that each school board should have at least one SchoolsPlus, or that the whole of the school board should have?

MR. MILNER: One site in each school board would not do it. That serves only a small percentage of students.

MR. SMITH: Right. In your case, in your situation, you have four schools, about 10 per cent of your population is being serviced?

MR. MILNER: Right.

MR. SMITH: So would you need 10 times that money to do a SchoolsPlus in your district, \$1.5 million?

MR. MILNER: I suspect there would be some economies of scale, but that could be a good estimate. Most of that monies are for salaries.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fleury, I think you wanted to comment.

MR. FLEURY: I just wanted to reinforce a couple of things from this report. One is that we said yes, there are instances of inter-agency collaboration such as the SchoolsPlus projects in some areas of the province, but it's not systemic. We still have children falling through the cracks in this province, ladies and gentlemen. I sit on the suspension review committee for our board and I can tell you that one of the frustrations with sitting on that particular committee is that we encounter situations, difficulties, problems that students have that are multifaceted and that require the resources and services of not just what we have available in Education, but also what's available through Community Services, Justice and Mental Health. If those collaborations are not in place - and they're not in place in all areas - then what happens is we still have students in this province who are being suspended, and suspended long term.

Unfortunately, the frustration is when you look at some of these instances, you realize that their problems are just symptomatic of far deeper causes that need the address and the resources that these other agencies have. That is really the rationale for the paper to say, can we somehow get the agencies - and I know it has to happen at the ministerial level, there has to be some discussion there - to coordinate and collaborate the delivery of

our services to better serve the problems that we're seeing, particularly with the young people. The school system sees it all, they see it first. The students come there, they have to come there and that's where we encounter it. I just wanted to put that perspective in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: No, that's fine, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacLellan.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thank you for your presentation and I think, Vic, you just touched on some of the issues that I wanted to discuss here today. Being from Glace Bay, I see Sally and Allie's problem all the time. Only you add cocaine, methadone, alcohol, child abuse, food banks and those types of things.

The reality is the kids in my neck of the woods certainly have very tough lives and many issues with falling behind and family problems and they turn to drugs. The common expression is, let's throw them in jail, put them in jail and let the justice system deal with them. The reality is that's obviously not the answer. There is a criminal component of those, but what do you do with a 15-year-old or 14-year-old girl who's stealing barbeques out of baby barns - is that the answer? A correctional centre, right. Obviously health issues - methadone I have learned many times isn't a treatment for a drug addiction, it's basically a life sentence, save a few lucky ones. Methadone is a lifelong treatment.

The socioeconomic problems that we see with the family units, as you mentioned earlier, some of the issues. I've seen situations where kids come and tell me they get their drugs from their parents, so you run into those kinds of problems; very significant. When you have a parent on drugs, what options do the kids have?

Finally and obviously which ties into all of these conversations today, it's the education that's lost and the foundation starts earlier and when you're talking about Reading Recovery, developmental disabilities, learning issues, those types of things, it's a very fundamental sort of component that the kids need. To me it starts there and it certainly starts there in Glace Bay. It's a series and it's a gateway of issues that arise from not having that structure, not having those supports in the various ways.

[2:15 p.m.]

My question or generally, relative to Glace Bay, would these issues be consistent across the province facing kids? Would the SchoolsPlus program be something that should be earmarked for some place like Glace Bay and if so, what are the hurdles to establishing this program and this idea, these initiatives across the province?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: I think the issues that you describe - well, I know they exist everywhere. We do know that we have pockets in the province, and I think they

change, where the challenges our youth and families are facing tend to vary. In my own area when a plant closes and employment is eliminated, we see the stress on families increase and when orders come in and the plants are open. So we see some variation, we deal with the fisheries.

By and large, the issues vary from region to region but they are there all over the province. So yes, we believe that integrated intervention is the only hope that we have, really, to success. Education is our core work but we simply recognize and educators have accepted that if we don't pay attention to the other factors, then it doesn't matter all that much what we do in terms of education. If we don't help them be successful at school, then every other challenge they face will quadruple.

Could I just take one moment and share one example. We talked about Reading Recovery catching them early because reading is primary to everything. We have students now who didn't get caught there who are in high schools. We have an initiative in one of our schools, it is called Co-Star. The school identified a number of young men and young women who, based on their experience, they were pretty sure they would not make it to Christmas in Grade 10; just the issues that they were facing.

They broke down the barriers, they assigned them to one teacher with some supports, with learning outcomes in a really alternative manner of integrating those outcomes and working with the agencies to get support. There are a whole lot more details around it, it was pretty complicated, but the long and short of it is almost every one of those students stayed in school, when they knew that without that initiative they would not have been in school.

The difficulty is, that's one group of 12 students in one school. Every school of any size in the province with Grade 10 has those same students, so we're back to the question of "we can do it once but can we do it everywhere?" I'm not sure if that was an answer to your question.

MR. MILNER: The word "hurdle" stuck out for me. I think the answer is the will to do so. We have enough experience, we've gone through a pilot phase, the staff involved know very well how to proceed, it's just the will to move forward.

I gave you statistics that when we talked to the other agencies in my area, more than 75 per cent of them said yes, we want to work together. In one agency, it came from above not to share information with other agencies and that was an appropriate response because that was the bureaucracy, that was the protocol.

On the ground we made it work, so the will is there to move forward and agencies say they want to work together because they can see the impact so it is just the will to move forward from here. We have the experience to do so now in Nova Scotia.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: We've had some false starts, too, so we're talking about SchoolsPlus and we have four pilots. We've had the children and youth or child and youth action committee, it's not meeting our needs. We have some structures out there that we've tried and haven't worked so in moving forward, we need to take a really hard look at what we tried and what didn't work and there are some reasons it didn't work.

We talked earlier that we really believe that the new strategy is completely stalled. It may be housed in the wrong place. Other than SchoolsPlus, we haven't seen a lot of solid indicators of it making a difference for our youth.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramey.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm a big believer in collaboration, not just in the school system but everywhere else, including between political Parties and all that sort of thing, too, and I've spoken about that many times. I also spent 33 years in the education system as a teacher, or in and out of it as a student. I have a reasonable picture, I think, in my own head of what used to go on in schools. I wouldn't pretend to be as on top of that now.

I do know that in the last 20 or so years, there have been huge changes in society and one would expect those to be totally reflected in the education system. What I don't think some people my age get is just how big those changes have been. One of the things we're always trapped in is your own skin and what you remember is the way it was when you were there. I know for sure it is not like that any more and I think we just heard some pretty good examples of how it can be quite different.

The S.T.E.P. program was put up there as one of the examples. I had a huge part to play in getting that started, for the very reason that we were losing kids at about the Grade 10 level out of the school system in my area. I really did appreciate the co-operation - I was at the community college at the time - that we had with the school board there to make that work.

I was in Cape Breton just last week and I went out and met with a group in the CBRM. Actually the meeting was chaired by John MacEachern who used to be a Minister of Education in this province. It had people there from Cape Breton University, the Y and Community Services, and they were sort of doing what we're talking about and they were talking about some of the projects they worked on, cleaning up an area of North Sydney. There was a patch of woods there where the kids were misbehaving so they mowed it down and put a skateboard park in, put a community police office out in one of the housing units there where they were having a lot of problems - not a uniform policeman - a helpful person, a pool table and that sort of thing and they watched the number of police calls go dramatically down.

We know that stuff works so the trick is how to get it to work and how to figure it out. Having collaborative practices where you have these services available in schools, it

makes total sense to me so I don't even want to talk any more about that, except to say that one of the things that came up, and I'm not sure if Mr. Fleury mentioned it or who mentioned it here but was this notion of - I think it might have been you, sir - transportation. If you live in an area like I live in, basically my constituency is largely the Town of Bridgewater and then a whole bunch of rural stuff. We're constantly having this problem of how to get people to places. I think somebody said, why couldn't the mother ride on the bus, or something like that, too.

I wish things like that could happen as well because that would be another piece of the puzzle. Somebody was trying to set up a rural transportation system, well, several people have been working on it for a long, long time. It never seems to come to fruition but I said, you know, we've got a rural transportation system and we use it every day and if we could be a little more creative we might even find a better way to utilize it, to keep it running a couple of times during the day.

I just wonder if anybody would like to comment a little more on school buses as modes of transportation for people other than students, or would you rather stay off that one?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: You know me, I don't mind commenting. I could go on at length about all the barriers to it because we have tried. We have had significant challenges getting adult students permission to ride on buses. I think we're okay but it has been problematic.

I think it would take a re-framing of those buses, for what they are used. Scott talked about a cultural shift - it would take a significant cultural shift in how we look at it if we wanted to have multi-use for buses. Now because I'm here as an educator, I will say, and we can't expect Education to pick up the tab but respectfully, it often comes back to that because one of the things we looked at when we were looking at the rural transportation is, we have just enough buses to bus the students and service the buses. So as soon as we have longer runs or more runs, we need more buses because we have to service them regularly or I would be here like I was once before, talking about why our buses weren't properly serviced.

So yes, the barriers are there but I think it takes a change of will and a cultural shift. You say what is good for the people of Nova Scotia, what are the barriers, and now let's sit down and figure out the barriers. I don't really see that other than some community-based initiatives, we're not really there yet and talking about this makes sense, now let's make it work, unless it's built by design, I go back to the Forest Heights example where all of the partners sat down at the design level and said we will have a community school and let's build it from the ground up.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. So we'll move to Mr. Skabar, and that will finish round one. I know that I have Ms. Regan on my list for the beginning of round two. If there are other questions, Ms. Regan will start but there will be opportunities for others. So, Mr. Skabar.

MR. BRIAN SKABAR: Well, thanks, guys. I noticed in Recommendation No. 8, you referenced Healthy Child Manitoba and other delivery models. In that model, or any other that you are aware of, are the previous seven recommendations addressed, to a greater or lesser extent? Like, Recommendation No. 8 is to review and study Healthy Child Manitoba and other delivery models. In that model or any other model that you are aware of, are the previous seven recommendations addressed, to a greater or lesser extent?

MR. FLEURY: Yes, Healthy Child Manitoba is a seven agency, there are seven departments because they include the Aboriginal population as well out there, so they are included.

MR. SKABAR: And why not, yes.

MR. FLEURY: If you look at the report, there's a description of that in the report as well. The process that they used involved many of the steps that are recommended in those other recommendations. Does that answer your question?

MR. SKABAR: So I'll take that as a yes.

MR. FLEURY: First of all, there had to be an agreement at the ministerial level that the deputy ministers would meet, first and foremost, to discuss it and talk about how their departments could be integrated, how they could interweave their mandates and how they could coordinate their delivery to the families and youth in Manitoba. So those preliminary steps had to take place.

MR. SKABAR: Actually I used to work in northern Manitoba for a number of years. When it came to the facility, the actual structure of the school - in defined communities, the school was the centre for a number of reasons because pretty much it was the only place that could accommodate them. So when the social workers flew in, that's where they went, when the mental health professionals came in, that's where they went, so there was integration but only - well, because it was necessary but that was a positive in that sense, I suppose.

How do they get past the sharing of information between professionals? That's always - I'm a social worker by trade, or used to be, in any case, and the whole issue of not being able to access information between professionals and one government department to another always irked me and still does, frankly.

MR. FLEURY: It's my understanding that the deputy ministers meet bimonthly. I see a lady shaking her head there, she must be familiar with it. They meet bimonthly . .

MR. SKABAR: I'm on that committee as well.

MR. FLEURY: Okay, so they established - I'm assuming this - some agreements and some protocols that would allow for the sharing of information on an inter-agency level. I am assuming that's what happened out there. I have not flown out there so I don't have first-hand knowledge of how they function but they co-operate and they do deliver coordinately the services that they give the community, those seven departments.

MR. MILNER: I had a comment. Through SchoolsPlus, provincially, we are going down that road. We are two years into work on an inter-agency confidentiality agreement so it has gone back and forth between . . .

MR. SKABAR: How many more years are we looking at before that . . .

MR. MILNER: I don't know, I won't comment, but we're going down that road. It has been back and forth between the appropriate, I suppose, lawyers and people who need to vet that information.

MR. FLEURY: It is a big barrier, there's no question. Confidentiality laws and so on, that's a big hurdle.

MR. SKABAR: Well, I mean they're there for a reason, of course, but by the same token we're all pulling towards the same objective.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you, Mr. Skabar. Ms. Regan, to start round two.

MS. REGAN: I actually want to talk about the experience of a friend of mine who is a principal at a rural school, an elementary school. She also has some teaching duties. She said to me that she spends far more of her day doing social work than she does on education. I suspect that's the case of many school principals, not just in rural areas but throughout the province.

[2:30 p.m.]

My sense is that when we talk about this, there has been a lot of discussion about working together among departments, but there has not been a lot of action. I haven't heard a whole lot about money because a lot of time when you are moving a person to do something different, that involves money because they aren't going to be doing what they did before so you have to have somebody replace that and you've got to move it over there to that new place.

Is the problem here that there's no incentive for other departments to get involved? They can kind of look the other way and say, well, just leave that to education because that's their problem? Why aren't the deputy ministers meeting, do you know? I'm probably asking the wrong people.

MR. FLEURY: There's a cultural thing, it's how we've done things and it's the way things have been - the way we functioned in the past. I think what we're calling for is to look at that function and say, how can we revise it so there's more coordination and delivery of this and sharing of information and sharing the address of the problems.

The other thing that I wanted to comment on, too, and what's crucial in all of this is dealing with these things at the earliest possible age. We see students on the suspension review who are 14, 15, 16 having problems that have been a pattern for years and by the time they reach that stage in things, it's very difficult to change behavioural patterns and conditions at that late stage. The other key, too, is early intervention when there are issues and problems that families and youth are having. The earlier the intervention, the better chance I think there is for long-term solutions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I wonder if - nobody has said anything so far about the child and youth action committees or in any detail. It seems to me that Ms. Regan's question, in a sense . . .

MS. REGAN: Nancy did mention that and she said they're not meeting the needs. Maybe you could expand on that a little.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: One of the challenges - and I've served on them in two areas of the province and we've had some great successes and we've had some not-so-great successes - one of the issues around it is the structures and how they don't match. We both mentioned how the geographic structures in the province are enormously problematic. I'll give a good example. I worked in the Valley before and there is a base for Justice in the Valley and so when we meet with Justice in the Valley there's actually a decision maker at the table so we can actually make decisions, and with the other partners.

Where we are now, it's very difficult for Justice to have a representative come to the table who can make a decision at the table, so it's hard to get people to stay at the table if it's all talking about the issue and no action. So the structure really isn't working. One of the things I would say is we need to look at that first and say what did work, what didn't work, why it didn't work.

The other barrier, I think - yes, money is a barrier. One of my enormous fears right now with our current funding challenges is that the first things that will leave the system will be the services we have added for children and youth that are actually making a difference, that are probably the most loosely connected to our mandate, which is having students meet the learning outcomes. If we start to strip away the supports we've added - in terms of student engagement, mental health services, physical health services, behavioural services, guidance services at elementary - then we're going to regress because we will just focus on having teachers in front of classes and that will be a huge problem for us.

The other piece that goes along with that is, very effective services become invisible and, therefore, very hard to sustain. I could give you a long list of examples. I'll use collaboration with community policing as an example. When we have excellent collaboration with community policing - which we do - and they are working with youth in a positive way and when youth start experimenting with substances or youth are involved perhaps in shoplifting and we're able to work with them so it doesn't progress, we don't see a saving in the justice system because they never got in serious trouble. So it's very hard to show that saving. We have to have the fortitude, as a province, to invest early, up front, to prevent those costs that we have later on.

We cost-share a nurse on the South Shore, enormously effective to be able to provide intervention to our most medically fragile children in school because they don't end up in emergency. It's difficult to track that because they don't end up in emergency, so that's one of the issues.

The list goes on and on and on, but it is difficult to track. We have to somehow get money out of crisis intervention and keep it in prevention.

MR. MILNER: And I'd make a comment about why there's lots of talk. I think probably a lot of the talk comes from education. I'd highlight the point that we get the best kids that the parents have, but we get them all. Attendance is mandatory, we do our best to serve the students. You're going to hear a lot of talk from education because we think that a lot of the fundamental needs are not met that we think other agencies could help with.

Sometimes - and I speak for myself - I feel that it's on the back of education that we're trying to address this matter. At times it feels ridiculous that we have to hire someone to help professionals talk and collaborate. It's where we are and I hope it's only a stepping stone and when we're done the cultural shift, the facilitator shouldn't exist, I hope that's an interim step.

MS. REGAN: I'm wondering if when you have significant cost pressures, too, when everybody is sort of jealously guarding their own budget. I would think there would not be a whole lot of willingness out there for - and I'm just plucking this out of nowhere - Justice to say, yes, we're going to devote x amount of our budget to doing this, because we think it's important when they're losing money. I would think that for everybody it's sort of human nature not to be stepping up and doing the stuff that is pretty clear needs to be done.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Justice is a great example, they have a fabulous support initiative called Options to Anger. One of the senior probation officers comes into schools, came into our SchoolPlus site, and talks about what they have learned about dealing with the youth who are the most threatening to other youth, for lack of a better term. That has been fabulous because she has a lot of experience with youth where it's not our work every day. My concern, of course, is with cuts, that it will be those outreach intervention programs that will be the first things to go because of the inability for Justice

to reduce the number of beds for incarceration, for instance. So you're right, the cost pressures are huge.

The thing for us though - at the risk of sounding like we're whining a little bit - it doesn't matter how big the cuts are, our caseload stays the same. We have all of the students all of the time, every day, and the pressure on us to keep every student regardless of what they do is increasing. As budgets are tighter that's tougher to do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Regan, I'm concerned about moving on to give a few more people a chance for questions. Are you okay with that?

MS. REGAN: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I want to add - and this is just because of my own background in the health system and doing some things that relate to education - there are examples of co-operation and sharing budgets. I worked for Addiction Services and I know around the province, particularly in the Annapolis Valley and I think on the South Shore as well, a fair proportion of Addiction Services staffing is devoted to in-school activities and has been for quite a few years. Mental Health is offering similar services in at least some parts of the province.

I had a conversation yesterday in the Annapolis Valley with the Annapolis Valley District Health Authority, which has provided half an FTE nursing position - Education is providing the other half - to work totally in the school. Of course, there are those problems of measurement of what savings are there, but I think there are some examples of that local level of co-operation that you're talking about.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Could I just add, we had many more slides before we came and I just think it's such an important point because we have lots of other examples where, on an ad hoc basis, people have made decisions to give services. The food service in our schools across the province has improved dramatically and that's because of a decision on the part of our partners to actually provide dietician services to the school system.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I want to go to Mr. Bain next and Mr. Ramey is next on my list after that.

MR. BAIN: Vic, I think, has already referenced what I'm about to say, but in the handout that we got it says: Provincial education department deals with children in school. What happens in the critical years before they arrive at school is largely outside the mandate. I guess the biggest challenge that exists out there is that the cases aren't identified until they arrive at school. The school boards have to take the lead in getting everybody together to provide the services that are necessary. I think the earlier you get them, the less the problem it's going to be, but that's not something that's going to happen overnight. I think there has to be a foundation established that we can get those kids at that younger

age. In the meantime, the other challenge exists right through the whole system so I guess, how do we begin to get that younger group so that we can start earlier?

MR. FLEURY: One of the recommendations calls for a symposium to get people from the various agencies to just start talking about it, bring them together and discuss the best way to do this, how we can ensure a better catchment of the problems. I think that's the first thing - let's get people from those four agencies we're talking about, bring them together and ask how this could be done more effectively. How could we integrate? It needs ministerial leadership, obviously, to call that symposium.

MR. BAIN: I guess my question would be if Community Services, for example, knows of a problem that exists before that child enters school, is the information shared on a regular basis now?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: It's area by area.

MR. BAIN: Or does it depend on the severity of it?

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Or it depends on how the agencies work together at the ground level. We have some early screening, for instance, which is very much a collaborative initiative with Community Services. We are able to pick the students up early, work with the parents with Community Services before they come, but I guess what you're hearing over and over and over is a bit sporadic and it depends on where people put their energy.

MR. BAIN: I guess, Nancy, that should be where it begins. The sharing of . . .

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Yes, what's working.

MR. BAIN: And not only that, the problems that are existing presently, before they even get in the school system so that everybody can work together.

MR. FLEURY: Again, there's the confidentiality issue, too, often.

MR. BAIN: Your hands are tied . . .

MR. FLEURY: The hands are tied. Some agencies can't share.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: I stand to be corrected, but I think there was a fundamental decision in the province that preschool is Community Services and that may be something that we want to revisit.

MS. REGAN: Yes, that's a simple solution.

MR. BAIN: Yes.

MS. PYNCH-WORTHYLAKE: Then that puts them in a different category. Maybe it's as simple as saying that the agency - sorry for the expression - that has all of the children all of the time, needs to follow the children where they are. All of the other agencies whose mandates are quite specific, need to bring those services in to those children, as it were. So maybe our system is too complicated.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramey, I think we have time for your question.

MR. RAMEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I'll be fairly quick. We've been talking about sharing information here and I couldn't agree more that that's what we need to be able to do. I don't know what the mechanisms are around that, but I know that in most hospitals you have an Apgar rating when you're born, and then there's another - I think they're using it in B.C., it's like an early-something inventory. You probably know the acronym for that and I don't. That seems to be able to point out lots of things that if you follow the person through life you keep noticing certain patterns. Of course, you can't prevent an accident unless you know that there's going to be one. So if we had a tracking system like that that we could carry through right into adulthood, I think we'd be miles ahead.

Since hope springs eternal in the human breast, or so I've heard, I do want to mention just this one thing before we wrap up. I'm the ministerial assistant to the Minister of Health and Wellness and there's a committee that has been formed - some of my colleagues are on it, Mr. Skabar is on it as well - that's called a Better Health Care committee. It doesn't just deal with health care, it deals with all kinds of issues like what we've been talking about today. I just want you to know it's the Ministers of Education, Health and Wellness, Justice, and Community Services meeting together with their deputies and ministerial assistants - like Brian and myself - in the same room to talk about exactly what we're talking about today, to see if we can figure this out and get on with it.

I just wanted you to know that and I sort of felt that maybe people thought nothing was percolating away there and I wanted to reassure you that it is. So that's it for me.

MR. CHAIRMAN: A comment and not a question. I think that takes us to the end of our questioning. Vic, any last summary that you'd like to give?

MR. FLEURY: I want to thank the committee for their patience and for their time and their interest. We're grateful to have an opportunity to present the report and to discuss it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you very much for being here. I do need the committee to stay around for a bit but we'll take a moment to recess to allow our guests to find their way out.

[2:45 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[2:50 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call us back to order. We have just perhaps a few more minutes of business. Under our committee business, I guess we know when the House is going to be sitting and our first discussion - as we always need to have at that point - is whether we will meet while the House is in session. Our most recent practice has been to meet in the mornings, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., instead of the afternoon. That has worked, but I guess I'd like to throw it out to see what your will is for this session of the House.

In fact we do have, I introduced it maybe that way, but we have some witnesses scheduled for April 5th who I assume, Kim, would be able to come in the morning?

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): Yes, I made them aware of that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, I am facing lots of nods so then what we will do is meet in the morning at 9:00 a.m. on April 5th and on that occasion, we have two sets of witnesses: one is Dress for Success, which we've agreed upon at some earlier date, and some representatives related to Family Resource Centres. I think we will have some people both from Community Services, which funds those organizations, as well as a representative from one of the resource centres directly. That is my understanding at this point.

I think it would also be useful for us to discuss selection of additional witnesses and I want to draw your attention, I guess, to three things. We have a list which Kim has provided us with, a three-coloured list which summarizes what we've done, what is scheduled and the black information is what has been on our list, but we have not yet turned our attention to.

Over the last few weeks, couple of weeks, two letters have been received. One from the Community Homes Action Group, which was sent by Wendy Lill and Brian Hennen asking to meet with us regarding group homes and wait lists for people with disabilities. I've also received a letter from Zach Churchill asking us to consider meeting with the Gambling Awareness Foundation of Nova Scotia. I must be honest, I'm not exactly sure at this moment what that group is. I don't know if anybody in this room can identify them, but they have asked to meet with us.

I guess if maybe we could start with that multiple list and with the items in black. Are there areas from that which have been before us for some time that you are interested in continuing to pursue?

MR. BURRILL: I do think that the food costing network, the food security project at Mount Saint Vincent is a unique Nova Scotia project and a very important initiative.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other thoughts about that?

MR. RAMEY: I, personally, am interested in that as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any objections to getting that in the mix for a future meeting? I'm assuming that's an item that would take a whole meeting, if we were to - we would probably need that much time to get our heads around what it is about.

MR. SMITH: I know in my area there are other people involved food security projects. I'm not sure about the Mount Saint Vincent University one, but there might be other groups that would be interested. If you're having one session on that issue, you might have other presenters other than just them.

MR. RAMEY: If I may, too, just to add a little bit of substance as to why I personally am interested in that is the recent events taking place in the Middle East, specifically now in Libya. We already have seen Tunisia and Egypt and there is some instability there, but we know when oil prices fluctuate or the world oil supply is interrupted, the cost of food instantly goes up because the people who move it around start putting surcharges on things.

It's my hunch that over the next number of years this is going to be a persistent and probably nagging problem that many jurisdictions in Western Europe and North America are going to have to deal with and that's why I think it is a timely subject to be looking at.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments? I'm seeing some nods. I guess at this point we're talking about getting it on the list not in terms of the order of when it would occur. Because this list was created some time ago, I guess I'd like to check it. For example, in the recent past we've had quite a few witnesses related to housing and affordable housing and public housing. We still have a task force on affordable housing on the list, but I'm checking to see whether that continues to be kind of a set of witnesses that we would like to pursue.

MR. BAIN: A lot of the discussion on affordable housing took place before I became a member of the committee. What I can do is check with our caucus to see whether or not the wish is still there and I can report back for the next meeting. They might be satisfied with what had already been done.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That does prompt me to say that for each of the caucuses it's probably useful to go back and think about whether there are other things we would like to begin generating toward. This list is beginning to get depleted, so new ideas would be welcome. Anything else from the list you wish to pursue at this point? I'm not hearing a lot of thoughts there.

MR. BAIN: I think if we look we have April looked after and if we're looking at food security, that's May and we would probably only have possibly one more before that anyway.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's right, maybe June and then that would be the summer.

MR. MACLELLAN: To be honest with you I don't know how this process really works. I'm just looking at the list and I don't know if I can prioritize them as they all seem pretty important, the ones that are remaining. I think food security is certainly a timely issue and for me, affordable housing is always sort of one that I like seeing on the radar screen. I can consult with the caucus as well, but for me I think they are two key, but I don't know sort of where we go from here. Where are we into then, the summer?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Typically we've recessed for the summer months and then would reconvene in September I would guess. It probably would be useful for us to plan at some point before we get there, our September meeting, so the witnesses could be lined up. Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: I had a question sort of on process. Do these latest requests go at the bottom of the list, is that how it works?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not necessarily. That is why I wanted to start with the pre-organized list because some of these things might either be pressing or less pressing because of how long it has been since they were generated. Certainly, the two letters signal an interest from these groups in meeting with us at this point, they have a freshness to them.

Any feedback about the letters? Is there an interest in meeting with both or either of these groups?

MS. REGAN: I would say in both cases they sound like groups that we would want to meet with and when you look at Wendy Lill and Dr. Brian Hennen's letter, over 650 individuals out of a population of approximately 5,000 are on waiting lists for services. I would say that attaches a fair amount of urgency to this situation, so I would encourage you to meet with them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Should we look at that for our June meeting, would that make sense? Okay. Maybe if we're on a roll, we've been asked by the Gambling Awareness Foundation to meet. Could we explore that for a possible September meeting? Would that be appropriate? Would it be reasonable because I'm not at all aware of what that is, if that looks like something that could go forward and there are maybe other witnesses related to gambling, gaming strategy that might be helpful, are you open to look? We can bring back ideas about that.

MR. MACLELLAN: Is this an addiction services type theme or an addiction type theme or what is it?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't know, that's why I'm not quite sure what this . . .

MR. SMITH: It almost looks like an AA for gambling.

[3:00 p.m.]

MR. RAMEY: I think that's what it is and we don't know for sure so we'll have to check it out.

MS. REGAN: I'll just Google it now to see. (Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think we've done that, but without success.

MR. BURRILL: I think we know with precision what the letter from Wendy Lill and the other person, what that subject is about and we don't have that same precision about the other proposal. Maybe the best thing for us to do would be to agree to move forward on the first and to look into with an eye to potentially looking forward to the second.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That sounds like a good idea. We'll bring that information, whatever we can learn back to the next meeting for discussion.

MS. REGAN: I've just sent an e-mail to Zach Churchill asking him to provide more information about the group to you as chairman, so that you can make a decision about that, okay?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you very much.

MR. BAIN: We just talked about going back to our caucuses and seeing if there are other items. Since we have April and May looked after can we not look after June and September at our next meeting? It provides an opportunity for everybody to go back to their caucus and discuss if there are any . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: So you're suggesting rather than schedule Wendy Lill and Brian Hennen, or whoever they would suggest for . . .

MR. BAIN: Basically what I'm saying, we have April and May looked after, we don't have to rush to book somebody for June right now, but we can in April.

MS. LANGILLE: I thought we approved two, but we haven't, then?

MR. SMITH: We had already said . . .

MS. LANGILLE: I thought we looked at Mount Saint Vincent's food pilot which would be May and then the Wendy Lill thing for June, so we would be looked for up until the break. Is that not . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's what I thought we had agreed, but . . .

MR. BAIN: Well, that's fine because those requests are actually here, so we should look at September.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, just so long as we're more or less on the same page.

MS. LANGILLE: And I guess just with regard to caucuses bringing lists, maybe what we could do is when we reconvene in the Fall, everybody will get their list together again and then we can go forward with a whole new selection and go from there? Does that make sense, since we're pretty well geared up to June?

MR. SMITH: We want to have something for September by the end of June.

MS. LANGILLE: Generally what happens in September is you have an organizational meeting and that's when the caucuses bring their lists in, they all get vetted and then we start selecting priorities, but that's fine . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think that's a good prompt, sort of corporate memory because it also creates the opportunity for us to give some reflection to the ideas that we're bringing and maybe to make a wiser prioritization because there are always more possibilities than we can satisfy. Good thinking.

I believe that brings us to the end of our agenda unless there are any other items. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:03 p.m.]