

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**Wednesday, September 27, 2017**

**Legislative Chamber**

**Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
Funding for Pre-Primary**

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## **Public Accounts Committee**

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[Mr. Bill Horne replaced Mr. Brendan Maguire]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille  
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Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault  
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Michael Pickup  
Auditor General

Ms. Emily Dickey  
Audit Principal

### **WITNESSES**

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

Ms. Sandra McKenzie, Deputy Minister  
Ms. Janet Lynn Huntington, Executive Director, Pre-Primary Program  
Ms. Vicki Elliott-Lopez, Executive Director, Regulated Child Care  
Mr. David Potter, Director, Financial Services

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2017**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIRMAN**

Mr. Allan MacMaster

**VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Mr. Gordon Wilson

MR. CHAIRMAN: Good morning. I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. We will begin with introductions, but I would like to remind everyone to ensure that phones are on silent, and I'm going to do the same with mine, so that we don't have interruptions.

We'll start with introductions.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie, you can now begin with opening remarks. Our topic today is Funding for Pre-Primary.

MS. SANDRA MCKENZIE: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to talk to you all about pre-Primary. I was going to say I have some colleagues with me today but you've already met them.

I would like to say that I am extremely proud of the people I work with. They've done yeoman service over the course of the summer. We've had 818 children who have been able to, over the course of this week, enter pre-Primary. It is due to a lot of work by the staff, at the board level, with our partners, and I know the minister shares my pride in the effort that has gone on.

Earlier this week Minister Churchill announced that 52 classrooms in 45 locations across the province will welcome more than 800 four-year-olds to pre-Primary. This is the beginning of a four-year journey that will end when pre-Primary is available in every community, to every family in Nova Scotia with a pre-Primary age child.

The introduction of this program is a major policy change that speaks to the value that Nova Scotians place on the importance of early learning. Pre-Primary changes the landscape of early learning in our province and it's a program we believe will help our children be more successful in their school years. We think everyone should have access to that opportunity.

High-quality early childhood education programs are a benefit to all children, and those coming from vulnerable circumstances are most positively impacted. The evidence is compelling. Decades of early years research has shown that early exposure to high-quality early learning can make a significant positive impact on a child's later school and life. Short-term benefits include improved cognitive development, increased social skills, improved health and well-being, and higher self-esteem.

There are other persuasive reasons for implementing a universal pre-Primary program across our province. Significant numbers of children are vulnerable in Nova Scotia - we can talk more about that in the course of our conversation this morning. High-quality early learning programs are cost-effective and provide short- and long-term benefits. School-based early learning programs level the playing field. We want to build a strong foundation for learning in the early years and to do so in a safe and caring, play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children.

I am proud of what we've done to help children and families in Nova Scotia. As a result of the Early Intervention Services review in 2014, we eliminated wait-lists for Early Childhood Development Intervention Services by expanding the services and improving access through nine additional locations. We were able to reach 500 more children with special needs across the province. Early Intervention Services not only support children and families in their home, they also support families and children in pre-Primary as well as through the transition to Grade Primary.

As a result of the 2015 review of regulated child care, we committed to the implementation of 27 actions to improve child care in Nova Scotia. For the first time in Nova Scotia we have a comprehensive child care plan that will create high-quality affordable care for Nova Scotia families. We've improved wages for ECEs and are about to roll out the province's first early learning curriculum framework. We've also made significant investments to our subsidy program, making child care more accessible for many Nova Scotia families. Pre-Primary is a natural evolution of our work to ensure that all children and families get the supports they need that will enable success in P-12 and in life. Early-learning programs are a powerful tool towards giving all our children an opportunity to prosper and live fulfilling lives.

This is the right thing to do for our children, our families, and our society. Thank you, and we're happy to take your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. Houston of the Progressive Conservative caucus, you have 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opening comments.

I think over the last year it has really come to light how much instability there is in the school system. A lot of people are frustrated, a lot of families frustrated by lack of supports for their children who are already in the school system. So, I think it took a lot of Nova Scotians by surprise to see that the possible solution to that was to add more to the system, to add another year, to add pre-Primary when the P-12 system is broken in many respects. Whose idea was it to add pre-Primary and when did the idea first surface, to your knowledge?

MS. MCKENZIE: I would say that over the last decade there has been a focus on the early years in Nova Scotia, to ensure that children have a successful start in life, right from the beginning of the introduction of Read to Me! 15 years ago actually, which is to set children off on a course of early learning, to the investments the government has made in EIBI to make sure that children are being - early identification through to early intervention to the family resource centres we have, there has been a focus on early years.

The One Nova Scotia report asked us to focus on the early years and We Choose Now asked us to look at early years and that effort was led by Gaynor Watson-Creed. So we knew that we had to strengthen the child care sector, which has been done and we can speak to the efforts that have been made there, but also to make sure that, through the efforts that we were taking a look at in the Early Years Centres which we've been piloting over the last few years in partnership with the McCain Foundation, to take a look at expanding that service.

MR. HOUSTON: All that's - thank you - there are lots of good programs, but now we're adding another. We're adding something completely new and the timing is just pretty surprising to me that it was added this year. So, I guess what I would say, my first question, are all the in-classroom positions filled as we sit here today? Have you been properly staffed up?

MS. MCKENZIE: The staffing has been taken care of and they will be opening this week, yes.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay and in some boards there is a bit of a veil of secrecy around who has been hired. The positions aren't all posted all the time. Are you aware of any of those kind of HR issues as to . . .

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm not aware of any HR issues. I know that people were in the process of finalizing the, you know, the reference checks and making sure people had their vulnerable sector check and closing off those final pieces, but we're really excited that the board has worked as hard as they did to get the staff into place.

MR. HOUSTON: And the staff is all in place as of today?

MS. MCKENZIE: The staff will be in place as they open this week.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, so not quite, but they will be.

MS. MCKENZIE: Well, I would say that yes, they know who they're hiring . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Like, they're opening - as they open this week - is it today that they're opening?

MS. MCKENZIE: They're opening through the course of the next few days, but J.L. can speak to that.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, just on the staffing though - the staff is all hired now or will be hired by the end of the week?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Huntington.

MS. JANET LYNN HUNTINGTON: That's correct.

MR. HOUSTON: What is the actual objective of this pre-Primary program? Is it to save money for families or is it more to improve the level of education?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm going to speak to that very briefly and I'm going to tie it back to the question that you asked earlier, which is why do this program now when we are experiencing some of the troubles that we've experienced over the last year. What we know is that there have been two very important steps taken. Teachers said that children were arriving at school and they were concerned about the vulnerabilities they showed. We know through the early development indicator data which tells us the children, and particularly in certain areas, are arriving with one or more vulnerabilities.

The other thing that the government has done is establish the inclusion commission which is taking a look at the model. J.L. will be able to speak to the research that points to early learning and pre-Primary as being a significantly important first step for children as they move into the education system and particularly children of low socio-economic experience.

MS. HUNTINGTON: The research is clear and there are decades and decades of research that talk about the benefits of pre-Primary. I'm going to refer to our neighbours in

Ontario. Ontario has a full day kindergarten program and they did an evaluation and they looked at the scores for the children that attended the full day kindergarten.

MR. HOUSTON: Mr. Chairman, if I may, I don't want to get into the merits. I'm just wondering, is it the department's objective - is it on the education side or the save family money side? I've been hearing both from the minister, so I guess I'm hearing today it's on the education side and you have all kinds of analysis that you can support that, I guess, and I don't want to dispute the merits of that research for today. So, if I'm hearing from the department that the main objective of the department is to introduce this program at this stage to improve the level of education of children, then I'm happy with that answer. Is that the objective?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. MacKenzie, can you clarify for Mr. Houston?

MS. MACKENZIE: We are the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development so clearly we want children to have the best possible start at education, but we also know that children don't get an even start in life, and we know that children who may live in poverty having access to a program that is free of charge to the parents, that will give them a leg up. Yes, I think there is a balance on both sides of that. We're interested in making sure that children who don't have the same opportunities, have that opportunity and this is what this program has provided.

MR. HOUSTON: Just in terms of - since you touched on the equal opportunity and stuff, the department is using the catchment area of a school for who is eligible to attend? Is that the position of the department or is that a board decision?

MS. HUNTINGTON: The department is working with school boards, but we worked with school boards to come up with the plan that, right now, it would be based on catchment only. We know some school boards may look at that in the future if enrolment is low. It will be a school board decision and it could also be a decision that varies by the school. So if they're already at maximum capacity, they would not be able to go outside of catchment, and many classes are, so it's really going to be a school-by-school decision, and it will be a decision that is school board based.

MR. HOUSTON: So some classrooms are over-subscribed?

MS. HUNTINGTON: No.

MR. HOUSTON: There are none that are over-subscribed?

MS. HUNTINGTON: No, if there were more than 24 children, we added an additional space or made sure there was an additional space to accommodate those children.

MR. HOUSTON: What is the class that has the most kids?

MS. HUNTINGTON: The maximum would be 24 in a class that we would allow.

MR. HOUSTON: Are there some that are 24?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Yes.

MR. HOUSTON: Are there any that are over 24?

MS. HUNTINGTON: There is no class that has more than 24 children. They would have to have additional space, so that if there were 26 children, we would separate the groups and put them in additional space in the school.

MR. HOUSTON: What is the smallest class you have?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I believe it's around five at this point.

MR. HOUSTON: So you have a class with five people in it.

MS. HUNTINGTON: Five pre-Primary students?

MR. HOUSTON: Yes.

MS. HUNTINGTON: We are expecting as the program rolls out, that more children will attend. That has happened in the future through the Early Years Centre, so we know that some parents wait to see if the program is up and running, and then they will enroll their children sort of mid-year, so we expect that to happen in some classes as well.

MR. HOUSTON: Continuous enrolment?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Yes, absolutely.

MR. HOUSTON: It just seemed like a bit of a rush to get this going in terms of the staffing and the space. I hear about a daycare for special needs children that had to be moved out. I think in terms of the space, as far as I understood the department's position was that they would only use available space. Yet I hear about a daycare getting kind of evicted. Was that considered available space or what happened there?

MS. MCKENZIE: Is your reference to the school in Halifax?

MR. HOUSTON: Yes.

MS. MCKENZIE: There was no one evicted. The intention was never to have anyone evicted. What we were looking to do was make sure that children in the area got a great start. There was a higher than expected enrolment. We needed to have two classes instead of one.



The community worked together. The board worked very closely with the association and I'm pleased to say that everybody will be housed in the building and people are pleased with the space allocation as it is, so there was nobody put out.

MR. HOUSTON: So it was resolved.

MS. MCKENZIE: Yes, it was.

MR. HOUSTON: Does every classroom have a bathroom in it?

MS. HUNTINGTON: No.

MR. HOUSTON: Is that okay?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Just like regulated child care centres, not every classroom has a bathroom in a regulated child care classroom. We know that the early childhood educators will work with the children to ensure that they are able to use the bathroom in a safe way. We have confidence that they can help support them in those issues and make sure the children are able to use the bathroom in a safe environment.

[9:15 a.m.]

MS. MCKENZIE: I just would like to add that we actually have 78 regulated child care centres that currently exist in schools now that are safely using facilities, so we have confidence in the people who are working with the children to ensure their safety.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you. Do you have a number as to how many EAs were in the school system who have now moved over to pre-Primary?

MS. MCKENZIE: In terms of hiring? Who was hired?

MR. HOUSTON: Yes.

MS. MCKENZIE: I don't have that. We do know there are EAs in the system who are qualified early childhood educators who may have applied for the jobs. I do know that those EAs, if vacancies existed, have been backfilled in the boards. I can ask J.L. if she knows specifically an answer to that question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Huntington.

MS. HUNTINGTON: No, I don't have an answer to the number of ECEs that took early childhood education positions but I do know that they have credentials and they applied for these opportunities.

MR. HOUSTON: The important part that I am most interested in was that they've been backfilled. There's a lot of children in the school system who don't have adequate support. I hear from families all the time who are concerned about the level of support their children are getting in the P-12 system.

I just read this morning about a child who went missing at school. The family was quite concerned that the supports aren't there for their child in the school system. With that in my mind, I hear that EAs are moving jobs, or whatever, and advancing their own careers and moving into the pre-Primary system but it's creating more stress on the P-12 system.

You're saying that those positions have all been backfilled. The department is not aware of any less EAs in the school system because of this?

MS. MCKENZIE: Thank you for asking that. I know there have been some people who have equated the hiring of the ECEs and whether or not we have enough EAs in the system. I think the minister said it well when he said that we have, in fact, increased the number of EAs in the public school system. What teachers told us last year when they lined up at the microphone is that the current model, the need is outstripping the current resources. That's why we've established an Inclusion Commission which is going to look at the model to see how we can work best in Nova Scotia to provide those supports for children.

The consultation will be underway this Fall and the Premier and the minister have asked for that report to be tabled by March so we can make sure that after 20 years we have a new model that we can move to, because we know there have been increases in the level of autism, for instance. What we want to make sure is that we've designed our education system to support children to have good outcomes.

MR. HOUSTON: I guess that really speaks to the crux of the whole matter, is that people are concerned about the existing system and the need is outstripping the resources. I don't know that anyone anticipated that a possible solution to that was going to be to add another year to the school system when the P-12 system is under so much stress. This isn't solving the need. What you heard from teachers last year, what I heard from teachers last year, this isn't in any way addressing that, it's actually making it worse in many ways.

MS. MCKENZIE: I currently co-chair the Council on Classroom Conditions. I work closely with our representative on the Inclusion Commission. I travelled around the province and met with 378 principals and I can tell you that they do see early learning and pre-Primary as important steps in supporting children and moving into school and addressing some of the challenges that children are presented with when they move into the classroom.

This is part of the solution, looking at the model, and that's how we presented it - pre-Primary is part of the solution, but an important part of the solution. It's endorsed by the educators who I speak to. Certainly we have principals who have Early Years Centres

in the system, who can speak poetically about the positive effect it has had on the children who have been moving out of the Early Years Centres into the class, into Primary this year, so I would say that this is part of the solution.

We absolutely agree that we need to look at the current model and that's why the Inclusion Commission has been put in place by this government.

MR. HOUSTON: The existing network of daycare systems is not cutting it in your opinion? There's already a network out there. This decision, in many ways, people are saying is going to have a negative impact on that network that exists. Did you speak to any of those people? Who did you consult with when this was first introduced? Is there any kind of analysis that the department has done on the impact on the existing network of daycares and early learning providers? There's going to be an impact on them. Has the department looked at that?

MS. MCKENZIE: We're about to launch a consultation with the sector. We have been working very closely with the sector. This government invests \$55 million a year in the child care sector and was the first government to introduce an increase in wages that brought people up to a living wage and honoured the work of the ECEs in the system. They also have increased the subsidy for families, and we have been negotiating with the federal government on further investment. We also know, though, that only 25 per cent of children who can access child care are accessing child care. It can be for a variety of reasons, which could be that there's no child care available in their community. The objective here is not only to invest in the child care sector, invest in pre-Primary, but there's going to be the consultation which links the child care sector into how we can do wraparound services. This is about abundance. There's going to be lots of space for people to work.

MR. HOUSTON: I think you answered my question when you said the consultations will start later. That's really what's happening here. There are so many moving parts, and to start a consultation after this has been introduced is why we're seeing some of the concern that we are seeing, for sure. There's no assessment of the impact on the existing network yet, but will be in the future.

So \$55 million is being spent in that system now. It could have been a decision to spend a little more. You could spend this money on that system and improve that system that already works for families. It doesn't jive with me. There will be an impact on that system for sure, and we don't know what it is yet.

MS. MCKENZIE: I guess I'm saying that I think there will be a positive impact as we work with them. I just want to . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. Sorry, I know I'm a little short on time, Mr. Chairman. What do you say to people? I hear a very reasoned argument that this is taking four-year-olds out of that system, and it's leaving a lot of places unable to survive. They're losing their clients. They're losing their customers, the children they're working with. It's going

to decrease availability, especially for the kids who are newborns to three years old, because there's nothing for them. This is taking four-year-olds out of an existing system that works and is well funded by the government - \$55 million - and is putting it in jeopardy. But that's not being considered as part of this. You haven't done an impact assessment on what the availability will be for children under four. That hasn't been looked at.

MS. MCKENZIE: We actually have continued to work with the sector all the way through this. We are going to do the consultation on what the opportunities are for wraparound services into the future. This will actually provide spaces for the zero to four-year-olds, and I believe . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Will provide spaces in the school system?

MS. MCKENZIE: It opens up spaces. I'm going to turn it over to J.L. I think she's going to respond.

MS. HUNTINGTON: I also want to point out that at the same time that we do a consultation with child care providers, we will be launching a consultation with families. I think this is really important and speaks to your point. We need to hear from families about what they need for child care. As the deputy pointed out, in lots of communities across Nova Scotia there is not regulated child care. This family survey that we're going to be consulting families on shortly, will ask families directly, what kind of care do you need? What kind of regulated child care do you need? We as a government will take that answer and try to support the needs of the families and provide that service.

MR. HOUSTON: That's a great idea. I don't understand why you're doing it after. That's the type of thing that should be done before-hand. It's great that it's being done. I don't understand the timing.

MS. HUNTINGTON: We committed in the regulated child care plan announced in June, 2016, that we would open child care centres in communities that needed it most. This is not only in response to pre-Primary, but also our commitments in the child care plan to work with families and providers to make sure that families have access to services that they need in their community. That is a follow-up to that, and the information that we receive from that consultation will be shared with child care providers so they're able to respond to need.

MR. HOUSTON: Is that how you picked the initial locations - because they don't have existing regulated child care?

MS. HUNTINGTON: That was one consideration for many communities, yes.

MR. HOUSTON: So all those communities that don't have, prior to this, regulated child care, they now have pre-Primary?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Some communities where pre-Primary is being implemented do have access to regulated child care but, as the deputy indicated, we know that not all families access regulated child care and there are not enough spaces to provide care for all children birth to five in Nova Scotia.

MR. HOUSTON: Speaking about the access to stuff, the busing is a big - the timing - it's really tough for families to get off work and go pick up their child, but busing is not an option here - why not?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie, you have five seconds. (Laughter)

MS. MCKENZIE: Thank you for the question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will move to the NDP caucus. Just for the benefit of our witnesses, I do recognize people before they speak when they've not spoken before, just so we can make sure your microphone is on. So I won't recognize you every time, but if there is a change from one speaker to another, I will recognize the new speaker - if you're wondering what I'm doing. We will move to Ms. Roberts of the NDP caucus for 20 minutes.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: In 2016, as part of the review and the consultation that happened with the child care sector, I understand that 7,000 people completed a survey, including families and child care providers. Why are we not working from that consultation - instead implementing a program that did not come out of that consultation, and then we're going back to ask them again what their needs are? Explain that.

MS. MCKENZIE: The survey that we did on the child care sector was specifically to child care. What J.L. has just spoken to is - we were looking at the child care sector and what people needed. The survey that J.L. is speaking about is to support the growth strategy that came out of the strategy that evolved from that original survey. Are there additional questions we need to ask now that we have a child care strategy in place? There is, and J.L., you may want to speak to the direction of that survey, a little bit more clearly.

MS. HUNTINGTON: We know some families, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, may only need seasonal care or part-time care. We made a commitment in the child care plan, as a result of that consultation that you referred to, that we would open child care centres in communities that need it most. Child care operators were really clear with us on that: please do not fund four child care centres within a two-kilometre radius of each other if we know that a child care centre is needed somewhere else. So, we heard loud and clear from families and from child care operators that they wanted us to be more strategic on where and when we open child care centres.

We know that child care centres do their own analysis of what type of care they should provide, but we also know that families have unique circumstances. We're in a really unique position in Nova Scotia that we are in federal negotiations with the

Government of Canada now, and strategic growth will be a priority using those dollars. So we need to have intimate conversations with families about what type of care they need. Is it wrap-around? Is it care for four-year-olds who are finished at the end of the day of a pre-Primary and they need somewhere to go until 6:00 p.m.? Is it seasonal care? Is it just in the summer? These are conversations that families will be able to tell us specifically, in their region by postal code, and that's information that we're going to gather and share with child care providers so that they're able to respond to the needs of families in their communities.

MS. ROBERTS: So just to understand that more, in my particular district within a one kilometre radius of two new pre-Primary classrooms, there are three child care centres, including a dedicated preschool. So that consultation in terms of what was needed where, was not done before this pre-Primary roll-out. Is that correct? Do I understand that?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I'm not sure I understand what you're saying, sorry. We know that none of the child care centres in your community have closed because of pre-Primary and we know that now families will be able to send their children to the pre-Primary program.

We also know that some families can only afford part daycare - send their child in the morning. So in this case, when there is a pre-Primary program in a community and a regulated child care program in the community, families - especially families with multiple children - will be able to perhaps extend the day, perhaps use the dollars that they would be saving by sending their older child to pre-Primary, to send their younger child to full-day wrap-around service.

[9:30 a.m.]

These are all options, we are going to be working with families and child care providers to ensure that the care is provided for the kids who need it.

MS. ROBERTS: If the emphasis of this program is on improving outcomes, particularly for families and children coming from lower socio-economic conditions, will the department be able to report on the demographics of the families who do access the program?

MS. MCKENZIE: Are you asking whether we going to be surveying the family in terms of their income? That's an excellent piece of research that we could undertake. There isn't a means test now to come in, so people are not applying based on an income level. We certainly have taken a look at the communities where we've placed the pre-Primary but the intention is to have it available across the province.

MS. ROBERTS: Our office filed access to information requests for records, including studies, plans, strategies, objectives for the addition of the pre-Primary sites,

anything from January 1 until May 2, 2017. The department responded that there were no records responsive to the application.

We also asked for records showing how much the new program would cost and, again, the response was that there were no records. Can you explain how decisions were made about the costing and implementation of the program if the department had not done that background work that we asked to look at?

MS. MCKENZIE: The work that we have done is on the Early Years Centres. What we knew is that they were successful. The Liberal Government took a look at the success with the Early Years Centres, the recommendations that had been made through Gaynor Watson-Creed's group that worked for the We Choose Now report. We've looked at research from across the country as part of the McCain partnership and there was a decision made to move forward with this program. We have costed it based on the Early Years Centres that were currently in place and rolling that out. In many ways we built on the experience we had with the earlier centres.

MS. ROBERTS: In your experience of opening Early Years Centres, how long was the timeline typically between identifying a site and opening a site?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'll let J.L. respond to that.

MS. HUNTINGTON: I actually don't have that information at hand. I wasn't the executive director at the time when we opened earlier centres, but we know - the reality is that when you are opening a pre-Primary program we had a really good foundation to build the pre-Primary program on. We have been doing Early Years Centres in Nova Scotia since 2014, so some of the decisions that you would normally have to make when implementing a program as quickly as we had to, we already had those answers, we already had the decisions.

The other thing is we have an evaluation of the Early Years Centres so we know what's working and we know what wasn't working. We took all that into consideration when we were developing the program for pre-Primary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. McKenzie has a comment, I believe.

MS. MCKENZIE: If the question is did we move quickly, we did. If you would look at how we moved out with the Early Years Centres it probably took a longer period of time because we were working with the McCain Foundation and putting the research in place.

I can say that when the opportunity came to be able to roll out a universal pre-Primary program in Nova Scotia, something the staff in our division have said they dreamed about for 30 years, we moved quickly. It was because we are ambitious for our

children, those 818 kids who would never have had the opportunity, this year to have the opportunity because we were ambitious and because we moved quickly.

In moving quickly we also know that we have opportunities to work with the child care sector. They are leaning in, in terms of participating in this consultation that is coming up and I believe we are going to have a strengthened system into the future and children who will have a better start at life.

MS. ROBERTS: Again, thank you for your answer. We filed another access to information request related to the selection of the sites for the pre-Primary classrooms, and in that package there was an email from a staff person from June 15<sup>th</sup> that said there has been no direction given to schools re pre-Primary and at this time we have no information re pre-Primary.

So, recognizing that you moved fast and that you saw this as an opportunity, how were the sites selected, and announced by July 18<sup>th</sup> if there was no information on June 15<sup>th</sup>?

MS. MCKENZIE: I can say that as soon as our minister was in place, we were off to the races, we worked with school boards, they were amazing and, I'll turn it over to J.L. but, it was a very quick turn-around time. This was an opportunity that the school boards saw and they went with it as quickly as they could.

MS. HUNTINGTON: That's correct. So, we worked with the school boards daily; we asked them questions like, where was their space, where would they prefer to have a pre-Primary site, and, what we could do, given the tight time frame that we were given? So, they were able to respond quickly, and I use the example of one superintendent, who, literally, got in his car and drove around to the elementary schools, to see what would be the best sites and where he could put a pre-Primary program in for September. So, when he called me on that Friday afternoon, he said, I've personally visited the sites myself. I'm very comfortable with the list that we've put forward and they were able to respond as quickly as possible. And we looked at things like space, as well as where there was need, so, where there was limited or a lack of regulated child care in communities, for example.

MS. ROBERTS: Will the pre-Primary classes be having outdoor play as part of their regular curriculum?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Absolutely.

MS. ROBERTS: In my neighbourhood, for example, where there are two pre-Primary classes at the school just up the hill. It does not have a fenced playground. What safety measures are you taking to ensure that you don't have four-year-olds, you know, 24 of them, running in, possibly eight different directions, in an environment that would not be considered safe in a regulated pre-school program?



MS. HUNTINGTON: We know that early childhood educators have expertise and experience in child development. We know that they will use outdoor play as much as they can, to teach the children - that's how they learn, through play. Oftentimes, what we've discovered is that, with regulated child care and, even with school playgrounds, children don't necessarily need a play structure, but they need access to outdoor play. So, it could be anything from going into the woods behind the child care centre, to explore what's happening in nature. The early childhood educators are trained and highly qualified to be able to make sure that the children are safe at all times. They will use whatever resources they can, outside, to teach the children, whether it's a tree, or a little patch of grass, or, you know, whatever is available outside to use, whether it's hiking or walking; these are the things that happen every day, in early learning environments in Nova Scotia, and will continue to happen now that we have pre-Primary.

MS. ROBERTS: But is there any plan to change the regulations where pre-schools operating in regulated child care environments are required to have a fully-fenced playground?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I would remind you that, in many regulated child care centres, it's not just four-year-olds, right? So, it could be one, two, three, and children after school as well. So, when it comes to regulations, I know, and Vicki can jump in here, but, we're always looking at the branch to ensure that our regulations are up to date, and reflective of meeting the needs of the child care centre and of the families and children that they serve. So, that is something that we could possibly look at. Vicki, do you have anything to add?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Did you have something to add? No, okay.

MS. ROBERTS: So, just in short, you're confident that these pre-Primary children are going to be safe in the playgrounds and in the play spaces surrounding the elementary schools where they're located?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I'm confident that children attending pre-Primary will be safe, because they have highly trained, qualified, early childhood educators that will work with them every day to keep them safe.

MS. ROBERTS: In 2010, P.E.I. began to move some children out of regulated child care centres and into the school system, and when the government realized the problems that they were creating for existing childcare providers, the province stopped and started over. What has the department done to learn from P.E.I.'s experience?

MS. MCKENZIE: Prince Edward Island actually moved to a fully new model of child care, which involved buying out certain commercial providers, and made some significant changes in their overall system, which also still includes the child care provision in the public school system. I don't know that they ever undertook a universal pre-Primary program the way that we did. We're certainly looking at models that they had in Ontario

and in the Northwest Territories - and is there anything that the two of you would like to add to that? Okay.

MS. ROBERTS: So in your obviously rushed timeline, did you have time and were you able to give the minister advice based on the experiences of Ontario and P.E.I., and what did that look like? When did those conversations happen?

MS. MCKENZIE: We have been imagining what pre-Primary would look like for some time because we had the experience with our Early Years Centres; we've had early learning classes - ELOs - happening in the Halifax School Board for some time; and we've had Four Plus programs. We were able to build it on our own experience in terms of how we would extend that out, and then it was formed by other people's experiences - both in highly urban settings like Toronto would have, through to places like the Northwest Territories where there is distance covered. So we were able to build on our own experiences with pre-Primary and learn from others as well.

MS. ROBERTS: Then how do you explain that when we asked, through access to information, for records of some of that conversation and work within the department there were no records that came back to us?

MS. MCKENZIE: In the time frame that you are asking, the commitment that was made in the budget leading up to the election is that we would move forward with pre-Primary. We had many conversations with Minister Casey about the strength of our Early Years Centres, the strength of our early learning, the experiences that we had with the Four Plus programming, and it was after the election that it was confirmed that we would be moving forward with pre-Primary, that we move forward with the fully developed program.

MS. ROBERTS: Pre-Primary programs only operate during school hours on days when school is in session and that means the program is not accessible to working parents - Is the department concerned about that?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We know that there will be families in Nova Scotia who will not be able to use the pre-Primary program, but we are pleased that we have over 800 who are accessing the program this year. So families will make arrangements that will suit their needs, whether they can have their child picked up by a grandparent or a neighbour, those types of things, whether they can send their child to a regulated child care centre for after-school care so that they can make the pre-Primary program work.

We know families are really excited about this program. We're hearing that all the time. They're pleased that their children can attend. It's important for us to be looking at those types of issues that you've just raised over the next four years.

The ultimate goal is to ensure access for every four-year-old in Nova Scotia, and so as we roll out this program we will be learning a lot of new things about access and

making sure that we can accommodate families and their needs - and if that means partnering with a regulated child care to provide that wrap-around service, that's something that we want to explore.

This program will be universal. It will be accessible to all four-year-olds in four years and we really want to work with families to make sure that it works for them as well.

MS. ROBERTS: Is there a site where, or an arrangement for, after-school care that has actually been made for this September? Is there a case that you can point to where parents are actually able to access regulated after-school care connected to pick-up after school?

MS. MCKENZIE: I should have mentioned earlier in the experiences that we've had - and in answer to the question that you've just asked, our francophone school board, CSAP, has been offering pre-Primary for a number of years. They partner regularly with private providers to provide wrap-around care in the morning and after school. So we have models that we're going to be able to provide to the current sector to show them how that works. That's why I'm saying I think there is opportunity here.

To the point that you raised earlier, those are working parents who are using that. They're able to drop off their children in the morning. They receive wrap-around service. They move into pre-Primary, which is free of charge to them and then they move straight into after-school care, all in the same setting, and provided seamless to the families. So it is supportive of working parents. I'm quite excited by that and that's some of the models we want to discuss with the child care sector in the rest of the province.

MS. ROBERTS: In terms of these new sites, as you mentioned, the CSAP has been offering pre-Primary in its schools for the past number of years. Do we have any example of a new pre-Primary site where similar wrap-around service has been made available this year?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We do know that one school board is looking to work with child care providers in their local community to offer that service now. They're putting sort of the finishing touches on how they would go about approaching a regulated child care centre to offer that wraparound service.

The other thing I would like to mention is that in the Early Years Centres, we do know that that service has been provided in the past. In some Early Years Centres when we asked if they wanted wrap-around, regulated child care services it wasn't a priority for families. We discovered that through the evaluation. So in some communities, absolutely, families will want that after-school care and that wrap-around service but in some communities there will not be a need for it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, time is just about to expire. Thank you, Ms. Roberts. We'll move to the Liberal caucus. Ms. Lohnes-Croft you have 20 minutes.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I am pleased to have you here. It's no secret I am an early childhood educator and proud of it. The topic today is funding for pre-Primary and I don't think we really got into discussion about the funding. Could you explain where this money is coming from. Is it new money? Are you taking from one pot for another pot? How will this program be funded?

MS. MCKENZIE: I'll give a very high level and then I'm going to turn it over to J.L. and to David, who is our Director of Finance, for the response. We have taken the money that we had, \$1.5 million, for the Early Years Centres and the support that we had. There was an additional \$3.7 million that was given in the Spring budget and then an additional \$800,000, bringing us to \$6 million; \$4.5 million of that is new money in the budget for these centres. It is budgeted at about \$125,000 a program.

What we've discovered as we've moved through this, is that that \$125,000 for the start-up will cover the six months for this fiscal year from September to March and start-up costs for the materials for the classroom and hiring the staff, including the supports at the board. So if there's anything that J.L. would add to that or David.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Potter.

MR. DAVID POTTER: No, I think the deputy captured everything really. The total investment is \$6 million, as she mentioned. You'll see budget announcements of \$4.5 million, that's the new investment, the \$1.5 million of existing funds that existed for the earlier centres, is being repurposed as those centres convert to pre-Primary centres.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: So you mentioned that you took money from the Early Years Program. Have all of the Early Years Programs been closed?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Huntington.

MS. HUNTINGTON: The Early Years Centre model has three components. One of them is early learning. That early learning component will transition into pre-Primary, so there will be no difference there. Early Years Centres also offer supports to families and communities and in some cases they offer regulated child care as well, so we are not abandoning the idea of Early Years Centres. We know that those centres are valuable to the community. Right now our focus is on pre-Primary; however, the eight Early Years Centres that we have now will remain in place. In the future if there is a need to expand on the pre-Primary and incorporate it into an Early Years Centre model so, for example, if we know that a community needs additional support, that's something we will look at in the future. So Early Years Centres will continue in Nova Scotia and possibly expand if there's a need.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: So why do we need pre-Primary in Nova Scotia and why are they in schools?

MS. HUNTINGTON: There are decades of research that speaks to the value of early learning opportunities for children. We know that children who attend pre-Primary or a program before they start school, do better socially, emotionally and academically in the future. The research is clear on that.

In Nova Scotia we participate in the Early Development Instrument, the EDI. That is a school-readiness assessment that is done in Grade Primary. It measures a child's development in five domains: physical health and wellness, emotional maturity, communication skills, cognitive development, and social competence. We have had two rounds of EDI in Nova Scotia, one in 2013 and one in 2015. The results of the EDI indicate that one in four children, so 25 per cent of our children, in Nova Scotia arrive to school vulnerable in at least one of those domains. We know in some populations and in some communities, it can be as high as 50 per cent to 60 per cent. That EDI result is really a call to action, if you will, to government and community, that we need to ensure that when our children arrive to school, they're ready to learn. The pre-Primary program is going to help with that.

The other thing that it does, and we've talked about this earlier this morning, is that there is not regulated child care in every community in Nova Scotia. There will be pre-Primary for every Nova Scotia child. That really does level the playing field. This program will be a game-changer for Nova Scotia and for families.

The other thing I think is important to mention is that through our Early Years Centre evaluations, we were able to have conversations with parents about what they thought about their child attending this Early Years Centre. Did they see any improvements or growth and development in their child? The results were clear. Moms and dads reported things like their child speaking better, better language, better communication, better able to self-regulate their emotions. I always love when parents report that they get along better with their siblings because they have attended the pre-Primary program. That's an added bonus for families.

We know that having children attend pre-Primary is also a great benefit if they have gone undiagnosed for a special need. Early childhood educators in Nova Scotia are trained and highly qualified. If there is a child who enters pre-Primary who does not have a diagnosis of a special need, and the ECE potentially has some questions and concerns, they will have conversations with the family about that. They will work with families. They will work with community partners to ensure that those children have access to services the year before they start school. That is a tremendous benefit that we can't forget.

Those are some of the reasons why we need pre-Primary in Nova Scotia. It's a great opportunity for children and families. In four years, it's going to be a game-changer, and we're already seeing the benefits of that now.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: And they're located in schools because?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We know schools are a great place for early learning opportunities and for pre-Primary programs because they help with transitions. I'm going to give you an example of a family that I met on Monday at the opening of the pre-Primary program in Lower Sackville.

I was fortunate enough to meet a mom who has a child with autism. That child is now at the pre-Primary program at the school in Lower Sackville. This mom has a new baby, so she's a new mom who has a little infant at home. She said to me that her son would only have access to a program twice a week for three hours a day, so that's six hours' worth of programming. The mom indicated to me that by the time she got up, got ready, got the child prepared, took the child to the program, dropped the child off, and made sure the child was comfortable, it was time to turn around, go back, and pick him up. This program allowed her child to attend this program five days a week for the full length of the school year. She just thought that was tremendous because not only would it help him meet new friends and help with his language and development and his social emotional skills, it's also going to help with transition into school.

That's why it's important that these programs are in schools. This child is going to walk into Primary next year, and he's going to know who the principal is. He's going to know where the washroom is. He's going to know he's going to have friends that he met in pre-Primary. Having a central focal point of a community school is a great idea to ensure that transitions into the public school system are done and that they're successful.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Transitions are probably the most challenging for children with autism. Okay, I understand that now.

Ms. McKenzie, you didn't finish this statement - you said that pre-Primaries will be positive for the existing education system. I don't think you finished that, and I want to know why you were saying that.

MS. MCKENZIE: I think J.L. just explained the positive nature. It's not only positive for the families and positive for the children. It's positive for the teachers who are receiving the children in Grade Primary. So, the principal in Yarmouth who hosted the Early Years Centre for the last two years has seen a tremendous readiness of the children who have gone through the Early Years Centre and moved into Grade Primary. They're saying that the things that the child may have struggled with when they moved into the public school system, many of those things a child has had the opportunity to address. There may have been self-regulation issues or, in some cases, children haven't all been introduced to books, to being able to sit and attend, listen - those types of things.

So, they've had those opportunities; they developed those skills; and they're ready to transition to the public school system - and Grade Primary teachers see the benefit of those kids moving into the classes.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: And I think as a former home and school president, I met regularly with my principal and when we say how can we help you, what's your biggest issue, I think his biggest comment has been children are coming to school lacking social skills. Often you can catch up on your academics as the year progresses but it seems like social skills will be the big thing - it deals with behaviour. You know, a lot of children are coming from homes where they don't have to wait or take turns, everything is instant gratification. So how much focus on social skills will be a part of this in problem solving?

MS. MCKENZIE: There is a play-based learning curriculum and in fact that's been rolled out in a pilot with the child care sector as well. I'd like J.L. to speak to that. It's a first for Nova Scotia. We've built on the good experiences across Canada.

MS. HUNTINGTON: So, the early learning curriculum framework that we've developed in Nova Scotia is something that we are really proud of. We were the last jurisdiction in Canada to have an early learning curriculum framework, but we actually think this was an opportunity for us. We were able to look at curriculum frameworks for early learning from around the country and from around the world and we really did build a document that reflects what we as Nova Scotians feel about children. It's based on the child and the child is curious, creative, full of potential, capable, and confident, and that's woven throughout the entire document.

What that does is it sets early childhood educators up to ensure that a play-based inclusive curriculum is being offered in pre-Primary and in regulated child care centres. If you look at the document, what you will not see in it is an outcomes-based document. It's very different than a curriculum that you would see in Grade 1 or Grade 2 - a child by 4 must do X. You will not see that. It's strategies and tips for early childhood educators to help those children - particularly the pre-Primaries and the ones in regulated child care - be the best four year olds, three year olds they can be, and they do that through play and that's woven throughout the entire document.

This is a document that we are proud of. We've piloted this document with 40 child care centres across Nova Scotia. They have been incredible in giving us valuable feedback on how to make improvements. The pre-Primary program will use this document. We're expecting the pilot to wrap up in November, I believe, and we'll be making some additions and changes to it to improve it, but the foundation and the basis will not change. It's only going to get better from here. We're lucky that we have it and we're really quite proud of it here.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: So, will that curriculum be used in early childhood programs across Nova Scotia or just the pre-Primary?

MS. HUNTINGTON: All provincially funded, regulated child care centres in Nova Scotia will use the early learning curriculum framework. So, it's not just for four year olds - it's for children from birth to eight actually.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Ms. McKenzie, you mentioned that this program would reach Nova Scotia's most vulnerable children - do you want to explain that? We just saw a property map come out last week and we do see sections of Nova Scotia where I'm sure that's one of the vulnerabilities with our children here in Nova Scotia. Do you want to speak to that?

MS. MCKENZIE: We know that there are children in Nova Scotia who live in families that are not accessing regulated child care. We do have a very strong subsidy program but they may live in areas where a regulated child care centre isn't available. So, by rolling out a universal pre- Primary program, it's making it available to all children.

We will work hard over the coming years to make sure that we have addressed access issues as they arise. We're committed to this being successful, as they are at the school boards as well.

[10:00 a.m.]

I believe, as J.L. has just pointed out, that the program and the research points to this being a very positive thing for children. We know that we have EDI scores that tell us we need to move in this direction - making it universally available to all four year olds in the province is the right thing to do.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I'm very interested. This is a great opportunity for early childhood educators. Their time has come. For 30 or 40 years there have been grandmothers, mostly because they've been women in these low-income positions advocating and telling the public that they are qualified and well-trained individuals, yet their pay never seemed to show that or even the respect they get publicly - so seeing early childhood educators up front in this whole program.

I understand each school board will have a higher-level person, a consultant or whatnot. Can you explain that role as opposed to the in-classroom ECEs?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Each school board will have a pre-Primary lead or manager; they all have a variety of titles, and that individual will be responsible for working with the early childhood educators in the pre-Primary classroom.

Each pre-Primary classroom will have a lead early childhood educator and a support early childhood educator. Both are ECEs; both have a very important role in the classroom. But, for example, the lead ECE would be responsible for parental interaction. So, if they were having challenges with a child, they would be responsible for working with the pre-Primary lead, the board, and the family, to help resolve those issues.

It's not that one is doing something different than the other, it's just that the lead has a bit more accountability when it comes to dealing with community partners for example, early intervention, welcoming them to the school, or with parents. Both early



childhood educators, whether they're lead or support, play an integral role in ensuring a high-quality, safe environment for children in the classroom.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Will there be professional development for these early childhood educators?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Absolutely. We know that the pre-Primary leads in the board have their own individual professional development that they want to explore and work with their ECEs on. Towards the end of October, we will have all early childhood educators working in pre-Primary come to a full-day professional development session on play-based learning and the early learning curriculum framework. We know just through the evaluation of the Early Years Centres that PD is a critical component to success. We have taken that message; we've heard it loud and clear from early childhood educators.

Whenever we can respond to professional development opportunities, we will do so. The first one will be a full-day session. We're really excited about it, to have all the ECEs from across the province together to walk them through best practice in play-based learning. These employees know play-based learning already. We're just introducing them to the early learning curriculum framework to make sure that they're set up for success.

We will continue to have conversations with the pre-Primary leads at the board to find out if there are other opportunities for professional development that they need. We will accommodate those PD opportunities whenever we can.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: That's good to know.

In the 1980s, I took part in a certification program. It was a pilot program for early childhood educators. There were other organizations, the Pre-School Association of Nova Scotia and the Child Care Council. Will membership in these organizations be important for these early childhood educators? I know they're personal decisions, but I think that attests to their professionalism in their own standing. Are there opportunities there?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Absolutely. I have already had conversations with the board chairman and the executive director of the Early Childhood Education Association of Nova Scotia. We have talked about the opportunity here.

Early childhood educators work in a variety of fields, whether it is developmental intervention, pre-Primary, or regulated child care. There are opportunities through that association to not only encourage more ECEs to participate in that association but for us to continue the good work we do with the child care association now, to provide, for example, PD opportunities for ECEs whether they are in pre-Primary, early intervention, or regulated child care. So absolutely there's a role and we will continue to work with the child care association that we have now and, hopefully, they'll be able to recruit some more ECEs to their membership.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: When someone comes in in the morning, parents are dropping off their children, what's the transition to be like for these - you have all these new four year olds arriving on day one.

MS. HUNTINGTON: A day in the life of pre-Primary, I'll just walk you through - and recognize that each class is different and each early childhood educator has their own ways of doing things - families can expect children to be greeted by their ECEs. There will be an open snack provided so a snack will be available, a healthy, nutritious snack will be available to children if they are hungry at that time. It will just be there. There is no - they don't have to ask for it, they can access it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, time has expired. We'd like to hear more about that, perhaps in the next round. We'll move to Mr. Houston of the PC caucus for 14 minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: The curriculum framework - is that accessible? Is that online? Where would I find the curriculum framework?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I can make sure that you have a copy. It's not available online because it was still a pilot but, absolutely, we can get you a copy.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you. That is the curriculum that is being used in the classrooms?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Yes, that's correct.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the costing, you mentioned \$125,000 per class as a start-up cost - is that the annual cost, \$125,000 per class?

Okay, so a class that has five kids in it becomes really expensive, right?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Ms. McKenzie, perhaps you can - I think you nodded your head in agreement with that last answer, but just so that our Hansard services can pick up on the answer, perhaps you could vocalize it.

MS. MCKENZIE: I was shaking my head that \$125,000 was a start-up cost, and apologies to Hansard.

We know that that's the cost of an Early Years program. This year we have that allocated for the program but, obviously, that varies depending on how many kids are in the classes - whether there's a large class that needs three ECEs and a small class that needs one.

The point I was trying to make earlier is that normally the \$125,000 would run for nine months. It's running for six months, and we also used the remainder for start-up costs. I'll let J.L. speak for the budget, or let David jump in.

MR. HOUSTON: I guess what I'd like to know is what is the cost, what is the budgeted cost per child for the 10 months for the school year?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We don't have a cost per child to attend; we have a cost per program. We provide funding to the tune of \$125,000 for each class as long as it has two early childhood educators. It would have two early childhood educators if there were more than 10 children in the class, as well as if, perhaps, there was a child, children, that identified as special needs who required additional resources, so we would provide funding for that.

MR. HOUSTON: So, \$125,000 per year, assuming that there are two early childhood educators in the class?

MS. HUNTINGTON: That's correct.

MR. HOUSTON: On a per child basis, how does that compare to what is happening in the market already - is it more expensive or less expensive?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Potter, do you wish to take a crack at that one?

MR. POTTER: Yes. When you refer to the market, you are referring to the regulated child care centre?

MR. HOUSTON: Yes.

MR. POTTER: I don't know of any comparison between those two numbers. The \$125,000 is the 10-month cost and that's based on a standard approach of two ECEs per classroom, as well as the classroom supplies.

MR. HOUSTON: Well to be blunt, I hear a lot of the benefits of the program, but the other side of that is the implication that there are inadequate services being provided by the regulated - really, I mean I see you are shaking your head no, but what I am hearing is we can do this so much better in the pre-Primary system and we're going to do it. I see your expression is maybe you don't want me to get that impression, but that is the impression that I'm left with.

Then when I think about if we're comparing it that way, have we at least looked at - if it's really about accessibility for families, I don't think you have it. I really don't think you have it. Now they have to get their child to the school, and they have to pick their child up and maybe take their child to after-school daycare so they can go back to work. There's just so many moving parts. It's not there yet. It has started, but it's not well-thought-out because it's not helping families.

Then I hear about practical implications of the system, that materials aren't in the classrooms. My colleague mentioned that the playgrounds aren't fenced. Well we're going

to rely on teachers to keep them safe, which is more and more responsibility on them because the system is not ready because it was rushed.

Then I say at least maybe they did some financial analysis about value for money for the taxpayers, value for money for the families and now I've just heard that wasn't done either.

Nobody has looked at what families are paying now for child care in the existing system and compared that to what the taxpayers are going to pay to start the pre-Primary - that hasn't been looked at?

MS. MCKENZIE: We do have financials for the child care sector, and we have been running Early Years. We could do that calculation.

Your point is that we haven't done it. What we know is that one is calculated by the child by age, and one has been done for a four-year-old program. We're separating the two. We have different funding levels by age for the child care sector and, like I said, we have the four-year-old program.

I just need to comment on a number of other things that you said. We will have all of the classes with equipment; we will have all of the classes with trained ECEs. Even in the regulated child care sector, they take children out for walks that are not inside fenced areas. We trust the professionalism of ECEs to do that in regulated child care all the time.

The question that you framed, though, is a scarcity approach, and I'm asking you to look at it from an abundance perspective. This is not saying that the child care sector wasn't able to provide this service, and we're doing it so much better in pre-Primary. We're saying we have a fantastic child care sector that we have invested \$55 million in. We have invested in early childhood educators in that sector for the first time. We have introduced improved subsidies - and we're going to have a pre-Primary program which that sector will be able to play a role in, it's not "or."

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, and I would say that you're potentially jeopardizing that whole system because you're removing the kids, and you're taking staff. There are all these issues. There's an impact on the existing system that hasn't been considered. I'm not convinced otherwise today. There is definitely an impact on the existing network of people who are providing these services. That impact has not been considered by the department, hasn't been considered by the government, even to the point of looking at what is the most cost-effective way to do it. Are we providing the same service for a better price for families, are we providing a better service? That's the case.

Then I still can't understand "we will have" the materials, "we will have" the consultations - "we will have." Meanwhile, the class has already started. I don't understand - why couldn't we start this January 1<sup>st</sup>? Why are we trying to roll this out in such a rush? That's the bottom line - it's rushed.

MS. MCKENZIE: Because 818 children have an opportunity they wouldn't have had had we not been ambitious for the children. The sector has not told us to date that they have been negatively impacted. There are a couple of centres that have called that were concerned about hiring ECEs. We immediately put them in contact with Labour and Advanced Education. They were at the ready to move in some of the ECEs in the province who are not currently employed, so we have covered that off. I believe that we are ready; we are ready to roll this program out.

MR. HOUSTON: So, 818 children have an opportunity that they wouldn't otherwise have. I believe that's the statement that you made. Is that a fact? I would believe that some of those 818 children were already in a regulated day care somewhere - do you know?

[10:15 a.m.]

MS. MCKENZIE: You're right, they may have been.

MR. HOUSTON: So, some kids might have an opportunity that they might have - how many, do you know? Again, I'm getting back to the point that this is taking children out of an existing network and putting them in a different structure, and I'm still trying to figure out why.

MS. MCKENZIE: I'm saying that we have worked with the child care sector. If they call and there are any concerns - the only concerns we've had is they need to backfill the ECEs because they have children they need to provide programming for.

The concern was the need to hire a new ECE because I have children in my program. So, the child care sector is still functioning, they need to hire ECEs, and we have 818 children in the new pre-Primary programming. So, that's in abundance, that there have been spaces opened up so the kids are able to move in and that we have better services for children across the province.

MR. HOUSTON: Do you know what the average - how much time do I have, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Houston, you have about four minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you. Do you know the average costs of child care in the province? Do we have an average number? Do we have it?

MS. MCKENZIE: J.L., can speak to the average and we can also provide some information.

MR. HOUSTON: If you had to guess, what would the average be?

MS. HUNTINGTON: It just depends on the region. So, what they charge and what you pay for child care in downtown Halifax is very different than what you would pay in Cape Breton or the Tri-County, for example. We do have regional averages that we can make available to you.

MR. HOUSTON: And it's probably somewhere between \$500 and \$800 a month, maybe?

MS. HUNTINGTON: It really does depend on your location.

MR. HOUSTON: It's somewhere in there. I'm still curious as to how much this is going to cost per child - it's going to be more than that, right?

MS. MCKENZIE: If you would like us to go back and do . . .

MR. HOUSTON: I would like that analysis, thank you.

I do want to ask a very specific question: Are you familiar with the Afri-Centric Pre-Primary in New Glasgow?

MS. MCKENZIE: We are.

MR. HOUSTON: They had a Four-Plus program. The community worked hard for that program, identified the need in that community. They are pretty proud of that program and they should be. They are concerned about the intent of the initial program, it is kind of diluted, I guess, with the pre-Primary. They are just concerned about the long-term stability of the Afri-Centric Pre-Primary Program. Is the department committed to keeping that program with its initial focus?

MS. MCKENZIE: There's a long history there. I'm going to turn this over to J.L. But there's a long history there in that community and they are very proud of the Early Years program that they had there, the Afri-Centric program. The intention is build on that strong foundation into the future. There would be no intention at all of losing what is a strong history and a great community involvement. I'll see if J.L. wants to add to that.

MS. HUNTINGTON: No, I have nothing else to say around that.

MR. HOUSTON: No. Thank you, they'll be happy to hear that.

Is there any consideration of including busing in the pre-Primary - is that something we can get to?

MS. MCKENZIE: I believe we will have to look at transportation over the coming years and what the partnerships can be with that. The idea that there is an opportunity there, I would have to look at what the safety standards would be and for transporting small

children. I believe the minister said this the other day, that we will be looking at transportation into the future.

I do think that extending the service to wraparound services where we can partner directly in the same setting with private providers for the morning care and the after-school care will help families a great deal. They may be able to drop them off and pick them up because of the extended times. I do believe we will be looking at transportation into the future.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. How many families applied that didn't get a spot? So, 818 got spots, how many didn't get spots?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I want to confirm the figure, but I believe it's around 925 families pre-registered for the program. Some of those families registered for multiple sites and that kind of thing. I will get you the exact figure. but it's in the 900s.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you. I know the minister is still announcing more and more classrooms as we go forward into the future. How many four year olds are there in the province - do you know that number?

MS. MCKENZIE: It's 9,000-plus.

MR. HOUSTON: Over 9,000, okay. I would be interested in the cost per child, so we can figure out what the long-term cost is.

We're talking about more and more classrooms, but how are we going to measure whether what we have is a success? Are you going to stop in June and ask: Did it work?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has expired. We'll move back to the NDP caucus and Ms. Roberts for 14 minutes.

MS. ROBERTS: I have a just couple of quick fact checks. The minister has frequently quoted the statistic that 75 per cent of the Nova Scotia population doesn't utilize or have access to regulated child care programs. Is he talking about four year olds, or is he talking about all children up to school age?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We know that there are enough spaces from birth to five for 25 per cent of the children in Nova Scotia.

MS. ROBERTS: From birth to five?

MS. HUNTINGTON: That is correct.

MS. ROBERTS: Do you know what percentage of four year olds could be accommodated prior to the pre-Primary program?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I don't have that figure with me.

MS. ROBERTS: Our education critic wrote to the minister with concerns about the appropriateness of pre-Primary classrooms for children with special needs. The response we got from the minister was that the children would have access to the same supports that they would have in regulated child care. However, the 2016 review of the regulated child care sector found that those supports were lacking. Can you describe what supports will be in place?

MS. MCKENZIE: When the minister responded to that question, he was responding specifically on whether or not they would continue, in the pre-Primary classes, to have access to EIBI, Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech, and other community-based services like early intervention. They will continue to have access to those when they're in pre-Primary.

We do know that the survey identified that only a portion of the existing child care sector had access to the supported child care grant. That was recognized last year as something that we needed to address, and that has been the subject of our negotiations with the federal government.

So, there are two elements to your question. Does the existing child care sector have full access to the Supported Child Care Grant? No, we have to work on that. But when the minister responded to that question, he was confirming that kids in pre-Primary would continue to have access to the same supports they would have in the community: EIBI, early intervention, and Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech.

MS. ROBERTS: If the parent of a child with special needs who needs ongoing one-on-one support to be in a classroom was interested in taking advantage of the pre-Primary program, would that be a possibility?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We know through the Early Years Centres - and we actually know through pre-Primary now - that there are children arriving in the pre-Primary program with a special need. They're working with the school board, the pre-Primary manager, and the early childhood educator, to ensure that the supports are in place to support that child when they arrive.

We have also made in the past - and will continue to make in the future - funding available to provide additional support for children in the classroom. For example, we know in the Early Years Centre model that, in some cases, children will arrive with special needs, and what they really struggle with is transition. Our early childhood pre-Primary consultants will have conversations with the ECEs about what that looks like. Perhaps we need an additional resource in the classroom - not for the full day but maybe just for transitions. It really is class by class, case by case.



I do know of an example. Just last week, I had a conversation with a school board official who met with a mum who has a child with special needs. She asked: Will my child be welcome in the program? The school board said, absolutely, your child will be welcome. So, this mom said they never experienced that before. How are we going to make sure that my child is successful? The school board official, along with the ECE, sat down and talked to the mum about what they could do in the classroom and how they could support this child. The mum was overwhelmed and quite pleased that this child was going to have this opportunity.

We support children with special needs every day, and if there is a need to provide additional support, it will be there.

MS. ROBERTS: The Council to Improve Classroom Conditions recommended creating a universal, pre-Primary program including Africentric, Mi'kmaq, and other culturally responsive programs. What work has been done with the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities to engage them in the development of these first pre-Primary classrooms this September?

MS. MCKENZIE: We know that we have children from all those communities who have access to pre-Primary in the schools. We also have a very well-developed treaty education effort and we will be extending a look at the supports in the curriculum. I do believe that the play-based curriculum that J.L. mentioned earlier takes a look at cultural inclusivity, but I do believe that we will also be able to work with the schools in the areas to ensure that the pre-school programming is an inclusive environment, that it prepares them for moving into the schools. If you're asking, have we specifically worked with MK or something of that nature to move kids in, MK already has pre-Primary programming that we can learn from and extend it in - just the same as we do with our regular public school programming.

MS. ROBERTS: So, is there an Africentric pre-Primary program or pre-Primary classroom currently, or could there be one as this program develops?

MS. HUNTINGTON: There is an Africentric, pre-Primary program at New Glasgow Academy.

MS. ROBERTS: And that's the only one - could there be others?

MS. HUNTINGTON: Those are conversations that we will absolutely have with boards and work with them to ensure that when the children arrive in their class that we're supporting the needs of all of them, and that's a great conversation to be having with the boards as we plan for the future.

MS. ROBERTS: I'd like to explore the change from the Early Years Centres to the pre-Primary classrooms, because those Early Years Centres have been in existence, as you mentioned, since 2014. I know that the ratio or the maximum enrolment in those

classrooms has gone from 18 to 24. Those sites were transitioned into pre-Primary classrooms. What is the impact of that and what's the rationale for going from 18 to 24?

MS. HUNTINGTON: So, we - if we go from 18 to 24, there will be an additional early childhood educator or an additional support in the classroom. So, there will not be two staff, there will be three staff if we're over 20. In the Early Years Centre - and I want to be clear - we know that they provide a great service to families and communities and we don't want to take that away from the families that rely on those services, so we'll continue to build on the Early Years Centre model.

Those Early Years Centres will continue to be in place in those communities and if there is a need, as we build pre-Primary into the future, to adopt some of the Early Years Centre components, we will look at doing that to meet the needs of families. So, it's a great program. We're continuing to evaluate it and learn from it every year and apply the best practices and the lessons to pre-Primary and, really, if we need to go and operate an Early Years Centre in another community, the evaluation that we're participating in will give us some great insight on how to do that properly.

MS. ROBERTS: So, are there components of the Early Years Centres in those existing locations that are no longer there with this September rollout?

MS. HUNTINGTON: No.

MS. ROBERTS: And what are the components of the Early Years Centres that are not in the new pre-Primary classrooms - what are the elements that aren't present?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I'm sorry. So, an Early Years Centre have three components: one is early learning opportunities, a pre-Primary component; and the other is family supports - so, in some cases, it's, you know, family drop-ins, flu clinics - those kinds of things can happen at an Early Years Centre; and the third component is regulated child care when required. We know through the evaluation that in some communities they wanted, they needed, regulated child care and the school board was able to partner with community child care providers to provide that service, but in some communities regulated child care was not required. So, there are three components of an Early Years Centre and in many cases, we know - every Early Years Centre has used the early-learning component; they've all used the family resources and support; and some Early Years Centres have explored the option of using regulated child care to provide that wraparound service, and some have chosen not to.

[10:30 a.m.]

MS. ROBERTS: With the pre-Primary program, will there be an element of family support or is it very much drop off/pick up?

MS. HUNTINGTON: It won't be. The interaction between early childhood educators and parents is really important in the pre-Primary setting. Families will be welcomed into the pre-Primary environment. They will be encouraged to have ongoing conversations with early childhood educators about their child's development.

This is not school, so there's no report card. There's no teacher report card day. This is ongoing, daily, family to early childhood education interaction. Early childhood educators know their communities and they know what supports are available. I would imagine if a family is in crisis - and we are now hearing this happening in one particular school board where an identified family came to the pre-Primary program and the pre-Primary manager and the early childhood educator recognized that there were some other things going on with the family and was able to provide information to that family about where they could get some assistance. That happens all the time and will continue to happen in the pre-Primary program or in an Early Years Centre.

MS. ROBERTS: What was the plan for the expansion of the Early Years Centres before we shifted gears and moved to the pre-Primary?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We were planning on expanding Early Years Centres by adding four new to the province to bring it from eight to twelve.

MS. ROBERTS: So instead of 12 we went to 50-some. What did we lose with going with volume instead of the smaller rollout?

MS. HUNTINGTON: We didn't lose anything. We are able to provide more access to families in 52 communities.

MS. ROBERTS: How do you hope things will look different in September 2018 - what will be the difference between September 2017 and September 2018 in terms of the pre-Primary program?

MS. HUNTINGTON: There will be more pre-Primary programs. We are going to be, again, always looking at what we learned this year and how quickly we rolled this out to make sure that we continue to improve on the services that we provide to families. We will be having conversations with the pre-Primary managers. We're already learning.

We had the pre-Primary managers from the board in to a meeting last week in Halifax and we met for the day. One of the managers said, I'm really struggling with this in my board and I don't know how to move forward. Then another manager will come to the table and say, this is what we're doing. So, they're problem-solving all the time. We really want to build the network of early childhood educators. If you're an ECE working at one school and you have a lead ECE or support ECE and you have some great experiences, we want you to share those experiences with the ECEs at the other schools in your communities - so really building the relationships between the managers and the early childhood educators.

We also know that we need to ensure that families feel supported - having conversations with families about play-based curriculum and play-based learning is going to be really important over the next year. Families are concerned that their four year olds are going to be sitting in desks doing math, and it's up to us to make sure that they know that they're going to be learning through play.

So, we have a really important job over the next year to make sure that families know and understand what a play-based curriculum looks like and how it can help their children learn and grow. We'll absolutely be doing that and, again, just learning lessons from this year. We are in year three of the Early Years Centres evaluation and the lessons that we've learned have been tremendous and we've acted on them. We've incorporated them into the implementation of pre-Primary.

This is going to be a challenging year as the last 16 weeks have been challenging, but it's so rewarding when we know that over 800 families are able to access the support for families for their children. Having those conversations with mums and dads about what this means to them makes it all worthwhile.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Time has expired. We'll move to Mr. Jessome of the Liberal caucus for 14 minutes.

MR. BEN JESSOME: I would just like to begin by acknowledging the work of the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions as kind of a launching pad for this endeavour. It has been made clear in some of the work that they've done, and some of the work that the deputy has been a part of, that this universal pre-Primary will provide an opportunity for students in preparation for Primary and later in life as well. I think that's important to acknowledge in framing this discussion. Secondly, and it's clear there is a tremendous amount of passion for these young kids and for the opportunity to create this universal program at the department, at the board, amongst educators.

I don't know if it was expressed, but acknowledging that you were given a tight timeline to do this, it sounds like the motivation was there for a completely genuine and eager means to kick this off. I think that regardless of some of the questions that perhaps have been asked today, hats off to you for taking this on and for the work you are going to continue to do over the next little while, so thank you.

Some of the questions that I have are in regard to what opportunities are there for, I guess, the private sector to co-mingle with this public endeavour, and how do you see the consultation rolling out between the department and the private sector?

MS. MCKENZIE: I believe that J.L. can respond to that. We do see there is an opportunity here for the private sector to offer both wraparound services through the summer, March Break, and what have you. We see this as an opportunity to work together.

If Mr. Jessome is okay with this, I do have an answer to Mr. Houston's question earlier, that we were going to have to go back, but we like to be real time responsive here so we're going to be able to respond to a question that was raised. You asked us to compare something. We do programming for pre-Primary and by child for child care. We took the \$125,000 for the class, divided it by the average of 20 students - obviously it would be up to 24 - by 195 days and it came out to \$32 a day. Now that would be slightly lower if there were 24 children in the class. That is comparable to the average across Nova Scotia of \$33 a day for pre-school child care.

Of course, in some areas that would be slightly higher; in some areas that would be slightly lower - that's the average. The average is \$32 a day with 20 students, knowing that it can be higher, and the average for the child care sector is \$33 a day.

I'm going to turn it over to J.L. to answer the rest of your question.

MS. HUNTINGTON: I believe you answered the question. I wouldn't have anything else to add, other than the consultation will give us some great information on what the child care sector requires and what they need from government to be successful in the future, so we're really anxious to get that consultation underway.

Vicki and I were really fortunate to meet with representatives from the child care sector just last week. We met for four hours and we went through what we planned for the consultation, line by line, and they provided incredible feedback to us. They were pleased with the meeting. We were pleased that they were able to give us so much time. I know they are under a lot of - September is a busy time for regulated child care in Nova Scotia, so line by line they gave us great advice and feedback that we're incorporating now so that we can ensure the success of the consultation. We really want this consultation to be as meaningful for them as it is for us. I think they provided feedback to us last week to make sure that that happens, so we're really pleased with the outcome of that meeting.

MR. JESSOME: Okay, thank you. Just quickly here, I know my colleague wants to ask a question. What opportunities are there for ECEs as a whole, in the context of - are there unemployed ECEs looking for opportunities in the field in Nova Scotia?

MS. MCKENZIE: Our labour market information would say yes. Of course, we'll continue to work with our training providers, but I can let Vicki respond to this.

MS. VICKI ELLIOTT-LOPEZ: According to our database we have 2,400 people registered to be a certified ECE. When we look at the regulated child care sector, we have about 1,300 of those working in the sector.

We have heard from the child care sector that since the 1990s recruitment has been an issue; they have cited wages as being one of the primary issues. As a result of the action plan of 2016 we have actually implemented a new wage floor. Previously, the average wage was under \$13 an hour; now we know that it's \$15, \$17, and \$19 an hour. We believe

that that will actually help to draw people back into the sector to work and provide them with great opportunities to work in the field.

We have heard anecdotally that enrolment is up at training institutions. I think word is getting out that this is a sector that people want to work in. We're very confident that we will continue to have a strong labour supply going forward.

MR. GORDON WILSON: It's interesting – there are lots of conversations around why didn't we wait, wait, wait. I come from a rural community and, thank you very much, one of the early rollouts is in the Weymouth area, which is certainly an area that has never had access to this type of service. It's an impoverished area that struggled. Educationally, the EDIs are very low.

I would just like to have two questions answered. One: What role does this play in breaking the poverty cycle that we see in areas of rural Nova Scotia? Secondly: How comfortable are you that the product that you've rolled out is ready?

MS. MCKENZIE: I am confident this will contribute to evening the playing field for children who live in poverty in Nova Scotia by giving them access to programming that will prepare them to enter school on an even level with the children who may have had access to more material resources in their lives. I'm confident that this is going to be a huge contribution to that.

I'm going to pass it over to J.L. because she has research that has come out of Ontario that said that pre-Primary has had a greater impact for children with more socio-economic disparity than it has had right across the board.

To your second question - we are prepared; we are ready. The programs are high quality and we have a lot of confidence in the people who are rolling them out, and we're very proud of the program. Do you want to just recite the research?

MS. HUNTINGTON: I think the deputy spoke to it. There is lots of research that speaks to how a pre-Primary program will have a positive impact on children socially, emotionally, and academically. In Ontario, by Grade 2 those children who attended full-day kindergarten were able to better self-regulate than those children who didn't attend full-day kindergarten. They looked at math and literacy scores in Grade 3 of children who attended full-day kindergarten and children who did not, and those children scored better in their academic assessments.

We know there's extensive longitudinal research from the United Kingdom that points to significant academic and social emotional benefits for every year of pre-school before entry to kindergarten. I'm going to refer to the PISA results from 2015. Children who attended early childhood education for at least two years, so that would be pre-Primary and Primary, perform on average better than other children by the age of 15 – and that's really powerful evidence.

To the deputy's point about us being ready - we have been doing this since 2014 with our Early Years Centres. We have a great high-quality model. Early learning opportunities have existed in many schools for decades. We are comfortable and confident that we're providing the best opportunity for these children now and in the future.

If you can indulge me for one minute, I would like to talk about a conversation that I had with a principal who has a pre-Primary program in their school, who indicated to me that there are a couple of children who arrived at the pre-Primary program who have been undiagnosed or the early-childhood educators believe they may have a special need that needs to be explored. So, that principal said to me at that time, when I spoke to her, that if those children are able to get the supports they need this year, before they get to school, the program is worth its weight in gold.

[10:45 a.m.]

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you. I hadn't heard it asked today but I do know that out in the communities occasionally you'll hear that our kids are going to school too early. You know, we're putting them in the school environment at a younger age and they question, okay, now we're putting them there earlier. Ms. McKenzie, can you give me your comments on that?

MS. MCKENZIE: This is a play-filled environment. They're not in school, per se; they may be attending a school - we know that child care centres are located in schools around the province. These are play-based programming. They are there to play with their peers, have opportunities to explore and do things that they may not otherwise have had, and I would say that there's a separate conversation about whether kids are starting school too early and, you know, some people point to other jurisdictions where they start later. This is a play-based programming that will give them success in school. It's my feeling that as they move in they'll be more successful and I think that it's exactly what Nova Scotians believe, they want to see the best efforts being made for our smaller citizens.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson, I believe Mr. Horne has a question as well. I'll let you decide.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Yes, no problem, I'll defer to Mr. Horne.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Well, thank you. Your question was asked by Mr. Wilson here. You just answered a few minutes ago. So, I'm quite pleased. I must say that I see the enthusiasm for this program by you folks and I have to say it's long- needed and a long time coming. But what really bothers me is the statistics you used about 25 per cent only. This is going to challenge 25 per cent of the children in that age group. I know you're going to continue the program over a four- year period to have all of the province covered - will that help change that statistic?

MS. MCKENZIE: We believe that the rollout of universal pre-Primary in Nova Scotia will go a long way to addressing the early development indicators that we mentioned earlier, but because we have two years' worth of data now that we will have that as a comparison and be able to do a strong evaluation for the pre-Primary program, and I feel confident now. I know that I won't be here in the future to look at it but I'll be watching from my seat in the citizenry and I'm confident that we will see very positive changes in our EDI scores entering Grade Primary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has expired for questions.

I want to give Ms. McKenzie a chance to provide some closing comments.

MS. MCKENZIE: Thank you very much. We are enthusiastic about this program. Child care moved to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, they actually moved the year that I arrived; it was 2013-2014 when it moved over. It was exactly the right place to bring child care. This allows us now to put a continuum in place for our youngest citizens and I'm very, very excited. You see the enthusiasm. The people who are working in our child care division, it has been a long dream for them to have universal pre-Primary and we'll be enthusiastic about this to a long time in the future, so thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Ms. McKenzie and thank your colleagues as well for attending today and answering our questions.

Mr. Wilson, Mr. Gordon Wilson, I believe you had something you wanted to say.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Yes, seeing that this is probably your last Public Accounts session here, I certainly on behalf of myself and I would also assume for all my colleagues, you've had a very broad service in this government for many years with many political Parties. You have brought forward an awful lot of tremendous initiatives. You've had some challenging years, but you've served us extremely well and I truly do want to thank you. I hope this isn't an emotional moment for you for your last Public Accounts, but, truly, I do want to thank you very much for everything you've done for this province. (Applause)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson, and thank you, Ms. McKenzie.

Our next meeting will be October 4<sup>th</sup>, with the Auditor General, and that will be to discuss the October 2017, Auditor General's Report.

Are there any questions or further business to come before the committee?

Hearing none, this meeting is adjourned.

(The committee adjourned at 10:50 a.m.)