

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Tuesday, November 29, 2016**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Report of the Transition Task Force &  
Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

Mr. Chuck Porter (Chairman)

Ms. Joyce Treen

Mr. Gordon Wilson

Mr. Stephen Gough

Mr. David Wilton

Mr. Eddie Orrell

Ms. Karla MacFarlane

Ms. Marian Mancini

Ms. Lisa Roberts

[Mr. David Wilton was replaced by Mr. Ben Jessome]

In Attendance:

Ms. Judy Kavanagh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### **Department of Education and Early Childhood Development**

Ms. Sandra McKenzie - Deputy Minister

Ms. Sue Taylor-Foley - Director, Learning Resources and Technology Services

### **Department of Labour and Advanced Education**

Mr. Duff Montgomerie - Deputy Minister

Ms. Elizabeth Mills - Senior Executive Director



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2016**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Mr. Chuck Porter

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone and welcome to the Human Resources Committee this morning. We can get started by way of introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you and we'll come back for introductions to the witnesses. We've just got a quick bit of business to do by way of appointments to agencies, boards and commissions. (Interruptions) Well we've started it so I guess we're going to finish it. As chairman, I guess I'll make the call this morning, thank you very much though. For all the time it will take and we'll have it out of the way, we'll have some business to discuss though, following that.

Just before we get to that, anyone who has a cellphone, please put it on silent or off, I'd appreciate that. We'll start with the Department of Business, the Waterfront Development Corporation Limited, Board of Directors. Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Mr. Chairman, I move that David R. Chisholm, Jim Eisenhauer, T. Denise King, Kevin Stoddart, and Sarah Young be approved as directors of the Waterfront Development Corporation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, Heritage Property Advisory Council. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that Vera Nadine Boinn and Nevin McFarlane be approved as members of the Heritage Property Advisory Council.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Cape Breton Regional Library Board. Mr. Orrell.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Chairman, I move that Murdoch Moore be approved as a member of the Cape Breton Regional Library Board.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Finance and Treasury Board, Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation of Nova Scotia. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that Karen MacWilliam and Rod Munroe be approved as members of the Credit Union Deposit Insurance Corporation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The Liquor Corporation of Nova Scotia. Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: Mr. Chairman, I move that Elizabeth A. Cody and Paul Kent be approved as directors of the Liquor Corporation of Nova Scotia.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Service Nova Scotia, the Board of Registration of Embalmers and Funeral Directors. Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that Elizabeth Alguire be approved as a member of the Board of Registration of Embalmers and Funeral Directors.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is there any discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried. Thank you very much.

We will move to our witnesses for introductions.

[The committee witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much and welcome. I believe you have a presentation. I'm not sure who is doing it, but please carry on.

MS. SANDRA MCKENZIE: To start, we are providing an overview of the Transition Task Force and the report, From School to Success: Clearing the Path. That's what we were invited to discuss today. We're going to do a presentation on the approach, progress to date, and just share the next steps.

There was a survey undertaken and 19,000 Nova Scotians responded, and there were 117 actions to transform the public education system. One of those was to establish a Transition Task Force. During the course of the survey, what we heard is that people were concerned about children's transition to school, so the zero- to 4-year-olds; children's transition through school, making sure that they were successful; and then transition from school.

This particular report focuses on the transition from school. On the Transition Task Force, you can see the list of the participants: students, teachers, principals, universities, and the community college. There was representation from school boards and the apprenticeship board. There was representation from the African Nova Scotian community, the Mi'kmaq community, and business and industry leaders.

Duff, did you have anything you wanted to add to that?

MR. DUFF MONTGOMERIE: The only thing I would add is when Minister Regan and Minister Casey first met with the task force members and they talked about deadlines, the members looked at the ministers and said, we need to meet more. That was pretty encouraging, the enthusiasm from all the members of the committee. That was a really positive start.

MS. MCKENZIE: To Duff's point, we started off suggesting that we meet once a month, and we ended up meeting every two weeks for four hours because there were a lot of complex issues that needed to be discussed.

The task force was asked to examine five themes: career decision-making information; how children could get meaningful hands-on experience that would help to guide their career decisions into the future; how we could support transitions for youth with low marks or no high school diploma; post-secondary retention and completion rates; and how education, training, and apprenticeship programs matched labour market needs.

What was really helpful about the whole discussion was that it was not just the education system looking at how to build bridges, but there was also the receiving side, which talked about how we could make sure those bridges were successful. There were employers represented for children who want to transition straight to the world of work and then representatives from all the post-secondary options in order to make sure that they also knew what we needed to do to help children to be successful.

The result was the report, which contained 15 recommendations relating to theme areas and built-in accountability and evaluation. It was delivered to government in June 2016.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: The first issue - to the honourable members, we'll get into more detail in the second part when we're talking about how we're responding to these. But I think it's important to understand some of the background of why the members of the committee went where they did.

This was an easy one for all of us, the career decision-making information piece. Some of you may be aware that several years ago, we inherited from the federal government the Employment Nova Scotia offices. As a result of that, there was a period of time when over 50-plus of those offices sort of worked individually with groups that would run those offices, and we sort of lost touch with the quality and really focus of what those groups should be looking at.

What the task force reinforced with us and reminded us of is that young people and parents and others are finding it difficult to find an easy way to get good career information; plus, we're looking at a level of service out of those particular organizations that needed to be higher, more standard. We also realized that we needed within those centres an individual who could relate to the private sector, particularly in the community. That individual could then, on behalf of the office, make sure that they're integrating with private sector folks and getting to know their needs and so on.

Working with Sandra and her team and recognizing that guidance counsellors are under a full court press with social issues and others, we needed to find a better way to work with the school system in a collaborative way to move this kind of information on. One of the key scenarios that we've landed on is a major initiative that's under way for a

virtual site that we would hope would be state-of-the-art at the end of the day and would provide easy access for students, parents, employers, and others to get appropriate labour market information and also to understand where jobs are in Nova Scotia.

The last piece I would mention is with the apprenticeship agency now under way and being industry-led, it becomes more and more clear to us that the system does not respond well to providing information to parents and teachers about the trades positions that are available in this province. There are many well-paying jobs that if you get into apprenticeship, you will begin to see some positive things. As we go on, later we'll show you a little bit more how we're responding to make sure I didn't miss anything.

I think - and Sandra may want to add to the Create an Entrepreneurship Culture in Schools, Colleges and Universities - on the post-secondary side we have five innovation tables we've set up with the universities and the Nova Scotia Community College and with several government departments. One of those innovation tables is around entrepreneurship. The universities and others are working together as to how we generate with the private sector a sense of entrepreneurship and at the same time we're doubling back to Sandra and her team, and I'll shift over to Sandra to speak from her department's perspective on entrepreneurship.

MS. MCKENZIE: We have been taking a look at how we can improve opportunities for hands-on learning. You've seen the introduction of Brilliant Labs where kids have an opportunity to essentially manufacture the ideas that they have. We've done more work related to coding, work related to robotics. We've made sure that we're working on a co-op work experience and that's part of the follow-up that's in this.

One of the things that we did hear loud and clear at the table is that employers feel that it's successful if children come in and have a co-op experience and they decide this is exactly what I want to do or if they decide this is not at all what I want to do because it's giving them an opportunity to recalibrate and re-think through what their opportunities are for the future.

Duff and I have had a lot of discussions about where we can connect to Employment Nova Scotia. One of the most exciting pieces for us with that is to be able to get up-to-date career information that will be made available and we'll be talking a little bit later about embedding career planning with children from Grades 4 to 12, so that will come in a little bit.

One of the areas that was identified is the fact that one in four graduates are graduating with a mark below 70. That is limiting their opportunities for the future. They may not recognize that as they're progressing through school, so what are the ways that we can make sure that they can on-ramp back into opportunities into the future.

Obviously, our best efforts will make sure that we have children who are graduating with marks that are stronger than that. We are taking a hard look at improving math and literacy right from Primary through to Grade 12, but for children that got marks between 50 and 70 - I can speak to my own son from that perspective. I talked to him a lot about academic math as he was moving through. He told me I was wrong, in no uncertain terms, as he was progressing through and realized almost immediately when he came out, in terms of what his options were into the future, that probably he should have taken an academic math for the areas that he was interested in. You don't need to take it for every area, but for the areas that you're interested in.

There are on-ramps, but they're not known or some cost money and some of them are not articulated to where children necessarily want to go. It was identified through this conversation that this was an area that the Transition Task Force was quite interested in - in making sure that we developed a cohesive, accessible system that removed barriers to completing or upgrading your high school. There are a lot of opportunities for us to be able to do that into the future.

No one that has graduated or maybe moving through school, for instance, if you took Grade 9 math, you took Grade 10 math and you decided to take a Grade 11 math that was non-academic, if you decided after six months or a year, I actually should have moved into academic math, we want to make sure that those crosswalks exist inside the school system, but also back to the school system if you've graduated as well. We'll be talking a little bit more about that, but this was a particular area of focus for the task force.

There were some interesting - the task force asked us to think about or to do some research on a number of different areas. One was related to a gap year program - more and more children are taking a gap year or taking one or two or three gap years. They asked us to think about, would there be a possibility to take a gap year that could in some way be taken as a credit when you decided you wanted to move back into the post-secondary system. That's one of the pieces of research that we'll be looking at.

They also talked about transition year programs with transferable credits. One of the things we had quite a bit of discussion about was the success of the 2-plus-2 program through the community college, where you take two years at the community college and it's articulated to two years at the university level. Again, I'm going to use my kids as an example; they were much better in the first two years in a teaching environment than they would have been in a lecture-based environment and they were able to - well, the last one hasn't done it yet but the first one has - articulate over to finish the B.Com. or whatever the program is that happens to be articulated.

People were thinking about what the opportunities were here - Duff will be able to speak to this - and we noticed that there are retention differences in the province for universities, depending on where children are coming from originally. What the opportunities are for transition programming that starts kids in their communities and then transitions them to post-secondary education, maybe to increase their chances of success.



Those are some of the things we'll be taking a look at and also looking at specialized apprenticeship transition programming.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: The post-secondary retention and completion, you'll see some data there that's pretty reflective of national data. One of the scenarios of Nova Scotia is the complexity of the post-secondary world. We have 10 universities in a population of under one million, and a community college system with 13 campuses. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada where those presidents meet with government on a regular basis to talk about corporate approaches to the challenges that face the province, in particular this piece. Two of the university presidents were on the Transition Task Force and the two senior leaders from the community college were also on the Transition Task Force.

The ability for them to work together on a go-forward basis has resulted in five innovation tables: research and development; entrepreneurship; a technical table; a recruitment and retention table; and out of the R & D table recently, in the Throne Speech was announced the government's intention to do a coordinated research council.

Why do I tell you that? Because when you look at the data that's there, the thing we all have to remember - and when Sandra talks about her children I think of my children - when you're making a decision out of Grade 12, a lot of times there's no silver bullet. I mean I have two children, one wanted to be a physiotherapist and the other wanted to be a teacher - that happened. One of the other ones took honours in computer science at Acadia, graduated, and immediately became an actor. The other one took six years to get a degree from two universities, went to a private career college, and ended up working for a major IT firm: Oracle - out of Orlando, Florida.

When I run into parents - I was at the House a while ago when the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development brought in some young entrepreneurs to meet with Minister Casey and I was talking with these four students. I said, what are you going to do? One of them said, I'm going to go two years at community college and then I'm going to segue into two years at Dal and I'm going to do this. Two of the others said, I really don't know.

I reassure them as I say to parents, don't panic about that because part of your experience getting in, whether it's a trade, whether it's post-secondary, whether it's a community college - if it doesn't work out the first year, don't panic. It's part of trying to learn and evolve as a young person and determine what your future might be.

What I really enjoy about our presidents in the community college and working with Sandra and her team - and the private sector is a little more prescriptive. They go wait a minute, why can't you say this person is going to be a welder and make sure they're in a welding course at the community college or in apprenticeship and at the end of the day

they're going to be a welder. It's not that easy, it's a little more complex, but there are things we can do to kind of pre-look at people who are looking at those courses.

One of them is, build plans based on data. The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission is one of the best and most robust organizations in the country for providing us with data on a post-secondary world. They're able to track students in a reasonable way but we want to get better so we're looking at the Maritime Higher Education Commission in collaboration with the federal Government of Canada, through Stats Canada, doing a pilot project where you can begin to track students.

Hopefully at the end of the day we'll come out with a common tracking system, so if you look at 17 per cent that leave in their first year, well where did they go? Did they go back to a community college? Did they go into a trade? Are they unemployed? We need a more robust way of labour market information so that between Sandra's team and our team we can collaboratively and collectively get better at how we target on a go-forward basis.

The private sector folks, in particular, are really helpful to us about the structured orientation program, so a little bit more about identifying and supporting struggling youth early, including mental health supports. It's trying to figure out who are kids in the normal stream who are having difficulty either because of a social background or whatever and how we make sure that they don't fall through the cracks. That is a tough challenge.

The other thing I would indicate is the Association of Atlantic Universities did a major survey of 4,500 students in 15 universities and five colleges throughout Atlantic Canada, and 86 per cent of those graduates who were surveyed said they had a more-than-satisfactory experience in their post-secondary education. That's what we've got to build on, but what we've got to do better on is the other folks who aren't having that kind of experience and why.

The community college does a survey of its graduates each year. It's a very in-depth survey, it's public, and it's online. From 2009 to 2015 inclusive, the average of individuals graduating from community college who got a job was 86 per cent, and 94 per cent of those stayed in Nova Scotia. That just tells you that there's more positive things going on in a lot of ways than we think. It allows us to focus more on those young people who need additional help, particularly working with the private sector in understanding their needs and also helping them be educated on how they can help us - whether it's through co-op, whether it's through apprenticeship, or whether it's through internship - how they can begin to help our kids.

The other stat - and I'm sorry to throw stats at you, but it helps us try to figure it out. We know that of co-op students who get in a co-op in a private sector or a government situation, almost 60-plus per cent get jobs quicker and sooner than those who don't have that work experience. We also do a robust survey with the employers who use our co-op programs. Every employer, particularly the new ones that come in, said, wow, we had a

great experience, and we'll be back to hire a co-op student. We've been working hard with the chamber and others to promote with their members the value of hiring a student.

There are a lot of things that we're looking to do. I guess the other scenario - and our student services do amazing work now that our student loans are all computerized and so on - is to reach parents and youth with financial planning information sooner. We get into Sandra's schools and work with Sandra and her team to educate students and parents about the financial scenario - student loans, et cetera - and universities, community college, and apprenticeships work, and things that you need or can avail yourself of and so on.

Good information drives good decisions. Labour market information has become a priority of our Premier's and in fairness to the Government of Canada with the new government, it's become a priority with them as well. Recently, the provinces, territories, and federal government have come together to create a major labour market information entity out of Ottawa - I think it's Ottawa (Interruption) Yes.

They will feed down to us to make sure that we have the most robust labour market information out of Nova Scotia, and that we're able to use that to help young people and others identify where opportunities are. It also makes sure that we're interacting with employers to make sure that the data that we have matches up with what they're seeing on the front lines. We deal with the construction association and a myriad of private sector folks who have been amazing at providing us with feedback around that, and several of them are on the task force. We're really working hard to enhance those to ensure employers have an effective voice.

The last thing I would say on that slide is that the private sector is fundamental to all of this. The more we're able to work with the private sector and understand their needs, we're able to educate them that any time you can give a student or a young person an opportunity of some type of employment or opportunity within the company, the more it benefits both you and the individual. The more we're able to match that up.

I'll tell you one story. Two years ago, we met with Valerie Payn, then with the Halifax Chamber of Commerce, and we were taking Valerie through post-secondary. We were saying, these are some of the things that are going on in the post-secondary world, and Valerie with her wisdom said, Duff, dealing with university is like dealing with government sometimes - you've got to know which door to go through. It's not a simple entry point.

We worked with the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. They now have an award system for employers that use co-op students. If any of you have been to their dinner, in many cases they'll have a co-op student sitting at a table and introduce them. That dynamic of the private sector promoting those opportunities with their own members of how you can become involved in helping to grow our workforce has been really exceptional.

MS. MCKENZIE: This is really the final slide. Both of us have named our associate deputy ministers as leads working together to action the items that are in the Transition Task Force report. The task force requested that we come back in the Fall of 2017 and account for where we are in each of the items.

As a wrap-up, I just want to say that transitioning youth is actually a question mark for North America and Europe. No one actually has it right. McKinsey did a study that it's very rare to find a jurisdiction that has actually figured out transition. Much of that attention that's being paid to transition is because in the 1970s when I graduated, if 50 per cent of us made it through to the workforce, we covered off every part of the workforce needs, there were so many of us.

Now with the demographic that we have, we need all our children to be successful and that's why there is moral imperative that we get good at transition, but there is also a social and economic imperative that we become excellent at transition as well.

We will be moving forward with taking a look at each of the items. They really are - in some cases boil the ocean - we have to do a bit of focus work within each of them and the intention is to account back in the Fall of 2017.

I guess I just covered the next slide, so we're good. Oh, we still have major milestones. I thought we were done. We better speed through this then.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Nova Scotia Works - just very briefly to build on what I said to you earlier, what we had is \$23 million of federal money that we had the ability to reposition and redeploy to make this system more efficient and more effective. We are working from a system where we saw that 53 per cent was spent on administration.

Under the new organization - and I have to say that when the minister met with all those groups and organizations in Truro well over a year ago, she talked about the challenges they would have to go through and the tough decisions they would have to make as we try to reorganize this system and make it more efficient and effective.

We've met with those groups as we've gone through this process and I can't begin to tell you the admiration that the minister and I have for the leadership they have shown. They have had to make some tough decisions, but they've done it with the understanding that things are going to get better and they're going to be more focused, and that we're going to provide certification programs for their staff; we're going to put a virtual site in place. We have a centre of excellence now established through St. F.X. University where St. F.X. University will take a board of all of a cross-section of African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq, women, people with disabilities, and others to make sure we're held to a standard of excellence through those centres that make them robust.

You now have, in those repositionings, the 53 per cent of admin is now down to 27 per cent. What that means is there are more front-line trained people to work in those scenarios.

An interesting dynamic we ran into - a survey was done of folks that were looking for work opportunities and so on and 90 per cent of those people polled did not know about Careers Nova Scotia - did not know that was an office they could go to.

Are we turning this puppy around overnight? No, we're not, but we are making progress. I've seen the pride and been in some of the offices and some of the openings where the absolute pride of those staff in those offices is just beaming now that we're more coordinated, more integrated, and we have better opportunities to provide for people in our community.

That has been a real success story so far. I know the input from the task force really helped us hone our approach to that.

The virtual Nova Scotia Works scenario - I love busy slides - really what we're trying to do is end up with a site that is easily accessible and provides, in a plain English way, good information. Interestingly enough, we were in South Carolina meeting with Michelin on several issues and Michelin hooked us up with several state agencies and officials. In the State of South Carolina, they've developed a virtual site, they worked with the private sector and others and young people to develop it. It's incredibly detailed in the context that you can actually go in and go in, Kentville, for argument's sake, nursing, plumbers, et cetera, it has that detailed information. I don't want to raise expectations that's where we're going but the possibilities for us to do things a lot better.

We've now got an RFP out, I think, Elizabeth, where we're beginning focus groups because we really want to take time with young people and the private sector and as we move this through - the Government of Canada has been very helpful in this, I should let you know. They've provided some funding, recognizing what we did with the reorganization, so they've allowed us to use some funding to help us advance this to make for better career information and it ties into the national centre that's in Ottawa.

Graduate to Opportunity, here again is a program that is designed to encourage medium and small businesses to hire graduates. It's salary support, as you can see, for the first two years, and the province contributes 25 per cent the first year and 12.5 per cent the second year. The goal is that especially small businesses and others will be encouraged to hire that graduate and obviously retain that graduate once they are in.

Since the launch in 2015, we had 360 applications and 338 positions approved and 220-plus permanent, full-time jobs in Nova Scotia. Now this is one part of trying to make sure we have co-op programs, we have MITAC, we have Start, we have other programs

that feed young people into opportunities. This is the one program, it's a hard opportunity for an employer to hire a youngster full time.

Again, the work our team has done to reach out to all the private sector, all the boards of trade, every opportunity we've had - and the Chamber has done a wonderful job with their members, again. This is a program you should invest in so we're hoping we're going to provide better opportunities for young people to stay in Nova Scotia.

Removing the GED fee, that was in the Throne Speech. I think it costs around \$50,000 for us to do that but the benefits simply are to make it easier and simpler for folks to involve themselves in this opportunity. The key thing was remove the financial barrier and increase access. I think we're looking now to look in the new year to begin to do this. We want to make sure we do it right so when we open the program we want to make sure we've answered all the questions and prevented any unintended consequences or confusion we may cause people. Again, we're looking to improve outcomes and improve access to higher education.

I guess if you ever want to see some really positive stories just to see folks outside of the school system who've taken this and have graduated and have been successful and the pride they take in doing those and some of those folks are seniors, well into their 70s, if I remember correctly, who take the GED and so on. This is meant to make it easier for folks like that. Sandra, I think this one is yours.

MS. MCKENZIE: I have two slides left. As I mentioned earlier, we're introducing a career education framework for children, starting in Grade 4 and moving through to Grade 12 because we need to start early. I think it's really interesting that overall, in terms of a growth sector in Nova Scotia, oceans is emerging, in terms of tidal and acoustics and new ways of fishing, nutraceuticals, you name it, the ocean holds a lot of interest.

Dr. Sherry Scully from Dalhousie came and did a survey with our youngest, junior high and probably Grade 6 as well - Grades 6, 7, and 8 - and they had already ruled out oceans, for the most part, as a future area for their employment interests. It was a fascinating insight into what they may be hearing at home, whether or not parents know what the opportunities are in oceans into the future but when they were presented with that, there was a predominance of kids who said no, oceans will not be the area that I'll be looking to for opportunities. It's important that we start early, before some of those biases are developed, and that's why we started with the Grade 4 students.

As you know, we also have a real emphasis on math and coding. We are very focused in the public education system in making sure that children are strong in math. There has been investment made by this government in math mentors for teachers, math interventionists for small group work, more professional development related to math. What we do know is that by Grade 10, only 59 per cent of our high school students currently are in academic math, yet we know that academic math is tied to almost every growth

sector opportunity into the future. Having more kids be successful in academic math or feeling competent in math is key.

This is like a whole cultural experience. We tend to be math phobic; in Nova Scotia, people will say, I didn't like math so I'm not going to make them take math. But we wouldn't substitute reading into that sentence. It's about talking more positively about math by giving kids more positive experiences with math.

One of the things we have introduced is coding. Coding is very linked to math, it's about logic thinking. This isn't just about teaching kids a specific program; it's about learning how to think in a systematic way. Early coding is as simple as saying to someone, write out all the steps to tying your shoelaces, now give those steps to another child and see if they successfully tie their shoelaces. It's about making it very systematic in terms of how you're thinking, and that actually lends itself to math. It lends itself to success in a variety of different areas that are opportunities into the future. That's some of the things we've been paying a lot of attention to in the public school system. We've actually begun to see some growth in math achievement this year - percentage points, but still the trajectory is going in a positive way.

In addition, one of the things we've noted is - Stan Kutcher came in and spoke to the Transition Task Force about the importance of addressing mental health. What was very interesting is that Stan speaks about "anxiety" as becoming a word that is used commonly to refer to - don't do that, I have anxiety. There is a percentage of kids who have serious anxiety issues and of course we want to be able to deal with those through mental health training. We've also caused anxiety in our kids by telling them that if they don't know what they want to do by Grade 12, then somehow they're toast.

Most people in this room didn't know what they were going to do today when they were in Grade 12. Our focus needs to be on graduating well-prepared, resilient, and hopeful children. That is a big part of what we're doing with SchoolsPlus, the partnerships that are formed through SchoolsPlus, the supports for children to be successful in school. This government has been rolling out SchoolsPlus across all the boards present in all the counties now, with an intention to complete with every family of schools over the next few years.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much. A lengthy presentation but a lot of good information in there. I'm sure we'll have some good questions as well. We'll start questions with Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you very much for the presentation, certainly an awful lot of information. In saying that I guess maybe really right off the bat - I'm sure some of the other members might want to also offer their comments, but thanks to the transition task force you sometimes don't realize all the work that does go on behind the

scenes actively to move these things forward. More in particular, also I know there were a lot of bureaucrats who sat on that but also people from the apprenticeship board, the African Nova Scotia and Mi'kmaq communities, and business and industry leaders that came forward and how important that is. I personally would like to pass on our thanks. Sometimes these committees happen and end, and nobody really thanks them.

I guess I was in the middle with Nova Scotia Works, to spin it into that one. In my community, we were one of three areas that agreed to disagree, I guess is the best way to put it, as a group and we watched and communicated with those groups as they went through the transition there with the career resource centres. It was an interesting transition - I know with the others, it was certainly a little bit smoother. I'm curious about coming out the other end, the differences that we might see in those three that had to put maybe a little bit more into it versus the ones that just smoothly moved into it. Are you seeing any differences? I know it's early on, but it's something I would be very curious about.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: This was not easy. The team that led this, led by Elizabeth - particularly Vicky and Amy and others, our senior staff who interacted with organizations like yours - worked really hard on respect, to really be good listeners and try to understand. Minister Regan had a line that we don't need to achieve perfection, but we need to change how we do things.

There were a lot of difficult discussions, to your point. But at the end of it, what totally impressed us was that even those groups that had to give or go on in a different direction would speak to me or the minister about how much they valued Vicky and Amy and the way that staff interacted with them. They didn't feel it was government coming down with the hammer and saying, you must do this. They knew we had to get to a place, but we wanted to work with them.

There were compromises made in some instances, but actually, we learned from it too, because we're good listeners. People who live in their community know their community, so how can we make sure that we work with them to end up with a team approach so that when we leave your area, for example, they are working together, they are focused, they feel they're valued, and they feel that we are listening.

The last comment I'll make is that we had a couple of universities vie for the opportunity to host the Centre of Excellence, and St. F.X. was successful. I can't tell you how excited they are about that, but how excited we are. Through that neutral organization with St. F.X. and a board that will be composed of representatives from the various groups, that will be our litmus test to make sure they're holding our feet to the fire.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just for the committee, I will allow one question and one supplementary, just because I have a number of speakers, to keep it going. We'll come back as often as we can to those who wish to ask questions. Supplementary, Mr. Wilson.



MR. GORDON WILSON: I know initially a lot of work went into the reason why we did this, certainly way too much time on administration, 53 per cent and the move to go to 27 per cent. I'm going to assume that the 27 per cent is on the table right now because of the submissions that we received, and that's the information that we're going by, that we're at that target right now simply because proposals have been brought forward with that kind of a business model. My concern is that we transitioned into what we had over many years. If we don't learn from our mistakes, we'll transition into that again. What is going to be done to ensure that we try to keep that 27 per cent over successive years down the road as things change, government changes, and priorities change?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Again, we take responsibility for allowing the situation to evolve the way it did. By us not paying probably as close attention to this as we should have, community groups were forced on their own to make - we needed to help apply policy direction, if you will. On a go-forward basis, we'll be meeting with those organizations on a regular basis to make sure they share with each other what they're hearing, seeing, and feeling, and also that they're sharing with us. At the same time, to your point, we're monitoring and making sure we're not taking our eye off the original ball, which was a much more effective and efficient service for all Nova Scotians out of those scenarios.

I do want to emphasize that this is not us looking at community groups and saying, you messed up. This is us looking at community groups and saying, we all messed up here, and we need to make this better. Again, to get to the 27 per cent, they had to make some tough decisions within their own organizations. I would like to applaud them for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you very much for your presentation. There is absolutely a lot of work that has gone into this. Last week was parent-teacher and I had the opportunity - I have two high schools in Pictou West; Pictou Academy and Northumberland so I have over 300 Grade 12 students between the two schools. I had an opportunity to go to parent-teacher, but also to meet some Grade 12 students.

They're very stressed and concerned, as I know you are aware, but are there provisions being put in place or discussed, if there is a strike what they will do? They're concerned - some of them have already spent \$300 or \$400 applying to different universities for early pre-admissions. They were asking me questions like, will we get our money back; what will actually happen? Do you have a plan? What is the message that we can bring back to them?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I wear two hats here. One is deputy minister of labour services where we have a responsibility - and the minister has a responsibility - for working through labour disputes in the province. The other hat I wear is post-secondary education.

I'll speak to the post-secondary education piece. We will work collaboratively with our colleagues in education as this labour dispute evolves to make sure that our universities and community colleges are aware of the nuances in that and working with the Primary to Grade 12 situation, working within the guidelines of a labour dispute - how do we make sure young people, parents, and others have the best information they can?

MS. MCKENZIE: We found out yesterday what form the job action was going to take and we actually don't have all the details on that yet because the union is taking their membership through strike schools right now to explain exactly what the form of that job action will be and that will be shared with us after it's through.

It is my understanding though that the teachers will still be in classrooms and children will continue to be educated. At this particular point in time it's extracurricular that has been identified as the areas that they will no longer be providing those supports, but what is within the TPA and what will be happening in classrooms will continue.

MS. MACFARLANE: Just my follow-up with that - there were a couple of students that are very athletic and were hoping to apply for scholarships. If there are no coaches, if there are no more sports teams, what do we say to these individuals? Is there going to be something that they can fall back on when they were pretty well guaranteed to apply for these scholarships, but now because there is no more hockey team or football team or whatever, has there been any consideration given to those individuals that are exceptional and would be looked at to be recruited and receive scholarships?

MS. MCKENZIE: Like I said, we found out what the form of the job action was going to be yesterday. We have been doing contingency planning as we've been trying to contingency plan for all contingencies. As Minister Casey said on the air last night, it's unfortunate that we're in the situation that we're in. The education of children will continue and at this point in time there is a suspension of the teams and we're hoping that we can get back to the table.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: It's interesting to listen to the very first part of it. We're talking about transitioning from school, through school, into school, into private life. You talked about inheriting programs from the federal government with labour markets and so on and so forth.

I've had a bunch of people in my office that have applied for programming and they were maybe three months short of the two-to-three-year - it went from three to two, it started as one from the feds, went up to three, and now it's back to two. These are kids that finish high school, maybe have had a couple of months of whatever training and now they're two or three months short of getting funding for programming. Has that been looked at? Can we change it back to the year or whatever it was?

When some kids come out of school and find out that university is not their thing, they go to Nova Scotia Community College but they're unable to get funding; they're not out of school long enough because of the time frame. Now we're going to help people get their GED free but then we're going to make them wait a year or two or whatever, since they came out of school. Is there something put in place to allow that to happen - even if it's a special circumstance because if we want to transform them, that's the way we can do it. Is there something being looked at?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I would sort of give you a high-level answer and then ask Elizabeth to sort of get into the weeds a little bit with you. The federal government is unemployment-centric, is the only way I can describe it. A lot of the monies and so on are targeted in that area. As we're evolving with the Government of Canada around opportunities to get more people in the workforce, we're beginning to see more flexibility, I think. We're in the middle of negotiating the LMMA - the labour market agreement with the other provinces and territories. My associate deputy leads that negotiating and we are seeing from the federal government more flexibility.

I mentioned the virtual site that we are able to get some funding for. I think, if I can, to the honourable member, I'll ask Elizabeth to try to answer hopefully your more detailed question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Mills.

MS. ELIZABETH MILLS: I'm going to answer it in two parts. With regard to young people who graduate from high school and then go on to post-secondary, some of those individuals may not meet all the requirements of the post-secondary institution. For example, Sandra talked about the fact that they are graduating with a grade 70 mark. You are right in that those individuals then have to go on and maybe get some additional training, complete that and then go on to post-secondary and that is not free.

In the Transition Task Force report it recommends that we do a cost-benefit analysis of how many students are actually having to do that make-up work, what the costs are and what the costs would be if it were free to them. That's one part of the question.

With regard to the federal funding, there have been some recent changes; we've just signed an amendment to our Canada Job Fund Agreement and to our Labour Market Development Agreement. Part of that includes two things; one is that we've expanded the reach-back so that individuals who have been on EI, it used to be up to three years, now we can go back up to five years, can access some of our labour market development programming. As well, we're looking at reducing the amount of time they've had to be in the workforce - the new entrants we call it - to access some of the programming.

You're quite right, the Labour Market Development Agreement has a lot of federal rules, as Duff was saying, and the funding is, by and large, for individuals who are EI eligible. Those two areas - reach-back and new entrants - I think will help the situation you are describing.

MR. ORRELL: We talked in Theme 4 of your post-secondary retention and completion, we just had a bill introduced in the Legislature that a person who attains their degree in four years gets their student loan eliminated - the provincial portion. Your percentages of 39 per cent completed in four years, 58 per cent completed in five years, so we've put a four-year barrier in place for people and our theme is to try to eliminate those barriers.

I guess I don't understand why the four-year would have been put in place if we're trying to encourage children to get their degree, why is there a barrier in place?

The other thing is, if we're going to look at our labour market and whatever as the transition part of it, why don't we start that in school, in high school, where a kid, if you want to live this type of lifestyle, here's the money you have to make, here's the bills you have to pay, here's the careers you're going to like or don't like. We don't do that now. Our guidance counsellors in school are concentrating now more on issues instead of where a child wants to go in life.

When I went to school, if you had an interest in health care, here were the things you could do and you liked it or didn't like it and you chose it and you researched it. That doesn't happen anymore. Our labour market out there, when the shipbuilding contract came in, we went to welding. Every school got a welding program and now we've got an abundance of welders and where are they? They're gone, so there's no one thinking ahead of that and knowing what they want to get achieved because they may want a \$300,000 home and an \$80,000 car, but they're not going to get that working at McDonalds. They have to have a job that can feed that.

The other thing with that - the elephant in the room is this looming teachers' strike. They're going to work to rule now but if that changes, how is that going to affect the development of these kids now from transferring over and above? Are provisions going to be put in place so that universities, student loans, the whole works will be set longer or given extensions so that's the one barrier we can take down?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I'm going to try to touch on all your questions. Let's go to welding, a prime example of working together with Irving, with the community college, with apprenticeship. I will tell you it was very strategic on how we've worked on training welders, very strategic. One of the great programs we put in place was training 10 women to be welders in the Irving scenario and one of the most emotional graduations that I know I've attended and the minister and others have attended - as a matter of fact, the chairman of Irving was pretty caught up to see those 10 women - sorry, 20 women who will now go into the workforce.

To your point about good information for kids and parents, I totally agree. That's where we're focused in the Transition Task Force, to get a lot better at that. When I taught school, guidance counsellors were just beginning in the social world of other issues but even then it was an academic bias, they were basically talking about university. We know we've got to get better and totally agree with you on that point.

Did I miss any of the questions? Oh, my team is telling me that if you take five years, you still get loan forgiveness for the four years. I also will tell you, and keep in mind that the limited financial package that sometimes we have to work with, the minister is always challenging us to look at ways, as we get better data, can we change and look at better ways to do the administration of that? We're continually trying to keep an eye on that and with our ability to free up funding.

The last comment I'll make on that - we meet with the students on a regular basis. Overall, the student leaders of all the universities and the community college are incredibly understanding. Obviously, their mantra will be free tuition but they mostly are totally understanding that they just want to make sure that the process for getting assistance is simple and it helps them on a financial basis. That's why we think that forgiving the Nova Scotia debt is incredible - plus we give them over \$1,200 as a start-up bursary when they go in the system.

I should add in the sport scenario of going to post-secondary and making sure that people recognize even though - I was director of high school sport for a number of years and my daughter is a varsity women's coach at Dal. I know my daughter knows the best soccer players in Nova Scotia right now, so I think there's a real understanding of the potential for good athletes who are trying to get into a university. I think a lot of them know those kids anyway, if that gives you any comfort.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie, did you want to add to that?

MS. MCKENZIE: Can we get better at making sure that kids know what all the opportunities are? Absolutely, but I do want to tell you just a couple of things that we are doing. We have a program called Parents as Career Coaches. It was noted by the Transition Task Force as something that was extremely well done because it helped parents to be able to have those conversations with their kids. Sometimes parents make a decision for their children in terms of what they're going to pursue based on their own interests, but it's not the kids' interest, so we do see some conflict happening through that.

Parents as Career Coaches is to give parents good information that's designed to help them have good conversations with their kids and to continue that from Grade 9 through to Grade 12.

We also teach financial management, but every Grade 9 student gets Dollars and Sense through JA - Junior Achievement - in all the schools in the province. It was identified by the Transition Task Force that we needed to start earlier and needed to communicate to parents what the options were for funding post-secondary education.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Mancini.

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: Thank you very much for the presentation and for the report. I think it was a huge task to undertake and I congratulate you for it. Education to employment - when you think of the three players in it, the educators are the teachers, the universities, and the community colleges; then we have the students with all their differing needs; then the employers have all their needs as well - it's a huge thing to try to converge it together.

One of the things too - it's almost paradoxical in a way because you're talking about young people within the school system, and in your Recommendation 2 you talk about a lot of things that you would like to implement into the school system. It's to try to incorporate more of an entrepreneurial aspect and career education into the school curriculum. At the same time, kids don't know what they want to do, so you can expose them to all of that and then - not interested. That's just normal human behavior.

My first question to you was about the talk about the embedding of the entrepreneurial and the career education into the school curriculum, and you specifically talk about embedding foundational skills into the curriculum and it talks about responsibility, work ethic, respect, etiquette - I'm kind of hoping some of those are in there now.

If you are looking at revamping that, I don't know if we're still in "back to basics" or not, or whatever our latest thing is now, what would we be replacing? I mean, we can't do everything.

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm going to ask Sue Taylor-Foley to speak to some of this, but what I can say is that we will be working on introducing a student portfolio from Grade 4 to Grade 12 with the high school students graduating with a portfolio that's really talking about what their skills and interests are in - particularly that they've done exploration, that they're able to articulate what their skills and interests are and those types of things.

With the Transition Task Force, it was very interesting. The business people that were on the task force wanted children to know basic things like how you shake a hand, how you do an interview, do you know to take your earbuds out when you're in an interview, what does customer service look like - those types of things.

One of the commitments in the modernization of education was to take a look at what does citizenship look like - what does it look like in the voluntary world, what does it look like to be a citizen in Nova Scotia and in the global context, but also how you take

the skills that you have and also be able to articulate those to a potential future employer, post-secondary education, but also how we can set you up for success.

Citizenship 9 will be piloted next year. We've taken Social Studies at the Grade 9 level and we've revisited it. It has been some time since we have revisited the curriculum and the Grade 9 Social Studies. Sue can speak to the teachers that are coming in and leading that process. The idea is there were some things that we're able to move out; there were some things that were duplicated and we're able to introduce the elements here that were identified that should be taught in school.

What was recognized by the Transition Task Force is many of those things are going to be learned when you go out and do a co-op, a work experience, when you learn how to translate your summer job or Building Futures into being able to translate that into your resumé or what you may want to pursue for future study. That's where Parents as Career Coaches comes in and that type of thing.

The idea with many of these pieces is that some of it happens in the classroom, some of it happens outside of the classroom and that we are culturally, really as a community, looking at - how can we successfully help our children to transition so they can be successful? It's going to take all of us. Some of the things happen in the classroom, but it's going to be outside of the classroom as well.

MS. SUE TAYLOR-FOLEY: The career education framework itself that we're developing - it helps to focus basically what will happen in the curriculum from Grades 4 to 12 and where the natural places are to integrate some of those aspects.

If we were to look at science programs, for example - if a student has an aptitude and interest in that particular area, they should be able to also make the connections as to what types of careers are available for them in those areas. It's also embedding where it's a natural fit for things. It's not an add-on to something or the removal of something else. It's making those natural fits to where things go.

When we look at the Grades 4 to 6 curriculum, because that's the one that was most recently renewed, the outcomes in Grades 4 to 6 were reduced by approximately two-thirds to reduce duplication, to modernize, to update, and to focus on some of the more essential aspects. Also, at the same time, we were able to add some outcomes to the curriculum that would bring it into a more modern era, and some of those were related to career education.

In Grades 4 to 6, there were three outcomes that were added that specifically looked at how students would begin to look at themselves in a larger context. What types of interests do I have? What types of things am I curious about? What kind of problems do I want to solve as an individual? That helps people shape what they're interested in, where they may want to focus and look at.

A specific outcome in Grade 4, for example, is that students will explore their skills and interests in relation to potential life goals, reflect on their likes and dislikes, investigate personal learning styles and preferences, and reflect on their understanding of self. For that, they'll be looking at inventories, reflections, artifacts, and learning experiences that would build on that. That's the kind of activity that would occur at that young grade level to plant that seed, I guess, that will then grow as we look at the career framework across the grades.

As the deputy mentioned, it's not just an aspect of what happens in school but also the kind of connections we can make outside of school too - co-op programs and other experiences that students can have. Yesterday, I had the incredible opportunity to go to the Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council facility in Ragged Lake. Apprenticeship supports that and funds that, but our students in the public system benefit from that because at least two times a week students go to this facility. In a warehouse, they've simulated all the trades. In a hands-on way, students get an opportunity to have hands-on experience, even at the junior high level - yesterday, one of our Discovering Opportunities 9 classes was there. In fact, I even laid some brick yesterday.

I realized that may not be my aptitude, but there were some students there who were really thrilled by an opportunity to have that kind of experience and to see for themselves. That then leads away and opens the door to the other kinds of experiences. When they then go to high school next year and can take a co-op course, their teacher may well connect them with those types of skills and other types of skills as well that they might be interested in. It's a larger perspective on things when we look at a career framework.

MS. MANCINI: Regardless of where it's from, there will be changes, and I think the recommendation points out that there will be implementation into the school curriculum. Whatever way that happens, teachers are going to be the front-line people in it, and I would say even with that branching out, the hub of that activity is going to be in the classroom.

There's a couple of things that concern me a little bit. Number one, it seemed like there was only one teacher on the task force. It seemed to me that, given the huge role that teachers will be playing, I would be more comfortable knowing that there were more teachers directly involved, but you can probably address that. The other thing, too, is, in the current climate that we're in with the labour unrest by the teachers, they've been pretty clear that they're feeling overwhelmed by changes that have been made without them being appropriately consulted. I'm wondering if this is feeding into that.

I'm wondering what steps we can take. We've got classes that are over 40 students, and even in P-6, which are capped, there are many split classes there. There's a lot of issues that the teachers are ready to take job action on. If we add this into the mix, a particular concern is the fact that it doesn't appear that there was ample representation on the task force. I'm just wondering if you could comment on that.



MS. MCKENZIE: There was a classroom teacher represented on the task force, a principal, and two superintendents. The idea has always been that as we move out to implement any of these, we would be involving classroom teachers in that activity and we're just starting with the implementation now. The idea was to get a variety of perspectives, to include the public school system but also to include the community college, to include universities, and to also include employers in that opportunity to take a look at how we can support transition. Public school was one of the partners at the table and not the only partner that was at the table.

I guess the other comment I would have is there was feedback in the P-6 that we were perhaps moving too quickly as things were rolled out. Of course, we've stayed in touch with the teachers who did the streamlining of the curriculum, the reduction in the outcomes, and I think that their feedback to us has been that we need to continue with the professional development related to that and that we need to perhaps slow down a little bit, the P-6. The work was done by teachers with respect to streamlining the curriculum but they've been quite clear with us that we could have taken more time and more effort with respect to the professional development.

Your point with respect to, is this going to be another - I guess how teachers feel about these pieces - the outcomes that we've identified with Careers are already in the curriculum. This is giving teachers resources to be able to support the delivery of those outcomes. This is not another change to the curriculum. These are things that have already been embedded when the teachers were in, they embedded career objectives at Grades 4, 5, and 6 into the curriculum.

With respect to the class sizes beyond Grades 7 to 12, as Minister Casey has noted several times, we've been moving through P-6 with respect to class caps. We haven't gotten to Grades 7-12 yet. It's a big endeavour and I know that's on the horizon. The objective is to ensure that we have the supports available to teachers and for students, to make sure they're well prepared as they move through the public school system.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: Thank you for your presentation. It's really exciting to hear about this happening because I can remember back quite a while ago trying to figure this out myself and not knowing where to go and what you want to take, where your interests lie.

I remember there was a little test we used and it would come back with like five career choices that you should be, some kind of little test you took. This is really great, I think this is really something the students need and the parents need because they care where their kids are going to go and how to get them there, so it's great.

I would like to go back and maybe have you guys expand on the co-op program that's offered through high school. When I used to be a business owner, I used to bring these students into my business and I had them there, I think, for 100 hours or something. I would have them there and I'd have to fill out a review or whatever. I thought it was a really good program, but maybe you guys can expand on it.

MS. MCKENZIE: Not only is co-op important in the public school system, it's super-important at the post-secondary as well. Duff may want to speak to that a little more; he has already alluded to it.

We do know that if students are able to get co-op experiences here in Nova Scotia, they are more likely to stay in Nova Scotia. That's one of the reasons it's so important for them to get those experiences, but Sue Taylor-Foley is going to speak to our co-op program in high school.

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: All high schools in our province are able to offer the co-op program and co-op courses to their students. Last year, in the 2015-16 school year, there were 3,437 students who actually took co-op courses. That's about 11.7 per cent of our high school students who are involved, and that's during the school year.

We also have summer programs as well, and Deputy McKenzie spoke briefly about that in her presentation. We had well over 100 students last summer take summer co-op, and for that they're also granted a co-op course credit for high school. We have partnerships with Building Futures for Youth, TestDrive, and last summer Serve it Up! was also added new into the mix of things that students could be involved with - that's a culinary program - and we certainly hope that one will continue to grow and expand. It's not just during the school year that students are involved with this, but they're also involved with this all throughout the school year too.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: So very briefly, I mentioned the five innovation tables - one of them is experiential learning. Again, you've got the universities, the community college key departments, and we're already focused on how we grow those experiences.

Each university and community college has a co-op department, if you will. These are folks that work within their community to maximize opportunities for young people to get an opportunity in the workforce. That survey I referenced earlier that was just done last year with the Association of Atlantic Universities, the graduate students that were interviewed, I think something like 68 per cent had a co-op opportunity. If you go back to the original national data that says when you have that kind of opportunity, your chances of getting in the job field happen quicker, happen for a better job. Our goal is to grow that 68 per cent figure to a bigger figure, so that's what the table focused on experiential learning is trying to do.

MS. TREEN: You mentioned that the summer program counts as a credit towards high school. The 100-hour program in high school, does that get any recognition? Also in university when they're off on co-op, is there a credit associated with that as well?

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: Yes, there is a credit associated. It's 110 hours. They also have a classroom component of that that teaches them about resumé writing and interview skills, because all the co-op students do have to go out on an interview with a potential employer to also see that it's a good fit, but also to give experience and practice for those types of skills. They have to present a resumé. They need to understand what it's like to be in a workplace. There is a whole host of classroom components that students go through first, prior to going to a placement.

I know we actually have co-op students at our office right now and those co-op students have a job description. They have specific tasks that they do. They understand and they learn responsibility that takes place within the workplace, and generally speaking, they get a wide range of experiences at those workplaces.

While we may be focused on some of the skilled trades aspect for some of these, certainly the placements that our co-op students are doing are quite wide and varied and even include health placements, as well, for those who are interested in medical professions. They are quite extensive types of experiences that they have, and yes, a credit is granted for that.

MS. TREEN: When they're in university and doing their co-op as well, do they receive credit for that work experience?

MS. MILLS: Students in post-secondary are actually enrolled in a co-op program so it involves their academic study and their experiential learning - so the full program itself, they have to be enrolled in that.

Most universities do have co-op programs. We in LAE provide incentives - we have an incentive program for hiring co-op students, but many employers hire them 100 per cent themselves. So just to answer your question, it's already embedded in the program that they take.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts - we should introduce you and welcome you to the committee. I think you came in just after our introductions.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Thank you for the presentation and thank you both for being so human in your recognition that figuring out what you want to do with your life is not a straightforward path and so in some ways you're trying to put a framework around what is in the end a very individual and complex process for almost anyone.

I did want to reflect on some of the comments that were made around anxiety. I had the luck to work with first-year university students for a number of years and can certainly witness that anxiety. It does seem to me that there is a relation between that anxiety and what is perceived as a very high cost of failure because an investment in university education is simply so high, and while the student loan forgiveness program is great if in the end you figure out that you're in the right spot, for some students I think it can - what if you're not in the right spot after a year and you've accumulated that debt, or after two years?

We had some stats from public opinion polling done by the Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education Coalition in 2014 which found that one in three Nova Scotians surveyed said that in the past year they or someone in their family did not attend college or university because it would mean taking on too much debt.

I'm just wondering, given the policy direction taken by Ontario and New Brunswick to make post-secondary education more accessible by investing at the front end instead of having loan forgiveness following completion of a degree, I'm wondering if there's any thought that Nova Scotia universities could become less competitive or simply that investing with up-front funding - even for the first year of a university program, for example - could be a better way to both redressing student anxiety and helping more students to connect with what their path is. Sometimes failure is actually a necessary step on the way to success, and also address concerns around equity and access and student poverty.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: The challenge - to put a human face on it - is, how do we best maximize our opportunities for all our students with the resources we have. Part of that dynamic is, we also believe that incenting students to graduate is huge. We walk the fine line between making sure those who are in need can get the help they can but at the same time, I think we structure our loan program in an incredibly positive way for our students. They get \$1,283 up front as a bursary, 40 per cent of upfront grant is \$9,792, and \$14,688, 60 per cent loan qualifies for forgiveness, \$30,000.

Provinces approach it in different ways. The other scenario people forget is the universities and the community college have a very robust way in their own way to help students who are in need. They have their own budgetary areas where they focus on young people who need assistance. If you look at the community college recently just over a year ago, Ron Joyce committed several million dollars specifically aimed at helping those young people who need help to get through, and that's the way it should work: the private sector and government and the post-secondary world working together. We firmly believe in the incentive of incenting young people to go through the process.

I also take your point, because I've gone through it with my own family to a certain extent, of how decisions change, people go a different way, young people end up going in a different direction. I feel Nova Scotia actually has a very robust student assistance platform.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts, do you have another question?

MS. ROBERTS: I wanted to ask about the IPP program. Ms. McKenzie, in your comments you made a number of comments about on-ramps so that students who leave high school early can maybe get back in. I'm hearing a lot of concerns from parents and community members about students in our current public education system who cannot on-ramp into non-IPP courses from an IPP and, therefore, the high school education they receive doesn't actually reflect the preparation they might need to go on to any kind of post-secondary.

I wanted to ask about that and about where the resources are to enable students to find success while they're still in the P-12 system, so they can transition to a non-IPP, if that is being widely recognized as being insufficient preparation for many post-secondary opportunities.

MS. MCKENZIE: Thank you for that question. Just for clarification, the IPP is not a program, it's a series of supports that a student may need to be successful.

About 18 months ago Minister Casey asked us to do a review of individual program plans because she was concerned - reflecting many of the comments that you made - the number of students that were on them and whether they were making progress on them and with the objective is if you came on in Grade 3, is there an expectation that you would still be there in Grade 12?

The other piece of work that we have also been doing is looking at the EDI, which is our early development indicator, and what the correlation is between arriving at school with one or more vulnerabilities and your chances that you'll end up on an IPP in Grade 3. We're doing that research as well because we want to understand how much of that we can affect by strong early childhood programming and supports for families as well.

Your question of course is - well you had a multi-part question - in terms of moving through school with an IPP. In some cases, students with profound developmental delays will be on an IPP as they travel through school. In other cases, they may have been put on an IPP - it could be a behavioural issue, it could be a specific subject. The objective that we have taken under the IPP review is to say, how can we track the progress, how can there be accountability with respect to how children are moving through the school system and how can we support children ultimately when they can move off the individual program plans?

There will be some children that will graduate with an IPP and that has been an area that was identified in the Transition Task Force in terms of what the options are for those kids and a particular focus on the Nova Scotia Community College and what the opportunity was there.

Not all children that are on IPPs may be able to do some of the programs that are at the Nova Scotia Community College, but that's when we started having the conversation about transition years. We also have transition programs called Achieve, which children can move into and then be connected to the world of work. There are a number - because not all IPPs are the same. There is actually quite a dramatic range in individual program plans, so there needs to be a spectrum of responses in terms of helping kids transition. The recommendations here are trying to capture all of those. In addition, we've done our own review to make sure that children are not just placed on IPPs and then travel through the school system with them, but that there is a genuine effort made to move children off individual program plans when we can.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: I appreciate your comments around the benefits of the co-op program and the opportunity for us to retain more youth with respect to finding them co-op opportunities here and how that translates into staying in Nova Scotia, also the mutual benefits that take place for the employer in regard to having additional work being done, and as well the important experience that comes through that experience for the student or for the co-op.

I'm wondering if you can - you've referenced here a couple of different numbers with respect to the number of high school students that participate in the program - more than 3,000 students that are active and a similar number of employers that are enabling those opportunities. I'm sure that translates into perhaps slightly different numbers for university co-ops.

I'm wondering if you can comment on the availability of co-op opportunities throughout the province and how that complements the requests or the willingness to participate in the co-op program from students.

MS. MCKENZIE: We spent quite a bit of time talking about co-ops and work experience at the Transition Task Force table. There has been a lot of additional work that has gone on related to that as well. The objective with the co-op also translated into one of the main recommendations that came out of the Transition Task Force, which was we were going to establish a Business-Education Council and the Transition Task Force made a lot of recommendations that these are the things that need to be looked at by the Business-Education Council. The Business-Education Council is now established and Cal Gosse from IBM is chairing that. Maybe at some future time we can come back and talk to you about the Business-Education Council.

The objective of that council is to encourage more businesses to step up on the co-op and work experience front, both from a public school side but also from a post-secondary side.

I'd like to mention that we are predominantly small business in Nova Scotia, from a sheer numbers perspective, and small businesses are stepping up in big ways to provide co-op and work experience for students. What we did notice as we were going through the Transition Task Force is there's a lot more room for large corporations to step up on work experience and co-op but also the government and our health care providers. There has been a real push to ensure that we're also providing co-op experiences in the public sector and working with health care to do the same because we are predominantly small business, as I said, in terms of numbers, but there are some very large employers that we need to participate as well.

MR. JESSOME: Just as a follow-up here, you also referenced a number of, for example, I believe Labour offers some form of incentive to potential employers to try to get them to enable more opportunities. Additionally, it's nice to see buy-in from the chamber in terms of offering an acknowledgement or an award for employers that enable this. Is there any, I guess data, or information that would highlight how many of those co-op opportunities are paid positions?

In looking at the Business-Education Council, it's fantastic that that is something that's active and they are trying to encourage more businesses to buy in. To what effect are they encouraging employers to enable paid positions?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Montgomerie.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: A couple of dynamics, again the key is awareness. To the honourable member's point about the marriage of private sector with the student in different dynamics, the other thing the private sector tells us is you've got to keep it simple. One of the things the chamber has helped us with, we did Graduate to Opportunity, for example, and what the chamber and others are saying to the members is wow, this is easy, and it's the same with our co-op program, this is easy to access - and as a matter of fact, the co-op program is usually over-subscribed. As Elizabeth pointed out, a lot of the private sector people do it on their own.

The other dynamic is the community college. I tour businesses across the province and when I sit in a business, and I remember being in Windsor a while ago in three different businesses. Every one of them knew the professor at the community college and the kids who were involved in what their business was, so they were sharp enough to know that they worked with the community college to get those young people in their setting, in their workplace. Some of them had both community college and university. One of them had two - Saint Mary's pre-engineering folks working with community college folks and trying to advance some innovative things they were trying to do in the business.

The other piece is, with the business consultants that will now come on board with Nova Scotia Works, we see that as a natural synergy for that business consultant to make links with businesses in the community of hey, are you aware of co-op? Are you aware of Graduate to Opportunity? Are you aware of other scenarios where we can match up? That's the awareness situation. I'm not sure if we have the data on whether they are paid or not but, Elizabeth, I'll turn it over to you and it's your fault if we don't.

MS. MILLS: We do have a co-op incentive program, it's about \$2.5 million a year, and we have about 600 co-op placements that we support with over 500 employers. But that's really just a drop in the bucket with the overall co-op programs that our universities have. As I said, many of the employers pay 100 per cent of the co-op placements.

We are doing some work, as Deputy Minister Montgomerie has said, on the innovation tables to look at experiential learning and other types of co-op placements to do some research and see how much of that is paid versus unpaid. We will have more information to provide to you, but I just want to say that our co-op program has been extremely successful. We have excellent feedback from our students and from our employers. Many of our employers are repeat users. As the deputy said, we are oversubscribed in our co-op program. Many of our employers who have hired co-ops go on to use Graduate to Opportunity. They have a chance to work with a young person in a co-op placement, they're very pleased with the work of that individual, and then they go on to hire them after graduation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: In the essence of time, we're going to move to our second round of questions. Folks have already had at least two questions now. We're going to move to one question so that we can try to get through all those who would like to get a question in. It will need to be rather quick, both question and answer, I would say, if we'd like to get them in before we close. Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I guess maybe I'll start with just a quick statement. I'm glad Mr. Orrell brought forward the Nova Scotia student loans. I just want to add a couple of points on that. There's no interest, I believe, on that loan also. That was eliminated. More importantly, people with disabilities have up to 10 years, I believe it is. What's interesting about that is how few people know, even people within our Legislature. Getting that word out is important. I had a meeting yesterday where one person wasn't even aware that the first four years are waived, free.

You mentioned Graduate to Opportunity. We hadn't touched on that. In rural Nova Scotia, I certainly think this has been one of the - with our biggest successes are our biggest challenges. That program has helped a lot of employers in my area. There's a lot of interest in it. I know that we've doubled the budget in that world. But out of that, I'm more curious about the future of the program. I'm also curious about the barriers with the program. There are some businesses that do not qualify. If you could touch on those barriers, maybe if there's any opportunities to tweak those barriers, or what you might see as the future of that program. It is extremely important in retaining our youth in rural Nova Scotia.



MR. MONTGOMERIE: An excellent question on awareness. One of the great things with our relationship with student leaders is they are great advocates for passing information along to their members. There was actually a meeting - when Minister Regan was meeting with the round table of students and one of the students who was there, a fourth year, did not realize that she could get her loan forgiven. I take your point. We have to do a better job and make sure that young people are aware.

Graduate to Opportunity, the intent of the government was, how can we incent small businesses and make them aware of the value of young people in the workforce and give them an opportunity to hire? We sort of started out on new ground when we started the program. It is missionary work to a certain extent, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, to make sure that folks in the private sector are aware of the program. Again, chambers of commerce right across the province, the RENs, and others are helping us to get the message out. The other dynamic in there is, it's all about workforce attachment.

There's Graduate to Opportunity. Then we have Mitacs, which is a non-profit organization that hooks up the private sector with students who would work as interns in that private sector, and there's federal money available. Mitacs will leverage federal money, it will leverage money from the private sector, and it leverages money from us. I think we pay 20 per cent. Young people end up in good positions. Back to the stats, 60-plus per cent who are in those kinds of things get jobs quicker and so on. There are different places, and the co-op student is another level of that program. All of them together are focused, at the end of the day, on trying to get workforce attachment for young people. Again, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, it's missionary work by all of us to make sure that small businesses in particular are aware of the opportunity.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. MACFARLANE: When I'm sitting here, I can't help but think about these students that I met last week. What's going on right now with regard to the teachers is most delicate mostly for the Grade 12 students. We spoke earlier about anxiety and mental health. At the end of the day, the great thing about this committee is being able to get answers to go back to your constituents and give them answers, whether they're the ones they want to hear or not, but to give them the answers.

This time I want to be able to go back and speak to those students again who are so upset about what's going to be happening. I'm going to just try to put it point blank. If there is a strike, what is the plan around provincially administered exams? Is there a plan to extend the school year into the summer so especially the Grade 12 students - I'm concerned about all the students - can be reassured that they will not be affected with regard to applying to colleges and universities?

It's ironic that we say From School to Success: Clearing the Path, and yet the last few weeks I think they're feeling that there are obstacles being thrown into their path. I just want to be able to go home and reassure them. I just want to know if you can comment on that or give me any advice as to what to say to them.

MS. MCKENZIE: As I said earlier, and I suspect you will think this is an imperfect answer, we were informed yesterday of the shape of the job action. We won't know fully what that looks like until the strike schools are over and that information is shared with us. Both the Premier and the minister have committed to doing everything that they can to ensure that children are affected as minimally as possible as we go through this period of time. The government has expressed an interest in getting back to the table, and hopefully, that will be where we end up and continue the conversation.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I would just make the observation as the Deputy Minister of Labour and Advanced Education that if I'm asked or the minister is asked, we give the answer that it's inappropriate for us to comment. I think it's important to take a second or two to explain why that is.

The mandate of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education is that at any given time we would be dealing with 20 or more labour disputes. That's done through our conciliation and mediation branch, which is staffed by professionals who work with both parties to try to achieve a settlement. They are 96 per cent successful, and you hardly ever hear about them because people understand that dynamic.

Why they're successful is, we protect the integrity of the conciliation officers. The people who are dealing with them need to know that they can trust them, that they can share information about the dispute they're trying to resolve, and that they will not hear from senior officials or the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education any kind of inference of how those negotiations are going or not. That's why you will hear us say it's inappropriate for us to comment. What makes this different, obviously, for all of us is, government is the employer, so the minister and staff have to stay neutral. The minister recuses herself from Cabinet for any discussions on employee contractual agreements - not just teachers but NSGEU and so on. That's why we would say it's inappropriate to comment.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: I understand what you're saying, deputy minister, but the Premier is out there in public talking about these plans. He's got all these numbers - it's going to cost, and it's going to cost. We're worried about the kids. We've got a bunch of kids who are going to need child care. If they change from work to rule to a strike, they're going to need child care. They're going to need people who give help after school.

I want to know, is that a plan that is in place? We could turn around tomorrow, and they could change their mind that it's not going to be a work to rule, but it's going to be a full-on strike. Or they could go a month and be on full-on strike. I've got kids, parents, and teachers all coming to me worried about what's going to happen to our Grade 12 students this year. A lot of them get help after school. It used to be recess or between classes and so on and so forth. If that's not there, what's going to happen to these kids? They're going to miss on this year or they're going to miss on it. Is there something in place for that and is there money set aside to do that so we can tell the people who are asking us that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie.

MS. MCKENZIE: As I said earlier, we are contingency planning for all contingencies. In the case of public education, it's complicated by the fact that everyone, all the way up to the superintendent, are in the union. It means that when we requested exclusions so that we were able to run the system to some extent, the union actually denied the exclusion request, so in most boards there will be two or three people left. The superintendents are excluded, as per the Act, and there are a few people who have been hired who are not within the union but for the most part, right to the superintendent, are in the union and will be part of any job action that is decided on.

So yes, we are looking at contingency planning. We've been working with our child care centres across the province, we've been looking at access to schools and there's a number of organizations that are looking at running camps. These are all part of our contingency planning; we're contingency planning for all contingencies.

Right now, we are taking it as the union notifies us, in terms of what their next steps will be. We will be responding.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Mancini.

MS. MANCINI: Your report referenced the McKinsey report and I had a chance to look at some of it. I didn't read the whole thing but I did note one of the things they point out right off the mark is the fact that there is this kind of paradox of high level of underemployment or unemployment by youth that they even suggest globally and that it's even a cause of a lot of political unrest, Arab Spring and that sort of thing.

At the same time, there's a critical shortage of skilled labour. I was kind of looking at who was on the task force and I see IBM was there and whatever. I guess kind of a simple question really, I'm just wondering, are we finding a trend and are you seeing a particular area - and I'm thinking maybe IT or the creative industries, digital, those sorts of things - where we need to really get kids focused? Is there a particular area that's really in demand right now?

MS. MCKENZIE: We are looking at all growth sectors and that will be part of the discussion we have with the Business-Education Council. I did read the McKinsey report front to back and one of the things that was very interesting in it is it talked about employers who are looking for skilled workers and the mismatch between workers and business.

Dominic Barton wrote that report and now leads the Economic Council for the Prime Minister and is aware of our transition report because, as he said in his study, there were very few jurisdictions that got this right so he's quite interested in the things that were identified here because he believes we've identified the areas we need to get right and that we need to continue to work on, so it's a continued work in progress. What was the next part of your question?

MS. MANCINI: Well it was just if you could identify that but since you're asking me, I think you've kind of answered it. I was just wondering about the recommendations; I think the recommendations go to the minister. Have they been accepted or where are we with the overall report?

MS. MCKENZIE: The recommendations go to the minister. Right now, we've been taking the recommendations, as I said, the associate deputy ministers are leading an action team to take a look at each of the recommendations - they were very wide. We're trying to pull them in and there will be a report back to the ministers in terms of going forward. Duff will probably have something to say to that.

MS. MANCINI: Would that be a public report?

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll let you finish it up. One question we let turn into a bit of a supplementary, Ms. Mancini, but that's okay for clarity. Mr. Montgomerie.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Just as an example of focus, the government has identified oceans - Sandra mentioned oceans earlier - purchased the Coast Guard College because we have the highest amount of Ph.D.s in ocean research I think in the world. We've got the Canadian Armed Forces, the Navy, we've got Fisheries, we've got those dynamics. Dalhousie just leveraged \$200 million in a partnership with Memorial University, UPEI, and other leading ocean institutes to locate a centre here over the next seven years that will absolutely be job intensive in a lot of ways because all the research and so on that they do will be focused on how we maximize oceans on a go-forward basis.

We talked to you about sandboxes when we were here last. We talked about ICT. We talked about agriculture - what's going on in fisheries in innovative approach to marketing our fisheries. There is a lot of research behind that that makes sure our folks are innovative and compete with the best in the world in those sectors. There are areas where we are focusing in on, there's no question.

MS. TREEN: The group was established in Fall 2015 and you delivered your Transition Task Force results in June 2016. I'm just wondering, are there any other provinces that have undertaken to take these steps and to evaluate the same thing you guys have done and that you can reflect on the results?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I think what we need to celebrate in this province is how we work together and the Associate Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, Karen Gatien, and myself made a presentation to the deputy ministers of post-secondary education and P-12 education in Toronto on the Transition Task Force. It was late in the day and both Karen and I said, this won't take long - an hour and a half later.

The questions they had - number one, how did you get everybody together? How did you get education and post-secondary in a room together? Then they said - then you had private sector, people from education, how did you do that? We said, we asked. The fact that we're working together and the large amount of staff you see behind us is because it's so complex and so varied, I think we should absolutely celebrate that we're showing this kind of leadership in this province.

MS. TREEN: Have any other provinces attempted it?

MR. MONTGOMERIE: Not in this collaborative way that I am aware of because they were saying to us, and several of the provinces have reached out to us to ask us how we did it.

MS. MCKENZIE: It has now become a priority for the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada. They want to understand more of what happened in Nova Scotia. They want to take a look at the report and will be sharing best practices across the country.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I was just sitting here thinking we may have to have math class - people don't know what one meant or two means. (Laughter) Thank you all for some great questions this morning. We're running close to the hour. I want to give Ms. McKenzie or Mr. Montgomerie or others a chance to bring closing comments before we touch on our final piece of business.

MR. MONTGOMERIE: I just want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the honourable members for the opportunity and for the questions and for the opportunity for us to do the missionary work, if you will.

The way I was going to close this is how I just did it a few seconds ago. This is a model that is incredibly successful because we're all working together and we're all focused on trying to move the yardsticks together. I think that's the strength of this task force scenario.

MS. MCKENZIE: Thank you for having us here this morning. It is a complex report and we will be bringing back, I suspect, various pieces of it because there are a lot of conversations to go through. The key to this report - the key to the intention of this report and the key to the success of this report - will be in our children transitioning successfully to their highest potential and that is what this is all about. Thank you for letting us talk about it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have two other guests who have spoken, Ms. Mills and Ms. Taylor-Foley - are there any further comments to close? Thank you very much, we appreciate you being here today.

Our next meeting will be - as we previously discussed - set for December 6<sup>th</sup> with Laura Lee Langley, the Commissioner of the Public Service Commission, Clerk of the Executive Council, on hiring practices - and we will have appointments for agencies, boards and commissions.

I don't think there is anything else on the agenda. We are adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:54 a.m.]