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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2015

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier's overhaul of school governance

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier.

When did you decide that you were going to launch your overhaul of the school governance program?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I just need to be sure what – the question referred to a school governance program?

So I assume the Leader of the Opposition is referring to the changes that were announced in early November? That work started after the session closed this past spring and summer with some exploratory considerations and the work was completed by early November, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier. Your campaign platform this spring floated the idea that these district advisory councils – was your plan to blow up the English school board on the back of your mind while doing so or after your government implemented or attempted to fire 35 teachers this spring?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: There are a number of premises to that question, of course, with which I don't concur. But let me do my best to answer the core of the question, which is whether, when the district councils were announced as part of our platform, it was our intention at that time to make the changes that were made to the English Language School Board.

The answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, is no.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier's commitment to elected school boards

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier. Back during your platform you committed to elected school boards. Did you ever really plan to follow through on that promise if you were already planning to blow up the board?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, since that phrase has been repeated twice, let me say that what took place in early November is that we asked a single trustee to take the place of the existing English Language School Board and for that to lead through a transitional process which, as members will know, will go through until approximately May of 2016.

So I don't think there's any part of that that I would call blowing up anything. What we're doing is making changes that will allow parents and teachers and learners to work together to have a better school system that's focused on the outcomes for the learner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

EELC minister's knowledge of school board plan

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Question to the Premier: When did you first let the education minister know of your plan in regards to the school boards?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't quite work that way when you're developing initiatives in government.

The minister is very much a part of it, as was our deputy minister who assumed her office shortly after the first of July. As for various others in government who discussed these things including, I might say, reflecting on some of the discussion back and forth across the floor in the spring and summer session of the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Caucus and school board plan

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier: How much discussion did you have with your caucus about the plan before you announced it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there would be discussions in both Cabinet and caucus leading up to the November announcement.

But just to clarify the previous question, the way things work when new initiatives are being developed in government, they get developed through officials, through discussions, and then they get brought to the Premier for my consideration and direction, or my agreement to proceed in that direction. It's at that stage that you have those discussions with Cabinet and with caucus.

So that's exactly how it goes. It's not that the Premier shows up and tells everybody what their marching orders are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Cabinet education ministry experience

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to point out that in the previous government in that Cabinet, you have over four caucus members over there that had

previous education minister experience. Four of them. How much were they involved in that process or how much confidence did you bestow on what experience they had in bringing forth these decisions?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I have confidence in all members of our caucus.

I'm very happy to take their advice and work in a fashion that's collaborative and to lead the team in that way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Advice from advisory councils

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Staying on the seam of education here I have a couple of questions to the education minister. Based on the department information that we've been able to obtain so far, there's probably about 220 people that are going to sit on advisory committees reporting to you.

Question to the minister: If you weren't prepared to take advice from 12 school board members, what are the chances you're willing to take advice from 220 people?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What's great about this is that our focus now is on our learner and on our student. We're going to take all our resources and put them together. Instead of working separately, we're all going to work together to help our students.

We have many people now that will be involved in these councils providing information to shape the future of education system on Prince Edward Island and we're very happy to move forward in a very collaborative and engaging effort with the

community, with all stakeholders, to help our students achieve and to prosper.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Selection of advisory council representatives

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, 220 people on an advisory committee is a lot of people. I mean anybody who sat on a community board anywhere on Prince Edward Island that had eight or nine people knows how hard it is to get your voice heard amongst eight or nine people. I don't know how you'd ever expect 220 people to get a clear voice to government.

Question to the minister: Have you figured out yet how you will select these 220 people to advise you?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been mentioned many times in here before and I'll say it again. Our selection process for the family of schools district council will be made up of a parent or representative from a parent organization, within the school, also from two high school students within that family of schools, and the regional rep for the home and school association.

Each school will have representation, each family of schools will have representation on them, and the selection process for the principals obviously will be the principal of each school.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

French language learners and advisory council numbers

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the minister was on the floor for the *School Act* bill here he mentioned to the House that he planned to have a seat at the table for the French language learners.

Question to the minister of education: How many extra bodies will this add to your council of 220?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're very proud to engage both the English and French on the Island. We will have someone representing the French Language School Board on the learning partners. We'll also have representation with the district of families advisory and on the principals' council. We want their active participation. Their information is very valuable, as where our focus is on the learner, whether it be English or French.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Adding the French learners voice seemed to be an afterthought that actually came because the opposition here was questioning why you weren't doing it right here on the floor of the Legislature.

Can you tell the House why the French language learners were an afterthought?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

They were absolutely not an afterthought. We, on this side, would never consider our French language to be an afterthought. We included them from the very beginning. There are conditions that we cannot bring them in the same way as the English Language School Board, but we are engaging them. They do have a seat on the learning partners advisory and they're more than welcome to sit on our other councils.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Teachers on advisory councils

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So we're on the topic of who has a seat at these councils. We've heard that principals will have a seat, we've heard that schools will have a seat, which means parents will have a seat, and students will have a seat. I've yet to hear that teachers will have a seat.

Question to the minister: We know that on the council of 220 there will be principals, but what about the regular teachers in the classroom? Why do you not make room for them to have a seat?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is trying to give the impression that we're going to have this big council of 220 people in the room trying to give direction. That's not how it works.

Each school will have representation and they will meet and they will forward their asks to me. I will also be meeting with each family of schools district advisory councils at least once a year personally.

The teachers will have a voice, they do have representation. Someone from the teachers' federation will be sitting on the Learning Partners Advisory Council to represent the teachers. I know the opposition says they're only there for union work, but now today he's saying: Who's going to represent the teachers and why didn't we ask the teachers' federation? We did ask the teachers' federation. A rep will be sitting on that Learning Partners Advisory Council.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't talk about the teachers' federation at all, I talked about regular teachers who don't have a voice at the table, who don't have a seat at the table. We have schools right across Prince Edward Island that are going to be represented locally by students, locally by principals, locally by parents, but not locally by teachers, if you can imagine. The very front lines, the people who have the frontline experience delivering education in this province, do not have a seat at any council of the 220.

Mr. Trivers: Shame, shame!

Mr. Myers: Question to the minister: Isn't this a worthwhile avenue to have teachers at these tables?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the principals' council principals are the instructional leaders of their schools. They will represent the teachers. We also have the teachers' federation represented on the Learning Partners Advisory Council. We know how important it is to hear from our frontline and that's why we have these organizations and individuals represented well.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't feel like the teachers are well represented at all at the local level because you're not giving any teacher a chance to have a voice and it's something that teachers have been crying for. If you've been listening to the debate of the Legislature here for the past four years you would know that teachers are frustrated because they don't feel like they're listened to. Again, you've set up a whole system where they won't be listened to.

EAs on advisory councils

There are many learners in our schools that struggle with learning disabilities and

special needs. These learners rely heavily on educational assistants.

Question to the minister: Where's the voice for EAs on your council of 200?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

EAs have a very important role to play in our education system and we value their role. In fact, this year we put in more positions, eight full-time equivalents back in, to help our frontlines and to help our students learn, to help our students achieve. They will have a voice again through the parents of the students that have special needs or need some assistance in the classroom on the family of schools district advisory council. They will also have representation on the principals' council with the CEO of their school.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

School rezoning

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A major part of our planned overhaul here for education for our schools is rezoning. Minister of education: When will you begin the rezoning business?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, rezoning has been an issue. It's something that we have committed to look into, something that the English Language School Board has committed to look into and build policy upon. We'll integrate their policy with the work that we've done within our department moving forward to make sure that rezoning is a priority within our education system.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister struggled this whole session to answer questions, just the simplest questions, on his department. Teachers, parents and students want some answers.

Question to the minister: What timeline do you have to start rezoning and what is the date of completion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The transition team is in place and we're moving forward. We are getting input from everyone at this time and this process does take some time. As your member from Morell said the other night, don't rush into things. Make sure when you do it, do it right, take your time.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're assuming the minister does have a plan. Each day Islanders learn something new about this proposed plan, or lack thereof of a plan.

Question to the minister: Will the rezoning process begin in January with the new advisory councils?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We definitely do have a plan. Our plan is to engage Islanders in the process of developing an education system that is focused on our learners, on student achievement, and excellence in education. We are starting that with the development of new advisory councils which will bring in the input that we need and the direction that we need to shape our education system to help our students achieve.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear again that there is a plan. I'm sure you're going to collaborate on that plan. Could you explain the outline that you have that you are giving to the advisory council, or you're collaborating with the advisory council, on rezoning?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we've had hundreds of questions on education this session. We've always had an answer for them. We do have a plan. It has been endorsed by the opposition.

I'm not sure what their point is here today with getting specific timelines, but we do have a transition team in place. I'm very confident of the experience and the knowledge that they have that they will carry this through in the most effective way possible.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad there is a plan. I'm sorry that we're asking for a timeline. I don't think it's too much to ask. We're going into the Christmas season, there is going to be a break. The advisory councils are set up for January. We do need to have a plan. We would like to know the details.

School rezoning and buses

To the minister. Part of the rezoning process will be buses and rezoning the buses. Can you explain to me what the travel times will be like and will they increase with the rezoning?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we have our advisory councils up and running they will give us the much-needed input and they can share their concerns with us so we can, again, develop a better strategy for transportation and for rezoning for our Island students.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So there is no plan.

Question, again, to the minister. The buck stops with you, minister, on all issues regarding education. What are your recommendations? What recommendations will you be giving to the advisory councils about rezoning and about bus rezoning?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our plan is to work in a collaborative effort making sure that we hear from all stakeholders. Now is an opportunity for our parents, for our community, for our students, and for our educators to address these concerns, to give us some input. We can put the question to them, they will give us what they think we should – what direction we need to take, and we take all of their advice and we'll make decisions at that time.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to hear the word collaborate. I was going to be disappointed if I didn't hear it today when I asked the questions before we recess sometime.

I'm hearing from Islanders that six-year-olds could be on the bus for an hour-and-a-half, two hours. It's a big concern.

Minister, can you give me some kind of indication about your plan and whether bus routes will be longer or shorter?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, that is a challenge that maybe some students may see. If you have a particular student that is on the bus for an hour-and-a-half, please let me know. I would like to hear from them personally and see what I can do to help them out.

But in the meanwhile, we are working, again, in the transition team. We have our advisory councils that will meet in January. This information will be a question I can actually put to them myself, to ask them for input, and we will develop a plan, a strategy, to help alleviate some of these pressures and some of these challenges that our Island students face.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Advisory council actions

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Fairly confusing roadmap as we move forward. I hope the advisory councils, although I've heard they know – the prospective members know less than I do.

So, moving forward, how can appointed advisory councils who are on these boards do something an appointed board couldn't do? You've had an appointed board before. Now we've got an advisory council board. Can you explain to me how this is going to be different and how you're going to collaborate with them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a great opportunity for all stakeholders, as I said many times, to have an opportunity to speak regarding their own particular schools, their own challenges that they have within these schools or challenges that students – whether it be their students or someone else's students, depending on the

perspective – that we can develop a system of education to – better than the system that we have now moving forward by doing it, again – and I won't disappoint you – collaboratively because we are a government that believes in listening to people, taking their input, and shaping the future of the education system on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Primary care facilities and health providers

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Liberal Party platform in the most recent election stated its support for primary care facilities to be established utilizing health providers such as nurse practitioners. Exactly such a clinic has been proposed for Crapaud where the local GP, Dr. Hank Visser, has announced his intention to retire over the next few years.

Can the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services give this House an update on the proposal, please?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Government is very committed. In our mandate letter it's clearly stated that two of our seven initiatives – one is enhancing primary health care in the Province of Prince Edward Island and two is strengthening rural health care as well.

I'm very familiar with Dr. Visser who has presented an exceptional proposal. We have currently given direction to Health PEI to add four nurse practitioners to the complement of nurse practitioners which currently sits at 14. We're working with the group from Crapaud looking at ways that we can be cost-neutral, looking at ways that we can continue to be part of a broader conversation as we continue to enhance

primary health care, which is being worked on currently as we speak.

Very pleased. Have to be very conscientious of the fiscal, but an exceptional model and we hope to be successful in the near future.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, first supplementary.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, can I speak to that ministerial statement?

Crapaud clinic

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The community of Crapaud is considering financing renovations to a community-owned building in order to accommodate this facility, and budgets drawn up by the proponents of this clinic show that not only will it be revenue-neutral but it could save the government money by removing 500 patients from the waiting list, moving to adjunctive providers such as nurse practitioners, and reducing emergency visits at our hospitals.

I have over 800 signatures here from residents of the south shore area in support of the establishment of such a health clinic. A question to the minister: What more do the people of the Crapaud area have to do in order to make this clinic a reality?

Mr. Aylward: Elect a Liberal MLA.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As we look at the future of sustaining the provincial health care system, primary health care will be a pillar of a health care system that provides timely and appropriate access by the right provider in the right situation at the right time.

Very respectful of the question from the Leader of the Third Party. We did meet with the Leader of the Third Party, with the committee from Crapaud. We really like the model that's being presented. We recognize that Dr. Visser has a very large practice and is very much engaged. I really respect the

fact that this is a model that shows innovation and a model that is sustainable in the area.

We currently are working with Treasury Board, we're currently working with Health PEI, to look at making sure that we're effective and we're cost-neutral, to make sure that this will be part of a broader, sustainable primary health care model for the province.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, second supplementary.

Community-based clinics

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the department have other plans for expanding these sorts of community-based, multi-disciplinarian health care clinics across rural Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

When we came into government in 2007 the nurse practitioner was not very common in communities. Since then we've built primary health care networks. We're currently at approximately 14 nurse practitioners. We're working with the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island. We currently have a Master Agreement which is part-and-parcel to conversations in building these models. We have some very successful models, but we see this as a model to provide timely access to health care professionals. It continues to build on our commitment to expanding the scope of practice, whether it be with the nurse practitioners, whether it be with pharmacists, whether it be with paramedics.

So yes, very committed, and this will be the way of health care delivery into the future, particularly in rural Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Bloomfield roundabout

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. I've raised the issue here in the House several times about the need for a roundabout at the intersection at Bloomfield corner.

This is a busy intersection and scene of many accidents. Unlike other communities that were opposed to a roundabout in their area, our community welcomes the installation of a roundabout at Bloomfield corner intersection.

Minister, will a roundabout be constructed at Bloomfield corner intersection?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I'm very familiar with that particular corner being from West Prince area myself, and it's a busy commercial area as well as a lot of traffic on that main highway. Our engineers have been up and looked at the area. Are aware that it's an area of concern for the community in general. We're looking at a number of different options that we feel may work there, but we will be going back out to the community and discussing that with the landowners in the area and the residents in the area.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, first supplementary.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Could you put a timeline on that, on when they'll be going out and when the construction will actually begin on the roundabout?

Mr. Myers: Tell them you want one by spring.

An Hon. Member: They're not very good (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: February 2016, it worked for us.

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Murphy: Madam Minister, could you put a timeline to that project, please?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our department has done a lot of different roundabouts across Prince Edward Island. They're very unique in a number of designs. During our TAC conference that was here we had a variety of engineers from across Canada who had an opportunity to go out and look at our rural areas. Our urban roundabouts were showcased while they were here. We have done a lot of great design work around roundabouts as part of our Road to Zero.

Mr. Aylward: Just looking for a timeframe.

Ms. Biggar: Engineering design, safety's very important.

Mr. Myers: That's the last (Indistinct).

Ms. Biggar: We will be working on the plans as I had noted and we'll come back out to the community we hope in the early new year to start discussions with what options might work best in that particular busy area of the highway. We will not be doing anything until we discuss it with the community.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Amalgamation and role of CLE minister

Mr. Gallant: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

We have heard many times in this House of the proposed amalgamation of various communities across Prince Edward Island. My District of Evangeline-Miscouche has also been engaged in these discussions.

Can the minister give an overview of his role and the role of government in these amalgamations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I certainly appreciate the question.

As the hon. member mentioned, his community and the Miscouche area are working towards discussions, and in fact I did have the opportunity to sit and speak with members of that council.

I know they are very engaged in their community and are fully aware of the Thompson report that said 73 municipalities of Prince Edward Island are not sustainable or cannot be viable into the future.

Of course, that covers only 30% of PEI's landmass. We know that these discussions have to take place. I as minister, and my department of municipalities, are willing to discuss with these municipal leaders any information or any questions that are concerns that they have.

I know that the federation is also doing a lot of work. It was mentioned in the *Guardian* last week that the federation is looking at putting forward – forming a toolbox to help in these areas. I as minister and my department will assist in any way with the federation on that issue.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, first supplementary.

Amalgamation timeline

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Supplementary question to the same minister. I believe there are many more important discussions needed around this topic, and I have been approached by some constituents who are worried that this process could be fast-tracked within the next two years.

Will the minister update this House on the potential timeline for these amalgamations?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much.

I can assure the hon. member that this is not a fast-track process that we are dealing with here in regards to municipalities amalgamating or forming larger regions. This is not an overnight process. This will take time, although interest and focus on this has become heightened a little more since the spring election of this year. But the reality is the Thompson report was released in 2010, written in 2009, and communities have been working towards this since around the 2010 level. Some have been in talks and negotiations for well over a year and a half.

This is certainly not a fast process, but we will work with all municipal leaders and all communities of incorporated areas that have questions or concerns to help them to deal with the process of regionalization.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, second supplementary.

Amalgamation process and Island voices

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has stated that ideally this will happen with communities working together and taking the lead on these initiatives. I also imagine there are some that are not interested in partaking in these discussions at all.

My question: What will the minister do to ensure that voices of every Islander in our rural communities that are facing potential amalgamation are heard during this process?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Since becoming minister of the department I have had many conversations with municipalities and the unincorporated areas in discussions of how the process will work.

As I said, it's not a fast process. It's one that we will continue to work with these areas on. We understand that there will be a sense

of fear and possible resistance from some areas, but we will work in a very collaborative way to bring forward all pieces of information that we know should be put forward. It'll be as open and transparent as possible, and the department is quite willing to sit and work with any communities as they (Indistinct) further discussion in this area, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Student enrolment

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a question to the minister responsible for education. When the minister tied to cut teachers this June one of his reasons was that enrollment had dropped by 300. When he reversed himself in July he said new enrollment figures showed an increase of 120. Now, just the other day, government announced new enrollment figures saying it was down 271.

Why are you all over the pond on how many students are in Island schools?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

We're not all over the place with our students. There is a process in place. Our numbers are given to us by the English Language School Board and we waited for those confirmed numbers. When they were confirmed we released them.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A supplementary question, Now that the English Language School Board is gone and the minister and the Premier have eliminated it, you are now taking charge of the school system and I hope you'll have a better handle on how many students you're responsible for.

Minister, do you have any plans in your new vision to get a more accurate picture on student enrollment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, there is a process in place. Our old system wasn't working. We were all working in separate silos to help ensure that our students learn. This way we're taking all our resources, we're combining our resources, to help ensure that our students achieve.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another question for the minister of education: Now that the school board is gone, how will your department collect consistent data on student enrollment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Mr. Speaker, the school board still exists.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Really, the question is now that you're doing away with the school board, how will your department collect consistent data on student enrollment, but since you don't want to answer that question I'll ask another one.

Student enrolment number shift

First the enrollment was down 300, then it was up 20, then it was down 271. That's a lot of change over a short few months. What do you think is causing these big shifts?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's always projection of what the potential enrollment numbers are, but we don't want to make any decisions until we have confirmed numbers. That's why this fall we waited until the numbers were confirmed by the English Language School Board, what the official numbers were for the enrolment of the 2015-2016 school year.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: To the minister of education: Are we seeing a spike in the number of students enrolled in private schools and going down the home schooling path right now?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Mr. Speaker, I think we're staying on par with those numbers at this time.

I think it's great that there's options on the Island for parents who either want to home school their children or send their students to either a private or one of our public school systems on the Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Class sizes

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to switch gears a little bit, although this is another question for the minister of education.

In the official opposition we believe that a key tenet of open and transparent government should be open data and class sizes are a great example of data that should be readily available. But because it's not, I need to ask this next question.

Will the minister please table all individual class sizes broken down by school for the Legislature and Island taxpayers to access?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's great that the opposition are asking many questions on education. They know that education is important on Prince Edward Island, and I'm very thankful to the opposition for endorsing our new system that we're approaching.

We will get that information for you and I will make sure that you have it in your hands.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Classroom caps (further)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the minister of education: Can the minister tell the House when he plans to introduce caps on class sizes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Caps in our classroom has been brought to my attention on a couple of occasions. There are people that are for it, there are also others that are against it. But this is an opportunity now, with the formation of our advisory councils, to have input from all stakeholders so that they can discuss this issue and we can make a decision afterwards.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, just wanted to clarify to the minister, we're not talking about baseball caps here, we're talking about caps on class sizes.

Last week in the House the minister indicated that he supported capping class sizes, something that we campaigned on, especially in the early grades. Again, you

can work in your collaboration with the advisory councils, but will the minister commit to bringing in legislation to make this change?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am committed to listening to Islanders, to listening to everyone, to help shape a better education system that will help our students on Prince Edward Island achieve and I'm committed to that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, your final question.

EELC remaining in Holman building

Mr. Trivers: This is again to the minister of education.

Minister of education, will you confirm that the department of education facility and the people located in the Holman building are not being moved back to Charlottetown as a centralization of services with the elimination of the English Language School Board?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have no intentions of moving the department of education from Summerside back to Charlottetown.

Thank you.

Speaker: That ends Question Period.