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HANSARD

Thursday, May 25, 2017 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Nils Clarke

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2017 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Nils Clarke, MLA, Riverdale North
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Don Hutton, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Ted Adel, MLA, Copperbelt North

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NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Deputy Premier Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Government House Leader Minister of Education; Justice
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
Hon. Pauline Frost	Vuntut Gwitchin	Minister of Health and Social Services; Environment; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Highways and Public Works; the Public Service Commission
Hon. Jeanie Dendys	Mountainview	Minister of Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board; Women's Directorate

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Yukon Liberal Party

Ted Adel	Copperbelt North
Paolo Gallina	Porter Creek Centre
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Yukon Party

Stacey Hassard	Leader of the Official Opposition Pelly-Nisutlin	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Liz Hanson	Leader of the Third Party Whitehorse Centre
Kate White	Third Party House Leader Takhini-Kopper King

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, May 25, 2017 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: I will now call the House to order. We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of REVEAL Indigenous Art Awards

Hon. Ms. Dendys: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal Party, the Official Opposition and the Third Party today. I'm very honoured to rise in tribute of six Yukon artists who were awarded REVEAL Indigenous Art Awards on May 22 in Winnipeg.

The REVEAL Indigenous Art Awards are a one-time program, funded by the Hnatyshyn Foundation, which is dedicated to promoting and funding Canadian artists and curators. The Yukon artists are six of 150 Canadian indigenous visual artists, media artists, craftspeople, musicians, writers, storytellers, dancers and actors who have been awarded \$10,000 each.

According to the Hnatyshyn Foundation, the purpose of the REVEAL artists is to fuel indigenous arts practices for the next 150 years. This may sound ambitious, but certainly the REVEAL awards will support recipients to develop and create more work in the months ahead.

It is well-known that the territory has many gifted indigenous artists, including the six individuals we are recognizing here today. Whether they are carving masks, telling a traditional story or creating a contemporary installation piece, indigenous artists in the Yukon are contributing to the revitalization and re-definition of First Nation cultures in the territory. I am so proud of these individuals who, through their incredible talent and artistic expression, are transforming Yukon's cultural landscape. The artists we are honouring today are from diverse backgrounds and artistic traditions. Each of these artists has travelled their own journey to find their unique and distinct voice, which makes up the many complex layers of Yukon First Nation art.

Yukon government is pleased to see that our support for the artist sector is helping to place these talented indigenous artists as part of Canadians' contemporary indigenous cultural fabric and national arts scene.

I would like to acknowledge each of the artists and ask, if they are here today, to stand. I believe there are a number of the artists here today and their family members. Eugene Alfred is a visual artist of Northern Tutchone and Tlingit ancestry, who belongs to the Crow clan of Selkirk First Nation. Eugene is descended from many generations of artists, including his grandmother, who was well-known for her

beadwork, and his uncle, an accomplished draftsman. Eugene's work is displayed internationally in public institutions and held in private collections. Eugene has high respect from his past instructors and is now an instructor himself, sharing his artistry with future generations of artists.

Calvin Morberg is a gifted Dakhl'awèdì artist whose carving talent has taken him to many far-away places such as Peru, Russia and northern China. Like many other indigenous artists who have mastered their craft, Calvin is now an instructor for young people at the youth achievement centre and at Northern Cultural Expressions Society. Whether his work is a simple pendant necklace or a large, elaborate panel, Calvin's carving is original and beautifully rendered. We can see his fine craftsmanship in one of the gates here in the Legislative Assembly gallery, which represents the wolf moiety and was carved by Calvin. The second gate represents the crow moiety, and was carved by Jared Kane.

Our next artist is Louise Profeit-Leblanc. Louise is listening in to the proceedings today. She is a storyteller, cultural educator, writer, choreographer and film scriptwriter who was raised in the First Nation of Na Cho Nyäk Dun and grew up speaking the Northern Tutchone language. Louise was a pioneer of indigenous art development in the territory and co-founded both the Society of Yukon Artists of Native Ancestry and the Yukon International Storytelling Festival. Louise recently retired from the Canada Council for the Arts in Ottawa where she distinguished herself as a tireless advocate for indigenous Canadian artists.

Doug Smarch Jr. — who is also, I'm hoping, listening in; we've tried very hard to track him down — is of Tlingit ancestry and grew up in Teslin and earned an undergraduate and graduate of fine arts degree in California. Much of Doug's work consists of contemporary installations, which draw on traditional imagery and forms. One example is his stunning work *Ice and Flowers*, which features translucent acrylic masks and floral designs that echo Southern Tutchone beadwork. His work is installed at the Da Kų Cultural Centre in Haines Junction.

Next we have Joseph Tisiga, who is a member of the Kaska Dena Nation. Joseph's extraordinary contemporary work has landed him as a finalist in the RBC painting competition and a place in the *Oh, Canada* exhibition, which was one of the largest exhibitions of Canadian art ever mounted. Very recently, Joseph's article, "The Working Life of a Cultural Amnesiac", published in *Canadian Art*, reflects on how his work as a youth support worker in Whitehorse contributes to his art practice.

Last, but certainly not least, is Keith Wolfe Smarch, who was born into the killer whale clan, part of the Tlingit Nation. We owe much to Keith and his revitalization of Yukon First Nation culture as he belongs to the generation of Yukon artists who established the use of Tlingit art forms. We are also fortunate that Keith and his son Aaron are now creating work together. One example of this collaboration is the incredible totem pole raised in the Carcross Commons. Congratulations, Keith.

I would like to add that among their many accomplishments, the Yukon artists who are now REVEAL recipients have work in our Yukon permanent art collection. Some of this work is currently showcased in our main administration lobby. If you haven't had a chance to see that and appreciate it, please take the time to appreciate the art that is displayed there. What a fantastic opportunity to see some incredible examples of Yukon First Nation artwork under one roof.

On behalf of the Government of Yukon and all Yukoners, I congratulate all REVEAL recipients from Yukon. You are adding to the unique voices and the indigenous stories in the territory and Canada, which collectively build a strong and enduring cultural legacy for generations to come. Günilshish. Mahsi' cho. Shaw nithän. Thank you.

I will ask all of the artists stand again. We also have: Stewart Tizya; Donna Geddes, Keith's beautiful wife; staff from the YFNCT: Charlene Alexander, Cherish Lepine, Desiree, Duran Henry, and Colin from Northern Cultural Expressions Society and Dallas Smith. Thank you so much. Did I miss somebody? Please, if I have missed somebody — Duran Henry, please stand — and Jared Kane. Thank you so much.

Applause

In recognition of National Hemochromatosis Awareness Month

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today on behalf of this Liberal government, the Official Opposition and the Third Party to pay tribute to National Hemochromatosis Awareness Month, which happens in May.

Hemochromatosis — strange name, strange ailment. As my colleagues know, I have some experience with this odd genetic disorder — I have it. I want to encourage others to know something about the symptoms — in my case, it is inexplicable fire-like pain in my joints; in others, it is fatigue, depression, abdominal pain, a diminished libido, most commonly — and to seek early diagnosis.

This genetic disorder represents a cosmic event, the result of hundreds of generations of people of the genes of untold thousands of people coming together and trying to foist on humanity through me and hundreds of thousands of people like me across the country — an estimated one in nine Canadians. It is something new to humanity — iron retention, the opposite of anemia.

If iron retention is an improvement to the species, the benefit is lost on me. As I have said, this is a genetic disorder for which there is no cure, but its effects are easily managed. People who have it are like fleshy magnets. They grab on to and retain iron in their system. When your body can't shed this mineral, it collects in your heart, your kidneys, your liver, your joints and bones — hence the fire. This can result in organ failure, heart failure, and arthritis — to name just a few things.

I was not diagnosed until my 40s — a very long time ago. As a result, irreversible damage was done, mostly to my joints. I have arthritis. This has impacted my life and my

family. Unfortunately, through my Welsh heritage, I have passed on this genetic mutation to my sons. Whether the health problems manifest in them as it has in me depends on my wife's DNA. This disorder primarily, but not always, affects people of Celtic descent. My wife Shona — those who know her — is of strong Irish descent, so she worries about my sons' future health. If the two chromosomes come together, they could have this too.

There is nothing for it. There is no prevention and no cure, but it can easily be managed through regular blood withdrawal — a unit of blood, as simple as giving blood. It removes the excess iron from the system. I underwent 53 blood withdrawals in one year.

Last year at this same time, the current Hon. Premier, the Member for Klondike, stepped up to help raise the profile of this disorder. I was grateful and I was not the only one. At the end of the tribute, a woman who just happened to be present in the gallery turned to me and told me how much it meant to her to see an open dialogue and awareness taking place about this disorder. She told me her husband suffered from hemochromatosis, as did I. While she didn't wish it on anyone, she was grateful to know her family was not alone and people were talking about it.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the health care professionals who have been instrumental in my treatment and care. It was Dr. Russell Bamford, who, through a chance, casual conversation, first brought this condition to my attention during a birthday party — my younger brother's 40th birthday party. This casual conversation about a weird-sounding, little-known ailment led to my diagnosis.

I also want to thank the incredible staff at the Whitehorse General Hospital who looked after me week after week during my initial intense year-long treatment. Those fabulous and attentive nurses at the hospital are exceptional. Over the years, there have been many who have cared for me, who have participated in my bloodletting, and I haven't encountered a single one who was anything less than wonderful. They know who they are, and they ensured my treatments were undertaken efficiently and effectively. I'm happy to use this tribute to thank them and the rest of the staff at the hospital and to push for awareness. The more we know about these ailments, the better prepared we can be in our lives.

Speaker: Are there any further tributes?
Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Gallina: I would like the House to recognize Connor Whitehouse, back in the gallery — a constituent. Welcome, Connor.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to commit to improving the public registry of contaminated sites by:

(1) improving public access to the inventory of all contaminated sites in Yukon, both before and after devolution; and

(2) improving reporting, documentation and cataloguing of contaminated sites to ensure transparency and public access.

Ms. Hanson: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to:

(1) work with Yukon First Nations to fulfill the obligations set out in section 4.0 of appendix A of the Yukon devolution transfer agreement to create successor resource legislation; and

(2) extend the current prohibition order OIC 2012/145 restricting quartz claim mineral staking within City of Whitehorse as per the city's request.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motions?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election, when referring to the idea of negotiating an exemption from the carbon tax, the Premier referred to the idea as — and I quote: “a scam”. He went on to say there's no exemption for the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday local media reported that a senior official from Environment Canada said a decision on whether to apply a carbon tax in the Yukon hasn't been made yet and the official said that the decision about whether and how to apply carbon pricing in the territories will not be until later this year.

Like the Premier's promise to tender all contracts by the end of the month of March, and his broken commitment on special warrants, this is another thing the Premier said to win the election that we now find out isn't accurate.

The question is: Did the Premier not know an exemption from the carbon tax was an option for the Yukon — which would be a big concern — or did he know but for some reason he wasn't telling Yukoners — which would be a bigger concern? Which is it, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'll read a quote from the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change: The federal and territorial governments are also working together to find solutions that address the unique circumstances of the north. This study is expected to be completed this fall. In particular,

“we will discuss how a price on pollution will apply given the unique circumstances of the north; not whether a price on pollution will apply”.

Mr. Cathers: Again, we heard a senior official from Environment Canada contradicting the Premier yesterday. We have seen the Premier with a pattern of answering questions. He has a tendency to blame the previous government, blame Ottawa or blame the media. Now he has contradicted himself several times in this House on the carbon tax. Yukoners tells us that when gas prices were higher, they didn't drive to work less or heat their homes less; they just had less money in their bank accounts. Unfortunately for Yukoners, it seems the Premier is more interested in making the Prime Minister happy than making decisions based on evidence instead of ideology. Federal officials now say an exemption from a carbon tax is an option if the Yukon government wants it.

Will the Premier stop making decisions based on what he thinks will make the Prime Minister happy and start making decisions that are in the best interests of the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I don't know how much more straightforward we can be than to have a quote from the federal minister who is responsible for this file. When the federal minister responsible for this file says that we are not negotiating whether or not we're having a price — but we're going to work within the boundaries of the last report or the technical report that came out last week. There will be a working group. That working group is going to do their good work this summer. We encourage the Yukon Party — as opposed to trying to confuse people on this issue — to finally give us their solutions as to how we're going to implement a federal price on carbon.

Mr. Cathers: We know the Premier of Nunavut said something very different on the issue of a carbon price and is seeking an exemption. The Premier has repeatedly told Yukoners that exemption from the carbon tax is not possible and, during the election campaign, he referred to the idea as “a scam”. On April 25, he said — and I quote: “There is no such thing as an exemption. There never was an exemption. An exemption was never an option. No province or territory was ever offered an exemption.” On May 9, he again said there are no exemptions. Perhaps one of his better quotes is from April 24, when he said, “It is interesting that the Yukon Party still believes that somewhere on the dashboard there would be some kind of exemption if we just held on and did nothing.”

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, a senior federal official contradicted the Premier and made it clear that the door is open for an exemption from the carbon tax if the Yukon government is willing to try. Is the Premier blinded by ideology or will he recognize the error of his ways and push for an exemption for Yukoners from the carbon tax so Yukoners won't pay the bill for the Liberal plan?

Hon. Mr. Silver: With all due respect to the member opposite, the only one blinded by ideology is him. We are working with Ottawa to make sure that the pan-Canadian framework, which made the decision that the north is a special case, can have special considerations in areas.

What the Yukon Party is doing now is pivoting from their original campaign promise. In their campaign promise, they said, “we are going to have a blanket exemption for the north.” That is what I have been talking about. That is simply not true. It’s not going to happen in Saskatchewan; it’s not going to happen in —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Member for Copperbelt South, on a point of order.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I believe in the past you have ruled it out of order when members have used phrases like “simply not true”, which the Premier just used in his response.

Speaker’s ruling

Speaker: I’m not sure if I have addressed “simply not true”; it may have been the Deputy Speaker. In any event, it’s contextual and, if it’s simply not true and then, in my view, if you then state the alternative circumstance, then in my view it’s a disagreement among members as to the circumstances.

I don’t think I have ruled on “not true”.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s inaccurate; it’s not the case. Use any term you want, but basically the Yukon Party, during the election campaign, was campaigning on a blanket exemption for the north. What we’re doing in this government is working with Ottawa to make sure that sector-specific considerations happen. We have always said that. We have always said there’s a case to be made that certain sectors can make the argument that a carbon-pricing mechanism will not do what a carbon-pricing mechanism is supposed to.

The Yukon Party can confuse the matter and try to make it sound like if any sector-specific considerations happen — I don’t know where they’re going with this, but I stand by the comments I was just quoted on again here by the member opposite as far as that a blanket exemption for any jurisdiction in Canada would be considered a scam, because it’s not true. It’s a misleading fact, if we want to go with that.

We will be working —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Member for Lake Laberge, on a point of order.

Mr. Cathers: The Premier said it’s “not true”. The Premier referred to comments made by other members as a misleading fact. This would certainly appear to be contrary to Standing Order 19(h) and has been ruled out of order by previous Speakers on multiple occasions when that type of terminology was used.

Speaker’s ruling

Speaker: I will take this under advisement. Thank you, Member for Lake Laberge, but generally, yes — generally avoid this language, I would say. I will get back to the House, if required.

Question re: Procurement policy

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, in an October 11, 2016 Liberal news release, the now-Minister of Economic Development committed to the following — and I quote: “As a priority implement the recommendations of the Procurement Advisory Panel Report in an accelerated manner, completing its implementation by 2018.”

Unfortunately, this commitment identified as a priority by the government is not mentioned in the mandate letter for the Minister of Highways and Public Works. Does the minister intend to honour the campaign promise made by his colleague or will he be throwing him under the bus by breaking or amending his commitment to Yukon contractors?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I’m perplexed. I have read my mandate letter and procurement is front and centre of my mandate from the Premier, passed over from the Minister of Economic Development. It is there in black and white in the written word. It’s there; it’s what we’ve been working on. This government has been working very hard on procurement. We’re going to continue to do that.

I’ve said it before, I’ll say it again — I met with hundreds of people on this issue. I continue to meet with them recently. It’s one of the things that, when I was up in Dawson, I heard about all the time, Mr. Speaker. It’s important to the community. The legacy that I have inherited is one of dissatisfaction with the status quo and this government stepped up and said, “We’re going to fix this problem” and that’s what we’re working on diligently every week. Every single week, we’ve been on this file and we hope to have the results of our procurement improvements. They will be done by next year when we start to roll out large projects that are seasonally dependent.

Mr. Hassard: I thought yesterday the minister didn’t understand the question, but today it’s, in his words, even more perplexing. The question was actually about the Procurement Advisory Panel and that certainly wasn’t in his response.

Mr. Speaker, I’m sure that the Premier would like some company under that same HPW bus — the minister’s bus rather. As the government continues —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I didn’t rise the first time, but I wasn’t planning on the Leader of the Official Opposition saying it yet a second time. I think the term, “throw under the bus” — he’s actually imputing false motives, but more importantly, using abusive language or violent language. He’s actually indicating that one member on the side of the government is going to cause concerns or say false statements with respect to another member of the government. I just don’t think it is appropriate language for this House and I’m asking for a point-of-order ruling.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: On perhaps the second point that the House Leader made with respect to it imputing some sort of violent language, I respectfully have to reject that. It is a turn of phrase and it is obviously not, in the common parlance, that any reasonable person would be assuming someone was actually suggesting that someone be physically thrown under a bus. I don't accept those submissions.

I will consider your second submission and take that under advisement as well.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moving on, then, in terms of the Procurement Advisory Panel, which I am trying to ask questions about — there were a number of medium- and long-term goals in that report that were scheduled to begin in a two- to four-year time horizon. Can the Minister of Highways and Public Works update the House on the revised timelines to enact the 37 separate action items of the Procurement Advisory Panel?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: There seems to be a lot of perplexity in this House this afternoon.

Let me read from my mandate letter for the member opposite: "Increase the ability of local businesses and First Nations to secure government tenders through changes in how government procures goods and services". It is right there in one of the bullet points. It is quite clear.

This Liberal government is committed to reducing barriers to local businesses and First Nations in securing government contracts. To do so, we are developing a new, comprehensive and modern procurement centre, Mr. Speaker. We are working on that as we speak. It is going to the Procurement Advisory Panel and recommendations are going to be worked into the DNA of that modern strategy we are working on. The goal is to make sure that money the government spends goes directly into the local economy and, ultimately, into the pockets of Yukoners as much as possible to maximize local benefits.

We are working on this file. We are working diligently. The Department of Highways and Public Works has some very talented civil servants right now working on this. They are putting together a plan. The plan is in motion and will be revealed in the fullness of time.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister keeps saying that he is answering the question, but he obviously isn't listening to the question because what he is saying certainly isn't anything with regard to an answer. Maybe if I keep it a little more explicit — recommendation 17 of the Procurement Advisory Panel is to propose updates to the contracting and procurement directive, including to the definition of Yukon business. It was identified as a long-term goal in the two- to four-year time horizon as well. Given the accelerated timeline committed to by the Yukon Liberals and the importance of this recommendation to the contracting community, what direction has the minister given his department specific to this action, and is he on target to meet his self-imposed deadline of 2018?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The Procurement Advisory Panel report was tabled in this Legislature in May 2016. Its overarching recommendation is to use procurement strategically to achieve government's objectives. This Liberal government is going to do that.

The other thing that the Procurement Advisory Panel report said — and I read it — is that leadership of the Yukon government did not understand procurement. Well, I took that to heart, and this government is educating itself about procurement. We are learning how it works. We are learning how to do it better. We are going to put together a modern strategy to make sure that this government addresses some of the needs that have been expressed by many, many people in the community about their troubles with procurement. We can go into it. It affects businesses, contractors and building developers across the territory.

We are committed to improving procurement by implementing the recommendations of the panel within two years. We have said that, and we are still committed to that. We are committed to supporting economic activity through government procurement. We are doing that too.

As I have said, in answer to the member opposite's questions, the work is underway to address systemic and policy issues identified by the panel and other stakeholders. I thank the member opposite for his question. I look forward to more.

Question re: Childcare services

Ms. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, having experienced and well-trained childcare workers in Yukon daycares is a reasonable expectation for parents and daycare operators. The *Child Care Act* lays out the expectation that daycare worker pay rates are based on worker qualifications. We have heard from daycare operators who experience difficulties when staff who received their training outside Yukon are not designated according to their training. These departmental decisions have serious impact on the direct operating grant that licensed daycares receive. This in turn affects workers who have to decide whether or not to remain in a position that does not pay according to their training, or it adds yet another financial burden on daycare operators if they try to cover the gap.

There is no process in place to allow daycare operators or staff to appeal decisions made by the department. Can the minister explain why?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can say that the Department of Health and Social Services is looking at some of the barriers and the gaps that have been identified and hopes to address some of the challenges. It is really great to get the feedback and get direct input on what, perhaps, has been some of the barriers in the past. Most definitely, quality, accessible and affordable childcare is an important component of service delivery in the Yukon. We want to ensure that early childhood development and the childcare community have quality childcare services in all of Yukon for all Yukon children and families. We know that the vision for Yukon includes improved coordination of early childhood programs and

maximizes on all of the benefits in looking at addressing some of the gaps.

Ms. Hanson: The reality is that daycare operators are experiencing these issues now. The Yukon Child Care Board is appointed to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Social Services on any issue that concerns childcare. Unfortunately, as of this morning, there are only four individuals appointed to the board. According to the *Child Care Act*, no less than seven members must be appointed in order for the board to conduct business. Having only four members leaves this board without any power whatsoever, including the ability to make recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government be making appointments to the Yukon Child Care Board so that it can function effectively?

Hon. Ms. Frost: I can assure the member opposite that the department and I have taken action to address the appointments and we have done that. I can assure the member opposite that the appointments have been made, and we are proceeding to ensure that we have appropriate representation.

Ms. Hanson: Well then, I would suggest that the minister request that those be posted.

Direct operating grants enable daycare owners to pay their staff a reasonable wage. The direct operating grant is based, among other things, on the number of children and the number and qualifications of staff. Without these grants, we would see even more astronomical daycare costs and underpaid daycare workers. Considering the educational and training requirements for staff in a licensed daycare, most would consider daycare workers already underpaid for the important job of caring for our children.

Direct operating grants for daycares have not increased since 2008, yet costs — for example, for rent, wages, food, utilities — that daycares pay have all increased.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government be raising the direct operating grants to daycare centres?

Hon. Ms. Frost: In 2016-17, childcare programs received \$4.3 million in direct operating grants to assist in operational costs and, in addition, over \$71,000 in start-up and emergency funding. Childcare programs also received \$1.6 million on behalf of families as part of a childcare subsidy. To that end, the direct operating grants are provided, as explained, to licensed childcare centres and family day homes to assist with operating costs such as wage enhancement, building expenses and hot meal programs. The childcare subsidy program makes childcare more accessible by providing financial assistance to low-income families. The subsidy is provided directly to the childcare program on behalf of the families.

I believe that the government — let me just go back a bit. Health and Social Services is preparing a childcare model in some of the communities, and we are looking at rural childcare models that will provide sustainable, stable and accountable childcare funding that will promote quality within rural Yukon — something that has been missed in the past. We are looking at addressing —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Minimum wage

Ms. White: Yesterday, the government voted down a motion to review Yukon's minimum wage, which should really be called the poverty wage, given that it stands at only \$11.32 per hour.

The Minister of Community Services tried to explain to Yukoners that his government is fighting poverty through other means, so it is somehow acceptable that today, people earn poverty wages. Let me humour the minister for a moment. He said that one of the ways his government works to close the gap between Yukon's living wage and our minimum wage is to lower transportation costs like transit.

Let me ask the minister a direct question: Within this year's budget, will the costs of transit for Yukon's minimum-wage workers go down, stay the same, or increase in the coming year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the member opposite for the question, although I think what I said yesterday in this House was that a report that came out from the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition last year about a living wage had within it several recommendations on how decision-makers should address the issue of a living wage. None of them, as it turns out, were directly about a minimum wage, but they listed off several things that could be happening — for example, around Housing First and around childcare support. I mentioned the ways in which we are working within the government on those.

There was a third one listed, which was around transit. It's not us as a government who deal with that, but I stated, and I will state again for the member opposite, that we will work in partnership with municipal governments who deal with transit to seek ways to get them infrastructure funding so that they can deliver transit in a cost-effective manner. They are another order of government that chooses at which rates to set their transit.

Ms. White: Again, many words and sadly, no commitments. If Yukon's working poor had a dollar for every time the minister says he will consult, work with or study something, they probably wouldn't have to go to the food bank to put food on the table.

Mr. Speaker, the answer that the minister refused to give is that the current budget contains no measure to decrease the cost of transit for low-income workers. So let's keep looking at the minister's statements from yesterday to justify keeping the minimum wage at \$11.32 per hour.

The minister said that another way of closing the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage is to reduce childcare costs for families. Again, a direct question: Within the current budget, will the cost of daycare for Yukon's minimum wage workers go down, stay the same or increase in the coming year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I do wish to respond to the member opposite about her questions around what we are doing. She stated that I made no commitments and yet I do stand and make a commitment. Our commitment was around working on Housing First. Another commitment I made was to work in consultation with other governments — other

orders of government. It is not the Yukon government's role to set the rates of transit, but we do work with our partners to assist them in infrastructure dollars for transit and I have a call with the City of Whitehorse today to discuss transit.

On the question of childcare and what we are doing — what I stated yesterday and what I will continue to state is that we have within our platform work on early childhood strategy and I will leave it to my colleague, the Minister of Health and Social Services to provide details on that.

Ms. White: The government has repeated that it's developing a childcare strategy, but a strategy doesn't pay the bills for Yukon's working poor today. The fact is that this government's budget will not decrease the cost of daycare or transit for minimum-wage workers this year. The current minimum wage at \$11.32 per hour forces people into a cycle of poverty. In a fair economy, people with a full-time job wouldn't need subsidized housing or the food bank to feed their families, yet this is the case for many Yukoners and the minister doesn't think it's a problem.

The minister even said — and I quote: "... we believe the system is working well." Mr. Speaker, would the minister believe the system is working well when Yukoners working full-time at the minimum wage take home under \$400 a week?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I believe when the member opposite quoted me, I was referring to how we address minimum wage and setting that here, and that the method by which we adjust minimum wage here in the Yukon is by applying a cost-of-living index to it each year. That is a good thing. For all members of this Legislature, I stand up and clearly state that I believe it's good that we have a cost-of-living increase to minimum wage.

Currently our minimum wage is the fifth-highest in the country. I have stood and will state again that I'm working within the department and with the Yukon Bureau of Statistics to find out information and gather evidence to see if there is more information regarding how our minimum wage stacks up against others across the country.

We are currently in fifth place and it has nothing to do with poverty. As I also stated — and what the member opposite could have quoted me on — is that a minimum wage is not about a living wage.

Question re: School structural safety

Ms. Van Bibber: I have a question for the Minister of Education. Many Yukon schools are nearing the end of their functional life. While these facilities have served many Yukon students well during their lifespan, some are over 50 years old. Many of these facilities have seismic concerns or contain hazardous material. We recognize that it will take time to complete this work. What conversations has the minister had with school communities about the long-term capital plans to renovate or replace existing schools?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. The ministry of Highways and Public Works has a process through which we evaluate all government buildings for their suitability, for their continued health and how they're

standing up. That process determines what structures we are going to replace on an ongoing basis. We have an evaluation.

The Auditor General has criticized the department since 2007 for not updating these things, but that has now changed. The department has the tools necessary to handle this database and it is moving forward with a methodical evidence-based approach to determining our structures — schools and all sorts of public buildings — and we actually evaluate them on an annual basis to make sure they're meeting our needs or are falling behind and need more attention or, in some cases, outright replacement.

As members opposite know, the Ross River school is one file we're dealing with right now and needs continual work. It seems that every two years now, we have to do work because it wasn't built properly.

Ms. Van Bibber: During the Dawson International Gold Show, we heard concerns over 17-year-old portables that house students of Robert Service School. With enrolment numbers rising and expectations for population growth with potential mining activity in the region, what plans are in place for new and/or additional portables at Robert Service School, or are there plans to add on to the school itself?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will ask my department for more information on the school. It's not something that was brought to my attention during my trip up to Dawson, but I will get that information for the member opposite.

Ms. Van Bibber: In the current budget, there is \$8 million allocated for a new francophone high school in Whitehorse. Can the minister tell us what the scope of the work associated with this expenditure is for the current fiscal year and when we can expect to see the tenders out for work? Should there be any unspent money from this budget line, will the minister work to tender the construction of new portables with those funds for deployment at schools throughout the Yukon where there is a demonstrated need?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the member opposite for her question. With respect to the third question — which is slightly different, but I'm happy to answer it for you — the funds dedicated to that project are dedicated to that project, and if they are unspent, they would flow over into the next year because the project is not entirely funded by the \$8 million. There is funding, as you know, in next year's budget as well to complete the project. It will be a project that takes more than one fiscal year.

With respect to the additional question about portables and those projects, there are other issues with the Dawson school as well. There is a list of schools. The Department of Education works closely with the Department of Highways and Public Works to determine the priorities that need to be addressed. It is a very serious matter and it's one that's of much concern to the department. They have been working on it since I've been there and I have asked them about that project. But there has not been a lot of work in the past number of years under the previous government with respect to the replacement of schools, and so it is a project that we will be looking at and looking to fund in the future.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Hutton): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Would members like to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 201: *First Appropriation Act, 2017-18* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 201, entitled *First Appropriation Act, 2017-18*.

Department of Education

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I would like to invite the Department of Education officials to come and take their seats. Mr. Chair, I have with me today Deputy Minister Judith Arnold and Assistant Deputy Minister Cyndy Dekuysscher. They are here from the Department of Education.

I thank them for being here and for the assistance they'll provide this afternoon in answering your questions.

I rise in the House today to present the 2017-18 budget for the Department of Education. I would like to say thank you for the opportunity and note that Education has a key role to play in supporting the Yukon government's mandate to build healthy, vibrant and sustainable Yukon communities.

Education helps us to develop a skilled and diverse workforce to support our economy. Through education, we are building Yukon's future, where our kids learn to read, write, count, think and question the world around them.

Our young people learn the skills they need to live, work, contribute to society and live happy lives. Our colleagues, friends and neighbours learn new ideas and skills for their careers and communities in trades training, in college or in university. Education helps people of all ages to learn and

thrive. It fosters the development of the skills needed to live happy, healthy and successful lives.

In these ways and more, education touches the lives of every single one of us. Through the Department of Education's programs and services, teachers spark students' career interests and passion for lifelong learning. Students follow their dreams through post-secondary education programs and bring their skills and expertise to our communities. Yukoners get into, or back into, the workforce and pursue their professional goals with a little extra support or training. New Canadians come to our territory, ready to share their skills and knowledge and enrich our economy and our society.

The Department of Education is responsible for the K to 12 public school system — 30 public schools — and advanced education, training and immigration programs. These programs are an investment in our future and the future of Yukon communities.

We will continue to invest in education and training of Yukon citizens and leaders of today and tomorrow with this year's total budget request of \$198,401,000. Of this amount, \$176,298,000 is designated for the operation and maintenance of the department. This is an overall increase of \$12,604,000, which is an increase of 7.7 percent over last year. This is largely due to additional school-based staff, collective agreements, funding for Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, and pension-solvency funding for Yukon College.

The remaining \$22,103,000 is designated for capital projects. This is an overall increase of \$8,734,000. This increase is largely due to the projects for Yukon College and the francophone high school, and the completion of work at F.H. Collins Secondary School. I will take a closer look at what this funding will support.

With respect to the Public Schools division — I should note that the department is separated into four divisions, primarily in the budget, with respect to how it is broken down. That includes Public Schools, Advanced Education, Education Support Services and Yukon College. I'll deal with each of them separately.

The first being Public Schools — of the amount sought in the total budget, \$118,520,000 is requested for the O&M, which is an increase of \$9,964,000, or 6.5 percent, over last year for Public Schools. This money will support Yukon's public education system, including the operation of the 30 Yukon schools. It will support the success of Yukon students, that being the central mission of the department and of this division.

There is \$472,000, Mr. Chair, requested for the implementation of the new curriculum in Yukon schools and the changes to what and how Yukon students will learn. In the new curriculum, Yukon students will develop key skills in literacy, numeracy, communication, critical and creative thinking and social responsibility.

Students will learn more about Yukon and Yukon First Nation ways of knowing and doing, trades, finance and career education in all grades. These changes are based on research,

good practices and advances in education that are happening across Canada and all over the world.

Yukon schools will start teaching a new curriculum starting in September 2017 for the kindergarten to grade 9 classes. Yukon schools will follow BC's new curriculum and program of studies for kindergarten to grade 12. All schools will use Yukon and Yukon First Nation content and resources to teach the curriculum. This funding will support the implementation of these changes, including developing Yukon and Yukon First Nation resources, school-based resources for mental health and much more. We will continue to work with students, families, educators, Yukon First Nations, school councils and associations, the Yukon francophone school board and other partners in developing and implementing these changes to support the success of all Yukon students.

We are requesting an increase of \$4 million from the 2016-17 budget for school-based staff salaries. Each year, we look at the projected number of students for each school to determine the number of teachers and educational assistants each school will be given to run its programs and classes. Enrolment in Yukon schools has been growing. As enrolment increases, we need to ensure each school can provide consistent services to its community. More students mean we need more school staff to provide these consistent services in all Yukon schools. This funding will support an increase of 88.86 FTEs in Yukon schools. These employees — some of them — were hired at the beginning of the 2015-16 school year and continued, with more hires in the 2016-17 school year, to maintain service levels with the increased enrolment. Prior to the 2016-17 budget, the positions were able to be funded through existing budgets because it wasn't the total — it has been an incremental increase.

To be clear, in the 2015-16 budget, the positions that were added in the schools were funded from within the department. In 2016-17, those new hires required almost \$3.5 million in the supplemental budget to cover the salaries and benefits that had already been spent. I have confirmed that in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 hires, no Management Board submission was made with respect to those new FTEs or new folks in our schools.

As new programs and services are introduced, such as the new curriculum and training for teachers and school staff in technology in our schools, the department is no longer able to reallocate funding from within to support these positions. You will have seen that request of \$3.5 million in the supplementary budget and the \$4 million figure in this budget. The staff is still needed to maintain regular service and support levels for increasing numbers of students.

Teachers are, of course, one of the most important factors in a student's success at school. Students tend to do better in their studies when they feel connected to what they are learning. Teachers and school staff bring the curriculum to life for students and create these important and necessary connections. We hope that will continue and there will be much more opportunity to do so with the new curriculum. We will continue to ensure that we provide the support that is

needed to help our students grow and develop in all Yukon schools.

With respect to our work with First Nations, there is \$895,000 requested to continue the department's ongoing work with Yukon First Nations in education. Yukon First Nations are essential partners in supporting the success of Yukon First Nation learners and, in fact, all students. They also have an important role in sharing First Nation ways of knowing and doing with all Yukon students. We currently work with Yukon First Nation governments, the Council of Yukon First Nations and the First Nations Education Commission through formal agreements and informally in school communities. For example, the Yukon First Nations' joint education action plan is a 10-year plan from 2014 to 2024 to strengthen First Nations' capacity and improve First Nation students' achievement. This continued funding will support our work with the Council of Yukon First Nations and the First Nations Education Commission on the joint education action plan and on six individual education agreements with Yukon First Nation governments.

Part of the journey of reconciliation is to continue to build strong relationships with Yukon First Nations and address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. Residential schools are a part of our shared history, and the Government of Yukon recognizes the impacts they have had on Yukon First Nations and all indigenous peoples in Canada. We are committed to educating students on the realities of this history in a culturally appropriate way, including with a unit about residential schools in social studies 10 that was developed in partnership with Yukon First Nations and residential school survivors. It was introduced in the fall of 2014, and the unit is sensitive and challenging for students, but it engages and informs them about this important history and the lasting intergenerational impacts.

We continue to work in partnership with Yukon First Nations to benefit the learning of all Yukon students, including: the implementation of the new curriculum that includes Yukon First Nation perspectives across all courses and all grade levels; the assessment committee and the proposed revisions to how we assess and report on student progress; the joint education action plan to improve First Nation student outcomes; education agreements with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Selkirk First Nation, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kluane First Nation, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and the First Nation of Na Cho Nyäk Dun; and on cultural language programs through our First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit.

Everyone has a role to play in reconciliation. We will continue to build and foster strong relationships with Yukon First Nations so that we can authentically and respectfully collaborate in supporting Yukon students in the future of this territory. There is \$450,000 requested to continue the support of the Yukon Native Language Centre at Yukon College. This centre offers certificate and diploma training programs for Yukon First Nation language teachers who are employed in Yukon schools.

An aside, I had the pleasure of being at the Yukon College graduation last weekend — last Friday, I guess it was — and was very pleased to see graduates of the Yukon native language diploma and program. They will go forth, we hope, and help all communities to enrich language knowledge in the communities.

We are also continuing to invest in Yukon First Nation educational initiatives to eliminate educational and employment gaps and support all Yukon students. Part of the mandate of the Government of Yukon is to foster strong working relationships with First Nations here in the territory. We will continue to work directly with Yukon First Nation governments, as well as with the First Nations Education Commission, to support First Nation learners and to educate all Yukon students about indigenous peoples and the importance of reconciliation.

While I'm still talking about Public Schools, I would like to highlight some of the related capital requests in that division and in this budget. \$2,666,000 is requested for school-based information technology purchases. As we move forward with the new modernized curriculum, we need to ensure students learn how to use modern educational technologies to enhance their learning opportunities. Students need to know how to use technology effectively and safely at school, at home and at work. As you know, technology changes quickly and becomes outdated, so we've given some thought to how we upgrade technology in schools. Previously, Yukon schools used a computer lab model where certain classrooms were equipped with fixed desktop computers. In 2017-18, the department is proposing to begin a multi-year plan to provide tablets to schools for students on a 1:3 ratio so that students and teachers can use technology in any class or, in fact, anywhere. As part of this plan, the department will lease technology and devices instead of buying them. Leasing technology means that we can keep it more current and at a lower cost and recycle the devices easier as part of a lease agreement. This funding will make it possible to implement this new plan as well as to support other technological needs of Yukon schools. The funding will also support the final phase of implementing the student information system, software, hardware and network infrastructure purchases, and infrastructure for distributed learning, videoconferencing, academic resources and instructional tools — technology that will enhance learning.

There is a \$70,000 request in this budget to purchase equipment that is considered special equipment to support the learning needs of Yukon students. The funding will provide special equipment to serve those who need a bit of assistance such as FM sound systems that amplify sound in classrooms for those who are hard of hearing. Sometimes it's hearing supplies, hydraulic lifts, wheelchairs and other equipment.

We are currently requesting \$115,000 for a new activity bus for the Porter Creek Secondary School. Learning in different places and spaces is only one part, but an important one, of the coming changes to the curriculum. It encourages teachers to create more hands-on learning opportunities, some of which may take place in the community or on the land.

Currently, Porter Creek Secondary School has limited opportunities to learn away from the school due to school bus availability and budget limitations. A new bus will provide the school with economic and flexible transportation for these types of learning activities.

I would also like to highlight a few of the requests for the Education Support Services branch of the department. It is also known as the Corporate Services division. There is a \$12,902,000 request for the O&M, which is an increase of \$23,000 over last year, or 0.2 percent. Although the net increase is small, this is simply due to the removal of time-limited funding that was provided last year for school supplies. I should note that no student will go without needed supplies for the 2017-18 school year. The department has confirmed this commitment, as I have personally to school councils that I have visited.

Please note that we are requesting \$200,000 in additional funding for student transportation services as part of this budget. The cost of busing continues to increase and we still need to get students to school safely and on time. The department has defined ways to manage some of the increased cost by finding efficiencies, such as fuel cost savings, in the student transportation services line item. This additional funding will address the remaining increased cost to maintain current busing services for students. This is just one example of how we're exploring ways to do more with our funding.

This year, we're requesting \$16,764,000 in O&M for Advanced Education. This is an increase of \$14,000 over last year, which is an increase of 0.1 percent. I appreciate that there are a number of items here that I can explain when there are questions, but I would like to note that Yukon College provides an essential and innovative post-secondary program for Yukon students, from skills upgrading to climate research and innovation. The budget for Yukon College for O&M this year is \$28,112,000 that is requested, and is an increase of \$2,603,000 or 10.25 percent over last year. This is primarily the college's pension plan and \$1.3 million is requested for the Yukon Research Centre. The practical nursing program and the School of Visual Arts are all important factors and programs at Yukon College that we intend to fund.

The French first language secondary school is a budget item of \$8 million. The member opposite asked me about that earlier today and I'm happy to answer more specific questions, if need be. In the capital budget, there is \$2.898 million for the continued work at F.H. Collins, as well as a \$2-million line item to complete the recreational facilities at F.H. Collins.

Ms. Van Bibber: I thank the minister for the quick — I know you didn't even start on several other of the departments you have to cover.

On January 23, 2017, the Yukon government announced its school curriculum changes, set to take place this September 2017. We have heard many complaints from parents and school councils about the lack of consultation by the government before it chose to finalize this new curriculum, and numerous complaints about the content of the new curriculum.

Regarding the survey that is currently being undertaken with parents, we have heard concerns that it is not a true consultation but done just to check a box. It is particularly true as a result of the consultation coming after the curriculum has been announced. We are sure the government will not consider going back to the drawing board on your implementation, but we must ask these questions.

In the \$427,000, I believe you said, for the new curriculum, can the minister tell us how much of the budget is dedicated toward this process of consultation and implementation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm very keen to make sure I answer the member opposite's questions. I want to be sure I understand and I'm also concerned to hear about the feedback that you are getting about the new curriculum and the redesign and implementation because that is certainly not what we've been hearing.

The development of the new curriculum has taken place over a number of years. Yukon schools follow, as you know, the BC curriculum and program of studies. Yukon First Nation ways of knowing and doing and career and finance education will be integrated into all grades with respect to the adoption of the BC curriculum, but with a Yukon flair or input, if I can say that. That has been happening over a number of years. It is based on the best research available with respect to education in Canada and in fact across the world. It will emphasize experiential learning and opportunities to do so and Yukon First Nations have been involved, as well as school councils and others across the school community, if I can say, with respect to having the development of that.

I think what you may be asking me about is the assessment committee that is currently doing some consultation with respect to how assessments will happen in the future. The final decisions with respect to that have not been made yet. The consultation is happening.

A part of the commitment in the new curriculum is to evaluate the achievement and the progress of students as we go and to give students and parents the very best information they can have with respect to knowing how their child is doing through the program. The new curriculum — decisions about it being implemented have been made. It is, of course, being developed with respect to Yukon teachers', school councils' and administrators' input — the ways in which modules are being developed for teachers to deliver the program in the school beginning from kindergarten to grade 9 in this coming year. Certainly all the school councils and the teachers who I have had the opportunity to deal with have been excited about the opportunity.

I guess I also would like to emphasize that in particular the rural schools are excited about this opportunity. I may have mentioned that before in the answer to a question, but they're often already — especially the elementary schools — using experiential opportunities with students because they have a wide range of students and they have a little more flexibility because they are often the only school in their community and they have the chance to make sure that they are meeting the students' needs as they see fit.

There is a little less pressure — if I can say that — from being a group of elementary schools in the urban centre, and they are excited about this. They are already using experiential opportunities to teach kids, and they are happy that they will be encouraged to do more.

With respect to the redesign and the consultation that is going now for the assessment stage of that, which has not been finalized, the plan will be for the new curriculum and any assessment that comes out of that to maintain high academic standards with performance expectations for each grade. It will include, as I have said, Yukon First Nation perspectives in the content at each grade level and in each subject area and focus on skills-based learning and flexible, personalized pathways for success. I know I also have a note with respect to assessments, and I will just, in an attempt to answer what you have asked, make sure that I note that for her.

The changes to how we assess and report on student progress, which is the part that is being consulted about still, is still being decided and the consultation, as the member opposite has mentioned, is underway. The best advice in the education world at this point is that we need to make some changes in how we assess students with respect to the curriculum so that students, parents and the folks who work with them can assess and really know where they are in the process as opposed to a letter grade that may be interpreted one way — a good way or a bad way, depending on your interest and depending on your perspective. The proposed changes to how we assess students are based on research and recommendations of a group of more than 40 Yukon educators. They are known as the Yukon Education Assessment Committee. They have been surveying staff, students, parents and community members for feedback on the proposed changes to assessment, which will help students and families understand the learning strengths and the areas for improvement as opposed to a C or a 70 in chemistry. The next step in this process is for the Education Assessment Committee to meet and consider feedback that is gathered in the survey that's currently happening — it may be this that the member opposite was referring to — and then they will develop an interim guide on assessment for Yukon schools, which will be shared before the end of this school year. I hope that answers your question.

Ms. Van Bibber: Yes, it does give a little more light. I was remiss in not thanking the staff from the department for coming and also for that briefing that they gave to us previously. It gives me a much better insight into the department.

With regard to this new curriculum, I have learned a new acronym — the KDU model, which means “knowledge, do and understand”. The department recently asked the public for input and it is still doing the survey — no letter grades up to grade 9. There have been some concerns voiced, as I had said, with the outline of the BC curriculum that we are taking on, and the buy-in from school councils are really not a given. I realize this is early on in the transition.

The current students, who are in grades 4 and 5 and who have become accustomed to receiving letter grades, and of course, their parents, who have known this all their lives and throughout their children's to date — progress — will be pondering the outcomes as they are going to be coming.

The teachers will give reports on what skills are being learned and what they need to spend more or less time on in a particular subject. I believe that written comments along with letter grades, which were the norm, will just go to longer comments and we are assured that students will be better for it. The budget line for Learning, Curriculum and Assessment has risen substantially.

Can the minister tell us if this new model accounts for most of the increase?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In answer directly to that question, the majority of that line item is — I think the member opposite is referring to \$3.8 million for the 2016-17 estimates and that being the change with respect to that. \$3.5 million of it is for the transfer that happens with the French first language school — the school board for the French first language provision of school. There is \$207,000 of that line item for curriculum redesign and there are a number of other items.

Ms. Van Bibber: Does the Yukon government's redesigned curriculum feature a technology education plan to provide students with the building blocks of computer literacy, including coding, to prepare them for careers in fields of information and communication technology?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: In my introductory speech, the member opposite will have heard about the emphasis on technology — \$2.6 million in particular — for the Public Schools branch, which will all be directed at student learning, including the advancement availability of tablets at a ratio of 1:3 for students. Some schools have managed to get quite innovative with respect to their computer labs. I think Elijah Smith is one, here in Whitehorse, where they needed the space because, as we know, the students are increasing here in the territory and put some of their computers on a cart that can go from class to class so they could use the space. But it is technology, and the education around the most and latest versions of technology is a key factor in the schools currently and as we go forward in the new curriculum.

There is, I'm assured, provisions of coding, as well, built in — sometimes as early as grade 4 — already in classrooms because the importance of that is being recognized by educators and administrators alike. But certainly, it will be in the curriculum going forward.

Ms. Van Bibber: Also, since our tax system has become so complicated, it would be an added bonus on the senior areas, perhaps, for our students to learn the basics on taxes — what is income tax, how it's used with general financial knowledge. As the curriculum has always highlighted numeracy, math and problem-solving, perhaps it could include a plan to develop financial literacy, such as basic skills in saving, investments, mortgages and taxes.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I agree with the member opposite because it is something that in past years — I won't say now

— has been lacking or have been addressed relatively late in a child's education. I know there are some life skills programs introduced at grades 9 and 10, but certainly the skills that are mentioned by the member opposite are things that need to be addressed at a much earlier age. The officials of the department advised me that numeracy and financial education is being started as early as kindergarten in some programs because I think educators have also recognized what the honourable member has noted — that these are important life skills and that they shouldn't be taught in high school, but long before that.

Ms. Van Bibber: Another word I learned was "ideating" which means "forming ideas or concepts". So, along with the basics — reading, writing and math — students are encouraged to show their curiosity and become active participants in the class. In a sense, they get a lot more control of how they learn and hopefully their best traits will shine through eventually. If a set pattern to accomplish a course is not kept, I'm not sure this will work for all students. I'm thinking of the introverts and the shy students, kids who don't or can't move forward without a lot of structure and routine.

I see the budget for Student Support Services has dropped. Can you assure us that the basic skillsets that ensure literacy for our children will be well-monitored in this new system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm looking at the Public Schools division. Student Support Services for 2017-18 has actually gone up a bit. I have \$3 million in that, up from the 2016-17 estimate of about \$2.9 million. Perhaps the member opposite could clarify exactly the concern she has. I'm happy to try to explain what that would be, but I can say that with respect to the Student Support Services line that I have, Public Schools division is responsible for the management of Yukon public schools, as everyone is aware. The division is divided into the schools branch and the learning branch.

The French First Language schools are managed by the Yukon francophone school board, and the schools branch is responsible for the management and operation of Yukon schools. This line — that \$3 million — covers projects or programs and services provided by 18 folks at the department, including psychological services, speech language programs, occupational therapy, sensory impairments and social-emotional support and self-regulation in schools. It's not that the person is embedded in the school, but that they provide those services from the department to schools.

Ms. Van Bibber: Yukon College is a mainstay of the territory for the past 50 years, starting as a small trade school across the bridge to the current campus. Along with 11 community campuses, the college continues to deliver programming to many Yukoners, as well as foreign students. It has become more secure through the years with additional funding and land acquisition, and is now transitioning to become a Yukon university.

We know this doesn't happen overnight, again, but it's a process that will take many years. It was stated that it was a quick decision at a board of governors meeting that it would all of a sudden become a Yukon university, but it was actually

pondered and discussed and finally decided that the board of governors would pursue this option. The board of governors, members, college staff and the president travelled to and visited over 60 similar-sized universities to question and see first-hand what those facilities offered. They saw many best practices and they also saw drawbacks, and this was over a period of two years.

It was methodical and well-thought-out to reach the stage where the college can say yes, we will become a small university — a hybrid university, if you will. It would still be a flexible post-secondary facility that includes adult basic education, trades and vocational training certificates, diplomas, degrees and post-graduate programs.

The university will provide niche programming, such as climate change modules, indigenous self-determination and governance, and sustainable resource development and innovation. Over the next five to seven years, it is hoped the Government of Yukon will bring in new legislation to ensure the smooth transition from college to university.

I believe that the federal government had at one point made a commitment to provide stable long-term funding for the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining. I see a transfer payment of \$758,000 under Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. Does this cover any of the programs for the centre?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you to the honourable member for her eloquent and important statements about the transition of Yukon College into a university because I too share the excitement about that opportunity.

With respect to the line item for Yukon College, \$1.3 million is allocated, or thereabouts — \$1,386,000 — for the Research Centre of Excellence. There is \$509,000 from the Yukon College portion of this budget for the Northern Institute of Social Justice and there is \$1.2 million for the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining or what's known as CNIM.

Ms. Van Bibber: What are the plans to bring forward legislative changes that would be required in order for the next steps of forming a Yukon university, and are you in discussions with the college on these timelines?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am in discussions with the college on these timelines because it is certainly an important project. The government is very pleased to be working with Yukon College toward establishing the Yukon university, and it's through a phased-in approach, which may have been developed after the member opposite was a leader at that organization but it may be something that she is familiar with.

There are a total of six phases planned. The first three phases will overlap in implementation and the last three phases will occur sequentially. Phases 1 and 2 are complete, and we anticipate that the required legislative changes will be approved. At this point, they are on the proposed agenda for the fall of 2019, which is in accordance with the wishes of the college. I have been meeting regularly with them on this and other issues and, were that to change, certainly the government would be open to having those discussions, but at this point that is their timetable as well.

Ms. Van Bibber: Is there any other funding that is set aside to ensure the university transition can be helped during the next five years?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Last year, there was \$500,000 in the budget for the implementation, the phases, the transition to university status. I guess I want to emphasize, as the member opposite has, the hybrid version, because certainly we want to reassure everyone that the trades and other programs that are currently very successful at the college will be maintained and must be maintained. There was \$500,000 last year, there is \$500,000 in this budget and there is \$500,000 allocated in the following year's budget, and then we will revisit as we move closer to 2019 and the phases change.

Ms. Van Bibber: As the transition happens, is there any potential for an increase in the Yukon grant or the Yukon training allowance? Has this been considered in this budget?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: There isn't anything in this budget with respect to that specific question of the Yukon grant and others, although certainly it is open for discussion. There were a number of changes made just last year with respect to the legislation around those programs and the funding from the department for student assistance. As the phases progress with Yukon College, it will be a good idea for us to make sure that we are in step with what is needed.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is always an interest to attract students from other areas, as well as international students to the college. Are there any considerations for more campaigning or more money to ensure that we continue to become a world-class facility?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: There is no budgetary line with respect to the member opposite's question. It is something that is part of the discussion as we go forward with respect to the transition to a university.

I think it is important to emphasize that Yukon College is — as many folks here will know — expert at their recruitment already. They have a very broad student body. They have a number of opportunities and they have put a great deal of emphasis on their recruitment of students from not only the territory — because that takes a certain amount of work and a certain focus — but from across Canada and literally across the world. The foreign student numbers — I don't have them at the moment, but I could get them for the honourable member. I am aware, with my recent meetings with the college, just how successful their recruitment is. Their student body numbers are increasing. That is good news for the future of Yukon College as a university.

Ms. Van Bibber: On that line, if we continue to have a robust student base, is there any consideration for expanding residences at the college?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, that is not something I have spoken to the president or officials at the college about directly, but it is part of the overall conversation that we are having and I know it's certainly part of their overall long-term plan. One of the benefits of this project and many run by the college is they have a very long vision and rightly so. Their planning is not one or two years, but often five, 10, 15 and

beyond because they have great vision and I believe that is the way it should be properly managed.

Residences, other opportunities, student services funding — those kinds of things — are all rolled into the conversation that we are having with Yukon College and that they are in fact planning for themselves.

Ms. Van Bibber: The mobile trades training unit has been very successful and well-received in many communities. Can the minister tell us if she knows the schedule for the mobile trades training facility and which communities it will be attending?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't. I am equally excited about this particular program as well. For those listening, or for those who aren't aware, it has been an opportunity for the college to literally build and equip a trailer or two for particular trades and have them go to different communities in the territory and teach on the spot and it has been very successful.

I don't know the schedule, but we can certainly obtain the schedule if that is of use to the member. I appreciate her knowledge of that particular program because it really is in line with the Yukon government's "all communities matter" mandate and promises. It really has been extremely successful at training carpenters and others in their home communities for the opportunity to learn those skills and ultimately become contributing members of their own communities. I know that some of the trainees have graduated that program and then gone on to build houses in their own communities.

Thank you for the question. I don't know the schedule and I'm not sure whether they are having more than one trailer go out this year, but we can certainly look into that.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you. To follow up a little on the question I had during Question Period on older schools — Whitehorse Elementary, as we know, is one of our oldest schools and it has been kept up very well through all the years, but we all know that buildings age. Pipes and electrical components eventually need replacing and as well there other major renovations that occur over time.

Is the government currently considering upgrades and enhancements to — or replacement of — this particular school?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank the honourable member for her question. The department is working closely — I had an opportunity to say this a bit earlier — with the Department of Highways and Public Works to ensure that the school facilities are safe and available for many years to come. We do know there are schools that are well up in years, if I could say it that way. We are undertaking a comprehensive planning process to address future new construction and/or renovations to existing school buildings. It's important to do that in order to do planning and be responsible with the investment in education and with the buildings that support education, as well as Yukon's social, economic and community goals.

With respect to Whitehorse Elementary, in particular, the member opposite has done her research. Whitehorse Elementary School is the oldest school in the Yukon and is reaching its recommended capacity. People in my very own

family were young students there many, many, many years ago — maybe I didn't have to say three manys.

Whitehorse Elementary is also located on the smallest school site in the territory, being in urban downtown Whitehorse. There have been regular, ongoing issues with the indoor air quality and lack of teaching space, as well as the playground size and the energy efficiency of the whole building. Seismic repairs alone are of concern, particularly with our recent earthquakes. It is on the list and they will be involved in the priority planning process with respect to determining which schools and what will be done with them. It is high on the priority list, being the oldest school in the territory.

I should add that we are in the process of doing a functional space assessment with the Department of Highways and Public Works with respect to schools particularly. I know they're looking at a lot of government space, but with respect to schools in particular, and we hope to have the functional space report I would say imminently, certainly by the fall of this year, so we can make some priority decisions.

Ms. Van Bibber: As was stated earlier, the schools are an integral part of any community or region, and there must be this plan for upkeep and maintenance, as well as retrofits at various times within a school's lifespan. Paint and flowers really do wonders, and eye appeal is good in any town, but with the push to conserve energy and help cut costs, can the minister tell us, with regard to upgrades to schools, is there any consideration to carry out energy retrofits on school buildings?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I can't give too much detail with respect to the honourable member's question. First of all, I should say that, in the functional plan exercise that is currently happening and the consideration of priorities for schools, everything is open to consideration — renovations, et cetera, right up to full replacement. We always want to make sure if we can possibly invoke efficiencies of scale or opportunities to renovate rather than replace — those would all be up for consideration.

There is energy retrofit funding. It also can be applied for by the government to the federal government, and while that has not been done at this point because we're waiting to make the priority list with respect to schools, certainly it's an option and something I can speak with the Minister of Community Services and other ministers in the government with respect to a one-government approach of making sure that we use all of the available options to achieve the best for Yukoners.

Ms. Van Bibber: One Liberal platform commitment was to review the Yukon teacher-hiring process. There's always work to be done whenever a number of employees are needed to fill so many positions in many different areas and under different circumstances. I understand the area superintendent and the principal of a school liaise with a teacher-recruitment coordinator to assess the needs based on enrolment and needs of that particular school. Within their mandate, they assign full-time, permanent, temporary or teachers' aides as they deem appropriate.

Can the minister give us an idea, due to the increase of new hires, if there are more permanent teachers being hired as opposed to temporary or substitute teachers?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The Department of Education has been working closely with the Yukon Teachers' Association over the past several months to address the concerns that were noted in the honourable member's question at the beginning regarding hiring practices. We will continue to do that. The information that we have with respect to temporary teachers — as the honourable member may know, I do know something a little bit about this file. But in particular, I will note that temporary teachers are hired for defined periods of time and to meet temporary programming needs in Yukon schools, or, on occasion, to replace permanent teachers who are on leave.

As a result of an adjudication decision that occurred a number of years ago — a few years ago, I guess — relating to temporary teachers becoming permanent after two years of employment, the government has worked very diligently with the YTA and converted a number of temporary teacher positions to permanent status. There is limited use of temporary teachers, but they are a valuable tool in a workforce as large as the teachers in the territory because there is always some particular situation — either through programming needs or to replace a teacher on leave — where they need to be used, so they're being used in a limited capacity.

Ms. Van Bibber: That's good to note. What plan does this government have to incentivize teachers to take positions in rural areas of the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: This is a work in progress. I appreciate the question from the honourable member. It is something that is again an example of departments working together. I know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works and I have had a few discussions about staff housing. The reason I bring that up is that it's often an issue with respect to having teachers and other government employees attend, reside or move to a new community that they may not be familiar with or may not be from. It also is an opportunity — when we have Yukoners returning to a home community, sometimes housing is an issue as well.

The concept is something that we are working on with the Yukon Teachers' Association. The housing issue needs to be addressed, which we are doing. Certainly I have made some inquiries and will continue to do that because I think it is a situation that needs some attention.

The other information that I have is that it is often quite successful when a family moves to a community — when there is more than one teacher, perhaps, or when there is a teacher and a nurse, or where there is a community that has a need for a number of employees in some more traditional-type jobs, and maybe others in the future where they can be contributing members of that community, and when a family can actually move, it tends to be quite successful. All of those things are open for discussion.

Ms. Van Bibber: Based on the information provided by the hiring teacher coordinator, with regard to the new staffing positions for this fiscal year, can the minister please

give us a breakdown of the new positions? What are they? In which community are they being placed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I do have some general information. I don't have a breakdown per school, but I think if I provide this information to the House, it may be of some use. The staffing allocation with respect to Yukon schools is done through work with the department as well as a formula where there is a base amount and individual teachers based on the need at each school. The allocations are done that way in conjunction with administration so that they can determine exactly what they might be needing.

For the past three years, the department has been funding approximately — well, let's talk about the new positions or how that occurs. School principals determine how to use the allocation for the full-time and part-time positions they need for school programs.

This works out to be between 0.15 and 1.0 additional FTEs for many of the schools in Whitehorse for this year. Four Whitehorse schools have decreased their allocation, again, based on the formula and then the allocation based on enrolment. That's the most important factor. Of course class sizes are limited by arrangements with the YTA and the collective agreement, but four Whitehorse schools have decreased their allocation this year based on enrolment issues — Christ the King, Elijah Smith, Porter Creek and Vanier — but they have been reduced between 0.38 of an FTE and 1.13, so no school has lost more than 1.13 FTEs due to lower student enrolment.

Most rural schools have the similar allocations to what they had last year or an increase of between 0.2 and 1.0 FTE. Two rural schools have decreased allocations — Watson Lake Secondary was decreased by 0.1 and J.V. Clark in Mayo was decreased by 0.5 due alone to student enrolment.

Ms. Van Bibber: We are very proud of our Yukon Native Teacher Education program at the college and although it has gone through many changes through the years, it is still a wonderful program for all the students who do graduate.

Can the minister tell us how the government intends to properly accommodate or integrate Yukon Native Teacher Education Program graduates into the workforce?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: There is \$540,000 for the Yukon Native Teacher Education program being allocated to Yukon College this year. We agree it is a stellar opportunity for Yukoners and others to receive education here in the territory and then hopefully join the education workforce.

I was very pleased last weekend at the Yukon College graduation ceremonies, as I have noted before, to see such a wide range of shiny new graduates looking to hopefully contribute to our economy here in the territory.

There is a staffing protocol with respect to how graduates from the YNTEP program are hired and priority is given to members of Yukon First Nations who have graduated — as a higher priority. They are hired in groups and given priority when they are hired.

I dare say that with the current changes in our population and the aging population, we see a lot of attrition, a lot of folks in every department, certainly across businesses as well,

retiring — that we are very encouraged that all of the graduates of the Yukon Native Teacher Education Program who want to stay in the territory — we would encourage them to do so and would be very pleased that they will be able to add to our workforce and bring their knowledge.

Certainly, I should lastly mention that if there is a member of a Yukon First Nation who is a graduate and who wants to return to their home community, they are given priority as well.

Ms. Van Bibber: The previous government had provided school councils with \$100 per student to purchase school supplies for the year, taking the onus off parents and providing a standard and balanced allotment of supplies to each student. It was mentioned that there was currently an excess of supplies from last year and it shows in the budget. This funding will not be continued by the current government.

Can the minister tell us the length of time that the excess of school supplies will carry the students for? Will it be up to the parents to purchase supplies this coming fall? Have they been notified?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: They have not yet been notified. I just want to get to that because I'll forget it at the end. They have not yet been notified, but the notification is being drafted, with the full intention that parents will be notified as soon as possible — certainly prior to the end of this school year. I agree that it is an important piece of information for them.

The funding for school supplies last year at \$100 per student was initiated as a one-time contribution to school councils. There was the opportunity for school councils to administer that and purchase school supplies for students, or for them to return that job to the department, and there was a variety of versions of that occurred over last year. Some school councils did it, although many returned that responsibility to the department. There was not a lot of time provided for planning for that particular initiative.

What we know is that many school supplies were purchased — some by families — that were not used by students. I have asked the department to also figure out whether or not — particularly at the high school level, when the lockers get cleaned out in the next few weeks — there are bags of school supplies there, and if we could figure out some sort of central repository for them to be donated so that we can redistribute them to schools. I can't tell you what the number of those would be, Mr. Chair, but I know it was a responsibility that was relatively last minute and difficult for school councils to administer. I also know that it resulted in at least one assistant deputy minister actually being out shopping for school supplies, which, in my view, was not a good use of resources. There were lots of volunteer hours by school councils and others — administrators — trying to get that project off the ground in a relatively short time frame.

No student will be without school supplies. I am told by all the school councils that I have visited — and there have been a few — and the ones that I have spoken to have said that they often have their own small batch of school supplies so that, if a student comes to school without what they need,

they can provide it for them. That is a commitment the department has made as well.

I hope I have answered the questions. In particular, I want to emphasize that the one-time funding announcement last year — while it was managed because of the strength and tenacity of the department — some parents definitely benefitted from that. We don't want any penalties or any concerns from families, and we want to make sure they know quickly in the next few weeks that we won't be doing that this year in the same manner it was done, although there will be school supplies available.

Ms. Van Bibber: I have heard many good reports that parents didn't have to do the shopping, but I didn't know the DMs were out doing it.

The need for a francophone high school has been addressed and a location has been assigned. There is a budget line for \$8 million and it appears to be a large sum for design and preliminary work. Can the minister outline the current plan and timeline for the design and construction of this new school?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the opportunity to address this. There was approximately \$400,000 in last year's budget to begin the design phase of this project. That is underway. There are a number of details that must continue to be worked out. I want to emphasize that the \$8 million — or what is showing as \$7.6 million in my document — in the budget for this year is not simply for design and planning. In fact, the intention would be to actually have those funds directed toward the beginning of the build. The details must be worked out because the design phase is not completed, but the idea of \$8 million in this year's budget and \$12 million in next year's budget would be a total of \$20 million for that project completion.

Ms. Van Bibber: Under Advanced Education Training Programs, I see the Yukon summer program, called Summer Career Placement, and the Student Training Employment Program, or STEP, have both increased in this budget. Is there an expected uptake on these programs? Is there a new campaign to attract more uptake?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have the reference to the Student Training Employment Program at \$366,000 for this year, which is the same as it was for the estimate for 2016-17, and slightly lower than the actual in 2015-16.

The advertising for that program is broad and wide and it is, I'm told, always fully prescribed by the university students who come back and get excellent opportunities to work in companies or government departments or others with respect to how that STEP program is administered. The opportunity for students to return home and have a well-paying summer job is a definite focus of this program and I would say, in addition to that, very successful.

The other one you've mentioned, I think, is the Canada-Yukon summer program — \$114,000 is allocated this year. It's the same as it has been last year in 2016-17 and slightly higher than the actuals in 2015-16, which was \$99,000.

Ms. Van Bibber: Going back to the Student Support Services line item of \$3.1 million, is that program able to

provide an adequate amount of services at these current funding levels? What services are provided to round out the \$3.1 million?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Student Support Services line being noted by the honourable member includes the provision of psychological services, speech-language programs, occupational therapy, sensory impairments, social and emotional support and self-regulation for students on an as-needed basis by a team of professionals at the department in schools upon request.

The students with those exceptional needs are entitled to an individualized education program that describes a student's strengths and needs, identifies specific learning goals and tracks a student's progress toward achieving those goals. The professionals who are paid for by that line item questioned by the honourable member are involved with those kinds of individualized education programs and in maintaining or determining what's needed. We continue to use a variety of support approaches, including IEPs, which are the individualized education programs, to ensure the success of all.

We also work with the schools, students and parents to ensure that all the Yukon students who need access to these resources have them and, in fact, if they need them to be successful at school, it's a priority. We're committed to working with those players — parents, teachers and other educational partners, et cetera — to make sure students are able to access those services.

The department continues to monitor its divisions to ensure that funding for the services that are provided is adequate. We have information that the \$3.01 million will suffice for this year. It doesn't indicate an increase of any FTEs.

As with many of the programs that are delivered, because of the way a school year works, I should also add that this is assessed in the fall as well to make sure that the needs are adequately funded in that particular portion of the department. I make reference to that as well as things like when all of the kids finally get to a school and the dust settles — if the teachers, EAs and LAs are adequate for the enrolment. It is a little bit of an adjustment sometimes in the fall, but we reassess it in the fall and then again as programs go forward.

Ms. Van Bibber: Just for my understanding, if someone in a community needs psychological, social or emotional attention, does a psychologist go there or does the student come to Whitehorse? What are the logistics and who pays for that?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The student would be assessed in — I guess I would not want to say that there has never been a case, but certainly in the vast majority of cases, the student should be assessed where they are going to school. The psychologist or the professional who is needed — a social worker or others — would attend the school in the community and make the assessment there and have an opportunity to observe the student in their home school environment. That is paid for through that line item in the Department of Education and a few other line items that would all contribute to the funding of that service.

Ms. Van Bibber: What is the plan to ensure that the department is able to retain professionals for the long term so that they get a feel for not only the students, but the communities that they are visiting and so they are not just Whitehorse-centred?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think the question raises a good point, and it is addressed at the Department of Education by having certain professionals assigned to certain schools so that they can in fact get to learn the school community and the students so that there is consistency of service. People do on occasion, of course, leave their great job with the Department of Education. We can't always account for that, but certainly every effort is made to make sure that they do have the opportunity to form a relationship, because having a new person — the next time there's a new person after that is not in the best interests of the students and that is the goal.

Ms. Van Bibber: Busing is an integral part of education, as it gets our children safely to and from school and events. There have been contentious issues around busing. We cover such a large area because of many factors. Can the minister tell us how much is left in the current busing contract?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question about busing. It's a very important part of the education process here in the territory and how kids get to school. It's also an expensive piece of the department's budget.

The current contract — I recently had some very positive comments about the current service provider and the bus drivers, quite unsolicited by me while at a school council meeting. It came from both some parents and from some administrators about how pleased they are with the current service provider. That contract goes until the end of school in 2018. There is a line item in this budget for a \$200,000 payment because the contract is indexed each year. The renegotiation of a contract will need to take place in 2018.

Ms. Van Bibber: To avoid the issues where the lowest bidder is awarded and can't complete a contract, will the government consider value-added pieces for the next tender, such as past performance, safety standards and maintenance standards, to ensure that the best qualified and safest contractor gets the contract, and not just the lowest bidder?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yes, I think those are all great suggestions by the honourable member. Without going into it today, we are all aware of some difficulties that presented themselves in the past with respect to a price-driven contract, value-added, and safety is the primary concern for the department in busing kids to school. So the answer to that question is yes.

Ms. Van Bibber: Busing is for students who live 3.2 kilometres away from the school. I know many parents make sure they get their children to school by personal means. I also know there is a student transportation allowance for parents who can get a reimbursement of \$13 per day. Is this program well-known and can the minister tell us if it is well-subscribed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am advised that it is well-known, in answer to the member opposite's question, and that it is

fully subscribed to annually, so people are finding out about it and managing to get the service.

I should also, in answer to this question, be clear that the department officials are telling me that no one would be turned away if that was in fact the case. I can't say how many people are currently using that option — and we probably could find out for you if that was of interest — but it is fully subscribed to. It does tend to be popular, and in the event that somebody is interested in having that service and we're at the limit, certainly nobody would be turned away because it's an important opportunity.

Ms. Van Bibber: I also notice some high school students — and I think this has been a few years — get to choose whether they ride the city bus as opposed to a school bus and it has proven successful.

Can you tell me the implications on the budget as to the numbers? I'm sure they vary from time to time. Is it an annual or a monthly pass that students are given?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: First of all, the member opposite is quite correct — there is the option. At this point, a number of students subscribe to it. Between 500 and 600 per month are receiving city bus passes. It's a significant number. It is a cost in addition to the busing service that the department provides of school buses, so there is an opportunity, in my view and in the department's view, for us to look at that and see if we can't make sure that students are using one option or the other. It is costing us approximately \$200,000 per year, or annually.

It is very well-used. I should indicate that we are having some discussions about how we could better manage that program — not to reduce students but to better manage that program — in conjunction with the City of Whitehorse — which is providing the city buses, obviously — and their ridership and the use of their buses is obviously a concern to them too. We think we should be having discussions with them to see how we can be most effective in providing services for our kids to get to school.

Ms. Van Bibber: Grizzly Valley residents who bought in that area thought they were going to be included in some bus schedule, but they discovered they are not.

Can the minister tell us what is going to happen in the bus schedule in this coming year and if these people have recourse?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I don't want to speculate and give incorrect information, so I am going to get that information from the department specifically for her in particular in that area. I know there are some transportation subsidies happening there, but again, I don't think I have enough information to accurately answer her question. I will return and give that information to the honourable member.

Ms. Van Bibber: On the bus schedule note, again — one constituent of mine said that her child has a differently numbered bus in the morning and in the afternoon and a different driver in the morning and in the afternoon. She finds it very confusing and wonders if this can somehow be addressed in the scheduling — about which numbered bus goes on a certain route both times of the day.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am going to suggest that the honourable member and I speak outside of Committee of the Whole so that we can actually discuss the details of the situation and see if we can get an answer for her. I don't have it today, but if she is willing to do that, I am very open to addressing that situation or at least providing any information that we can to address the concern of her constituent.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you. We can certainly do that.

The year 2016 marked the end of the New Horizons five-year strategic plan for the Department of Education. Is there something that is going to be replacing it? If so, when will this new plan be ready?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I just wanted to confirm my thought on this. There is not a plan for a new strategic plan. Much of what will be happening in Yukon schools in the next three to five years is embedded in the concept of the new curriculum and the implementation of the new curriculum. There is also direction in my mandate letter on many of the things that the honourable member has already mentioned about hiring practices and new schools, repairing schools — those kinds of things — in my mandate letter and in the mandate of this government that will set the priorities over the next five years.

Ms. Van Bibber: Can the minister give us an update on the status of the Auditor General's report and recommendations? Have all of the tasks associated with that report been completed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the question, because it's one of the early questions I asked when I came to the department and wanted to see what recommendations had been made by the Auditor General's report with respect to education. The key factor is that we are always wanting to improve outcomes for Yukon students, and that's a key focus.

I will endeavour and undertake to get back to the honourable member about the specifics of how many recommendations — and how many have been met. I do have a memory of that; I don't have the document in front of me, and I wouldn't want to get the numbers incorrect. I have asked that question. I know a number of the recommendations that were made at that time have been dealt with, and I will just leave it at that. I will get back to you about what the recommendations were and which ones, if any, are outstanding.

Ms. Van Bibber: Does this government have plans to review the *Education Act* during this mandate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I mentioned earlier that there is a plan to do amendments to the act with respect to Yukon College and the requirements that are there for the college to become a university. There is no plan to do a widespread review of the *Education Act*, although with respect to the college and a few other matters that might arise, I could see us bringing some forward, but there is no plan at this point to amend or review the *Education Act* from my current mandate letter.

Ms. White: It's a bit different sitting on this end of the counter. You get to wait until the end, so a lot of my questions

have been answered by my colleague and I thank her for that. I welcome the department officials and I promised them during our budget briefing that a lot of the questions I have asked in previous years I would also be asking again. We're just following up on some things.

I would like to start off with F.H. Collins. When you drive past F.H. Collins, you still have a fairly large pile of rubble and, more than that, you still have some of the steel structure in the back and underneath the roof. That was originally set to be completed in October 2016. We are in May 2017. When is the expected completion date? When will that steel structure come down and what is the estimated final cost of that demolition?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm familiar with the details of the answer to this question because it was asked earlier by the Leader of the Third Party and I have — although I seem hesitant — just reviewed the response that is going to her and I want to make sure I get the numbers correct.

The delays with respect to that site were as a result of far more hazardous waste being located when they actually started to take the building down than what was anticipated in the estimate and the plan — both financial estimate and time estimate — to complete that project. The information that we have up to date is that the total cost will be approximately \$6 million. Approximately \$5 million of that has been spent and my understanding on the timetable is that this site should be completed in the next six to eight weeks.

Ms. White: Just to get it on the record, I believe that was in a written response that you were sending to the member. It wasn't necessarily asked here.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. White: I'll just keep going. It was just to make sure that it didn't seem like I was completely not paying attention for the entire time. It was mostly that it was coming back in a letter and I thank the minister for that response.

There was a lot of work that was being done to the technical wing at different points of time, partially probably because of access to the wing and things were complicated. Is the technical wing fully completed and is it being fully utilized at this point?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Chair, I apologize for directly speaking to the honourable member. I didn't mean to do that.

I was wanting to simply clarify that the letter is in draft and it will be sent. I didn't anticipate that she would be apprised of any of that information, so we'll move on.

With respect to the technical wing — it is completed. I am aware that there are some cosmetic additional things to be done. There is some painting to be finished, some flooring to be completed, but it is fully being utilized currently by the school students in F.H. Collins this year. It is, for all intents and purposes, completed, which is not to say there aren't a few small things to finish.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for her answer.

I've talked at other times in this Chamber — my father is closely related to the track and field program in the territory. Sometimes I think I know more about the track at the F.H. Collins site than I should know, mostly because he spent a lot

of his free time, when there was no track, using chalk to mark a track, mowing the track, setting out a track and he spends a fair amount of time at F.H. Collins, spending time at the track — the current track — not the one that my father mowed into the lawn, but the one that actually got put in. There were some problems — there were some challenges with that track — and I believe that we have \$2 million budgeted this year for changes to that. Could I just get some updates as to what will be happening and the timelines for that?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. There have been challenges with the track at F.H. Collins. I would like to commit to the timeline, but I can't at the moment because it is intertwined. The changes that will be made and the completion of that part of the F.H. Collins school project are intertwined with the concepts for the French first language school, because it will depend on where the ultimate site is physically on that site, and what changes can be made to the outdoor recreation facilities for F.H. Collins.

I would like to assure the member opposite that, when discussions were taking place with respect to this budget, this government, supported by the department, was very concerned that we not proceed with yet another building project near that site without completing what has been not properly completed for the F.H. Collins school students and the greater community. The track will be of benefit to the whole of the Yukon community, frankly, because opportunities will be available for other schools to use that, as well as community groups. Consultation is taking place with the honourable member's father as well, because he is the expert with respect to that facility. The direction I have given the department is that, as soon as possible, we need to be addressing that issue.

Ms. White: I'm not going to tell my dad that I mentioned him, because he would be mortified to know. He's a bit of a shy guy.

I appreciate that the Department of Education is doing the site planning prior to the construction of a new track, because part of the problem we saw previously was that, when we rush forward in projects without long-term planning, we get the new new F.H. Collins as opposed to the new F.H. Collins from a number of years ago that was promised.

I do appreciate that. I thank the minister and the department for that.

There has been a fascinating change. As communities change, including the City of Whitehorse, the numbers shift within different parts of the community. We have seen levels of students change in schools. For example, Selkirk school now has a French immersion program that was started there. In Whistle Bend, we know there is — I'm not sure if the language is school endowment land, but there's the possibility of a future school on a site in Whistle Bend.

When government is looking at long-term planning, are we looking at projecting numbers that will be going to different schools? For example, when I was at Whitehorse Elementary just a couple of years ago, it was half French immersion and half English. It's amazing that the uptake in the French immersion program has been so strong that not

only has it fully taken over Whitehorse Elementary, but it's now spreading out, for example, to Selkirk.

How does the department make projections about school planning and school populations? I know that at one point in time there was talk about students in Crestview, instead of being bused into Jack Hulland Elementary School, they were looking at taking them out to Hidden Valley. How does the department deal with the shifting numbers, especially in the City of Whitehorse? How do we do future planning in communities as well?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The honourable member asked a good question. It may be the bane of all education departments — determining how many kids are going to come to school in any given year. Long-term projections for enrolment are in fact done. The department looks at it annually and then makes longer term projections over the next five-plus years. StatsCan figures are used in order to do some of that work. It tends to be pretty accurate because birth rates are recorded and then we are looking five to six years or four to six years, depending on when kids enter school.

The House may be interested to know that more than 300 new students came over the last three years. This year, we are projecting 109 new students in September 2017 coming to schools who will need to be accommodated. They are shifting numbers.

In particular, one of the tasks we want to tackle in Whitehorse is looking at the catchment areas because the preamble to the question is quite right. There are new neighbourhoods. They have to be taken into account. There are school capacity issues. There are new programs, like the Selkirk French immersion, and those things that all must go into the calculation of where and how students will be educated. Those long-term projections are done using the best of the numbers that are available. They tend to be pretty accurate, although we always have families moving, which can also do that.

The review of catchment areas and the contemplation of the school, the functional plans for school priorities, buildings and that sort of thing all fit in with the long-term plan for the department. It is a spider web of priorities.

Ms. White: I am glad I am not part of that discussion on how birthrates will affect school intakes five years into the future. I do appreciate that the department is aware and they are trying to shuffle that around to make sure that schools have as much capacity as they need or as they can use, and that we are not overpopulating in some areas.

I know the minister has received letters that I have, because I have been copied on the letters that she received from parents from the Montessori school. It's my understanding that the Montessori school board or members of the board approached the government about actually getting a Montessori test pilot within a school facility, and that it would be kindergarten through grade 3, I believe, and grades 4 through 7, or something similar to that.

One of the reasons why the group was approaching government is that, as it stands right now, Montessori schooling is essentially private schooling, so there is a cost

associated with it — quite a steep cost, to be perfectly honest. One of the reasons why they were looking at trying to get it into the public school is that it would become accessible to all learners.

Could the minister fill us in on where that conversation is, and if the Department of Education is looking into the issue, and what the response has been to the Montessori group?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I do appreciate the opportunity to clear up the request with respect to Montessori school and the pilot project, as described by the question. The request that came to me as minister — and I met with the executive director of the Montessori parents school committee and I also received numerous letters from individuals who were supporting this concept.

Unfortunately, the concept that was understood by a number of the writers of those letters was not the concept that was presented to me. I should answer the question by saying that a decision has been made that the department would not entertain the Montessori school, or a program of Montessori school that was proposed to us, being entered into the public school system.

The Department of Education is in the business of public schools, and the proposal that was brought to me was that the Montessori school would operate inside a public school, but maintain its parents and executive director and council. Their request — and I was very clear on confirming this — was that they wanted to maintain their ability to control enrolment in that program, so it wouldn't be as broad or as open as I might have been able to entertain. In fact, the ultimate request included the fact that the Montessori folks would control the enrolment and priority would be given to siblings of current Montessori students, which couldn't operate inside a public school. There would need to be access provided and it would need to be much broader than that.

There was also information brought to me with respect to this request that the school timing of any elementary school wouldn't really fit with the Montessori program, so they would want to run on a separate school time schedule than would be in a regular elementary school, wherever that may be.

Ultimately — again I will clarify this — I did ask if space was of interest to this group that approached me and my office about this and was told that space was not their number one priority. In fact, the cost of their teachers was, and they wanted to maintain the concept of hiring their own teachers with the Montessori training.

It was a very complicated concept and, ultimately, I should say that, while not exactly the same, the new curriculum will introduce many of the individual learning concepts and experiential type things that are dealt with in Montessori, which I am quite familiar with. As a result, all those pieces put together ultimately brought the decision that we would not entertain the Montessori school as part of a public school program, because it really wasn't conceptually compatible, if I can say it that way.

That said, I took care to answer every letter that came and to provide a letter to the group that approached, and to answer

every parent's letter with a full explanation — which I hope I have articulated here today — as to what the reasons were. It's important that all of those things be addressed, because there was some misunderstanding about that they were just initially looking for some space or they were just initially looking to incorporate the Montessori program into the public school system, and it really wasn't compatible in the request that I got.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Ms. White: I was really lucky in the previous Legislative Assembly to be able to travel as far as Beaver Creek multiple times, and I had the great pleasure of stopping in Burwash Landing. The community of Burwash started talking as far back as 2012, requesting that a school be put in the community. As it stands right now, students in Burwash Landing are picked up by a school bus and they're taken to Destruction Bay. I believe it's 16 kilometres down the road —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. White: I was just corrected by the Member for Kluane.

Regardless, the students are picked up in Burwash and are taken to Destruction Bay. Depending on government employees who are stationed in Destruction Bay, there may or may not actually be children living in the community. The last time I was there, every child who went to school lived in Burwash Landing.

In the last debate we had in the Spring Sitting of 2016, the then-minister said they were in conversations with the Kluane First Nation and the community of Burwash Landing about a school. I just wanted to know the status of that conversation and where we stand, as far as getting a school in Burwash Landing.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I thank you for the question. It also gives me the opportunity to mention, which I think I forgot to mention earlier when I was being asked about some other specific schools, that all of the conversations that our government is having with First Nation governments involve an element of education, whether it is the questions that arose around the Dawson school or the questions that arise around programming in certain schools, whether it's First Nation language elements or the opportunity to deal with the First Nations Education Commission and those other elements. I just want to emphasize that the opportunity is always taken. First of all, the First Nations bring up these issues, and rightly so. The opportunity is always taken to have the broader conversations with Yukon First Nation governments include an education piece.

The concept of a school in Burwash Landing has come up and it is part of the functional space plan. It will end up in that report and ultimately in that plan.

More specifically with respect to the Burwash school question, we have just completed the business case for the concept of a school in Burwash Landing. I know they have less than 10 students — I was going to say eight, but let's go with less than 10 students — right now, but that doesn't mean their concerns are not legitimate.

The business plan has been completed with respect to that particular project, and it has now moved into the capital planning process, which will allow us to address it as it moves through that process. The emphasis is that we are speaking of not only doing this work at the department but speaking with the First Nation governments on lots of education issues, but in particular with respect to schools, and that school and their request.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer and I look forward to the time when I drive through the community and get to check out their brand new school facility. That would be fantastic.

One of the challenges for Education has often been staff housing in communities. I can cite Beaver Creek as saying it was particularly complicated, as the teacher residence was in the school building itself, and that's a really hard separation of home and work. We know there is an ongoing problem where there's just not enough housing. I'm wondering what is being done by the Department of Education to address housing needs and shortages, and sometimes where that housing is within communities.

How do we make sure teachers are housed in the best way possible to allow them to do what they need to do with their jobs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will add to the answer I gave previously on this because I do think it is an incredibly important factor in our being able to recruit the very best teachers and have them — I mean, teachers are such an integral part of communities. They have such a huge responsibility and a huge effect on the lives of our young people. Every single one of us here — and I know that the honourable Member for Takhini-Kopper King said before in this House that every one of us can remember the very best teacher that we ever had and maybe the very worst teacher we ever had as well. But it resonated with me because I think that teachers are such an integral part of the communities, and particularly when you get to a smaller community. Obviously, they affect students every day in school, every day in the City of Whitehorse or Toronto or Fredericton or wherever you may be. But when you get to a small community, those teachers become part of the school community and become part of the larger community. They are involved in community events, et cetera. They are such an important part of what happens.

We want the very best teachers. We want them to go to communities and we want them to stay and develop relationships with kids and have them go through a number of years. I know that the Premier is a former teacher who has very fond memories and knows kids who started when they

were very small and came up through the ranks. You are there for a big chunk of their lives if you are embedded in the community and take the opportunity to stay there and grow roots.

That said, I will also endeavour to say something that the Minister of Highways and Public Works doesn't even know. I have recently written him a note to ask if we could review housing in communities in a broad way, not just Yukon Housing Corporation and not just for Education. I know the Minister of Health and Social Services and I have had conversations about this as well. Housing in communities: Where is it? How much is there? How is it being used? How is it being allocated? Is there a different way or a more accessible way for us to have access to that for members of the government or departments for providing services, whether teachers or others, so that they can have — maybe it's just initial housing — but secure housing; a place to go so that they can get familiar or embedded in a community?

I don't know if that answers the question that has been asked, but it is something that I am asking. I know that other ministers here are asking too. It's not something we have been able to turn our attention to yet. I am sure that the Minister of Highways and Public Works is surprised to hear me say this, but I have written this memo to him very recently, and I hope that we will be able to address it by taking a broader approach perhaps or taking a different lens and maybe reallocating resources. I don't know how many there are. It's a very early stage and we just need to know if there is enough.

If there isn't enough, how are we going to address that? If there is enough, how can it be allocated differently so that we are using every possible option to make sure that the people we are sending to communities to do these important jobs have a place to live, have a place to settle and will hopefully stay?

Ms. White: I think the minister might be interested to do some Hansard searches on what the Member for Klondike had said about being a teacher and housing. Having an infinite amount of time to live within staff accommodations or staff housing in a community like Dawson City or Watson Lake where there is an ability to actually become invested in the community maybe is something that needs to be addressed because it is a system that can inadvertently be abused. Low-cost housing, long-term — even if you are within a school community for a decade, it seems to me that this is a long time to be in subsidized housing. I'll leave that.

The callout system that was being used for substitute teachers for a while there was challenging. It was challenging, I think, for school communities and it was challenging for the substitutes who were being called. Is that system still being used, or are we going on to an individual callback, or how are substitute teachers being reached these days?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: With the support of school administrators, the Department of Education has implemented what's called EasyConnect, an automated system for calling substitute personnel into the Whitehorse schools. It is not in the communities. The new system reduces the amount of time it takes for school administrative staff to call in a substitute

teacher, or sometimes they are EAs and others — for the most part, substitute personnel — while at the same time, it preserves the ability for staff to call in a specific person for a specific assignment, so there are options there.

The Department of Education has conducted training for administrative staff and administrators in the use of EasyConnect, and the system went live at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year.

I concur with the honourable member. I understood that initially there were some glitches in the system, but I am told that they have been worked out and it has been in operation since the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, so we are partway through that.

The school principals were consulted before making the final decision, and the response was overwhelmingly in favour of implementing the EasyConnect. It's an automated system that allows an administrator to program the system to call, and the person who answers first, I understand, has the ability to accept or reject, if they are not able to do the job that day or if they don't want to.

The early lumps, I'm told, have been resolved, although we do continue to monitor it because we want to make sure that it's not just working on behalf of the administrators and the department — although that is important — but we want to make sure that it is user-friendly and actually allowing substitute teachers who put the effort into their own education and to making, sometimes, the career decision to be substitute teachers, making sure that it's working for them and they are getting access to the positions that they choose to take on a given day. With the number of teachers that we have, substitutes are a regular activity at schools across the city and as such, we want to make sure that it's working.

Ms. White: Understanding that it is just kind of coming to the end of its first school cycle, will that program be reviewed, both with substitute teachers and administrators?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Yes, the intention would be to check in. It is being monitored, but to check in to make sure that it works for administrators and that it's working for substitutes as well. I think it's important that both halves — if I can say that — or both pieces of that puzzle are investigated so that it's not just working for one or the other, but it's actually effective.

Ms. White: That's excellent news. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the beautiful things we've seen in the territory, especially in the City of Whitehorse, is the amount of immigrant families who are choosing to move here or are moving here and hopefully are happy to stay. Something that brings is that we have an entirely different spectrum of students than we have had in a number of years past — and those are English language learners, so the ELL students. I was wondering if the minister could tell me how many ELL students are currently in public schools — whether they are elementary schools and high schools. Maybe if it's not too much, if there is a breakdown — for example, I would imagine there are probably more in the Catholic school stream than there would be in the public school stream.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have asked the department officials to get those numbers for me so I can convey them to the honourable member. I don't think the breakdown is terribly difficult. There are ELL students, both at the elementary and high school level, but I wouldn't be able to say what the numbers are with that at the moment.

The Catholic schools versus the other schools — I don't think it's terribly complicated to get those numbers either. But I will endeavour to get those to you.

Ms. White: I appreciate that. It was just more trying to figure out if there were concentrated numbers in certain schools over others — to know that then the programming would be focused more in that school. To be perfectly honest, it would probably make sense that the students were concentrated in one school as opposed to others because of the special requirements for English as a learned language, and just knowing that it has been going on for a number of years now. Is there a way that we're evaluating the programs — whether that's with the students and their families and with the educators? Are we hitting the right notes? Are our students who are coming from other countries who don't speak English — are they integrating well and how is that going? It's probably quite a lovely thing because I bet you the students are learning quite a bit quicker than their parents because the sooner a child starts to learn a second language, the easier the absorption is — so it's just as to whether or not we're sure that the programs are working and whether the community is happy with how that's going.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the comments. I think they clearly articulate the issues the department has and is also concerned about. We will get the numbers for you. I think it is fair to say there are concentrations, although I'm not familiar with some of the other schools. For instance, Vanier has a concentration of ELL students. I know they work carefully and productively with those students so they can make sure. The evaluations that were mentioned in the question — how is it working and are they integrating well — anecdotally, those programs are evaluated. I can also note that supports are provided for the ELL students' integration as needed, as some need more than others, for up to five years. A student coming into the high school program could have supports through the entire year.

It's not to say there aren't challenges there, because there are, but we want to make sure we are looking closely to make sure the goals are being achieved. As has been said in the question, we can have all the good intentions in the world, but if we're not looking to see if we're achieving those goals, it's not as valuable as it could be.

Ms. White: At one point in time, there was an educational assistant program being offered. My question is: Is that course still being offered and, if it is, are individuals who are completing that program being hired by the department to work as full-time education assistants within the Education branch?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The educational assistant certificate program is being funded in this budget to the tune of \$40,000 at Yukon College. We provide funding in partnership — that's

not the entirety of the program — with Yukon College to deliver the program, which has been designed to integrate theory and practice associated with providing support to individuals with exceptionalities in the public school system.

This is a decrease, based on the previously agreed-upon cash flow requirements for the program at Yukon College. I did witness education assistants graduating last weekend at Yukon College. To answer the second part of the question, absolutely, locally educated and trained education assistants who apply for jobs in the education assistant postings at the department are encouraged. It's one of the true benefits of Yukon College and the vast array of training programs that are available there and the contribution they can immediately make to our community.

It sounds like I was impressed at Yukon College last week, Mr. Chair, and I was. There was everything from diploma programs and certificate programs, right to the granting of master's degrees in conjunction with other universities across the country — and including trades.

It was such an array — 32 programs and 150 graduates. I know I am off supporting Yukon College in this answer, but the opportunity is there to do so and, yes, the program should be maintained and locally educated EAs are an important piece of the puzzle. I should also say that the program is being evaluated to make sure that it is actually addressing the needs that we are finding in schools. If it turns out that it doesn't do that, then Yukon College and the department will work together to make sure that this is actually happening because training without meaningful training is not valuable at all.

Ms. White: I appreciate that the minister got to sit through all 150 certificate awards. I learned early on that I am much better served in the parking lot high-fiving the graduates as they go toward the Arts Centre because I don't have the ability to sit still for that long on stage. I found my role, and it involves high-fives, so I appreciate that she sat through that.

Education assistants are superheroes in the education realm. They support the classroom teacher but, more importantly, they — and I liked how the minister said "exceptionalities", because there are really special students in our education system who do require the support of an education assistant. It is through that support that these students thrive.

I am not sure, Mr. Chair, if you have had the opportunity to read the *Education Act*, but it is lovely. It lays out that every student, every learner, should be supported to be the best that they can be. I am paraphrasing. It is quite a bit longer than that, but that is essentially what the intent is.

There was an example — and I am hopeful that there was a successful resolution because we didn't hear back. When there is a student who requires an education assistant, it is more than just having a body in a seat because they have to build up trust and a relationship. Sometimes that EA will follow that student through many years of schooling. They will go through different grades and they will be core support. There was concern in this one instance because, with the support of a very specific EA, this one child started to thrive in a way that they hadn't before. The concern was that it was a

temporary posting because someone was coming back from a maternity leave. It's not to say that I wouldn't want that person to come back to their position, but my concern was that, if we switched up this support in the middle of the school year, the concern from the family was that there would be adverse effects.

I just wanted to know from the minister's perspective and from the department's perspective if there is a way to make sure that, when we have a really good match between an EA and student, and it's working on both sides, there is that continuity of support for the entire school year. How does that get addressed? How can concerns be raised by families? How does the department make sure that they are honouring the *Education Act*, which highlights that every learner will be supported to the best of the department's ability?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Without speaking about a specific case, I guess I want to make sure that I reiterate that, like having professionals go to the same community and form a relationship with that community, it is important that EAs stay in schools if they can and form a relationship with the staff, students and administrators there and form relationships with the teachers they are working with, and most importantly, with the students that they assist. Some EAs are, on occasion, assigned to a particular student — as the member opposite has said — and follow them through. There is intensive support that way. Other EAs are more generally assigned to a class or to a group of students that move between classes and provide support to individual students on an as-needed basis, or to groups of students on an as-needed basis. Every effort is made when it is paramount that the students' interests — it's always in the best interests of the students as the *Education Act* says. Every effort is made to maintain those relationships, but it's not always possible. I won't speak about a particular case because I don't know the details of what the member opposite is speaking, and it's potentially a personnel issue. I guess my answer is to reassure the members of this House that is a serious factor in assignment of EAs and it's not lost on the department that those relationships are critical and that supporting the student is paramount.

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that answer. Understanding that education assistants are so important to classrooms — we have definitely seen a change; even when I went to school, we had one teacher and we had a number of students, so whether we were able to complete the course work was something different. My question is: What is our current number of education assistants within the Department of Education? How many of those positions are auxiliary on call or temporary positions, and how many of them are full-time equivalents?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The allocation of education assistant FTEs for the 2017-18 school year — so incoming in September — is 210 FTEs. That could result in more individuals than 210 because the allocations of how to use those FTE hours or the education assistants is made by the administrators. So a school might have 10 FTEs for our education assistants but they might have 20 people doing half-time jobs — if I can explain it that way.

So the FTEs currently for that intake in September 2017 is 210.

Further requests are coming and assessments continue. Students who might arrive over the summer who need an EA — all of those numbers adjust a bit — I don't want to say "shift" — in the fall once everybody is in place. Obviously it changes throughout the year — if a student suddenly requires the assistance of an EA, or if a class does and it wasn't anticipated before. The allocation that has been made for this year is 210 FTEs.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer. It does make sense that the administration of a school would be the best ones to manage what they required for their assistants.

There was concern raised a number of years ago and I'm hoping that it has changed with new direction, but at one point in time there was opposition to teachers requesting more individual learning plans. The teachers were told that they had a maximum number of individual learning plans that they could have per classroom, so even though there might be seven students who required that, they were only allowed to submit, for example, two. That was challenging because what it meant is that the students' needs weren't being addressed in a way that they should be. I'm thinking — I'm hoping — that at that point, this was a direction and I'm hoping that this direction is changed.

At this point in time, can the minister confirm that any student who requires an individual learning plan will be able to get one, and any student who requires assistance will be able to get that, and that those numbers are not being limited by the Department of Education?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: As has been pointed out already and is certainly well-known to the department officials and me, the *Education Act* requires that we evaluate things in the best interest of the students. There is no practice in the department of limiting individual learning plans or access to EAs. The evaluations are done on a case-by-case basis, and individual students who require assistance should be provided with that assistance. I guess that is where I'll stop. To be clear, there is no sort of artificial number that can be reached in any given classroom.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer and I do appreciate it, because now that it has been vocalized like that here, then hopefully some of those barriers that were up will not be up any longer. I absolutely agree that if we look at the aspirational statements in the *Education Act*, it does say "every student, every learner". I appreciate that and I thank her for that answer.

It was interesting because I have a lot of friends in town who are teachers and a lot of them worked in communities first before they moved into postings in Whitehorse. There is a lot of stress associated in springtime because you didn't necessarily know if you would have a position again. The minister has done a lot of work — especially with the Yukon Teachers' Association — to make sure that the people who had worked for two consecutive years were actually getting permanent positions. I thank her for that and I thank the department for that.

But there is still a stressful time for people who aren't in these permanent positions because, come springtime, you're not actually sure if you're going to stay in the community that you're in, if you're going to be in the school that you're in, or that there's a guarantee you will have work.

We can talk at length about the inability to purchase houses or set down roots or any of those things, but that's beside the point. It seemed to me that this year — because I have friends who don't have those permanent positions again — that those postings came out very late compared to other years. Can the minister tell us if they did come out later than normal and what the reason was, and then if all those positions — it was quite recent, so they probably haven't necessarily gone through the interview process, but can the minister fill us in on that process? Was it later this year and, if so, why?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I'm told that the teacher allocation information went to schools a little bit later this year, between two and three weeks. I can tell you that at least a significant part of that was that the department, our staff and I were learning about the teacher allocation process and the formula and what has been done since 2010 — the opportunity to determine how that formula was going to play out, and ultimately the decision at Cabinet about how that was going to happen. There were 88 personnel hired over the last couple of years without Management Board approval, and frankly there was some difficulty in unravelling that and figuring out exactly what I was learning and what I was prepared to approve, going forward. There was a delay. We hope that will not be the case next year. We will make best efforts to make sure that's not the case.

I appreciate what the member opposite has described as uncertainty. While we would like to achieve certainty in this particular area of the department or employment period, it is an uncertain world. There are lots of teachers; there are considerations with the Yukon Teachers' Association and, while none of these are ultimately responsible for this being a complex and uncertain situation, they are factors, and that's what I want to be clear to say.

The department and the YTA — I don't want to speak for them — but the department encourages leave on behalf of teachers. There is educational leave and there's deferred leave that, in any given year, is taken up by a number of teachers. In addition to that, there is maternity leave, which is a significant factor with a particular population of young professionals, and the department is required to staff a lot of positions around these opportunities for permanent teachers. Many of the temporary teachers begin as temporary teachers in the filling of a leave-type position.

I hope that has answered the question. It was late this year. The responsibility is mine. We won't do that again, but it is always an uncertain situation, I think, to a certain degree when you are not talking about permanent teachers with permanent roots in a community.

Ms. White: I do appreciate the candor of that answer. I thank the minister for that because it's not always easy to say that we are partially responsible, so I thank her. I am hopeful that next year it's a bit sooner, and I'm sure that she and her

department wish the same thing. Have all of the teaching spots been filled for the next school year?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I know the department officials can tell me that, no, that is not the case. I also know that because I have recently been at a number of schools with administration or school councils, and that is an ongoing process. Actually, despite the fact that the allocations were a bit late this year, I am familiar enough with the hiring process to know that it does occur through May and June and often — sometimes — into July, depending on the movement of teachers as well. One of the issues — sometimes even, as an example, in the City of Whitehorse, where there are a number of high schools and you don't think as an administrator that you are going to be filling a post for a chemistry teacher in grade 11, but all of a sudden your past chemistry teacher is moving to another high school and that happens. That's a bit erratic — or uncertain, I think is the way that I should say it.

The other thing that the department encourages is knowledge about retirements, but sometimes the end of the school year brings new decisions about that so there is a filling of those kinds of positions well into the summer. But May and June are not unusual for the hiring process to be taking place during that time. Currently there are a number of vacancies that are actively being pursued by administrators.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that answer. When I had the coffee shop at the Canada Games Centre, one of the things that I got to see was home-schooling groups because it turns out that you don't necessarily want to educate your child in isolation and you want to make sure that they can participate in sporting activities and definitely social activities because we all know that is important. My question right now is: What are the numbers of students who are currently home-schooled? Do we have numbers in Whitehorse and outside of Whitehorse, if that is possible? How is this monitored? How do we make sure that we are supporting parents who are choosing to home-school? How are we supporting students? How does this work?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the opportunity to explain this a bit because it is an interesting option for Yukon families and several of them take advantage of that for various reasons.

The Yukon department in the government is supporting families who choose to home educate their children, and we support them by providing standards for them to do so and resources. The one element of that puzzle is the Aurora Virtual School, which helps home-educated students with planning, with access to distance learning and with funding and resources. The Aurora Virtual School at this time is a bridge between the traditional education system and the home education system. It helps ensure that all Yukoners have access to a variety of options.

There is a home education handbook that supports families and students who choose the option of home education. It's available and outlines the process of creating a home education plan, which is required for each student. It also helps with information about teaching a child at home,

assessments for that work, and the role and resources of the Aurora Virtual School and how they can help.

Home educators can be reimbursed up to \$1,200 per year to cover the purchase of education resources that they may need to complete their children's home education plan, but materials and services are normally provided by parents for students in the public schools, such as pencils — and we talked a bit about school supplies and those kinds of things — so they're not eligible outside of the \$1,200 annually. As other schools in the Yukon, the school supplies were supplied last year, so we'll make sure that notification about that program not continuing goes to those families.

A number of things support those families. I had the pleasure of meeting not too long ago with a group of parents, because they are very well-organized. While they do individual home learning plans for their students, they do a lot of cooperative activities, including when the Minister of Community Services and I were at the bridge-building contest this year. There was a contingent of home-school families who did very well. Their bridge was solid, and they were very excited to be a part of that larger group of students who came forward from all over the territory with their bridges to test.

In answer to the question about how many — generally the information I have here is that there are approximately 60 students being home-schooled across the territory, the vast majority in the Whitehorse area, with a handful of others outside. They are primarily between grades 1 and 6, although the parents I met with did have some older children at the grade 7 level. They explained to me that they often want their child to go to a school situation for part of a term or for particular courses, and then maintain other courses at home, or sometimes they want to go to school full-time at that age level for the social activities and for the educational opportunities and the classes with larger groups of kids — those kinds of things.

That's the way the program works at this time. I should also emphasize that courses are taken by the home-schoolers through the Aurora education. They are supported through that process, but the courses are also paid for by the department.

Ms. White: In one community that I was visiting, I actually had the good fortune of sitting next to the valedictorian for last year's graduating class. He actually flagged concerns about the Aurora Virtual School in communities because he said it was fine for kids like him who were able to keep up, but for students who struggled, with only having one adult in the room — and he used the term "adult" — so I'm not even sure if he was referencing a teacher. But he said that for those who weren't able to keep up, they struggled, and that meant that their attendance dropped and that they would be out and about in the community.

How is the success of the Aurora Virtual School being evaluated? It's one thing for the schools to say it's working great, but how do we make sure that the students who are accessing the programs have the ability to say, "Well, actually it didn't work for me because I actually needed more help and

I couldn't get the help because it wasn't available." How do we make sure that the Aurora Virtual School, when it is being used in community schools, is fulfilling the purpose that it was designed for?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I guess there are a few pieces to this puzzle. There are course completions and the passing of those courses monitored by the Aurora Virtual School, but I don't think that is what the honourable member is asking. It may be that the reference is to Moodle, which is programming that should be used in classrooms, in communities, but with the assistance of teachers and that may also be a piece of that puzzle, but I am not sure of the specifics that are being of concern.

I guess I want to say, in addition to that, that any concern that a student would have about how they are being served by the Aurora Virtual School should be brought to the attention of the department — to the school first and then ultimately to the department, if that is of concern.

I had many of the questions that have been mentioned here today, and I have asked for an assessment of the Aurora Virtual School to make sure that, particularly when we are looking at the cost and whether or not we are actually achieving what we want to be achieving with that particular program. There are a number of ways for people to access it. One is to have the virtual school assist them in distance learning courses and having access to those.

Another is for them to actually attend online portions of courses there. We want to make sure that we are providing the service that is needed in the community, so an assessment will be done of that.

I'm not sure that answered the question specifically, because I'm not sure of the concern, but please bring it to our attention if it's a specific case. We can do that.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I will. I can send an e-mail off. I'm totally aware of the time and am hopeful that Education will come back up, but I also understand that we have many other departments.

One of my favourite topics in the Department of Education is immigration. I want to start off first — this isn't so much for the minister because this isn't so much under her watch, but I definitely want to reiterate to the department of Advanced Education that I really appreciate some of the actions that have been taken with the nominee program. I know numerous people who have entered Canada under the nominee program and have been on-site when there has been a site visit, and that didn't happen before. That has been a really important change and I do appreciate it.

I have recently been involved in a nominee application before I was told about them, but I got to recently take part. One of the concerns I have is — if you go through the *Yukon Nominee Program Application Handbook*. Keeping in mind that I'm an English-first speaker — my first language is English — I can tell you that, at times, I struggled through this. There are such things as having to take proficiency exams in English, which I do appreciate. I find it fascinating that people who have English as their first language, although they're coming from countries like Great Britain, Scotland or

Australia, are also having to take the language test. I find that fascinating.

One of the concerns I have is that all the documentation — and I appreciate that all the documentation that is required for an application must be notarized. I'm not sure if anyone in the department has ever made phone calls, but I can tell you the average cost for a signature for a notarized copy is \$10. To give the House an idea, a Canadian passport has 48 pages, and when a nominee submits their application, they need every page copied and notarized, so that would be 24 copies and 24 signatures required for a Canadian passport to be notarized. Education documents need to be notarized, health documents need to be notarized, and I appreciate all that. We want to make sure we're not committing fraud. I do appreciate that.

I think, at a point in time, it might be worthwhile to contact previous employers who have utilized a nominee program and previous nominees to ask if they have any feedback — now that you're safely in the country, do you have any feedback about how the program worked?

I'm just putting that out there because I saw all sorts of barriers that I didn't realize existed. I was invited to a meeting at the Department of Education by the previous minister where I was told that the nominee program is an economic program. I did raise my concerns at that point, because we, as the Yukon government, have a responsibility to the people who are coming in under this.

It may be an economic program to start off with, but we do also have the expectation that, within three to six months of being accepted in the nominee program, people are going to apply for permanent residency. In my mind, it may be an economic program, but it is also an immigration program and we have a responsibility.

Some of those concerns have been addressed. I do want to make sure I say that I appreciate that some of the concerns I raised previously have been addressed, but I still have concerns.

It says the wait times can vary quite a lot — I believe from 12 to 15 weeks. My question right now — I have a couple of questions about the nominee program. What is the processing time right now for current applications? Is there a ballpark? What is the current number of applications that are being processed by the department? What is the current number of successful nominees in the territory? Can we get an idea of how many job site visits there were? Is that per nominee or is that for job placement? I would like just a bit more information that way.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will deal with the first part of the commentary by the honourable member — I would agree with her. We want to remove barriers. Let's start there. We do have notaries at the department, and we might need to get better at deciding whether or not they could be notarizing documents for people who are coming to this application process with the kinds of problems that are pretty practically and easily solved, I would say. I will make those requests and we will talk to the department about that.

I should also say that I am a notary, and I have never, ever charged anyone anything to sign a document because I

think it is a responsibility — but that's another story. Whether I can sign those applications is another question altogether.

To move on from that, I will say that the Yukon nominee program is intended to help Yukon employers fill vacant positions with foreign workers when no qualified Canadians or permanent residents are available to fill those jobs. Under no circumstances is the Yukon nominee program meant to replace or displace Canadians or permanent residents from jobs or training. We're committing to take the actions that are necessary, including notarizing documents if at all possible, to maintain the integrity of the Yukon nominee program.

I do have some of the numbers that — let me just make sure I understand what I'm saying — are requested, but not the specifics. I don't have the ballpark on the wait time. If the honourable member thinks 12 to 15 weeks, I will determine whether that is in fact the case. You have asked about processing time, which we may have for you. I will give you that information. The current applications in line and the successful applicants in the territory and job site visits are all things I will need to return with those answers.

The processing time for approved and refused applications, I have up to 2016. In 2013, it was taking about 110 days. It reduces over 2014-15 and, in 2016, it looks like the average was 60 days — so less, I suppose. It could be up to 60 days, although I don't have numbers for 2017. Those are the kinds of determinations, or answers, that we can provide following.

The other piece of information that I can provide today is that, in January 2015, express entry was introduced by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada as a new way of managing the entry of skilled workers into Canada and was intended to create a fast, flexible and economic immigration system. In March 2015, the department launched a new stream within the Yukon nominee program called "Yukon express entry". It mirrors the federal program. To qualify, candidates must be eligible for at least one of the following three federal programs: the federal skilled worker program, the Canadian experience class, or the federal skilled trades program. The Yukon express entry — under the YEE, the department assesses candidates against the federal requirements and approved candidates have a greater likelihood of being approved by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada process when they apply for permanent residency.

The IRCC increased the number of annual nominations that could be here in the Yukon by 60 for YEE candidates, bringing the annual allocation for all Yukon nominee program streams to 250. To date, seven people have been nominated through the Yukon Express Entry — one from Germany, two from India, one from Nigeria, one from Switzerland, one from the US, and one from Croatia, for a grand total of seven. The other numbers, we will provide.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I am happy to just get the numbers. I am just curious. It is something that I have been paying fairly close attention to. Again, I just want to reiterate that I appreciate the work within the department because there have been big changes. I am not having people call any more about fear of their ability to stay, about horrible

things that are happening with their employers. So that has been addressed, and I want to say thank you because that is a huge thing.

I am going to put on the record that I will have questions about YuWIN the next time the officials are in the House.

Seeing the time, Mr. Chair, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. White that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. McPhee that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Mr. Hutton: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 201, entitled *First Appropriation Act, 2017-18*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole. Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:25 p.m.