

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, January 31, 2017

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Re: Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Strategy – May 2016
& 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. Stephen Gough was replaced by Ms. Patricia Arab]
[Mr. David Wilton was replaced by Mr. Bill Horne]

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 - Executive Director
Education Innovation, Programs and Services

Ms. Jennifer Burke - Director of Curriculum Development

Ms. Susan Kelley - Executive Lead, Special Projects

Mr. Lennie Comeau - Mathematics Evaluation Coordinator



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2017

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Chuck Porter

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone. We'll call this meeting of the Human Resources Committee to order. We'll start with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will come to the witnesses shortly. We're going to do the ABCs first. We have one department, the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage for appointments to the Board of Governors of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. I'll call on Mr. Gordon Wilson, please.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Chairman, I move that Joline Comeau, Wendy Connors-Beckett, Patricia Donnelly, Floyd Dykeman, and John Volcko be approved as governors for the Art Gallery 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.

Thank you, that's all we have for ABCs this morning. Just for the record, I will note for Hansard that Bill Horne is filling in for Mr. David Wilton, the MLA for Cape Breton Centre.

We're pleased to have with us this morning folks from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Ms. McKenzie, we'll welcome you and maybe you can introduce your team and provide us with a presentation and some opening remarks.

MS. SANDRA MCKENZIE: Good morning, I'm Sandra McKenzie, the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. My team is going to introduce themselves.

[The committee witnesses introduced themselves.]

MS. MCKENZIE: I know all their names but sometimes I get the titles a little bit confused so that's why I wanted to make sure we got that all right, even though I have cue cards right here in front of me.

We have a brief presentation to give the overview of the literacy strategy. I will ask my fellow departmental colleagues to jump in when I need a little bit of extra information but I suspect that will be mostly with the questions. Thanks very much - and you are going to start.

The overarching goal in public education is to focus on increased achievement in math and literacy and career readiness. There are a lot of expectations on schools in the public education system but we've focused in on achievement in math and literacy and career readiness as the focus for our work over the next period of time.

We have a brief video to show you to give an overview of our direction.

[Video played.]

MS. MCKENZIE: That's our goal, for all children to leave school with competence and a love of reading.

We developed the literacy strategy recognizing four major points. We looked at 10-year outcomes for the provincial assessments in literacy and noted where we were strong and noted where we need to improve. That's where we had the opportunity to develop a comprehensive literacy strategy.

What was exciting about developing the literacy strategy was that in Nova Scotia, there never had been a comprehensive P-12 literacy strategy. There had been a number of actions designed at different grade levels or different initiatives, but they didn't necessarily roll up into any type of a broad-based strategy to raise the outcomes for all children.

We did a review of literacy supports and resources within Nova Scotia public schools. We did a very extensive research review, and we also developed the strategy with teachers and talked to teachers about what the critical components of the strategy would be.

I mentioned the results and our trends. One of the things that I would call your attention to - if you take a look at our outcomes, you see over a 10-year period that the children in our provincial assessments showed strength in idea development and that type of thing and were weaker on convention. They would be very strong at coming up with ideas and the things that they wanted to write, and if you gave them a prompt, would be able to write stories about it or be able to write in a number of different formats. But when it came to the convention of writing, in terms of grammar, spelling, being able to construct ideas in a logical pattern, we were weaker. That's one of the things that we've paid quite a bit of attention to in the development of the literacy strategy.

We also noted trends that were inside boards. For instance, there would be some boards that would be very strong in literacy and would be consistently strong across a 10-year period, and then there were boards that would be consistently weaker across a 10-year period. What we noted was that without a comprehensive strategy, there was no sharing across boards in terms of the best practices. That was the same for math as well.

Another thing that we looked at was what the top skills were currently needed in the workplace. You can see literacy there at 15 per cent - actually, literacy is embedded in every single one of those top skills currently needed in the workplace - strength at literacy, at math, and at being prepared to move into the workforce. There was attention in terms of not only what students are going to need in the workforce, but also literacy and the ability to participate in society and how literacy supports citizenship.

As we move on, the goal of the literacy strategy is that all Nova Scotia students will achieve a high level of literacy so they can thrive in school and beyond. How are we meeting the goals? One of the keys was to develop the strategy and also to really focus on the professional development of teachers to make sure that teachers felt strong in the areas that they were being asked to lead and to teach. The literacy strategy is new. We've had some complicating factors in terms of the rollout, but the focus is on the strength in teachers and also providing teachers with the supports that they need for children who may not be achieving the outcomes.

So, for the first time, there are literacy leads in every board who will make sure that they are consistently supporting teachers and also being able to learn from the other boards that may have strengths and being able to translate those strengths across the various school boards. There are mentors and coaches for individual teachers. There is a focus on strengthening early literacy teachers. There are Reading Recovery leads. Reading

Recovery is being rolled out across the province, and of course, the strength in the training of the Reading Recovery teachers.

There's also resources and supports relevant to the cultural needs of students and providing the various supports for that. In addition, there has been a focus on culturally appropriate pedagogy to support all children being able to learn and being supported in their culture.

We are also looking at using appropriate technology to help literacy in all grade levels. What we find is that kids learn to read when they're engaged and when they see the benefit of reading across a whole variety of different uses. There's an opportunity there not only to support it through technology but to use technology as a method of instruction. Then we monitor and track literacy development of students in order to know when things are working and when we need to improve them. Did you want to add anything to that?

The early focus has been on P-6, and we know obviously that this is a P-12 strategy, but the early focus has been on improving the outcomes in P-6 because we know that if children are strong at reading by the time they leave Grade 3 that they are set on their course through the education system. Primary to Grade 3 saw an increase of 340 minutes, or 68 minutes a day, of increase in focus in terms of literacy through consolidation; Grades 4 to 6 saw an increase of 50 minutes a week, or 10 minutes a day.

There was an increased focus on the development of literacy in each of the grades from P-6. Also, the strategy introduces the notion that every teacher is a literacy teacher, so that it's not just your English classes that you're being marked for your construction and for your grammar and for your spelling, but that every teacher is doing that - your science teachers, your math teachers, and what have you. We also know that a strong basis in literacy means a strong basis in math. We need to build the capacity for high-quality teaching and literacy through professional learning. That will be a major focus over the next few years.

This is just capturing the increased investments. Where it's in red, it's a new investment for 2016-17. You can see where there has again been a focus on the P-3 with early literacy teachers, Reading Recovery leaders, Reading Recovery teachers, and additional investments made this year in specialist teachers to support literacy. You can pull that slide back up if people have questions.

In terms of literacy and professional learning, I'm going to ask Jennifer to speak to that.

MS. JENNIFER BURKE: When working with our literacy leads in a working group, one of the components we felt was very important and that was requested by teachers after we had implemented the streamlined Primary to Grade 3 curricula was to provide professional learning for teachers on instructional strategies for literacy in Primary through to Grade 3. The boards, with the literacy leads leading all these components, put

forth a comprehensive day for teachers to engage in professional learning around literacy, in particular looking at their data - their classroom data, data from observations survey, data from their Grade 3 assessments - to look to see what they needed to do in their literacy plans to improve learning for their students.

Survey results from this particular professional learning has been tremendously positive. Teachers were really pleased to have the opportunity to go through and use those pieces and to talk to their colleagues about what they were doing in their classrooms to make improvements. That's just one of the first pieces that has come out from the literacy strategy in supporting teachers.

MS. MCKENZIE: The other thing I'd like to add is that we've done quite a bit of work with the Bachelor of Education program in the five universities. Teachers told us when we talked to them that they felt there had not been enough time spent inside their B.Ed. in terms of the amount of literacy instruction, so we've been working with the B.Ed. programs to define what a modern graduate would look like from the B.Ed. programs and how much time they would spend on literacy, math development, and other important components.

Coaching and mentoring - do you want to speak to that?

MS. SUE TAYLOR-FOLEY: We've also added to the system additional mentors who support classroom teachers in their practice. Those individuals this year have received two days of professional development, altogether, collectively from across the province. They had an opportunity to come together to work together to learn about their roles. They have professional supports and materials and they've had ongoing opportunities for contact as well.

They can support teachers in literacy at any grade level, although initially in this first year the majority of them are focused on the P-6 area and supporting teachers in those particular areas. That's the area where additional time, as the deputy mentioned, has been added to the day or added within the day in the configuration of the time to learn. That is also where the language arts curriculum in particular has had a streamlining and renewal. It's also where in Grades 4-6 there has been an outcome added in all subject areas that respect literacy so that literacy, as the deputy mentioned, is in all subject areas as well.

The particular focus of the coach, or the mentor as they're called in some boards, is really to support that classroom teacher, to go in the classroom with them and act as that coach in literacy for them, and to meet their individual needs.

MS. MCKENZIE: How will we measure our progress? We do this through feedback from teachers, parents, and others, including employers and successful transition to colleges and universities. We were in here earlier talking about the transition task force

and what universities and the community colleges had identified as areas that we needed to strengthen. We also used provincial assessments that give us a detailed understanding of how we're doing in reading, writing, and math in the public school system. I'm sure we'll have more discussion about that as we go through with the questions.

Then finally, working together, we have a literacy working group and steering committee, which of course is on hold now as a result of the work-to-rule. But once we're through this period of time, this will be reinstated in order to get better outcomes for literacy.

Then we've just ended with an inspirational quote, which I don't need to read for you. This is essentially just capturing that the path to educational excellence is not one individual strategy. It's a collection of the right things to do and also being cognizant of what to stop doing in order to be able to be focused.

That's our presentation, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll start questions, and Mr. Orrell to begin.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you very much for your presentation. It's very important that we address literacy, and I think math is another very important issue that we're dealing with in our school system right now.

On your very last slide there, Working Together, you talked about the literacy working group and steering committee being on hold because of the work-to-rule. Why would that be on hold because of the work-to-rule? Is this stuff that's done outside the classroom after-hours or during the day? Is that why it's on hold?

MS. MCKENZIE: Because it's a specification and directive inside the work-to-rule not to attend meetings.

MR. ORRELL: My understanding is a work-to-rule is just abiding by your contract. If that's the case and the contract gets settled, and the teachers decide to do that, after this is all over and everything is settled and they have a contract, could this be affected? Will it be part of the negotiated contract? If it's not directly in the contract, then this is going to affect literacy in the province.

If that's the case, then we're going to be in real trouble with this program being effective in our school system. It's important. From what I'm hearing outside the area, a lot of teachers are quite pleased that they're doing their contract. They get more time with their family, and they get more time for whatever. If this is the case, and they don't get into these committees, what's going to happen?

MS. MCKENZIE: The current work-to-rule includes more than a suspension of things that are within the contract. It also includes a suspension of items that are in the

Education Act, and also contractually and legislatively required. There is a requirement within the Education Act to participate in working together to improve the outcomes for children.

I would just like to say that the teachers who participate in these forums do so happily and willingly. I understand that there are some teachers who are pleased with the current work-to-rule, but I know that there are many teachers who are also looking forward to getting back to working together in terms of better outcomes for kids. I don't anticipate that there will be an issue with meetings. Within the Education Act, there's a number of different requirements, and working collaboratively and co-operatively is one of them.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What I'll do, just so the committee is aware, is two quick things. I'll welcome Ms. Arab, who had just joined us and replaced Mr. Gough. As I usually do, we'll do one question and one follow-up, and we'll make our way around the room. We'll go to Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you to the department for the presentation. It is encouraging, I know myself, personally - I don't want to get into particulars - my experience with my children, one in particular, the struggles with literacy in his life and I see the outcome of it today. It is interesting and I didn't realize it was the first time that we actually put a strategy in place in this province, which is very commendable.

I am more curious, I don't think you answered it in your presentation but I'd like to know more about the development of the strategy, of what the backbone of it was, where the research was done, who was involved with this. Obviously as part of that you talked about the evaluation and the re-evaluation of it. I'd be interested in knowing any comments to date that you might have on what tweaking you might see that might improve it.

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm going to go to both my colleagues, Sue and Jen, to respond because they were involved in the actual development of the literacy strategy. I can tell you that like the development of all strategies, there were contentious discussions, so we've included phonological awareness inside our literacy strategy. That is an educational debate that we had. This was not something that was whipped up and rubber-stamped, this was the product of a lot of discussion and debate and strongly-held beliefs. I believe it has resulted in a collection and a set of directions that we believe will improve literacy outcomes for the province. I just want Sue and Jen to talk to that.

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: Okay, I'll begin on that. Even prior to the actual strategy itself we've been working for a number of years with international experts in this field and we certainly have had many activities related to literacy at all different levels. From each one of those things we have learned and we have received feedback as well.

When we actually came to looking at needing an umbrella, I guess, for literacy, I would say, of course we honed in on the development of a literacy strategy. We researched the literacy strategies that exist in other public education systems across Canada and internationally as well. We also did extensive research in the literature on the different things that are high leverage kinds of things that you can actually do to improve literacy for all students. We looked at the literacy of all students, so part of that is being culturally responsive as well and making sure that our classrooms reflect that, too, particularly in the learning that we're having in our classrooms with respect to literacy.

We also looked at literacy across things, so not just from P-12 but also how does literacy begin before students enter school, what information do we have about that. Our Early Years part of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was a great help with that. They actually look at an early developmental index and from that we glean a lot of information about what types of literacy skills students are bringing when they enter school already and, as well, what we need to help level the playing field for all students but also help to raise a student's literacy levels, no matter what they're coming into school with.

We also looked at what kinds of things are available outside the school system too. One of the goals within the strategy, as well, is looking at strengthening partnerships because we know that literacy just doesn't happen in school and just during the school day. Obviously literacy is something that happens all day, for everyone.

One of Jennifer's first tasks actually as Director of Curriculum Development when she came on, was to actually look at bringing together a variety of individuals within the school system who are representing their boards and represented a wide variety of backgrounds in teaching. There were individuals who had speech and language pathology training, individuals with Reading Recovery training, individuals who are early literacy specialists, individuals who have been school administrators and saw a broader spectrum of things - resource teachers and classroom teachers as well.

All those individuals came together to bring all this information to bear when they looked at the literacy strategy. Jennifer, do you want to pick up from there?

MS. BURKE: As you noted, we had an opportunity to work with literacy experts from across the province so these are classroom teachers, these are literacy experts who work with us over a series of months. We reviewed all the research material. We also reviewed all the work that had been done in individual boards where we could see very promising practices.

Based on lengthy discussions over a number of months, we crafted the literacy strategy. It went through a number of iterations because it went through a number of channels and a lot of people had a chance to look at it and give us their feedback. After a number of months we were able to put together what's in front of you today, which is our literacy strategy.

Every one of the people who were part of that are very much committed to making literacy successful and literacy happen for our students in their schools across the province. Actually, many of those people actually work with us on a regular basis for our working committee and for the steering committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson, you had about three questions in that, so I'm going to pass for your follow-up. We'll happily come back to you. Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you so much for your presentation. I'm curious, geographically within the province, if you have data showing where the weaker areas are in the province. I know you may not have that information today but I'm particularly interested in P-6. I believe if you're not reading by Grade 6, I think later on you just fall between the cracks.

I would like to get that information to see where the areas are. I'm curious because I see in the increased investments here we have the \$650,000. I'm also wondering if you have a breakdown of how much of that money went to CCRSB compared to, I think it was the HRSB. I would like a breakdown of that money and what schools that money went to.

I know that for a lot of my questions you're probably going to have to get back to me. I would also like to know, where does the Province of Nova Scotia rank nationally with literacy?

MS. MCKENZIE: I can tell you that the detailed breakdown is on our website. We publish all our provincial assessments. We certainly can send that package of information to you in terms of the breakdown of the funding, and we also may have to get it from the boards in terms of how it was distributed through the system. We can certainly follow up with that.

The last part of your question was, when did you get the data?

MS. MACFARLANE: I was curious as to where Nova Scotia ranks nationally with literacy.

MS. MCKENZIE: Right now, we're in the middle of the pack in terms of where we sit nationally. I don't know if you saw the PISA results which are international - again we came in sort of middle of the pack.

Our objective, though - this is the first time that within a literacy strategy we've set numerical targets for improvement. We set an 8 per cent improvement target over four years but we've also set an additional target to close the achievement gap by an additional 5 per cent. What we didn't want is for it to just go up and have the gap stay the same. What

we wanted to do was close the gap for populations and at the same time raise the bar for Nova Scotia kids.

There's planning that supports this called Student Success Planning that works with the schools - sorry, I'm being passed a note. I want to make sure I'm saying all the right things. PISA is the first time the Canadian averages in reading - do you want to just . . .

MR. LENNIE COMEAU: We were at the . . .

MS. MCKENZIE: We were at the Canadian average in reading for the first time. That was an important thing, thank you very much - I knew we had done quite well in PISA - so we can provide that information. Our objective, though, is to raise the bar for all kids.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let me just clarify this in case some people don't understand. In an effort to be fair and to let everyone ask questions and get around the table numerous times, I'm going to go to Ms. Treen because, Karla, you got about four questions in that. We can go that way if you want and have one, but let's try to get around the table. We'll come back to you. Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Mr. Chairman, you're very good at math, aren't you?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Indeed, I am.

MS. TREEN: Thank you for your presentation. I see how you have written here how we're going to meet our goals, what we're going to do, and where we're going to start. How long is this strategy supposed to take? When do you move - like, how is that part all going to fall out?

MS. MCKENZIE: We were very strategic in our strategy. We set our goals, and we put Student Success Planning into place to work with the boards and with the individual principals and teachers to roll that out, then we had this year. I would say that although we have a four-year plan, it may take five years. I don't know that we've had a real opportunity to go out and work with people the way that we had hoped, and I don't know that teachers would feel that they were as knowledgeable about the strategy at this particular point in time as we would have hoped that they were in the first year of its implementation. It's a four-year strategy, which may take an extra year to implement.

MS. TREEN: How are you going to be monitoring your strategy as it rolls out, that you're being successful with each step? Is there something in place to monitor that?

MS. MCKENZIE: For the first time, we've established literacy leads in every board, and we will be working closely with them. What we want to do is make sure that principals and teachers feel supported in the classroom, and we'll be using a number of different mechanisms to determine that. Jen works with the literacy leads, so you may want to speak to that.

MS. BURKE: The literacy leads meet on a regular basis, actually; we meet once a month. They report on progress within their boards, and they collect that data. They are entirely very mindful of all those pieces that are happening, and they're tracking it on a regular basis. We share it at a monthly meeting, when we're able to meet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: I don't want to be at all disrespectful of your work, but it strikes me that even though this is Nova Scotia's first literacy strategy, surely our literacy strategy is having a public education system. That's what a public education system is all about: to learn basics of literacy and math and all the other subjects.

I want to focus for a moment on the EDI, the Early Development Instrument. I'm wondering how we're trying to move that because everything I have read over many years of interest in early childhood development and the importance of the early years suggests that really it's that score where you can take a measure of when children are entering school, which has the greatest power to predict their literacy success and their success in every other measure. I don't think we're doing enough on that front, so I would like to hear some reflection on that.

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm glad you asked that. Just to go back to the idea of why we need a strategy, my observation when I came into the department was that we had eight boards and we had eight different results. Without a strategy that spanned those boards, we would have 118,000 kids that would have - divided by eight - the results they were having. What we needed was a better mechanism for being able to share best practices and raise the bar across the board, particularly for kids who were within the achievement gaps, and that's why we have the strategy. The lack of a strategy wasn't working.

We're also responsible for the early years. There's a number of things that are happening there. We believe that the foundations for learning are set in zero to four, from everything starting with Read to Me - which is more than a books-for-babies program. It's basically a collection of supports for parents that tells them, you are your child's first and most important teacher. It talks about developmental milestones, and also links them with supports.

From Read to Me through to our own strategy, we're looking at an 18-month check and a 36-month check in order to be able to track progress for kids and to make sure they get early referrals, because we know that that's important. We're looking at being able to use our Early Years Centres that are out in the community to do those checks - not only to be able to link kids to the programming for children with special needs, but also to make sure that children get the socialization that they need and to support families where the adult literacy in the family may be an issue.

We have a number of initiatives in Nova Scotia tied to family literacy which are projects that are working in communities to support the importance of family literacy, people understanding the importance of reading to your child, singing to your child, and being able to set those patterns with poetry and those types of things. Also, this year we will be introducing a curriculum into our regulated child care that raises up the bar in terms of being able to address EDI.

I think for me, one of the most exciting things tied to the early development indicator is the work we've been doing in inspiring communities, where we work with communities that may have a number of factors that are contributing to children entering school that may have low EDI scores. We started with a project called Between the Bridges in Dartmouth and will be expanding out to two other communities. In those cases, we work across departments - Health and Wellness, Justice, Community Services, Labour and Advanced Education, and ourselves - but also working with community, with the United Way and other groups, to be able to address very basic needs of families so they are supported in terms of developing literacy.

We want children to come into school with the developmental milestones they need to be successful. I've heard the saying many times that parents send us the very best they have and that we have a responsibility in the public education system to also be able to close some gaps when children arrive, so we're also looking. That's why we do the EDI scores and look at what we can do, that's why we follow up with the observation survey, to make sure we're tracking as best we can.

Is there more that we can do in the early years? Absolutely, but there has been a major focus by this government to be able to set the standard so that kids arrive at school ready to learn.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts, some follow-up?

MS. ROBERTS: One of the comments we've heard from many teachers in the course of the prolonged contract dispute that we're in is about the amount of time spent on data collection and the amount of time spent on preparing for the tests that generate this data for this strategy, in particular concerns I heard from Primary to Grade 3 teachers needing to spend a week with a split class, sending the Grade 3s to the cafeteria to be supervised by someone while they spent a week doing data collection with the Grade 2s in the class and so forth, when they were just getting started and just sort of starting to set the classroom tone for the year.

Then, of course, the minister announced that she was suspending all provincial student assessments this Fall. I guess I'm wondering, what concrete difference will it make to the achievement of the literacy strategy and the literacy goals that we're not doing an assessment, that some assessments were not completed this Fall? What difference does it make in terms of student achievement?

MS. MCKENZIE: Can I just back up for a second and talk about assessment in general? I think teachers are right, I think we rolled out a lot in P-3 and across the board, in terms of collection of information and we could have done it better. We were learning as we were going and they had an opportunity through the negotiations in the collective agreement to talk about some of their frustrations. You'll see inside the tentative agreement, an agreement that substitutes would be provided if there were one-on-one interviews required of those types of things. Those are appropriate supports to provide.

Another thing that really came to light and the reason that the minister suspended the provincial assessments and the board assessments is that we were duplicating each other's work. I think that was because - with all the best intentions and because the elected boards were asking people inside the boards to track, and I think that also the Auditor General contributed to that by also saying that the boards needed more information to be able to carry out their own responsibilities - I think that what ended up happening was there was a collection of assessment that was put out that teachers were the collectors.

We wanted to make sure that teachers were able to use assessments for children for learning, to support children. There has been quite a bit of work that has been done looking at what was being collected in the provincial assessments. To be honest, there's no preparation required for the provincial assessments, it's just held on a day, it's taken off. Teachers don't mark it, it's shipped back.

There were others that were being provided by the board, they could have gotten the same information. If I can give a bad example that I think kind of encapsulates it: when you go to the doctor to get blood work, they don't take nine vials, they take one vial and test it nine times. What we needed to do was to be able to use the information that we were gathering in nine different ways, as opposed to going out and gathering it nine different times.

Do we need to improve that? Absolutely. Do we need assessment data to be able to inform good practice? We also need that as well. What we wanted to make sure is that we've got assessment practices that are happening in the classroom that teachers see the benefit of, that they participate in meaningfully and that they see that the information that has been provided be collected in the cleanest and less-intrusive way and that they see a benefit of that in the end. At the same time, we can roll it up to be able to set a provincial course of action. That's work that's under way.

The current suspension of assessments will cause a little bit of a blip but I think that we'll come out and be in a better place as a result of what we've had to take a look at.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: I'm very impressed with this new strategy literacy. It is something that I suffered a bit with all through school, learning to read and to express yourself in a manner that people can understand and you can move ahead. I guess I didn't have any problem with math, chemistry, or calculus - or not as much trouble.

To be successful I think you have to be able to express yourself and get your points across. I was wondering if you could give me examples of how this new program will be done or work within the school that is additional to what the kids were learning before, say from P-6. There must be many different objectives you want to see carried out over that period of time with the school kids.

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm going to ask Sue and Jen to speak to exactly how it rolls out. I think essentially, though, I can say that it builds on best practices that teachers are currently using and reinforces and certainly is a focus on professional learning for teachers so that they feel strong in the classroom. It also provides resources in order to provide those supports as well.

MS. BURKE: In terms of what the strategy is offering, to be honest, a lot of it is already supported in the classrooms right now. If we are looking at P-3, we're working with teachers in terms of best practices and strategies to support reading and writing at those grade levels. We're looking at phonological awareness, we're looking at oral language strategies, and we're helping with all those components.

In addition to that, we've added more Reading Recovery teachers. We're supporting early literacy teachers and we have mentors in the classroom. As the deputy noted, there is more time in the classroom, in the class day, actually for students to engage in literacy learning. We've done that as well for Grades 4-6, so there is more time in the day for teachers to focus on those things. At that level, we're actually looking at literacy across all disciplines.

Now, in Grades 4-6 there's something called a learning outcome - all our curricula are designed using learning outcomes. There's actually a learning outcome in all our curricula right now that actually asks teachers to address literacy learning across all the disciplines, so there's more time, there's more support, and there are more directed components within resources and within the guides to support those pieces.

As we move forward and we look at middle schools and high schools, as we move forward with all our work, we'll continue along that same path.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Taylor-Foley, are you going to add to that? Are you okay with that? Mr. Horne, on a follow-up?

MR. HORNE: Just a quick follow-up and maybe you can discuss it a little bit more about how you're going to recognize the increase in students' uptake of your new system, to show that it's been worthwhile and something you want to continue on, to expand upon.

MS. MCKENZIE: I think that teachers have had a whole variety of strategies to instruct kids all along. I don't want to make it look like we stop something and then we start something else - the strategy is meant to build on best practices and to share information between boards. One of the things I noted when I started meeting with the superintendents is that people were fascinated, why does the Strait get the outcomes they get in math? What are they doing differently in order to get the outcomes they're getting in math?

We spent time talking about what the strategy is that they are using. It is meant to build up teacher practice, as opposed to change teacher practice. I think that's an important difference here, and to make sure that teachers have the resources and supports they need to feel they can be successful. They are identifying they have very complex classrooms and what can we do to improve the situation both within the classroom to ensure that the teachers feel they are able to teach all the children that are present but also to make sure that if there are areas they feel they need to be strengthened in - for instance, culturally appropriate pedagogy or something like that - that we have made sure they have the professional development.

One of the things I can say is that I'm on the board of the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority. One of the things we've done is we've partnered with all the Atlantic Provinces to make sure, for instance, that teachers have access to a set of video learning supports that teach them if they have a child, for instance, who happens to have autism and is non-verbal, how do you incorporate and support their learning in the classroom? We are trying to make sure they have as many supports as they can.

I really would like to just reinforce that we're building on the strengths teachers already have and the good practices they have by making sure that not only do they feel supported but we're sharing best practices across the system.

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: I'd just add to that particular piece that as the deputy mentioned, certainly we have very skilled teachers and, as a teacher, I knew when there was an area that I wanted to continue to grow in and to learn about, so as a professional, I was able to look for the things that would support me in my learning.

In the professional learning aspect of helping our teachers and supporting teachers, we have a differentiation as well of the kinds of professional learning supports that are available. The little video clip you saw at the beginning with a student in a Primary classroom in Nova Scotia, that's part of a larger series of videos that we have. Those videos talk about readers' workshop, writers' workshop, what does it look like when you set up

guided reading in your classroom, so that they are there and available on demand for individuals when they want to have those supports.

We have an online portal that teachers can go to as well. In Primary to Grade 6 it's fully developed at this point and we're adding things to that. Teachers go to that all the time. There's a lot of different types of resources and links on there.

We've provided a lot of professional learning resources and in the summer, for those individuals who wish to continue on their professional learning in the summer, we've also provided summer academies as well that not just link up literacy but link literacy to other disciplines as well. Last summer I think we had approximately 300 teachers who were engaged in a three-day summer camp. They were looking at technology but they were also looking at literacy and technology as well and how those things work together.

We're providing an array of different supports for individuals so that people can make professional judgment about what PD and what supports they need for themselves as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We'll move into another round and since I think we've got this down to a science now, we'll go to Mr. Orrell for a question and a follow-up. Mr. Orrell.

MR. ORRELL: I want to go back to your increased investments. I'm looking at nine new literacy leads at X number of dollars, 28 literacy mentors, and 24 new teachers in the Halifax Regional School Board and the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board - for a total investment of \$2.7 million. The total investment in specialists is \$11 million. Where are these literacy leads and literacy mentors located? I see nothing in here that mentions anything about Cape Breton Island. I'm from Cape Breton and I'm sure we have just as many needs and wants as everybody else.

There are 24 new teachers in the Halifax area, how many have gone to Cape Breton and how much of this investment is done in Cape Breton to help the literacy needs of Cape Breton children?

MS. MCKENZIE: This is the new investment in 2016-17. Reading Recovery had been rolled out in every board, not across every board. I have the breakout of all the investment in terms of Reading Recovery, including Cape Breton. That was an additional investment in the two largest boards in 2016-17 but back in the 114 Reading Recovery teachers and the nine Reading Recovery leaders, that would be inclusive of all boards in the province.

There was a gap in the two largest boards that we were starting to fill. We still haven't got Reading Recovery rolled out fully across the province. We're working on that. I can provide that information to the breakout.

MR. ORRELL: I'd appreciate that. I would assume then that finances might play a role in making sure that is rolled out the way it should have been rolled out, as it should have been rolled out.

I'm going to ask a question here; I probably won't be too popular when I ask it. Just recently we got the capital plan about building and repairing schools. There is a school on that list that was not asked for by the school board. They were going to put \$4 million into repairing it, and they've already got \$3 million into it. I assume a school is going to be \$10 million to \$12 million, so there's \$7 million or \$8 million that's going to be fired into a school that nobody wanted. What could we do with that \$7 million or \$8 million to help improve literacy? Knowing that you don't have it rolled out in all the areas, could that \$7 million or \$8 million have been used better in classrooms instead of bricks and mortar for a building?

MS. MCKENZIE: Just to the first question, we had to roll Reading Recovery out in stages because you have to have the training done, and then those trainers train other people, so we were actually going as fast as we could in terms of rolling out Reading Recovery. It had been stopped for four years by the previous government, and we were reintroducing it. Under the requirement, you had to start that training. Everybody had to be trained again. I can get Sue to speak to exactly how, now that we've got some momentum in terms of the critical mass being trained, we're able to move a little bit faster in terms of moving it out across the province.

With respect to the announcement that was made on capital, it's my understanding that the current school is built for over 1,300 students, and it is currently half empty. There was an assessment done that continuing to do capital repairs on a building twice the size as is required is not as cost-effective as creating a school that is right-sized for the students and for the area.

Beyond that, that would be a question for - I understand there was an investment that was done in Cape Breton that was done in Brookland Elementary School because of the flood, and it was also requested by the board. I would just like to reinforce as well that the HRSB did, in fact, ask for an investment in J.L. Ilesley school.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: There has been a lot of discussion around how we got here, how it was built, and what has gone on to implement it. I believe Ms. Burke just touched briefly on future improvements in rollout of the implementation of the strategy. Can you tell us what the out years are going to look like as far as further movement of the strategy into other grades and where that's going?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm going to ask Jen to do an update on that. We have two additional strategies to support our direction. We have a math strategy, and we have a coding strategy. There are three pillar strategies that we have to roll out - literacy was the first one. That got moved out, and everything else kind of got put on hold with the current place that we are now. Jen can speak specifically to what the out years are going to include.

MS. BURKE: Within the literacy working group, there is actually a series of subcommittees that have identified key areas that we needed to move forward on in order to move the literacy strategy forward. Of course, we had one looking specifically at P-3, and they've started their work this year looking at the provincial learning piece for teachers. They've got ongoing plans for professional learning for teachers over the next number of years. As Ms. Taylor-Foley talked about, it's a differentiated plan, so a series of various ways that teachers can gain more access to learning about effective literacy strategies at those grades.

In addition to that, we have another action group which is actually looking at literacy support structures within all schools. In other words, it doesn't matter the grade levels within a school - what supports are in place for teachers and students to enhance and support and move forward on literacy learning? They are looking at various structures and looking at various ways that different boards have actually made this happen and various success stories. We're looking at putting that one in place as well.

In addition, that same group is actually looking at various ways, resources, and supports for teachers in Grades 4 through 12, looking at what those teachers would need in terms of professional learning and in terms of resources, and what some of the pressure points for students are where they need additional supports. They've got that piece going, they're doing the research components on that, and they're putting forward plans for that.

In addition, there's another group that I'm working with which is putting together a website that's focused on curricula and literacy strategies. It's easier for teachers, for parents, and for communities to have access to those pieces. We're in the process of developing those components.

Then of course we also have another group looking specifically at oral language because we know that's a very big component of the early grades, so oral language components. They're actually completing work on those pieces now and will be developing a series of professional learning materials for teachers on that. Those are the go-forward pieces right now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. MACFARLANE: I'm going to go back. Earlier you indicated, I believe Mr. Comeau did, that we met the Canadian standards for the first time ever.

MS. MCKENZIE: In reading.

MS. MACFARLANE: Right, which I knew we had been lacking and that was why I was asking. Are you crediting this success to this strategy? I mean it is new, it was just implemented - are we crediting the success to the strategy and are we seeing children's scores improving because of the strategy?

MS. MCKENZIE: The strategy is new, so no, we would not be crediting to that. In two or three years, yes, we'll hopefully see the gains that we anticipated. Back in 2013, more into 2014, we started to increase focus on literacy and math, supporting teachers, streamlining the curriculum - those types of things. You would have expected to start to see some positive results and if I was going to give credit, I would give it to teachers.

MS. MACFARLANE: That's great to hear. I know that Reading Recovery has been around for a long time. One of the things I often heard from teachers was they found that within Reading Recovery it was most effective if they had the child from four to six weeks intensely, every day - I heard this three or four years ago. Have we listened to that advice? Is Reading Recovery across the province now intense like that?

I am a believer that if you take a child out of the classroom just once a week, over three months, I don't think it is effective. I'm just wondering with Reading Recovery, is there a standard procedure across the province now?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm going to pass it to Sue, in terms of the standardization and the support for Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is one of our strategies - that intensive one-on-one work that's done with the child - but we also have small groups happening with literacy intervention so it's also bringing small groups out to support. There are a number of strategies that are happening.

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: Reading Recovery is in Grade 1, and Reading Recovery reaches the students who are at really the bottom percentage of their peers in their Grade 1 classroom. Generally speaking, a Reading Recovery teacher would work with about four students at a time, but individually. The average amount of time is usually around 12 weeks - it can be as much as 16 weeks - that a teacher would work with an individual student so it's a bit more of a prolonged period of time - individually, on a daily basis, that they work with those students.

When students are discontinued, which means they've completed their work with the teacher and they've reached a certain point, the teacher does not see those individuals anymore, so they are working back in their classroom with their peers during that time period. It's an individual pullout, a daily program - obviously, that's for individuals.

As the deputy mentioned, we also are utilizing some of the strategies you would find within Reading Recovery as well with the early literacy teachers, and that's a piece of work that the literacy leads are coordinating within their school boards as to what the early literacy teachers do. Those early literacy teachers work with small groups of students, usually between Grades 1 and 3, looking at supporting them and then working with their classroom teacher as well, to discuss with them what has happened during that intervention, what some things are that they need to be mindful of, and sharing in a co-teaching type of way with those individuals.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: I'm going to bring up the subject of cursive writing, which is quite controversial, about cursive writing. I'm wondering if you can tell me how that is going to come into play in this literacy strategy.

MS. MCKENZIE: That was one of the areas that we had lots and lots of discussion around. I'm going to let Jen talk about how you will see cursive writing as a strategy in the literacy strategy, that's what I can say.

MS. BURKE: Cursive writing is one of the many forms of written communication that we're asking students to engage in, along with that, print, word processing, and cursive is just one of them. It is important that students have exposure to a number of different ways to effectively communicate.

If we look at our curricula at Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6, there are indications within the guides and support for teachers to integrate cursive writing as one of the many forms of written expression students can engage with, so it is in there and it is supported.

MS. TREEN: To be clear, we're still going to be teaching that in school? Yes? And how in-depth? I just find it, and I know it's a form of communication and it's hard, too, because if you've never learned cursive writing or you haven't learned it well, when that form of communication comes up in front of you it's like you're reading another language, you have no idea how to read it.

MS. BURKE: That is why it exists within our curricula guides and that's why there are supports for teachers because students should be exposed to it. They certainly need to learn how to write their signature so that is why it's there.

It is noted for teachers that many students will choose various forms that they will feel comfortable with and that's the most important piece. We want our students to communicate clearly and accurately and that's the most important part of it all. But yes, it is there and it is something that teachers do focus on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: How were classroom teachers included in the development and the implementation of the literacy strategy?

MS. MCKENZIE: I would say there were two major components of including teachers. One was on what I would refer to as the streamlining of the curriculum from P-6, that was an intensive engagement of teachers. There was a whole team of teachers who were in for three months, in order to do the streamlining, and then it was rolled out through. The first time we did it from P-3 we did it as a Halifax-based roll-out and we learned from there that from the 4-6 that it was better to do it in the regions.

There has been quite a bit of discussion about whether there was an adequate - whether there was enough professional development associated with that so we've learned quite a bit as we've gone through and I think we've improved it as we've gone through the last few years. There were teachers intensively involved in that and then there were teachers intensively involved in the development of the literacy strategy, and as Jen spoke to earlier, workshops in P-3 in terms of professional learning.

Have we had a chance to do the whole piece? Not yet, we haven't gone P-12 yet because it's brand new and we've had this work-to-rule being implemented. Do you want to speak to the number of teachers that were involved?

MS. BURKE: There were a number of teachers involved from all of the boards in the development of this but we were also looking at survey results that we received from teachers when we did the initial roll-out of the P-3 streamlined curriculum. We had hundreds of responses. What many of the teachers were asking for was for additional professional learning in relation to language arts and literacy. We're very mindful that teachers are thinking about this on a regular basis, and we're shaping the professional learning and development of the strategy based on their responses.

As the deputy mentioned, it's an ongoing process. We need to continue to have those conversations and to move forward. Oh, sorry, the deputy wanted me to note the fact that we have Moodles that we have in place. Moodle is an online platform whereby we have information for teachers, so curricula, resources, et cetera, are available. For the new, streamlined curricula P-3 and 4-6, we have this online piece. It's also another way for teachers to communicate with us about what they need and what they want.

MS. ROBERTS: In conversations over the last couple of months with classroom teachers, one concern I heard is that they don't necessarily see how resources and supports follow assessments. If an assessment shows that either a particular student is struggling or that in a given classroom in a given school, students are not meeting outcomes, what does

that trigger for those students - not for the system but for those students? I wonder if you could address that.

MS. MCKENZIE: I can give you observations in terms of coming into this department in 2014. We collected the assessments as information but didn't necessarily trigger an action.

What we started doing, and Lennie was instrumental in it, was the Lessons Learned document from the assessment results - putting those booklets back out to teachers to help them support assessment. What we're doing at the macro level would be the Lessons Learned piece which has been very, very well received. I can let Lennie speak to that.

But also, there was the expectation that boards would be sitting down at the school level and looking at their results in terms of what they could do as a teaching community in the particular school to provide supports. Teachers are doing assessment constantly to be able to line those up for student achievement.

It's at the classroom, at the school, at the board, and at the province. We needed to make sure that that didn't end up being a pile-on but that instead it looked like it was supportive on all levels. We're getting stronger at that.

Do you want to speak to the Lessons Learned document that's been created?

MR. COMEAU: Part of what we heard from the assessment results is that, initially when we rolled out the assessments, we weren't doing enough in follow-up, just as Ms. McKenzie said.

Part of the response to that was to develop this Lessons Learned document where we would go in and analyze the provincial results for teachers and sort of highlight the areas where we see time and time again that students are having difficulty with. We're not only identifying them but then giving teachers next steps. In other words, if you see students are having difficulty with X, Y, or Z, here is what you can do to address these problems step by step in the classroom.

We also support teachers by crunching the data numbers for them and saying, here are some of the patterns that are emerging for your school and here are some patterns emerging within your board, to sort of highlight those for those teachers so that they can focus in and work one-on-one with their students to develop those. I think over the years we've realized we do need to do more with assessment results for teachers, and we've certainly started putting those in place.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Arab.

MS. PATRICIA ARAB: I'm going to apologize because I came in late, so I hope my question wasn't already touched on. My experience has been in high school, so I'm

curious as to how this strategy is going to catch our academic-bound high school students who haven't typically been prepared to continue on their studies at university level.

We have a number of students who will struggle once they get into post-secondary and will not have had the Primary to 10, 11 years leading up. What is the plan within the strategy to catch those high school students?

MS. MCKENZIE: I think there are two parts to your answer, and I know that you have good experience in the schools and so you can probably be instructive to us.

There is a focus on 9 to 12 ready to launch where we've actually spent quite a bit of time finding out what kids need to be successful in post-secondary and at college and in life, and what we need to focus on in terms of that. It's listed on Page 2, which is the research skills, the reading skills to support successful transition to post-secondary, reading and writing skills across subject areas, writing for different purposes, and oral and written presentation skills. Those are all things that they need to be successful if they move into post-secondary.

We know from the Transition Task Force, and we had that discussion when we were here, about 50 per cent of our kids are moving on to post-secondary immediately, and then we know that there's another block that move after a gap year or what have you. Then there's the other group that may be moving directly into the workforce. For all those kids, we need to make sure that they're successful moving forward.

I think although we've had a massive focus on P-6 at this particular time, to make sure we lay the strong foundations, we've had quite a bit of conversation internally in terms of what some of the best practices are. Some of our boards have alternative high schools or have alternative ways to serve kids, that are able to zero in on kids that may not be meeting the outcomes that you would expect but need to close those gaps in order to be successful when they transition.

There's an ongoing conversation that I've been having with the Nova Scotia Community College in terms of the roles they can play with that. We talk about what we can do inside the school system, how we have to start earlier in middle school to make sure that kids are successful when they move in, but also to make sure that the kids have had lots of experiences. We don't want anyone to graduate never having had the experience of writing a research paper because you're going to need to be able to do it if you move into post-secondary. You need to know how to structure it, which is different than writing an essay and those types of things, so different forms of communication.

I would say that the focus to date has been on P-6. When I met with the principals across the province what we heard was you're going a bit too fast on P-6, and at the higher levels it was, you had better get here quick. We know we need to continue that work. We've

just started doing the review of the overall public school program, the PSP, with a big focus on Grades 7 and 8, so we're on our way. We also have curriculum renewal, there has been a particular focus on that at the high school level, but we have more work to do.

The focus that we've had is we want the children we graduate to be strong with reading and literacy, and we want them to be strong with math. We want them to be prepared, which means that no matter where they transition to, they are ready.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Arab, on a follow-up.

MS. ARAB: I think there's so much that is done at the front level of education and it makes sense that you want to build those steps from P-6 and 7-9 and so forth. But there is an immediacy at the higher grade levels because that opportunity to - we're using the word "catch" but you do, you catch the weaknesses and you elevate the strengths. Once you get to Grades 10, 11, and 12, those opportunities to help within the public school system are dwindling and they're going to be pushed out into the real world. It's a very different reality once they get to high school, compared to the first 10 years of their secondary education.

You mentioned professional development for teachers in terms of this but do you have anything specific or is there - sorry, let's not go there - would there be any collaboration between our post-secondary institutions - NSCC, our universities, and other colleges - and collaborating with those organizations and our department or our teachers so that there's a better dialogue that high school teachers and middle school teachers know what the expectation is once our students leave and enter into those post-secondary institutions?

MS. MCKENZIE: Yes, so the focus on prepared is to make sure we have the career planning moving through so that kids know what they need. It's difficult for kids to find out in Grade 12 that they actually needed academic math if they made a decision in Grade 9 that they were taking a different route.

What we need, though, is opportunities for the kids to crosswalk to what they need. There should be no dead ends. I've always said that we need the best system of on-ramps in Canada. If we had the best system of on-ramps here is that you never take an off-ramp that you can't find your way back onto the path that you want to move forward. I think that has to be a big focus into the future.

The Transition Task Force brought universities, the community college, business, and public education together. There are a number of things that have continued on through the business education council, but the Transition Task Force itself is remaining. I'm in constant dialogue with the universities about how we can improve things.

I would like to talk about one thing - I think it's an innovation that's been wildly successful and we're planning on expanding it. One of the things we noted is that success

in math often was tied to whether or not you had access to a tutor, so what we've done is introduced the Homework Hub, which is linking kids directly with teachers; it runs in the evening. We've introduced it for Grade 10 math because that's where kids are starting to make a decision if they're going to opt out of academic math, and may take a different route. We want them to stay in academic math because we know it's tied to all the growth sectors in the province.

I'm just going to let Sue speak to the Homework Hub. It's been very, very, very successful.

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: To your point, Ms. Arab, we haven't reached all the high school components yet. We've been working through, as you know, from Primary to Grade 6. But there are a few things that we have done at the high school level to support those students and their academics.

One of them is the Homework Hub that was introduced this year in October for Grade 10 math students. It's open from Sunday evenings through to Thursday evenings for live tutoring sessions. It's also open 24/7 for resources too. Since it opened in October, as of last week, there were approximately 5,000 visits to the site by Grade 10 students alone, and by some of their teachers as well to look at the resources.

There are quizzes that students can create for themselves in there. They can create their own assessments from banks of questions that are there, which is very popular in preparation for exams as well; we've had our busiest time leading up to that. The live tutors are available in this electronic platform through the Internet, through a shared whiteboard. If a student happens to be working in some of the resource sections, in the resource section, there are videos on specific topics, there is their textbook in electronic format, there are graphing calculators, and there's a variety of other supports.

Let's say they're in their textbook, their e-text, and they're working on a particular question. That question might be question no. 3. They can actually click on that question, and it populates into the tutor's whiteboard where they share the question and what the student has been doing up to this point. They can choose to auditorily talk with the tutor, or they can do chat. A lot of students will start out with chat and then will move from that as they feel more confident. It's been incredibly popular.

Of course, we know that all our students don't have access to Internet at home all the time, so we have a phone line, as well, with a 1-800 number so that any student in the province can access that.

Our teachers on the other end of the line all have math education. Some of them are actually second-year B.Ed. students, and some of them are retired individuals as well. It

has been incredibly popular, and we're looking to grow that next year as well to Grades 11 and 9.

MS. MCKENZIE: The other thing I would like to add is that we've had 10 pilots run this year in terms of extended math 11. We knew that some kids felt that the semestered math was going too quickly for Grade 11 and opted to drop into a different math level. We've had a lot of success with the full-year Grade 11 math. We think that it sets people up well to be successful. We have a number of things that we have done at the high school level. It's just that that's an area that we're continuing to work in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll go to the next round. We'll start with Mr. Orrell, and we'll stick to one question in an effort to try to get around one more time.

MR. ORRELL: I'm just wondering if I could get some clarity. We talked about the funding for J.L. Ilesley and that funding not going into the literacy program or any other programs. (Interruption) Okay, I said that. But you also said that the decision to not renovate J.L. Ilesley, to build a new one, was because they were operating a half-empty school.

I imagine the board in Halifax would know that that school was half empty when they decided they just wanted the upgrades to it. We've had other schools in the province where the board recommended no, they don't want this, or they don't want that. Parent groups, parents, teachers, whoever fought to have those boards.

We had the minister in Question Period stand up and say: that's a board decision, I can't overrule it, and I won't overrule it. The board's decision here and in other areas was not to build certain schools or to renovate certain schools, and that's being overruled. Who makes that final decision? What are the criteria for that decision to be made? In some areas, the board is right; in other areas, the board is not right.

I'm confused about how those decisions come to pass. Can someone explain that to me? Who makes the final decision? It seems suspicious to me as an Opposition member that some of the stuff being done is in areas where there are government people. Some of the other stuff that's not getting done that is being asked for is because it's Opposition or non-government people.

I don't want to accuse anybody of anything and I don't want to imply anything but I'd like to have that clarified. Who makes those decisions? How come it's the board one way and it's not the board another way. Can someone clarify that for me?

MS. MCKENZIE: The boards make recommendations. In the case of the work that was undertaken that was announced, the board had made requests. In the case of Brookland Elementary School, there was an upgrade requested for 2020 in order to accommodate the kids who were coming from Sherwood Park that was being closed as a result of a flood. The insurance money could have either restored the school to where it was or, with

additional money, take it to where it had to go. That was a request by the board and it was honoured.

With Frank H. MacDonald, that was not a government riding but it was an area that had been prioritized by the Chignecto-Central board. In fact, this would have been one of the - you know there's a five-year window to get the work done, so it was prioritized and I'm sure the MLA in the area is appreciative of it.

The third piece of work done was the work that was being done on J.L. Ilsley. There has been a significant amount of investment on schools through the capital repairs that were providing upgrading. There has been some work done on J.L. Ilsley through that fund.

All those requests came in from the board, and an A and A was requested by HRSB. Internally it was looked at, what was the best return for investment, in terms of continuing to do patchwork on the old school that was twice the size that was required, or to provide a new high school in the area and that was the decision that was taken.

All those requests came from the board and the final decision was taken and announced by the government.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Obviously, I recognize the fact that I represent probably one of the largest concentrations of Acadians in one community. I have a very interesting opportunity to engage with both school boards, from the English- and French-language side. I actually am quite proud, I must say, of the CSAP and the work they do with their board also.

In regard to that with the literacy rollout, is it different in the French-speaking schools than it would be in the English? If it is, I'd like to know how. I guess we don't get a follow-up so can I ask if cultural identity is part of that determination in building the program in the French schools?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'll let Sue and Jen - because they're obviously getting prepared here - provide an answer to that question. I can say that the literacy strategy overall is the same in both the French and the English boards but with the addition of cultural identity in the French curriculum. The development of literacy and language is a major part and component of focus of the cultural piece of the CSAP, and it has been built into their strategy and also into their curriculum.

We also have French immersion which is significant in the province, and of course that would be supported through the literacy strategy as well as part of our French-language programming. Did you have anything you wanted to add to that?

MS. BURKE: I can just note that the CSAP has a literacy lead who is represented and works with us on the working group. The initiatives that are happening across the province are happening within the CSAP as well. We work together hand-in-hand and we do the same sort of work.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Taylor-Foley, do you have something? No, okay, thank you very much. Ms. MacFarlane.

MS. MACFARLANE: My question is just a yes or no answer. It is aligned with my colleague's question - just a follow-up on my colleague's question. At the end of the day, a school board decision can be overruled by the minister?

MS. MCKENZIE: I don't know which decision you're requesting.

MS. MACFARLANE: Any decision. Like if there's a school board decision that has been given to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the minister has the authority to override that recommendation or suggestion, yes or no? Is the Education Act or - the authority is there somehow for the minister to say no, I'm not going with that recommendation from the school board because - and often there are very legitimate reasons why they shouldn't but I'm just wondering. We're just looking for a yes or no, the minister does have authority to override any school board decision.

MS. MCKENZIE: It depends. On a school closure within the Education Act it specifies that the minister may not override a school closure. The final decision is made by the school board, which is a difference in terms of the collection of requests that come in for capital requests also come in for capital repairs. In those cases, the government has to assess that in the context of their overall tangible capital asset budget and they do the best they can overall. They look at a variety of requests, they look at the budget they have, and they look at regional fairness.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: One group of people that hasn't been involved in this, maybe have been in some way but I'm not aware of it - are the parents themselves engaged in this literacy program at all? Are you hearing anything from the students through the parents?

MS. MCKENZIE: We operate on the belief that parents are important learning partners and that what we need to be able to do is communicate with parents what the educational outcomes are that are expected in each grade. If there needs to be modifications in the outcomes for any particular grade, parents are involved through parent programming. That may be through adaptations or through individualized program plans. Each teacher will communicate to the families each year what the outcomes are for any particular subject and how they'll achieve those through their class.

We also have parents engaged through Power School, where parents are able to find out how their kids are doing and engage in a dialogue with the teachers that way. Is there anything else you guys wanted to add to that?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Anyone else? Good, thank you. Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: I'm also going to build off the line of questions that Mr. Orrell started, related to J.L. Ilesley but for me more specifically related to the requested capital investment in the Citadel family of schools. I participated as a citizen, before I was elected, in the School Options Committee process that had a number of very intense public meetings that a whole team of volunteers invested literally hundreds of hours into, which resulted in the request for a new junior high school in the north end of Halifax, as well as significant investment in St. Joseph's A. McKay as alteration and repair, I think.

I know that from the board's level I listened back to their deliberations related to J.L. Ilesley and they made a decision based on quite a lot of questioning of school board officials about what had been done and how much more needed to be done and whether that investment had been good investment and so forth. That was how they decided not to invest or not to put J.L. Ilesley on the list to request a new school. At the same time, they deliberated very thoughtfully on the recommendations of the School Options Committee report related to the north end of Halifax. They decided to put forward the request for a new junior high in the north end of Halifax and the significant investment in one of our elementary schools.

I guess I'm just left wondering, recognizing that there is a host of parents who are giving hundreds of hours right now in the Cole Harbour family of schools, what assurances are there that all of that work and deliberation and relationship building and analysis will be respected in the end with decisions that really value that input?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm very familiar with the work that's gone on in Halifax and the amount of time that parents and teachers and other supporters of the schools have invested. What was interesting about the recommendation that was put forward is that there was no recommendation that was made on how to deal with the excess space that actually existed in Halifax. Instead, there was a request for a new school without actually having made decisions about how the excess space would be addressed.

It's my understanding that the Halifax Regional School Board put placeholders on their request based on further discussions in terms of the other work that's going to have to happen with the Citadel family of schools; only a certain portion was used. Right now, there are some schools that need work. There are schools that have significant populations, and there are some that have open spaces. It's my understanding that would come together as a set of recommendations that would talk about what schools need to be consolidated and what would happen in the future.

I would look at the Cape Breton example. There were decisions that were made by the Cape Breton-Victoria board in terms of which schools would be closed, which schools would be consolidated, and which schools would require upgrading or new construction in order to meet the overall plan. We did receive a letter from the Halifax Regional School Board that asked for a new junior high, but it was my understanding that there would be additional work done on the Citadel family of schools to take a look at what had to happen with all the schools.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. TREEN: I'm going to make reference to this chart here. Literacy leads, literacy mentors, Reading Recovery teachers - some of them I recognize. Can you do a brief description of each one of those - what a literacy lead does compared to a literacy mentor - and describe them, please?

MS. BURKE: Literacy leads are new. Their job is to coordinate literacy for the board, so they are going to be working with their Reading Recovery teacher leaders, with Reading Recovery teachers, with their mentors, with early literacy teachers, and indeed with the classroom teachers who support literacy. They meet with us once every month for two days, and they also coordinate data collection in the board, so they have a significant role.

If we move to our literacy mentors, again, we've put those in place this year through the strategy. Their job is to work with teachers, as Sue Taylor-Foley noted, on their instructional repertoire, to do the very best they can for their students. Teachers were already doing amazing things with their students. They're just there to support additional components that the teacher may want to be looking at to support student learning.

Of course, we have our early literacy teachers. Our early literacy teachers work with small groups of students in Primary through to Grade 3 who need additional support in literacy. That can vary in time frames, and it can vary in terms of when they address students within their learning needs. The boards make those determinations based on the needs of schools and not upon the recommendation of teachers.

Then we have our Reading Recovery teacher leaders. Those people within the boards are actually the ones who are coordinating Reading Recovery within the board, training their teachers and working with those teachers on a regular basis. They also have a workload as well. They are also working with students.

Then we have our Reading Recovery teachers. I think Sue Taylor-Foley identified their role within the school. They're working with students for between 16 and 20 weeks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I know we've gone right across the whole spectrum in this discussion upon what the strategy is and all the programs. But it would help, and I would appreciate it if you don't mind, if you could break it down for me to understand better, simply from Primary to 3, 4 to 8, and then 9 to 12. Can you take each one of those threes and give a summary of what is being implemented in each one of those? I'm not sure who the question would be for. I see Ms. Taylor-Foley nodding her head.

MS. TAYLOR-FOLEY: On Page 2 of the strategy, we do outline some of the high-leverage types of things that will be occurring at each of those areas that you mentioned. In Primary to Grade 3, we've mentioned a number of times that we want to really put a strong foundation into place.

I appreciate you highlighting this though, because these are the things that came out of a lot of discussion. Now they're not the only things, of course, but they are really the high-leverage kind of pieces that we are looking at with this that are supported through the research that was mentioned about the development of the strategy and that were supported by the teachers who worked with us and all of the specialists from the board levels as well.

In Primary to Grade 3 building that strong foundation for literacy is extremely important and we do want all our students to come out of that Primary to Grade 3 being literate individuals obviously and ready for the next stage of their learning, where they're going to be really innovating and exploring a lot more and working with subject areas in different ways, too, and using their literacy across subject areas in different ways than they would be just in the Primary to Grade 3 area. In Primary to Grade 3 is the concentration on that, and the innovation and exploration is that literacy across subject areas.

As we've already begun to renew that particular area, so Grades 4 through 6 we've actually renewed the curriculum at this stage. Teachers are working with that right now for the first time. What will happen is we will get feedback from those teachers when we're able to do that and we'll visit their classrooms a little bit more, as we did with the P-3. In P-3 we visited classrooms, got feedback on how things were going. We also surveyed the teachers, as Ms. Burke mentioned, and we also had an open dialogue with teachers online, on their online portal that Ms. Burke mentioned as well. We'll be doing that same kind of thing with the Grades 4 to 6 teachers.

Our next step is looking at the Grades 7 through 8 curriculum and looking at how we will renew that particular curriculum to ensure that literacy lives in the way that it is mentioned in here. Then we will be moving up to the high school level.

To Ms. Arab's point earlier though, we recognize that many of these things are important now so we really don't want to wait for all those things to occur. Some of those things exist within the curriculum already and it's a matter of how we can also look for

additional supports, recognize resources that are in place already, and provide additional professional learning opportunities for the strong and committed teachers of course that we do have right now and helping them to realize the professional learning opportunities they want to have in those areas.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: Since 2013 there are 7,500 more people in the province using food banks; in 2015 there were more than 13,000 children who had to get their food from food banks and there's a connection. We talk about social determinants of health but we could also talk about social determinants of literacy, certainly. Poverty leads to stress, which is cortisol, cortisol affects the prefrontal cortex. Children who are arriving from stressful environments are going to have a very hard time applying themselves to what is happening in the classroom, regardless of what strategies are attempted to be implemented by teachers, given that context.

My question is, obviously you are the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, you are not the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, you are not the Department of Community Services, but what is the department doing to address child poverty and the impact on learning?

MS. MCKENZIE: Currently we work with Nourish Nova Scotia to provide school breakfasts. Last year I believe we served five million breakfasts in schools. There was a recent announcement in the Throne Speech that there would be an additional investment with Nourish Nova Scotia to be able to cover all schools and to ensure there were breakfasts every day, as opposed to some days. It wasn't based on need; it was provided to all children because there's lots of reasons why. I can't guarantee that my kids went out of the house every morning with the most nutritious breakfast. If they had a pop tart in their pocket sometimes that was it, but that's not to make light of it.

What it's meant to say is that we have to make sure that all children get a good start with breakfast in the morning and then ensure, through a variety of different ways, that we recognize that not all children have the same starts in life and making sure that we reflect that in our practice.

The breakfast program is one of the examples of where the community works with the schools and works with businesses and others and we have great partnerships with the Departments of Health and Wellness, Community Services, and others to make sure that we're dealing with the whole child and the whole family.

The example that I would give that I believe is the most effective example of working together across departments is SchoolsPlus. We are continuing to roll that out across the province. That's really a reflection of making sure that we support not only the child but also the family to get the supports that they need, with the focus, of course, from our perspective on the child being successful in school. Again, I would point to the

inspiring communities work that we're doing as well. There's lots of work that's under way. We wouldn't hold it out as being perfect, but I would say that from the teachers in the classroom to the people who work in SchoolsPlus to the people who show up every morning and make breakfast for kids, there's quite a community effort to address some of the issues that you've identified.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Arab to finish.

MS. ARAB: This strategy is being rolled out as a whole school approach, so the onus on literacy skills doesn't fall just to the English teacher, it's going to be across all subjects, across curriculum. I like to focus on the junior and high school. I'm wondering particularly in junior and senior high what professional development is going to be given to teachers who don't teach in the humanities, who are more science- and math-based, in order for them to be able to incorporate the strategy within their own curriculum, within their own teaching styles.

MS. MCKENZIE: We recognize that not only do we need to provide those supports for teachers in the middle school and the high school levels, but that is recognized as part of the professional learning in the literacy strategy. We've introduced it this year. It has been a rocky year to introduce it. I think we've made some good strides. The intention is to provide that professional learning for teachers either through Moodle or through videos that they can play at their leisure or through focused professional development. There's a recognition that we need to make sure that everyone is contributing to the child leaving and graduating with not only the literacy skills we want them to have, but also that the teachers feel they have all the tools they need to be able to support that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie, I will give you and your team an opportunity, if you would, please, to offer some closing remarks. I want to thank you on behalf of the committee for appearing today as well. We got 33 questions and answers today, which is pretty good. We appreciate that very much. Please carry on with some closing remarks.

MS. MCKENZIE: The closing remarks I would have is that I thank you very much for inviting us to talk about this. I hope we get to come back in the future and talk about the math strategy and the coding strategy as well. These are intended to build on good practices that are already in the schools and on the strengths we have in our teachers and our principals and in the system as a whole. The focus is on the best possible outcomes for kids, so thank you very much. We are frequent flyers here, but I appreciate it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very kindly.

Just for the committee, a couple of things. One, you'll see some correspondence that came back dated December 16th, just for yourself.

Also under committee business, I guess there was correspondence from Duff Montgomerie.

Our next meeting is set for February 28th. We will have as a witness the Pictou County Injured Workers Association.

Anything further to bring before the committee before we close? Nothing further. I guess we're adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:44 a.m.]