

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, May 11, 2016**

**LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER**

**Regional School Board Governance and Oversight**

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## **Public Accounts Committee**

Mr. Allan MacMaster, Chairman

Mr. Iain Rankin, Vice-Chairman

Mr. Chuck Porter

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

Mr. Brendan Maguire

Mr. Joachim Stroink

Mr. Tim Houston

Ms. Lenore Zann

Hon. David Wilson

[Mr. Terry Farrell replaced Mr. Brendan Maguire]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Leadley  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault  
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Michael Pickup  
Auditor General

Ms. Evangeline Colman-Sadd  
Assistant Auditor General

Mr. Andrew Atherton  
Audit Principal

## WITNESSES

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

Ms. Sandra McKenzie, Deputy Minister  
Ms. Sue Taylor-Foley, Executive Director, Education, Innovation, Programs & Services  
Ms. Ann Power, Executive Director Student Equity and Support Services

### **Chignecto-Central Regional School Board**

Ms. Trudy Thompson, Board Chair  
Mr. Gary Adams, Superintendent of Schools

### **Halifax Regional School Board**

Ms. Melinda Daye, Board Chair  
Mr. Elwin LeRoux, Superintendent of Schools

### **Strait Regional School Board**

Ms. Francine Boudreau, Board Chair  
Mr. Ford Rice, Superintendent of Schools



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2016**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**9:00 A.M.**

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Iain Rankin

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order.

Our topic today is regional school board governance and oversight. There was work done by the Auditor General's Office in their November 2015 Report, Chapter 2. We have with us the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development - we have three school boards, the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, Halifax Regional School Board, and the Strait Regional School Board.

I would like to remind everyone, if you have a cellphone to place it on silent. We will begin with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We also have our Auditor General's Office with us today.

I would like to give everyone an opportunity for a short introduction if they wish. We would like to introduce our guests as well. I will allow us to start with whoever's microphone comes on first, because I know our audiovisual crew has that set up, so I will ask you to be aware if your microphone lights up.



[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. McKenzie, would you like to begin with some opening comments?

MS. SANDRA MCKENZIE: Good morning. I would like to thank the committee for inviting us here today to discuss the roles of the department and school boards in educating our children in Nova Scotia.

I have introduced the staff I am here with today. I want to again thank the Auditor General for conducting an audit on the workings of the regional school board in the province. The minister actually requested the Auditor General to consider doing the audit as a result of the survey that had been done that was responded to by 19,000 Nova Scotians, that resulted in the Education Action Plan. The Auditor General was asked to consider a review of the roles and responsibilities of the board and the department as part of our plan to move forward with improvements to the public education system.

We are continuing our work on improving the governance and efficiency of school boards in the department. While we have a good system, we know it can be even better. I know that the elected boards pride themselves on providing effective governance and oversight. I am also proud of our working relationships and the commitment to our educational partners to remedy any shortcomings. We are working closely with the Nova Scotia School Boards Association to clarify the roles and responsibilities of school board management, governing boards, and our department.

Mr. Chairman, we have a common goal: student learning, student achievement and student success is our main priority. I look forward to answering your questions today on behalf of the department. The school board chairmen will respond to governance questions and superintendents will be able to answer questions around operations. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do our school boards wish to provide opening comments or shall we proceed right to questions? We will begin with Ms. Thompson.

MS. TRUDY THOMPSON: Good morning, Chairman MacMaster, committee members, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for extending me the opportunity to appear before you today to speak about the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board's response to the Auditor General's recommendations and to our philosophy as a public school board. CCRSB welcomes 19,746 students into our 70 schools each and every day.

The majority of our students, close to 17,000, travel by bus and I am proud to say that our transportation staff are some of the best in the province. CCRSB has 2,700 full-time and part-time staff working in our schools, our offices, driving buses and at work sites. We are also blessed with dedicated and passionate volunteers drawn from our schools and larger communities. CCRSB is governed by 16 elected and one appointed board member.

Our role as board members is to oversee the development of policy for our system, to ensure that the budget we are entrusted with each year is distributed to the greatest benefit of the students in our system, and to make sure that the programs put in place are having a real impact for students.

Student achievement has been and remains a priority conversation around the governing board at CCRSB. We consider it our primary responsibility to oversee and understand how students are achieving so that we best know where to direct funding for resources.

In his November 2015 Report, Auditor General Michael Pickup directed seven recommendations to CCRSB. As you will have seen from our official response to the report, much work to answer those recommendations was already underway when the report was tabled. As a governing board we have spent last year reviewing and updating our bylaws to ensure that our governance model aligns with best practice and the Education Act.

In the 2014-15 school year CCRSB took a great leap forward. Thanks to the hard work of our senior staff, the governing board began seeing very detailed information about students' success, including literacy, mathematics and the breakdown of students on individual program plans. This wealth of data continues to flow forward and is only increasing in quality. Beginning this Spring the governing board will receive detailed reports on student performance, school improvement goals, and teacher and principal evaluations. Staff have prepared a literacy and mathematic assessment and reporting schedule so that as board members, we know when data will be available and when to expect this information to come to our table.

The governing board is committed to continuing an annual self-assessment and to ensuring that all 17 of us, as well as our superintendent, are held to the highest standards according to the Education Act.

The mission of Chignecto-Central Regional School Board is to develop independent, life-long learners in a student-centred environment with high expectations for all. At CCRSB we operate always with our mission in mind and in accordance with our organizational beliefs. Again, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We do have limited time for the remaining opening comments. I'll ask speakers to be brief. We'll move now to Ms. Thompson. I'm sorry, I mixed up, Ms. Daye.

MS. MELINDA DAYE: Hello and good morning. I want to thank the Public Accounts Committee for the invitation to appear today. As you heard in the introductions, my name is Melinda Daye, and I am the current chair of the Halifax Regional School Board. Along with me today is our superintendent, Elwin LeRoux.

I look forward to discussing the Auditor General's findings with you today. We were pleased to participate in this review because it gave us an opportunity to have a third party identify what is working as well as identifying potential gaps in our current policies and in our practices.

I would quickly like to provide a little bit of context for the members of this committee. The HRSB shares the same geographic boundary as the Halifax Regional Municipality. We have approximately 48,000 students in our 136 schools. We employ approximately 9,000 full and part-time staff.

We have a governing board of 10 members, and nine of these members are elected. We represent geographic areas on the board. One, who happens to be me, represents the African Nova Scotian community, and we have one appointed Mi'kmaq member who represents Mi'kmaq and indigenous peoples.

There is a distinct division of roles between a governing board and the superintendent. The governing board has an oversight role, whether it is through passing the budget or establishing policy. It is then the superintendent's job, as we are well aware, to implement the board's decision and oversee the daily operation of the system.

Although I suspect that we will spend the majority of our time today discussing the challenges raised in the audit findings, I want to just take a brief moment to highlight a few of the things the Auditor General did compliment us on. Just give me a few moments.

The audit found that we did a good job of implementing the continuous school improvement process. This is important because it forms the basis for how we monitor the progress of our schools. The audit found that the governing boards generally get good information from management, and specifically, our governing board does receive the necessary information from staff to assess student performance on provincial assessments.

As was indicated in the audit, the Halifax Regional School Board agreed with all of the recommendations. We believe that, when fully implemented, they will lead to improved performance not just for the governing board but, more importantly, for our students. To ensure compliance, we have incorporated these recommendations into our 2016-17 business plan. All of the recommendations are incorporated into our business plan. Staff will now be required to provide the governing board with quarterly updates on the progress of these recommendations.

On that note, I'll conclude my remarks, and I'll be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Daye. Ms. Boudreau.

MS. FRANCINE BOUDREAU: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. On behalf of the Strait Regional School Board, I thank the Standing Committee on Public Accounts



for the invitation to attend today's meeting with respect to the November 2015 Report of the Auditor General.

As a board, we certainly respect and welcome the recommendations that have been made by the Auditor General. We thank the Auditor General and his staff for their time and commitment to public education and for the examination of our operations. Any time we can improve our practice, it is a good thing.

I would like to take a moment to provide some brief information about our school board for background purposes. The Strait Board was established in 1996. Our board is comprised of 12 members: 11 elected, and one Mi'kmaq member appointed. Our jurisdiction encompasses an area of approximately 11,000 square kilometres and includes the Counties of Antigonish, Inverness, Guysborough, and Richmond. During the school year 2015-16 there are 6,280 students attending our 21 schools. The main work of our school board is to govern by setting direction and providing leadership, establishing policy, providing financial oversight, approving strategic and annual educational business plans, monitoring student achievement, and evaluation.

For the operation of the school board as a whole, it is very important that we have a successful, professional and respectful working relationship between the governing board and the superintendent who is responsible for the day-to-day operations. As such, it is very important to respect the role of governance and the role of administration.

Our board members and staff have been working to implement the Auditor General's recommendations to ensure that our continued focus is always on student learning, achievement and success, and that we will fulfill the responsibilities as outlined in the Education Act. It is important to evaluate on a regular basis what we are doing to determine if it is working or if improvement is needed.

The Auditor General's report has identified some areas of improvement for our board. We will ensure that the specific recommendations for improvement are acted upon to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public school operations here in the Strait. In fact staff, through the superintendent, have already begun working on a number of areas identified in the report. As a board, at the end of the day our efforts will continue to be focused on providing students in the Strait region with the best possible learning opportunities, regardless of where they live in the region.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Boudreau. We'll begin with the PC caucus and Mr. Houston for 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: I'd like you to turn to Page 9 in the AG's report; there's a chart on Page 9 that the Auditor General described as concerning. I actually have a different word for it but I'd like you to - if you look at that chart and you just use Grade 6 math as an example, I was pretty surprised when this chart was described to me because what this chart shows me is that on average, across the province I guess, but especially in your three

boards, roughly 70 per cent of the kids are meeting the minimum expectation for Grade 6 math, so it means that 30 per cent of the children in the classrooms aren't even meeting the minimum. The AG called that concerning and I was pretty shocked.

I'd like to start with Ms. McKenzie and ask her, what's her reaction to that type of performance?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie.

MS. MCKENZIE: Not only can I say that the results are disturbing in the things that we need to address, 19,000 Nova Scotians responded the same way when we surveyed them related to the Education Action Plan. That's why the Education Action Plan has identified a focus, an increased focus on math and literacy, as being the primary job of the public education system and that's where we're going to place our focus.

We've set the last year assessment results as a baseline for improvement and we've worked with all the boards to address the streamlining of the curriculum so that teachers felt that they were able to teach to the outcomes that needed to be identified for the results.

There has been \$3.2 million invested in literacy and additional funds invested in math this year, including early interventionists and math mentors to address this. So there's a plan around math and a plan around literacy because the statistics are not acceptable.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, so it's not good. Oftentimes when you deal with the government there's a lot of finger pointing - it's not me, it's somebody else. This poor performance rests at the feet of whom - the department or the boards?

MS. MCKENZIE: Ultimately we are a collective and we are administering a system that supports children, right now about 116,000 children, in learning. Schools find themselves responsible for almost really raising children from P to Grade 12 and that we take that job fully and responsibly.

In the past I would say that the department has passed the money over to the boards and left the accountability with the boards. We would do provincial assessments, look at the results, and then ask the boards to do better.

In the last two years you've seen the department step to the fore and work directly with the boards around getting targeted better results in math and literacy. We have established a management team with the superintendents around the Action Plan and we have collectively developed a math strategy and a literacy strategy, which will be released to the public over the next few months, that knits the elements together to get better results, including setting targets for improvement.

MR. HOUSTON: So the department?

MS. MCKENZIE: I beg your pardon?

MR. HOUSTON: It rests at the feet of the department?

MS. MCKENZIE: I think that the minister would say that she is responsible, as the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, to work with the boards to get better results. The boards are responsible for implementing the responsibilities as assigned to them by the department, and she has made it clear with all the board chairmen – she has met with them on a fairly regular basis to say that student achievement is her number-one goal.

MR. HOUSTON: The Auditor General summarized the report saying the department is not doing a good job of monitoring and evaluating student achievement. That was in the report of November 15<sup>th</sup>, so it would have been based on an audit from a period just a little bit prior to that. Would you still agree with that statement, as we sit here today, that the department is not doing a good job of monitoring and evaluating student performance?

MS. MCKENZIE: I wouldn't agree with that today. I would . . .

MR. HOUSTON: You would not?

MS. MCKENZIE: I would not.

MR. HOUSTON: Because you've taken which steps?

MS. MCKENZIE: I can outline the steps that we've taken.

MR. HOUSTON: Well, just in the interest of time, if you can just - it's a powerful statement to say you don't agree with that right now. So we can leave it for now, unless you can kind of summarize it quickly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston, we'll allow the witness to answer the question.

MS. MCKENZIE: I am going to respond to say that we agreed with the Auditor General's statement that we were not doing a sufficient job with monitoring outcomes when the report was released. We've taken steps since the Auditor General's Report, but we were already in progress, as some of the chairmen have identified, as a result of the Education Action Plan. The Auditor General's Report, of course, is retrospective as opposed to forward-looking, so he is commenting on where we were in the past, not necessarily where we were going in the future. We've taken very direct steps to address the achievement gap, including establishing a centre of excellence which is focusing on teacher excellence and student achievement.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, thank you. I'd like to turn to Ms. Thompson. If a student is unsuccessful in the course material, they still pass - is that correct?

MS. THOMPSON: It depends on where the student is - we have students in individual program plans, and as they work through their material, there are goals set for their level of ability. As they reach that goal, it gets moved on. So we do have different programs. We have extra resources put in place for students who are struggling in the system. In literacy, we have our Early Literacy Program, which are boosts of either four or six weeks to try and get to those students up to where they need to be. Last year, we also introduced the early mathematic boost for about four weeks, to get students achieving where they need to be.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you for that, and I do want to talk about the IPPs but, for now, if a student is not on an IPP and they are unsuccessful in the course material, do they still pass?

MS. THOMPSON: Students need to achieve at a certain level before they can move on to the next level.

MR. HOUSTON: Is that an individual level? If you have 20 kids in the class and you have four of them on IPPs and 16 not on IPPs, would each of those 16 students have their own individual hurdle to achieve - is that what I take from your statement?

MS. THOMPSON: Students are all different, and they learn at different rates, and they learn in different ways, so it depends on the student. We do have students repeating grades.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. And that's across, all the way from P to 12 there would be students who are held back or repeat a grade because they didn't meet their individual outcomes?

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, we have students who, if they are not successful in a course, do repeat it.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. Across the board? You mentioned there were about 17,000 students. Could you give me a sense of how many may have had to repeat a grade, let's say last year?

MS. THOMPSON: I don't have that right at my fingertips but I can get information back to you.

MR. HOUSTON: If you had to guess, would it be in the hundreds or the thousands or the tens?

MS. THOMPSON: I have no idea at this point, but I can provide the information if you need it.

MR. HOUSTON: So, you don't have a sense of how many students are repeating grades, just no sense at all?

MS. THOMPSON: Well, it depends, some students repeat a course, some repeat a grade; it depends on where they are at. Some may repeat a math course but continue on in English. So, it varies.

MR. HOUSTON: Mr. Chairman, I would maybe request that each of the boards could send us a note on how many students repeated a course.

MS. THOMPSON: Okay, and Gary will probably be able to answer that question more fully.

MR. CHAIRMAN: So, Mr. Adams, would you like to add to that?

MR. GARY ADAMS: Certainly, to add to that, through the PSP from Primary to Grade 9, it is important to note that if a student is experiencing difficulty in one aspect of the curriculum, the research would tell us that retention would not necessarily be the answer, and rarely is the answer; instead, addressing programming in those specific needs. It would be a different conversation if you were looking at a subject-specific high school course, and we could certainly get statistics on how many are not successful in passing a particular course.

Imagine for example if a student is struggling in an area of mathematics concepts but he is doing very well in other areas, holding that child back for an entire year based on one specific set, as opposed to identifying the needs and targeting the interventions in supports, and that is what Chair Thompson has alluded to in terms of early math supports, other levels of programming through adaptations, perhaps IPP, but it is important to be supporting the student in those specific needs not to the detriment of their strengths. So, it is a strengths-based approach to supporting students.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, I do want to come back to that; I appreciate that. I would ask if the deputy has a general sense of across the province how many children are repeating grades?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie.

MS. MCKENZIE: We can provide you with the statistics, and you have asked for those to be tabled. I do want to say that a lot of Nova Scotians expressed concern when they responded to the survey that talked about the no-zero policy or if kids were moving through without being prepared and that type of thing. Minister Casey responded with saying that we would be releasing ministerial policies which will be consistent across the

province. She started with the code of conduct; she has released a homework policy; she is about to release a discussion paper on attendance; and, coming up in the next few months - actually it would probably be the Fall - will be the beginning of a discussion around promotion, acceleration, and retention, which will deal with exactly what you are requesting. That was reflected in the questions that came from Nova Scotians and it will be something that we deal with through ministerial policy.

MR. HOUSTON: I would like to go back to Ms. Thompson and Mr. Adams for a minute and then maybe we will ask the same question of the other boards. The funding that comes to the board from the department is allocated to schools, generally on enrolments, the number of kids in that school. Is that a fair statement?

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, we are funded per student.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, now, maybe just quickly - is that common across the province?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just for the record, we will ask Ms. Boudreau and Ms. Daye.

MS. BOUDREAU: Yes, it is.

MS. DAYE: Yes, it is.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, and in his response Mr. Adams talked about if a child needs some additional supports or something like that, so is there another pocket of additional funding for specific supports that would go to schools? Start with the Chignecto - do you have a pocket of funding that would be allocated so you would allocate funding to schools, per student, and then you would say, and this school has some additional needs and we are going to allow for this additional funding. Is that the way it works, Ms. Thompson?

MS. THOMPSON: What we do is we get targeted initiatives from the department and as we look at the students and the assessment results, those targeted initiatives are put where the need is greatest. So, where those funds go depends on the needs within a school.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, and is that consistent, Ms. Daye? Do you get targeted funding as well for special projects?

MS. DAYE: We get targeted funding, and boards can determine where best to put that funding.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, and the Strait, that's consistent as well?

MS. BOUDREAU: Yes, the targeted funding around class caps, math strategy, and early literacy, as well as the skilled trades.

MR. HOUSTON: Can you give me a sense of your overall budget? How much is distributed to schools based on pure numbers of students, and how much is distributed for targeted - is it 70 per cent and 30 per cent, or maybe if you even have the numbers, that would be great.

MS. BOUDREAU: For 2013-14, for instance, \$2.9 million of our budget was targeted funding.

MR. HOUSTON: And how much was regular per-student funding?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Rice?

MR. FORD RICE: I'm not really sure. I can't give you the exact figure, but for small boards like ourselves, where we're experiencing declining enrolment, targeted funding has increased in terms of, as Ms. Boudreau said, math strategy and literacy strategy. So for a small board like ourselves, targeted funding has enabled us to provide support to schools and individual students, which we wouldn't have otherwise been able to do. So for a small board, for us, it has been a great help.

MR. HOUSTON: That's good. I appreciate that. Ms. Daye, do you happen to know how your funding splits between targeted and per-student?

MS. DAYE: Basically the same thing as my colleague, Ms. Francine Boudreau has said, we consider whether it's for math, for literacy, for classroom support or student support.

MR. HOUSTON: But in terms of the dollar amount?

MS. DAYE: That's a good question. I don't have the dollar amount right here to tell you right now, honestly, but maybe I can ask my superintendent and he can help me out here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. LeRoux, do you have numbers at your fingertips for that?

MR. ELWIN LEROUX: No, I apologize. I didn't bring our budget or profile sheet. I just want to be clear, when you're talking about targeted funding - we receive funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. We don't flow that funding out to schools. We use that funding for our budget. We plan appropriate resources for schools. Some of that, as others have described, is targeted funding for specific programs or specific initiatives - as an example, class cap - but then other resources, we use our data to say, where do we need to be assigning these resources in order to make the greatest difference?

That may not be on an annual basis; it may not be to a school for a full year. It would actually be some of our central office resources in response to the data that you referenced in the beginning.

MR. HOUSTON: I assumed that's what happens. I think the concern that the Auditor General has raised is, what type of data is that decision being based on? That's why first I'm trying to get a sense of how the money is distributed. I know from my own area that certain schools would have different needs than other schools in the same area, and I'm just wondering how much of that factors into how a school gets funded.

First I was trying to find out how many dollars were at stake, and I will say that I don't know if Chignecto-Central has that to hand, as to how much goes to targeted funding as a portion of the overall funding.

MS. THOMPSON: We didn't bring our profile sheets with us either, so at this point I cannot answer correctly, but I can get that information to you. Our targeted funding is also - we look at our provincial assessments, and we do have some board assessments.

We now are rolling up some that were held up at this school into a summary for the board, and we always had some. We're just making our information more robust. Looking at the data and the summaries, our funds are targeted where there are the greatest needs.

MR. HOUSTON: I don't want to read too much into it, but I will tell you that I'm surprised that, collectively, there's not really an understanding as to what percentage of your overall budget goes to targeted funding.

My sense, from talking to people in schools, is that targeted funding is really important to them. When they get that additional funding for a certain purpose, it's important to them. I don't want to minimize how important it is to you guys, but I had an expectation that you would have an appreciation for how much of your budget goes to targeted funding - and maybe that's unfair of me.

Mr. Adams, do you want to comment?

MR. ADAMS: Thank you. Just to build on what Superintendent LeRoux was suggesting, it might in fact be clearer to speak in terms of "targeted supports" versus "targeted funding." There are, certainly, in profiles that we receive year over year, some targeted lines that are easy to identify and point to; however, there is also discretionary.

When possible, year over year, the board has identified the funds that they would increase the ability to provide additional supports. There might be targeted lines for literacy intervention. At the board level there have been enhancements, when possible, to those and other initiatives. It is not assigned school by school; rather, we're working more and more to take the achievement data that comes to us in all forms and let that guide where we provide the support.



A great example currently is that we are paying particular attention to the achievement gaps for our African Nova Scotian and First Nations students. That would be not necessarily effective by pointing dollars to particular schools - rather to look at the achievement data and identify what strategies we can employ. Our board was fortunate in having some available funds between January and March of this year. We identified, using the data, where we saw the most effect in the short period of time based on priorities, and the results of that intervention were very effective and encouraging and will inform the future. If that had been assigned on a school-by-school basis . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. I do apologize. We've run out of time in that segment.

We'll move to Ms. Zann and the NDP caucus.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Thank you. I was following along quite interestedly with what you were saying, but perhaps we'll come back to that when it comes back to the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Thank you for coming here today. We really appreciate it. Many of the issues that have been identified through the audit seem to relate to insufficient data at this point in time. Is the issue that the data is not collected or not available, or that it's not made available or not reported to the relevant decision makers?

Trudy, would you like to respond to that, perhaps?

MS. THOMPSON: Certainly. As you're aware, in the Auditor General's Reports, we were receiving some data. In his recommendation, he did ask us to make our data more robust. We had data that was held at the school level, and although some of our senior administrators knew that, it wasn't being summarized along with the board-wide data that we were receiving, or the provincial data. So we're making our data that we received more robust. All of it will be rolled up, and we will receive the summary report. We were receiving some; we are now receiving more.

MS. ZANN: Is the new system of having things online helping you to be able to collect data now?

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, it is. As the systems get better, we are able to access the data more and more rapidly. I think that before, before the systems that we now have in place, it was taking a long time to collate that data and put it into a form that we could make decisions on - although it still takes time, and we need data analysts with every new program. There's always something else we need to tweak.

MS. ZANN: I remember when we first put in the online information, a lot of the teachers were finding it a little bit hard to get hold of the program and had to take the time to do it. Are they finding it easier now - are more teachers happier about having to do it?

MS. THOMPSON: Well, we've provided professional development for those who were having a difficult time with it. But with any new initiative, or anything new, some of us adapt to it quicker than others. As long as we work together and provide professional development for those who are struggling, we're coming along great.

MS. ZANN: Is accreditation still taking place, or is that done now?

MS. THOMPSON: Well, it is now student success planning. It's just different names - similar processes.

We are receiving information on student success at this point. We had continuous school planning, which we received and we knew where schools were in our strategic plan at the end of every year, but what we didn't get was a summary report. Now all of those are being summarized and rolled up and a report given to the board.

I did appreciate the Auditor General. We're always looking to improve our practices, and he did point out areas where we could improve. We've acted upon all of them.

MS. ZANN: I notice that Recommendation 2.2 relates to the clear definition of responsibilities of board management, governing boards, and the department, including regional education officers. As mentioned in the department's action plan, there are a number of mechanisms for defining those roles - the Act, the policy, and the by-laws. Could somebody perhaps explain what roles and responsibilities have been defined for each group and how this is or has been recorded and communicated? Perhaps Ms. Daye?

MS. DAYE: I will be honest with you, I'm not quite clear. I hear your question, but I'm not quite clear on all that you're asking. Some of it, I would say, maybe the department would be able to answer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie?

MS. MCKENZIE: There has been considerable work on taking an examination of governance, so we've been working with the Nova Scotia School Boards Association. There has been extensive work done. The school boards are providing leadership around that. They're looking at board governance and board self-assessment and taking a look at the role of the superintendent and the role of the governing boards within that.

We have also done an alignment inside the department. We're reviewing the roles and responsibility to the regional education officers, and we've also established - I meet with the superintendents two days a month in something we call the ECF - the Education Consultative Forum. We meet two days a month, and that would be the overall management team for the action plan. That has been codified in terms of how we are taking responsibility for the various roles and responsibilities.

MS. ZANN: I think at one point a few years ago - did the department ask the school boards to provide a description of what they do and what the different people within their department do - what their defined roles are?

MS. MCKENZIE: That hasn't happened, unless I'm not understanding - but we're in constant contact with the boards with respect to governance, particularly through the NSSBA project. But we haven't specifically asked them to define the roles and responsibilities, at least not since I've been there.

MS. ZANN: Ms. Thompson, do you remember - did a request come from government to do a description of all of the different roles of people within the board, or was that something that the board did themselves? I remember there was somebody that was hired to do that, within our board, anyway.

MS. THOMPSON: I'm not sure I'm quite understanding what you're asking. Can you clarify that for me?

MS. ZANN: A few years ago - I think it was maybe the last year that our government was in power - it came to my attention that there was somebody that was hired by the board to list all of the different jobs within that board and describe them and what they do and what their value is. So I was wondering if the board was asked to do that by the government or if that was something internal?

MS. THOMPSON: I don't have any recollection of that. I know that with some of the new computer programming and making everything more cohesive, I think boards were trying to establish the roles. We may have different names for them but to get more clarity where each one of us was at.

MS. ZANN: Also, when there are issues on the ground, let's say as an MLA I'm being told by teachers, for instance that they need more EAs, that there are just not enough EAs. Then if I go to the minister and say okay, there are not EAs, I'm hearing on the ground that there are just not enough educational assistants, could you please do something about it. Then the minister would go to somebody within her department and get them to talk to the board.

Oftentimes what I'll find is that there's a discrepancy so that if the teachers are saying they need something, and then the minister goes to the board, oftentimes I've found in the past anyway, that the board would say no, we're okay, we don't need any more EAs. There sometimes seems to be a miscommunication or there was something that was dropping and I'm just wondering, how would something like that happen? Have you noticed that yourself?

MS. THOMPSON: Our schools are under many different stresses and I know with the special needs population, I think we get more every year. We do receive funding from

the department for special needs but I think every board across this province spends beyond what is targeted for the special needs population.

You also have to understand that we have close to 20,000 students and we have to balance the needs for every student. Yes, sometimes we make hard decisions. We are putting programs in place and we're looking at different models, sometimes, to address the needs of our special needs population. It's a work in progress but I think every year we get more and more. It's hard to balance the needs of every student within our system and we do the best job we can. We do have a program planning process and many of those are in individuals.

MS. ZANN: The IPPs.

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, the IPPs. So we do the very best we can and we're always supporting staff with professional development and trying to find best practices to address the needs of the students we have in our system.

MS. ZANN: Yes, I would say that from my discussions with a lot of the teachers, it's a big issue and it's not really going away any time soon. As you said, there seem to be more and more children who are needing extra help in this issue and that's probably why there are so many IPPs.

Have you found that the funding you are receiving now is better than it was before, to be able to address that particular issue or are you having to use the funding? I know that last year or the year before you had a funding deficit, there was a gap there. Where are you able to spend that money that you are getting now? What are the main priorities for you in the CCRSB region?

MS. THOMPSON: This particular government has made it their commitment to put back in the funding that we had lost in previous years and we have received that. But there are so many needs in our system. Our system is totally different to when I went to school or even when you went to school. We're very data-driven and the resources we receive, we try and put them where the most needs are. It is a struggle, and we struggle and we try to balance the needs of every student because we can't just address one population and forget about the others. We also have students who are high achievers, and we're not even meeting their needs. Those are all questions that the board struggles with every month - achievement is on our table every month, and we try and make the best possible decisions within the financial budget that we have.

MS. ZANN: As you said, a lot of those would have to go to computers, laptops, things like that, which used to be a blackboard and chalk. It's not exactly the same these days, and in order to stay on top of things, yes, you have to spend money.

The response to the recommendation also mentions providing training and support for school boards. What specific training and supports are going to be provided? I guess

that would be to Ms. McKenzie - has training been provided in the past and, if so, what? I'm specifically interested in training around evaluation and evidence-based decision making.

MS. MCKENZIE: I just want to clarify, are you asking for training for the boards, or are you asking for training in the schools?

MS. ZANN: Response to the recommendation - the recommendation mentions providing training and support for school boards. I'm asking what specific training will be provided.

MS. MCKENZIE: Where we've started, and particularly I think where the boards find themselves in the cycle, within the project with the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, they've been paying a lot of attention to governance roles and responsibilities and making sure that the orientation packages are in place for October. Subsequent to the October elections and the board members taking their place, there would be a focus on data and evaluation following up from that.

MS. ZANN: Mr. Chairman, how many more minutes do I have?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have approximately five minutes remaining.

MS. ZANN: I just want to go back - in recent years schools have needed to implement a number of new security measures. I know in the Truro elementary school, we needed to do quite a bit of work on that one. But there are a number of new security measures including lockdowns, and hold and secure drills limiting access to school buildings. Could each one of you perhaps talk about any training that has been provided to the staff and management related to these new processes?

MS. THOMPSON: Thank you for the question, Lenore. We have training for all our principals before school starts again. I know in the past we've done some videos. So they know what to expect. They have training within their schools, I think two or three times a year, and also with the students. They know what to do when a lockdown occurs.

MS. ZANN: That's great, thanks.

Ms. Daye? We don't have much time, but I'm just curious.

MS. DAYE: We have school emergency management. We have the fire drills, relocation drills . . .

MS. ZANN: So for things like security, if a gunman was to walk into a school or something like that.

MS. DAYE: Hold and secure, lockdowns, those are very real today especially.

MS. ZANN: What about Ms. Boudreau?

MS. BOUDREAU: Like the other two boards, our staff is trained. As new individuals come in, they are trained individually. We've currently started a system where all our drills, whether practice - starting in 2016-17, we're going to track the real incidence of lockdown and what the situation was, so that we can go back and look and see how the process worked and if there's need for improvement.

MS. ZANN: I think that's probably all the time I have right now. I'll come back.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move to the Liberal caucus and Mr. Rankin.

MR. IAIN RANKIN: I'm just curious when we're talking about funding based on enrolment; it seems to be that that's generally the case - what was the justification in the prior government when funding was removed? What was the conversation with the school board - was enrolment declining at the time and was that the justification behind the cuts to education?

Ms. Thompson, you're the one who broached that subject, so I'm just wondering if maybe you'd like to respond.

MS. THOMPSON: I think with any government, I know at the time we automatically get a decrease with enrolment decline, even this year. You get funded per student, so that as your student population declines, your funding also declines. Then funding gets put back in at times for new initiatives (Interruption) Yes, with the minister's Action Plan, if you look at those actions. So then we do have targeted funding put back in, but we automatically get a decrease as student enrolment goes down.

MR. RANKIN: Right, but you're seeing an incremental increase on the funding that's not directly assigned to the enrolment is what you're saying - right?

MS. THOMPSON: Correct.

MR. RANKIN: In looking at Page 9 again, I think that has been the main concern, the outcomes of the students. My first question on that, is that inclusive of the IPP students? I'm not sure who would answer that.

MS. THOMPSON: The data?

MR. RANKIN: The data, yes.

MS. THOMPSON: No, it isn't because the individual program plans do not write the provincial assessments.

MR. RANKIN: Okay, that's interesting. No doubt that the outcomes are relative to the class sizes in funding, but also what I am hearing from teachers is that some of them aren't being held back and maybe that's why they're continuously not meeting the outcomes.

I know you've answered for your school board, maybe I can direct it at the Halifax School Board which has my schools. I also obviously have teachers who live in my area who teach all over HRM. Is that your understanding, that they actually can hold kids back or they can give a zero today?

I know the deputy minister spoke to the thousands of people who've mentioned that in the Action Plan, and I'm going to have the deputy minister respond, too, but I am curious in the Halifax region if this is a policy from the department or from the Halifax School Board or is there an ability to hold kids back until they meet the grade?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Daye.

MS. DAYE: There is no policy in terms of holding students back. As you heard earlier, it's one of the most difficult things to do in terms of when you, as a classroom teacher, as a program planning team, along with the administrators, you have to really look at each student you are considering and the needs of that student, the academic success of that student, where that student is right now in their whole "academic education plan" - I'll use those words.

It's not a thing where you just - once upon a time I know with us, when we were growing up, we would run home and say okay, here's my report card, I passed or I failed, mum. Today in the early elementary grades especially, there are so many things that are put in place in that classroom already, before June, that you would have to identify that - say no, this student is not able to meet the outcomes, is struggling to meet the outcomes, can meet some of the outcomes.

There are a lot of things you have to look at - is this student meeting some of the outcomes, partial outcomes, not able to meet the outcomes? There are a lot of things that you consider.

MR. RANKIN: The teacher considers, you're saying.

MS. DAYE: The teacher, his or her administration. There's also a program planning team. This is a team effort in the schools today, in terms of . . .

MR. RANKIN: I appreciate the complexity, but maybe I can shift to the deputy. I think it would be helpful to have consistency when we're looking at whether or not a teacher meets the grade. I did hear something about attendance and I know this discussion goes back - there was a teacher in Alberta who was in the news who gave a zero because a

student didn't even show up. I think most people would expect that you would get a zero if you don't show up to work. Eventually these students are going to be in the workforce.

Is the department really going to be able to provide consistency for all boards so that there is an expectation and teachers actually have to follow guidelines on whether or not a student gets the grade and moves on to the next level so that we don't have the same student consistently not meeting the expectation in the assessment because there are outliers in the data. Maybe you can respond to that.

MS. MCKENZIE: I think the Auditor General identified for us that there were inconsistent practices across boards and that the department wasn't necessarily providing the direct oversight that we needed to on some of the important issues that are being identified. That was certainly reinforced when the 19,000 Nova Scotians responded to the survey and identified what they were concerned with.

A perfect example would be why the minister identified homework as being one of the earliest ones that she wanted to have a ministerial policy around. Two teachers in the same school side by side could say, I'm not giving homework because the department doesn't allow it and the one next door could say, I'm giving homework because the department requires it. The zero policy has also taken on life of its own.

She started first with a code of conduct. We conducted a consultation process and a code of conduct has been rolled out across all boards that has replaced the code of conduct policies that were in place in the eight boards and also by high school, by various families of schools.

The next was the homework policy. The attendance policy will address the zeroes. It will be a discussion paper that will be released. The minister mentioned the other day in the House that that will be the next one that comes out. It will be asking Nova Scotians if people should be held back or not be provided credit for lack of attendance; what is allowed and supported under zeroes, those types of things. We have to get a good feedback around that. That will be the next ministerial policy that rolls out across the boards.

The one right after that will be the Promotion, Acceleration and Retention, which is intended to be the ministerial policy across the province. Again, that will be a consultation process and it's intended to put consistent practices into place across boards so the teachers feel supported in classrooms when they use their good judgment, which is what we expect.

MR. RANKIN: Do you expect that to be in place before school this Fall?

MS. MCKENZIE: The minister committed yesterday that the attendance policy would be in place for September. I believe that the Acceleration, Retention and Promotion will be over the course of the year and that will be a bigger engagement again with the school boards, with teachers, and with community, to really address some of those. They're



very complex issues, those ones in particular. We want to make sure that we're not disadvantaging kids that are already disadvantaged and it is part of that bigger conversation that needs to take place.

MR. RANKIN: I will stay with you for my last question. I was listening intently to the discussion around First Nations and African Nova Scotians and going back to the extra funding that goes beyond enrolment. How are we addressing the needs of those particular students and do you have any sense of how we compare in the country in terms of program delivery for that cohort of students? Is Nova Scotia in the middle of the pack? Are we doing anything special above and beyond?

MS. MCKENZIE: I would say that we are probably consistent with the rest of Canada in terms of identifying areas that we need to improve in serving both populations. I'd just like to point out that there is not an equivalent African Nova Scotian population in other provinces. We're unique in Canada in terms of having an indigenous African Nova Scotian population.

One of the things that has come out with working with the Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute is to do African Nova Scotian-centric research related to the results that we're getting. That will be moving forward.

In addition, we've just committed to treaty education and education on residential schools and very targeted pieces of work with respect to outcomes for both African Nova Scotian students and working with MK around Aboriginal students in the - I know you're checking the clock.

MR. RANKIN: Yes, I have to share my time with my colleague. I appreciate that. That's helpful, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stroink.

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: This question is for - I'll start with the deputy minister - I know you did not get an opportunity to chat about the targeted funding, and I know that you wanted to talk about that, so if you could just kind of have an opportunity to answer that question, that would be great.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie.

MS. MCKENZIE: Thanks, I appreciate that. The one comment that I would have made is that Minister Casey made the commitment when she came in. Right now, there is \$147 million committed to special education. About 20 per cent of our budget is committed to targeted projects. With respect to the special education, that would have declined according to population, but Minister Casey made the commitment to the school boards that no one would experience a decline in special education funding because their

population was going down. So all boards have continued to receive at least the baseline of what they were receiving when the government came in.

MR. STROINK: Great, thanks. I guess my question goes back to the graph on Page 9, the assessments of the kids, and I guess when you look at those numbers, sure it is not a surprise if your education budget is cut significantly, and you know caps are not put in, and there is no commitment from the government at the time to put money into education, then of course your numbers are going to get flatlined or decrease.

I remember having conversations with the minister at the time on kids with learning disabilities within the classroom and the IPP, and there was all this hoopla of supporting that, and then they cut funding to the Learning Disabilities Association. So, these numbers are not a big surprise from that, and understanding that the new education platform that Minister Casey has put out on the annual report, with the action plan, we are seeing a slight increase in numbers, and I think that shows a lot to the dedication the department has put in, that the boards have put in; and I guess to understanding that it takes a year to two years. But if you have some of those numbers, then maybe you can share them with the group, so that we get an understanding that it is working - it is slow, but it is working, and that is the way the province needs to move forward.

MS. MCKENZIE: I can give you a high-level set of numbers. They are modest increases, but they are going in the right direction, and we are really pleased with that. There has been a 2 per cent bump in Grade 4 math, 1 per cent in Grade 3, 3 per cent in Grade 6 literacy, and 1 per cent in Grade 6 math. Do we want to do better than that? We absolutely do, and through the school improvement plan, the student success planning that we have put in place and will be working with the boards, we will be creating targets for math and for literacy and working with the boards to be able to achieve those; that is important.

I would like to just run really quickly for a second through several big things that have happened to make changes. There has been a streamlined curriculum now for P to 6, teachers led that, and teachers have appreciated the changes that have been made; in fact, the 4 to 6 rollouts are currently going across the province.

We have actually set student achievement goals now in the business planning process; that has never happened before. So every board has set a common business planning goal in co-operation with the department. We have been improving assessment practices, releasing lessons learned, and working directly with the boards on how to improve assessment practices in the follow up. Like I mentioned, the student success planning, every school will be setting targets for improvement. There will be math and literacy strategies rolling out, and we need to focus on how we collect the data. There will be a further investment in targeted resources, and Minister Casey was able to roll those out in the budget.

I just want to mention one thing. The Auditor General has asked for data. An automatic response from the system is to collect data. What teachers have told us is be careful, collect once, use it multiple times. Everybody going back into the classroom and asking for teachers to do data for the individual school, the family of schools, the boards, and then the department, we need to be careful in terms of overload on teachers. So, one of the commitments that we have made across the management team for the Action Plan is that we will be doing a very streamlined collection of data so that teachers can see the benefit back in the classrooms. We are able to meet the standards that the Auditor General has established, and the boards will have the information that they need to make decisions.

MR. STROINK: Okay, thank you. This question is to Ms. Daye. I guess that is what I am asking you is do you see a difference in your support within the education system now that you are getting more supports with IPP or more supports within the HRM to enhance a better education experience for the kids under the new curriculum, specifically P to 3?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Daye. Sorry I didn't recognize you right away.

MS. DAYE: That's okay; I'm so anxious. Oh, definitely so. Do I see a difference? Do we see a difference? We certainly do. We have the targeted funding, as you heard earlier. We have supplementary funding. We work with our budget. Sure, there's always room for more. But we have a department that we work very closely with. As the deputy minister said, on a regular basis, she meets with the superintendents. Our boards are in talks and discussions. We receive letters and emails continually going back and forth between ourselves and the minister. She keeps us informed on what is happening, and we are working collaboratively with one another.

In answering that question, yes, for sure, we are seeing a big difference. The cut was some years ago, well before my time, and even well before my superintendent's time. What we understand is that maybe at that time the minister or that government was seeing a difference in the budget, and they had to do some work with the budget. As far as students go, there has always been a great need to meet the needs of the academic success of our students. Whatever that reason was, they made a decision. However, this government has come in and said, look, we need to look at this thing differently, and we really do need to put our dollars behind education, and our school board indeed is grateful for that. We work very collaboratively with them.

MR. STROINK: Great, thank you. I'd be remiss if I didn't speak a bit and ask a question about the IPP. IPP is something that we have in our curriculum as a toolbox, and it should not be abused in that sense. I guess my fear is that for some people it's easier to put a kid in IPP just because they're difficult. I want to make it clear, and I hope you can articulate this as well from your position as a school board member, that is not the case. IPPs are used in a very strategic way to ensure that the child has a mechanism of success instead of failure. Saying that, failure is a good lesson learned, but we need to ensure that these kids get that opportunity to succeed within the parameters that they have. Maybe you can speak to that a bit, Ms. Daye.

MS. DAYE: One of the most sensitive areas of education in the last number of years has been the area of IPPs. We want to ensure that practices related to IPPs are in place, and only in place, and only seen as special, as necessary. When we talked to parents over the last several years, over and over again in this Province of Nova Scotia, we've seen many parents who are indeed very concerned about why their son, daughter, child, is on an IPP. What does that mean? We had to do a lot of work in looking at why this great concern. Parents don't quite understand it. Students were coming out of school at one time and they didn't quite understand it. What happens to me now I'm on this IPP?

We looked at it. Okay, let's get the data. Let's find out for certain how many students are indeed on an IPP. Who are those students? What is the need? What has been identified as the need for that particular student to be on an IPP? Is the parent involved? Does the parent understand what this IPP will mean? Do you have to stay on an IPP throughout your education years? That doesn't mean that you're on an IPP forever. You may be on an IPP for literacy. You may be on an IPP for math. But we need to know why there is an IPP. Our board has done a great job in trying to do it, get that kind of data and get that information. This month, that information is coming back to this board. We've asked for it, and that kind of information is coming back. There's a lot of discussion and dialogue in terms of what is happening with the students on IPPs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, the time has expired, thank you. We'll move back to the PC caucus and Mr. Houston for 13 minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: Ms. Daye, I'll continue on that theme because you mention you are collecting data for IPPs. I often hear from teachers that they don't have enough time to actually provide differentiated learning techniques to students who are in IPPs, like actually getting to those students and working with them in a way that is meaningful to those students. They are on an IPP but maybe they're not getting the attention that the teacher might deem is necessary.

I'd ask you, in your process of gathering information, did you survey teachers or give teachers some mechanism to respond back to your board, in particular, as to whether or not the teacher feels they have enough time to get to the student and provide meaningful, differentiated learning to benefit the student? Did you actually survey teachers?

MS. DAYE: No, we did not survey teachers. What you just said is quite concerning, that teachers are saying they don't have enough time.

MR. HOUSTON: It is concerning but is it surprising?

MS. DAYE: It is quite concerning because that should not be the case. I don't believe that is the case, that teachers don't have enough time to be concerned or to be able to look after and meet the needs of that child or two that is in his or her classroom, in terms of - you have an IPP, so what does that mean?

The resources and the tools are placed in the classroom, given to the teacher so that child can meet academic success. Whether it's on an IPP or not, the tools and the resources have to be put in place to accommodate that teacher, to accommodate those students for academic success.

Let me also say here that the IPPs are reviewed twice annually, with families within the HRSB, that's what we do.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, you mentioned you'd be concerned by that and I'm concerned by that as well. You mentioned you'd be surprised, I think - I don't want to mis-characterize - but if the teacher couldn't get to that one or two students in their class on an IPP. What is the average amount of IPPs in a, let's say, P to Grade 6 classroom, inside your board?

MS. DAYE: How many students are on IPPs?

MR. HOUSTON: On IPPs in the average classroom?

MS. DAYE: We have that information, I'll get that. We do have that information, let me get that for you.

MR. HOUSTON: Because again, did you ask teachers if they have enough time to get to those students? You said no, you didn't do a survey but I mean the survey would be a nice way, in my mind, a succinct way to gather information from teachers. You seemed a bit surprised by that suggestion.

MS. DAYE: Yes, I do, because every school has a program planning team. Every school has a principal and a vice-principal. That program planning team is made up of the administration and the various teachers - the classroom teacher, the learning centre teacher, resource teacher, the social worker, the psychologists - and of course parents come in on those program planning teams as well.

MR. HOUSTON: Here's the thing, in the interest of time I will have to move on. There's a long way from the department to the student; there's a long way from the board to the student. The teacher is the closest person to the student so when I hear well, in between the teacher and the board there are different teams and administrators and all these things, I'm saying, to me it would make sense to go right to the teacher and ask them directly - no filtering of teams and administration, just ask the teacher, do you have enough time to get to the students that you need to get to?

I'll leave that as a suggestion with you because it's not happening, is it?

MS. DAYE: You want to leave that as a suggestion with me but you don't have to because the teacher is very much involved, a great part of the program planning team, who

meet regularly during the course of that month regarding those students in his or her classroom.

That program planning team is a very important, vital part of the education of our students so that's where that conversation is. Remember now, I'm talking about the parents who are involved as well in that program planning team, it doesn't exclude the parents; it doesn't exclude a number of other resource persons, especially the classroom teacher. It's there that he or she gets an opportunity to say this is what else I would need to help meet his or her success.

MR. HOUSTON: They share it with the team and the team shares it with the school administration and the school administration sends it with - and the end result of all that is that we have the Auditor General saying that the board should ensure they have sufficient data collected to assess. I'm saying that's a lot of levels in between - for me, standing here saying that's a lot of levels in between.

It would seem pretty straightforward to me to say yes, okay, we can do that, but we're also going to ask the teacher - and you can do it anonymously, you can do whatever you want, but it seems like that's something that I would think would be valuable. That's just my perception from the outside looking in, I guess.

I do think that when you're on an IPP you deserve some differentiated learning and you need it, and we should know if they're getting it or not. Maybe your systems are allowing you to know that they are?

MS. DAYE: Our systems are allowing us to know that they are.

MR. HOUSTON: That's pretty definitive, so we'll take that and move on.

I'll go to Ms. McKenzie, does the province fund any breakfast programs across the province in any schools?

MS. MCKENZIE: We are co-funders, with the Department of Health and Wellness, of Nourish Nova Scotia.

MR. HOUSTON: Does that provide a breakfast program to every school?

MS. MCKENZIE: It does not provide a breakfast program to every school, it provides breakfast programs to participating schools.

MR. HOUSTON: How do you become a participating school - do you have to meet some criteria or just ask?

MS. MCKENZIE: It meets the criteria and we work with the school boards.

MR. HOUSTON: What is the criteria to become a participating school in the breakfast program?

MS. MCKENZIE: I would have to get that information for you.

MR. HOUSTON: Does anybody know what the criteria is to become a participating school in the breakfast program?

MS. THOMPSON: Every school in our school board has a breakfast program, because I believe in every school there would be a need. We do have funding from the province; we have other donations. We have PTAs that help out, and we get our resources from various areas, but every school in Chignecto has a breakfast program.

MR. HOUSTON: I'm bumping against the clock here, but I have to ask about the Frank H., East Pictou, because I was listening intently to your comments that funding as a rule goes down just naturally with student enrolment going down, but I did hear some accolades that maybe it goes down, but then it goes back up for all kinds of special other pockets of money.

In the case of a situation like Frank H., in East Pictou, it is past its lifetime - its community has decided to close that school, do some renovations, make it P to Grade 8 at Frank H. I know it has been a top priority of the board for a couple of years. I did hear the minister say earlier this week that she is hopeful that it won't have to go back through a school review process again, which made me hopeful that there would be some money for that renovation this year or next year, but over the last couple of years the board has had to - the cost of running that building hasn't gone down.

Would that be a situation where the department would say we accept that you have to run an extra building, here is a bit of extra money for your needs? Would you get extra money from the province for that while they haven't advanced on the capital project?

MS. THOMPSON: I want to answer this correctly, so I'm not quite sure if I have it totally accurate. We did get funding per student, but within that is a percentage of our square footage, so there is a little bit there for that. But yes, it's a cost to the board to run that building, and the renovation to Frank H. has been our top priority for additions and alterations. We're hopeful that we'll get approved.

MR. HOUSTON: That's good - there is an amount in there for square footage.

MS. THOMPSON: There is a little bit, but I don't have the breakdown.

MR. HOUSTON: Maybe off-line we can chat about that.

I do want to talk about power schools and schools that aren't power schools. If a school is not a power school, would there be additional funding from the province that

would go specifically towards providing mental health supports in a school, or does that only come with the power school designation?

MS. THOMPSON: Okay, do you mean the wraparound SchoolsPlus?

MR. HOUSTON: SchoolsPlus, yes. So if you're not a SchoolsPlus, does the board get additional funding from the province for mental health services?

MS. THOMPSON: There is some in the targeted funding that we do have; I believe there's a little bit this year. I wish I had my draft - but we do have SchoolsPlus now in every county that we have. They do a lot, and then they work direct . . .

MR. HOUSTON: I think the SchoolsPlus is very good, and I hope it expands.

MS. THOMPSON: It is excellent, and we have been waiting - we did get an additional SchoolsPlus site in Elmsdale which we're very pleased about.

MR. HOUSTON: So if you're not a SchoolsPlus or a PowerSchool, is there funding that goes to that school for mental health supports?

MS. THOMPSON: We have services within the board that will address the needs in every school, Student Services keep a close eye on that and they will try to get the supports.

MR. HOUSTON: Would those be counsellors? How many counsellors?

MS. THOMPSON: Guidance counsellors - so they will find the resources that are needed at that school, so we do have supports in place.

MR. HOUSTON: How many guidance counsellors do you have on the board?

MS. THOMPSON: Just a minute, I'll let Gary continue with that one.

MR. ADAMS: There is additional funding for complex cases.

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, there is, and I knew that. There is additional funding that's held at the department for complex cases so you can access by need.

MR. HOUSTON: Have you accessed it?

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, we have.

MR. HOUSTON: That would be for specific schools or for specific students?

MS. THOMPSON: Specific students. It is case by case.



MR. HOUSTON: Okay. I got the “one minute” sign from the chairman there. How many schools in your board would not be encapsulated in a PowerSchool?

MS. THOMPSON: In the SchoolsPlus?

MR. HOUSTON: In SchoolsPlus, yes.

MS. THOMPSON: Yes, you’re confusing me with your terminology.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. How many schools would not be SchoolsPlus?

MS. THOMPSON: There would be some, but even though they are not designated, I know when we just put SchoolsPlus in Milford, in Riverside, it will concentrate on the schools in the corridor area. Once it gets established it will move out to the schools further away within East Hants, so eventually all schools will be able to access some supports through SchoolsPlus.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. We will move to the NDP caucus. Ms. Zann.

MS. ZANN: Thank you very much. I’ll try not to make you do too much mental math here. I’m going back to something. The Education Act does not clearly define the accountability relationship between school boards and the minister, and the Auditor General pointed out though that school board management seems to be doing a good job implementing the continuous school improvement process. He did point out, however, that province-wide, superintendents seem to have a large influence on what the board members do because he gets the information first from the department and then passes it on to the elected board members.

I’m just wondering, how does the board know that they’re getting the exact information and it’s not coloured one way or another? Is there any kind of capacity to find that out? Have there ever been any problems with that in any of your school boards with not getting all the information or having just a limited amount of information from the superintendents? Trudy, do you want to start?

MS. THOMPSON: So just to get a greater understanding for your question, do you mean about embargoed information?

MS. ZANN: Well, I wonder, is the Auditor General allowed to speak?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Certainly, if you wish to have him clarify something.

MS. ZANN: Can I ask him a question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: What do you wish to have clarified?

MS. ZANN: Well, I believe he just heard my question. Do you want me to repeat it? Okay.

When we were talking to the Auditor General a little earlier, he said that - and I wrote it down so I am hoping I wrote it down correctly. He said that superintendents seem to have a large influence on what the board members do because they get the information first and then pass it on to the elected board members. However, they do not necessarily give all of the information to the elected board members, therefore, I am wondering if that is ever a problem with only getting limited amounts of information from the one person. Mr. Pickup, would you like to comment and make it a little bit clearer what your concerns were?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Pickup.

MR. MICHAEL PICKUP: Sure, I can give you an example if you like. An example would be the provincial assessment results that we refer to in the report. The superintendent would have got those and they would have been embargoed from the board. We discussed that in the report and included a recommendation around that which the department has indicated they will allow the superintendent now to share it with the board at an in camera session. That was an example where we felt, given the board has the oversight for the assessment results, it probably makes sense for them to be in the loop as quickly as possible.

MS. ZANN: Right, and so that is going to be addressed then is it?

MS. THOMPSON: It has been addressed.

MS. ZANN: Okay.

MS. THOMPSON: The superintendents received the information as soon as it was available from the department, because it was still embargoed until the final analysis was done, but the boards receive that information at an in camera session; so yes, that concern has been addressed.

MS. ZANN: Is that the same right across the way for all the boards now?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do other boards wish to comment? Ms. Daye.

MS. DAYE: Yes, it is so. That is what I would love to say.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Boudreau.

MS. BOUDREAU: That is how it is, yes.

MS. ZANN: Okay, thank you, and the Auditor General would like to say something.

MR. PICKUP: Just another quick point - part of at the in camera session what we were talking about, besides this point, was the boards describing to the superintendents and indicating top down from the board, the type of information that they wanted versus what the superintendent was necessarily feeding to them. So, for example, if the board was wondering how students on individual plans were performing at an overall summary level, if they were not getting it from the superintendent, they should identify their information needs and indicate to the superintendent what information they may want.

MS. ZANN: Thank you very much. I want to go back to the issue of security in the schools because I have actually received some emails recently from concerned parents about some of the incidents that have happened. So, going back to security measures in our schools, including lockdowns and drills, are the number of incidents requiring this type of response tracked and monitored at the board or department level, or both?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie.

MS. MCKENZIE: The number of incidents is tracked at the board level, and it is rolled up to the provincial level. In addition, we will be tracking the - and when I say we will be tracking, we have indicated to the boards that would be doing this, confirming that the two drills for lockdown, hold and secure, have occurred and the boards will be confirming that across the system.

MS. ZANN: And could you tell me how many incidents we have had in the last, let's say, year?

MS. MCKENZIE: I do have that information in my binders. I don't have that with me. I can get that information.

MS. ZANN: Okay, I would appreciate that. And, in fact, if you could get that to me for the last few years, would you have that?

MS. MCKENZIE: I can check on that. I know that we have it for this year for sure.

MS. ZANN: Okay, thank you, I would appreciate that. Where schools have limited access, like needing to be buzzed, how are staff trained about who to let in? Who would like to answer that one? Is there training - are they trained as to who to let in?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Daye.

MS. DAYE: That is an operational question, and I wanted to jump in because I believe that our superintendent can really best answer that question. I know I would want him to answer that.

MS. ZANN: Okay, well, let us hear if from the superintendent then.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. LeRoux.

MR. LEROUX: Our schools do have training. From an emergency management perspective, we do have emergency management plans - they include evacuation, which we traditionally used as fire drills; they include relocation; and they also include what you're saying about a lockdown, hold and secure.

I appreciated earlier when someone said that's the way we do business in schools today, and it's very difficult to be thinking about hold and secure as always an urgent and imperative issue that's alarming for an entire community.

If there is a dog outside that puts our young children at risk, we would want them to be safely inside, so we would hold them and secure them inside to make sure they didn't go for outdoor recess until we figured out where that dog went. So when we're tracking those and aggregating that data, sometimes we misinterpret that to mean our schools are facing situations which are alarmingly worrisome when, in fact, the current strategies that schools use to make sure a smooth, effective learning environment include the kinds of things that we are talking about.

Recently we did have a very alarming case in one of our high schools, and in a debriefing with the school and the principal, what I was proud to hear was he said everyone did what they were supposed to do that it was as if we'd been training for this forever. There were guns found on a public bus and later in close proximity to a school - that is amazingly alarming, but in fact the training for staff, for RCMP, for first responders all worked the way we wanted it to, to ensure the safety of our students and schools.

MS. ZANN: Have you ever had any situations where individuals who should not have been allowed in the building have been buzzed in by staff?

MR. LEROUX: I'm not aware of anything in particular about staff being buzzed in, but as you are noting, our schools do have protocols where we don't have doors unlocked during the day. In modern construction - in fact, with new schools there is a controlled access that's considered so that all visitors automatically go through the main office, but ultimately in all of our elementary schools and most of our secondary schools in Halifax we do have a buzzer with a video camera at the front door with controlled access. I'm not aware of anyone buzzing anyone in inappropriately.

MS. ZANN: How do schools determine who can enter the building and who can't? How is this information determined and communicated? Let's say for instance, a parent who says he's the parent of a child and maybe doesn't have the permission to take that child - how do schools determine who can enter the building and who can't, and how is the information determined and communicated?

MR. LEROUX: If you arrived at one of our schools and buzzed, I would hope that an adult would receive you in a caring and helpful way, and try to assist to find out why

you're at the school and how they can assist you. That does not mean giving you uncontrolled access throughout the school to children, to classrooms to interrupt learning. We do not have pictures of every adult who can gain access and every adult who cannot gain access.

Many members of our community - Canada Post - a lot of people interact with schools. I think the measures that we put in place have an adult paying attention to who is coming to the school, who is gaining access, and making an informed decision about who should be allowed into the building.

MS. ZANN: I have received a few emails from people saying that the people who are at the desks are oftentimes very busy and that they have trouble and sometimes they'll just buzz people in because they don't have the time to check. So I have had a few emails about this and they are concerned - both teachers and parents. That might be something for another day, but I was just wondering how those kinds of things were determined.

Also, over the past few months, the Halifax School Board welcomed about 316 Syrian children spread across 30 schools. In a recent news article, the president of the Teachers Union said she was hearing from teachers who are struggling because appropriate resources and funding weren't in place.

I know the New Brunswick Government had a process in place as early as November to ensure a smooth transition for those students. Could Ms. McKenzie, or Ms. Daye, perhaps provide an update on the situation and what arrangements are being made to address the additional costs for those students?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm happy for the board to respond. I can say that we've told all boards to track their incremental costs with respect to accepting the newcomers. Halifax in particular is an experienced board with accepting newcomers into the system, in terms of students.

There were additional funds of \$100,000 provided to the Halifax board to put up to 17 substitutes in. Those numbers came down as the teachers became more comfortable with the influx. A couple of schools had received a number. We are in constant contact with the superintendent around this and we have indicated all along that our support is there, for Halifax in particular where they have had 300-plus students. We've also indicated to them that normally there's a one-year lag time in funding so that the students for this year wouldn't show up until 2017-18. That won't happen in the 2016-17 school year so we'll be providing funding support for the students.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, time has expired. We'll go back to the Liberal caucus, Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I'm going to go back to the assessment because when we had our briefing earlier we found that assessment was a big focus for the

Auditor General. The chart on Page 9 interested me because I see that my school board did not do too well in the Grade 6 math assessments and have the lowest overall and I find that concerning. I saw a few years ago math facilitators cut from our school board so that was concerning. I'm glad that Reading Recovery has come back to help with early literacy.

I've been on school accreditation teams and I will give my home school, for one thing, when we did our assessments we found that there were gender differences in how well they performed in testing. Does the testing that is done provincially have any indicators for gender?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'd have to get specific information on the testing. I don't believe that we're testing by gender. The classroom teachers would be aware if there were results that they needed to pay attention to. Again, just to back up for a second . . .

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: The standardized tests, do they have a spot where we know whether it's a female or male taking the test?

MS. MCKENZIE: We do know and we'd be able to aggregate that.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, so maybe this question is for the Auditor General's department, too. Did you find any testing that showed one gender doing better than the other?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Pickup.

MR. PICKUP: No, we were looking at the information that was provided to the board so it was these summary assessment results on Page 9.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, that's fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie.

MS. MCKENZIE: Although we track by gender, there is no significant difference by gender in the results that we currently have.

To your earlier point, we're taking assessment very seriously and working directly with the boards. In the past we collected the data and then there was really no follow-up back to the boards. We provided them the data and hoped that they did the right thing.

What we're doing now is, we meet intensely on the data and provide something that's coming out of our Student Assessment and Evaluation division called Lessons Learned. It supports teachers to ensure that they've covered the material that's required for the assessments.

I think what we're seeing is with a streamlined curriculum, with supports to teachers for assessment, and then additional supports - math mentors for the teachers, that there's literally professional development in the classroom with them and also early intervention for the children who could use additional supports, we're starting to see those numbers start to improve.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Do you have anything to report on how the math mentoring program is going currently in the schools?

MS. MCKENZIE: The math mentoring program is being evaluated and we would have results from that, but I wouldn't have them with me now.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I noted that there is a business plan you are talking about now to go along with assessments. Can you explain exactly what those are?

MS. MCKENZIE: In the past, and this was identified by the Auditor General - there was really no common way to assess across the province how we were doing, other than standardized assessments. Based on the feedback from the Auditor General, we have worked hard with the superintendents to identify common business planning goals. They have taken those back to the elected boards, and those have been confirmed so that the common business planning goal that we are working on right now is student achievement. It wouldn't just be looking at the provincial and standardized tests. We would be looking at pockets for instance of families of schools that may need additional interventions, and the school board then are using that information to make decisions about where they put their resources. We're trying to be very targeted around the achievement gap.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, so, where have you really invested in math, to improve math?

MS. MCKENZIE: Well, I think the very first thing we did was we streamlined the curriculum and the teachers led that; they made sure that the outcomes were targeted for better achievement.

We've also improved our practice around assessment. Specifically, we have put additional money this year for math mentors, additional money this year for early intervention - building on the investments that were made last year across P-6. In addition, specifically with math, there will be a pilot coming up this year on extended math 11 which will provide students who perhaps found the one semester Grade 11 math going so rapidly, they perhaps dropped down into a math they felt that they could successfully get through - we have extended the math 11 so that they would have an opportunity to have a full-year program for two credits. We're hoping that more children will move through the academic math stream, so we are looking at it across the P to Grade 12 spectrum.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: And is that follow-up with the two maths that you take in Grade 10 now, because that was newly put in?

MS. MCKENZIE: By 2020, you will require three maths to graduate. Right now, you need two maths to graduate, but by 2020 you will need three. The objective is to have more children in Nova Scotia graduating with academic math because almost all growth sectors in Nova Scotia are tied to strength in math.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: What about financial literacy? Is that somehow going to be incorporated into the school system, because I think that is really lacking in students when they graduate? It is a life skill, and a lot of students are not getting that.

MS. MCKENZIE: We now have Junior Achievement offering Dollars with Sense for all Grade 9s across the province; that is the objective this year. That is the financial literacy component, and it is built into outcomes across the curriculum. Minister Casey takes financial literacy very seriously and we know that those are key pieces of information for kids to be successful as they transition from secondary school. So it is built into the curriculum, but it is also focused on in the Junior Achievement programming we've invested in.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Great, thank you. I am going to pass it over to my colleague.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Farrell.

MR. TERRY FARRELL: How much time, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have until 10:54 a.m., so you have about five minutes.

MR. FARRELL: Okay, thank you. I just want to ask about the Early Years Centres because I know there is a relatively new one in one of our schools in Chignecto-Central board - West Highlands Elementary School in Amherst. I think I know what it is about, but I'm looking for maybe a more fulsome explanation. Perhaps I could start with Ms. McKenzie, and then maybe Ms. Thompson would chime in as well if we could.

MS. MCKENZIE: The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is working in partnership with the McCain Foundation, and there are eight Early Years Centres - there is one in every board now across the province, with four more this year to come. Early Years Centres are again places that have wrap-around services. They can provide child care if required, but they also look at early learning; the idea being that they would provide supports to the community around children.

We spent some time just last night with the J.W. McConnell Foundation having this discussion. Our early development indicators show that we have a number of children that are showing up with one or more vulnerabilities when they start school. Focusing on the early years, 0 to 4, is actually the most important time to ensure success in school over the long run.



The Liberal Government has also announced increased investment in child care and with more information on that, it will be rolled out. The Early Years Centres are meant to work in co-operation with the IWK research that we have in place, to make sure our children get the best possible start in life and are coming into school with perhaps some of the issues addressed that they may have needed to have had addressed earlier.

One of the key commitments in the provincial Education Action Plan is to work with the Department of Health and Wellness to institute an 18-month check for every child in the province. That would be an opportunity to identify if there were issues that they needed to have referrals. The early years is a big part of making sure that we ultimately have success in schools and the centres are part of that.

MR. FARRELL: Is the notion to identify particular needs in children and funnel those children into a limited number of Early Years Centres or is there a broader plan to make Early Years Centres available to all children across the province?

MS. MCKENZIE: Early Years Centres are for all children, making sure that all of our children get a good start. We do have Early Intervention and that is across the province with 17 sites. That's where children can be referred from the Early Years Centre to Early Intervention.

In addition, the Department of Health and Wellness has EIBI, which is the early autism intervention. The Early Years Centres become important sites for referral for services.

MR. FARRELL: Okay, maybe I'll pass it over to Ms. Thompson and she can explain a little more, particularly how that's working within the CCRSB.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Thompson.

MS. THOMPSON: We have the Early Years Learning Centre in Amherst and there's one in every board. I'd like to see more but as funds become available I'm sure it will be expanded.

I'm also pleased that there is money going in for many different initiatives at the early years and our early development instrument, we've been using it for a number of years so that identified where we wanted to put our first one because we have students coming in to our system with many vulnerabilities.

I'll let Gary Adams give you a more detailed explanation of what is happening in Amherst.

MR. FARRELL: Please, that would be great, thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Adams.

MR. ADAMS: I had the opportunity just last week to actually be in that classroom and I can tell you that it's going very, very well. It is play-based programming with two early childhood educators. In the implementation of that first year, of course, there's always a great deal of attention paid to whether or not the enrolment and sign-up will go well. We did hit the targets for that first year but find out that registration and expressions of interest for the coming year are very impressive.

The community is behind this; teachers are very encouraged and looking forward to the future data, in order to see the benefits of that program as it rolls forward so we're very pleased and excited.

MR. FARRELL: I know that's the area where I grew up and my siblings went to that school although I didn't. I think it's important that it be in that area. It has been a great experience for them. I don't have anything further, if any of my colleagues do, perhaps I'll pass it on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions - and we are just about out of time anyway. We don't have much time for closing comments, just a couple of minutes. Perhaps I'll let Ms. McKenzie, as the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, provide some short closing comments.

MS. MCKENZIE: I'd just like to thank the committee for inviting us in to be able to answer the questions. I think education is important and our children are important. The people who are sitting at this table are committed to their work every day to making sure that we have the best possible outcomes for the kids in the system, so thanks very much for allowing us to talk about it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to thank the Auditor General's Office for their work and to all of the witnesses who have been with us today and answered questions. I think, Ms. Thompson, you might have sat in the wrong chair because you got most of the questions today.

I know there are lots of people from various school boards around the province as well with us taking an interest, too, from the school boards involved here.

We do have a couple of items of committee business. There was correspondence received from the Department of Community Services on the public housing wait-list; also correspondence received from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education on enrolment in universities and fees for out-of-province students and how much the province is saving using Novanet. That information has been distributed to committee members. Does anyone have any questions or issues with that correspondence? Seeing none, we'll move on.

Our next meeting date is June 1<sup>st</sup> where we will have Service Nova Scotia to discuss the registry infrastructure renewal and associated costs. We also have a meeting that we

need agreement upon - this is a meeting with the Auditor General to discuss the Spring report. The date we have tentatively scheduled for that is June 8<sup>th</sup>.

What we have done in the past is we have held a briefing in camera with the Auditor General's Office that same morning for an hour, so that would suggest that we could have the briefing from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and the meeting from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. Are members of the committee in agreement with that?

I'm seeing agreement, our clerk will take note of that. So we have a decision that we will have a full meeting on June 8<sup>th</sup>, including a briefing.

The only other piece of business we have is a meeting following this meeting, a meeting of our subcommittee to discuss future topics for our meetings here at Public Accounts Committee.

Is there any further business coming before the committee? Seeing none, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:57 a.m.]