

# PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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## Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development

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**DATE OF HEARING:** 18 OCTOBER, 2017

**MEETING STATUS:** PUBLIC

**LOCATION:** LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

**SUBJECT:** BRIEFING ON RED FOX DESIGNATION AS PEI PROVINCIAL ANIMAL; UPEI STUDENT UNION

**COMMITTEE:**

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, Leader of the Third Party  
Jordan Brown, MLA Charlottetown-Brighton  
Kathleen Casey, MLA Charlottetown-Lewis Point  
Bush Dumville, MLA West Royalty-Springvale [Chair]  
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque  
Hon. Robert Mitchell, Minister of Communities, Land and Environment  
Steven Myers, MLA Georgetown-St. Peters

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Chris Palmer, MLA Summerside-Wilmot

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Hon. Jamie Fox, Leader of the Opposition

**GUESTS:**

Montague Consolidated School (Alex Beck, Connor Cheverie, Meadow Papp, Isaiah Williams);  
UPEI Student Union (Taya Nabuurs, Colin Trewin)

**STAFF:**

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research and Committees)



The Committee met at 10:00 a.m.

**Chair (Dumville):** We'll call our meeting to order and first I'll ask for the adoption of the agenda.

**Ms. Casey:** So moved.

**Chair:** Moved by Kathleen Casey, thank you.

This morning we have a briefing on the designation of the red fox as a provincial animal and I welcome the students from Ms. Edwina Arbuckle's grade 5-6 class from Montague Consolidated High. There are 31 of you here today so we won't be able to name you all, but I will name our presenters.

Our presenters are Connor Cheverie, Meadow Papp, Alex Beck and Isaiah Williams.

I welcome you here today, our presenters and the entire class. Although I can't introduce you today, we'll record your names in our minutes so you will be duly recorded as being here today and I welcome you. It's always wonderful when we can have students like yourselves; our future leaders, to be here with us today. We'll try to be on our best behaviour in front of you today.

For committee members, you'll notice on your desk the clerk and I, we have 15 topics that are on our agenda now. We're a little concerned in regards to – we have two meetings today and we're trying to get through these topics, but I'd like you to give some consideration to, if we could prioritize these topics in terms of probably doing a better job of completing our reports. We think we're possibly getting spread a little too thin. We can deal with this new business this morning if we have time. If we don't have time this morning, we can deal with it in new business this afternoon.

I thank you all for bearing with us, having two meetings today. It's because of some of these presenters that we have to get in and get through our agenda.

Richard Brown will be subbing for Chris Palmer later in the day and I'd also like to welcome the hon. Jamie Fox as a guest

MLA here with us today. He is the Leader of the Opposition.

With having said that, just to our presenters, I'll shortly ask you to do your presentation and you can go through your presentation. Just relax and enjoy it. We appreciate you being here today and showing interest on our Island, and your thoughts, so you can do it one or two ways. Would you like to have the committee members ask any clarification during your presentation, or would you like to just go through your presentation and then possibly answer some questions after?

**Connor Cheverie:** Just to go through and answer after.

**Chair:** Do you know how long your presentation is? Have you run through it before?

**Connor Cheverie:** Kind of. We've kind of run through it. It shouldn't take that long. Like five or seven minutes.

**Chair:** All right. Normally, in the past when we have other presenters, we usually allow a half an hour so that if your presentation is 10 or 15 minutes, we allow 10 or 15 minutes for questions.

**Connor Cheverie:** Okay.

**Chair:** The floor is all yours.

**Connor Cheverie:** Thank you.

**Chair:** I just forgot, before you speak, this is being recorded so would you just say your name before you speak, each one of you, so our recording people will know who is doing the talking?

**Connor Cheverie:** Okay.

**Chair:** All right. The floor is all yours.

**Connor Cheverie:** The presentation won't open.

**Clerk Assistant (R. Reddin):** Do you have a USB?

**Connor Cheverie:** Yes I do.

Do we say our name every time we start talking?

**Unidentified Voice:** The first time.

**Isaiah Williams:** I'm Isaiah Williams.

Why the red fox should be PEI's provincial animal, presented to the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development.

Did you know Prince Edward Island does not have a provincial animal?

**Alex Beck:** In Canada, six provinces and one – oh sorry. Alex Beck.

In Canada, six provinces and one territory have adopted animals as symbols. Prince Edward Island is one of the provinces which to date has not. Some of the provinces are Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, Manitoba and British Columbia.

As students of Montague Consolidated and Montague Intermediate schools, we are proposing Prince Edward Island declare the red fox as our provincial animal.

**Connor Cheverie:** The red fox has contributed to PEI's history. In the early days fox fur helped put Prince Edward Island on the world map. Even today, the Island is internationally recognized for the marketing of high-quality fox pelts.

To celebrate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary; the fox is such a recognizable and important part of our history that it is even found on the provincial coat of arms.

**Alex Beck:** The fox on PEI is most commonly red in colour like our flag, Anne of Green Gables, and our red soil. The crafty red fox is also visible everywhere on PEI from license plates, companies and merchandise.

**Connor Cheverie:** The attractive and friendly red fox; most Islanders can tell a story about seeing a red fox. If we as Islanders are delighted by the sighting of a red fox, then you can be sure tourists also find them intriguing.

Did you know in the year 2014, we had 1.3 million tourists visit our Island?

**Unidentified Voice:** And that number is still growing.

**Isaiah Williams:** The red fox is a natural part of Island wildlife.

**Alex Beck:** The adaptable red fox; indigenous to PEI, the fox has a reputation as one of the most intelligent land animals in the world. As Islanders, we should appreciate their quiet nature and adaptability to changing habits and our growing, diversified Island environment.

The curious gentle fox, a clever survivor; the red fox shares life in our towns and cities, as well as the countryside. Healthy foxes pose no danger and are able to care for themselves without human help. Maintaining respect for the red fox as a wild animal means allowing them to adapt naturally. Remember: Do not feed foxes.

**Isaiah Williams:** Part of our culture and heritage, the red fox is part of our Island life and the youth of PEI, the future promoters of our culture and heritage. We are asking the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development to request PEI Legislature amend the *Provincial Emblems and Honours Act* naming the red fox Prince Edward Island's provincial animal in 2017, the year we will be remembering Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a nation.

The red fox, our spirit animal. Study of the red fox has been integrated into many curriculum subjects and outcomes for grade 5 at Montague Consolidated School since 2015, published an opinion article on the designation of the red fox as a provincial animal, exhibited paintings of the red fox completed through the PEI ArtSmarts Program, applied the Junior Achievement Program learning to greater understand the basic marketing strategy as well as researching the red fox, participated in a Canadian Wildlife Federation project to celebrate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday, currently developing a trivia game and writing, gathering stories on the PEI red fox, enhanced knowledge of municipal and provincial government procedures.

**Alex Beck:** Finally, we wish to acknowledge our school for supporting our imaginings, artist David Trimble for guiding our paintings of the red fox, photographer

Brittany Crossman for sharing her professional photos of the PEI red fox, committee members, education and economic development for the opportunity to present today and assist us in our request.

**Chair:** That's your presentation?

**Alex Beck:** Yes.

**Chair:** Well listen, thank you very much for your presentation. I want to commend your teacher and all your supervisors in Montague for helping you and seeing you here today. It was a wonderful presentation. I'm sure that the members of the committee didn't know that much about the red fox, but we do now.

What I'm going to do, is I'm going to ask committee members to ask you any questions in regards to your presentation here today. Just relax and they can direct their questions – anyone of you can pick up a question. If you wish to answer it, always say your name when you reply.

I'm opening the floor to committee members and our first committee member is Matthew MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you students for coming in here today; certainly an interesting presentation. It seems like you put a lot of hard work into it, so once again, thanks for coming in.

I didn't know we didn't have a provincial animal until after I realized you guys were coming in and I started to study it myself. It was an education for me knowing that we didn't have one.

My first question I guess: How did your class start this project? What made you do it?

**Alex Beck:** In our grade 5 class in 2014-2015, our teacher, Ms. Arbuckle, came up with the idea to basically write a persuasive letter about why we should have our provincial animal and we decided on the red fox as a class. It started off as a school project and then eventually we sent it into the newspaper. Then last year they painted pictures and now this year we're presenting the idea.

**Mr. MacKay:** It sounds great.

Thank you very much for coming in.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Steven Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** Thanks for the presentation; you did a great job. I know how hard it is to read off a sheet of paper; having to do it in here all the time, it's not as easy as it looks. You guys were fantastic at it.

Mine, I guess, is more of a statement than a question. I think you did a really great job. I, like Matthew, I didn't really realize that we didn't have a provincial animal until I started following the work that your class had been doing.

I'm very supportive of the idea of pushing forward a request for change to the act, which this committee doesn't actually have control over the legislation but we can send a letter to whoever it does. I believe it's the Premier, or is it you? I can't remember. We'd have to find out which department it fell under, but I support 100% your efforts and I think, collectively, this committee will probably be able to make a recommendation that would support greatly your request.

Thanks for coming in and sharing with us today.

**Chair:** I've got Peter Bevan-Baker, Robert Mitchell and then Kathleen Casey.

**Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker:** Thank you very much Chair, thank you Isaiah and Alex and everybody else for being here and Madam Arbuckle for making this happen.

It's always lovely when we see young eager faces in the Legislature here. I really appreciate all of the hard work that you must have put in to put this presentation together. I'm fully supportive of what you're trying to do here and I think it's a lovely idea. I, too, I was not aware that we didn't have a designated provincial animal as a symbol.

I grew up in Scotland and foxes are very rare there. Occasionally we used to see one when I was walking through the mountains up in the highlands of Scotland, but they're very rare indeed. Of course that's not the

case here on PEI, we see them everywhere. We see them in the National Park, we see them as we drive through the country and we see them here in Charlottetown and in Summerside in our city. They've adapted to life on PEI very well.

One of the things that I love about foxes is how often they appear in children's literature, whether it's the *Fox and the Hound* or the *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, or the *Fox in Socks* – oh my gosh there's so – *The Ginger Bread Man* where the fox is the villain, rather than the cute gentle guy that you are portraying here. But foxes are sort of – they are an animal – but they also occupy a place in our culture as well, in our writing and in our films and books.

My question to you is: Do you know whether here on Prince Edward Island where we see them everywhere and they're clearly thriving, whether the number of foxes on PEI, is it going up? Is it going down? Are they in good shape? Do you know anything about that?

**Alex Beck:** I believe, I'm not 100% sure, but I believe they're saying at a steady rate, if not growing, I don't think we're losing any foxes, necessarily. But I'm not sure if they're growing either.

**Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker:** Thanks, Alex.

I don't know either and I'd be interested to know that. I know, again, I'm fully supportive of what you're doing here, but I know that people have different ideas and attitudes about foxes. Some people consider them to be nuisances.

**Alex Beck:** Yes.

**Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker:** They're beautiful animals and nobody can deny that; but they're also deadly killers. There are people who are concerned about what foxes are doing here on the Island.

I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on designating an animal that some people think is a problem, rather than something that's cute and cuddly.

**Alex Beck:** Want to answer that question this time?

**Isaiah Williams:** Well, people do have you know, different opinions. It can be hard to persuade other people.

**Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker:** Yes, tough question isn't it.

**Alex Beck:** I think if it does become a provincial animal people will get to understand the red fox once they're (Indistinct) instead of just instantly seeing it as some crazy animal that just wants to attack. It seems like if it becomes a provincial animal they can learn that red foxes are a good animal and a good choice.

**Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker:** I think that's a really great response, Alex. Thanks so much.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Robert Mitchell then Kathleen Casey.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you very much, students.

The ease of how you're here today and answering questions and you did your presentation, it's really impressive, let me tell you that folks. But to all the students that are with us today in the gallery, welcome in and to your teacher, it's great to have you here. Your presentation was well done, let me begin by that.

Obviously, a couple of members weren't aware of not having an animal and they're not aware of who this goes to and I understand that. But as the minister responsible for fish and wildlife, of which foxes come under, and as somebody whose grandfather – my grandfather George Mitchell was a farmer and particularly a fox farmer in Dromore, Prince Edward Island back in the 1950s and 1960s. Fox farming is in my history and obviously, it's an animal that's been around Prince Edward Island for many years. I really liked seeing in your presentation the part about 'don't feed foxes', foxes can be healthy and sustain their own life on their own and they don't really need the hand of humans to contribute to that. But let's face it; some of us do try to help the foxes out and it's not always the right thing.

As the member across the floor said, some people consider foxes to be a nuisance. As the minister responsible for that, we do deal with calls like that. But overall, when you made the piece of your comments, if we think they're cute; tourists probably think they're pretty cute, too. I think that's a fair thing to say. But occasionally, every once in a while there's a fox that becomes a problem.

Like the member, Mr. Bevan-Baker across the way, I was thinking: Is that a good fit? Trying to rationalize that myself and you did a really good job of answering it, but if you look at animals that other provinces have, bears, wolves, they're much more dangerous than a fox, let's be clear on that.

To have a fox as the animal of your province, it's probably a pretty worthy thing. As you pointed out – very well I might add – there's a lot of businesses that uses the emblem of foxes and the golf course and all those types of things. I know the City of Charlottetown has been involved in a fox project as Canada 150, as well, this year. I'm supportive of what you're trying to bring there and add my part to it.

The only question that I might have as I leave you though: because Montague will be the responsible class for getting this changed, the red fox, would you be putting some pressure on the mayor and your minor hockey team to call them Montague Red Foxes, rather than the Montague Norsemen? Would you consider doing that (Indistinct)

**Isaiah Williams:** It would be, maybe, a good idea to think about. Montague Norsemen have been going on for years and years and maybe giving a change would be something to consider.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Well it's something that you might get some leverage on now, because if this changes, it will be because of your involvement over the last two years in Montague school.

Well done; you presented very well today. As the hon. Mr. Myers said: I think some of you might show up on the floor of Legislature down the road; really good job.

Thanks a lot.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you so much for your presentation.

What I did to prepare for your presentation is I, too, didn't know that there was no animal designated in our coat of arms, or for the province. I was aware of the blue jay and I was aware of the lady slipper. What I did was, I took a look – and I don't know if you did this when you were doing your research – did you take a look at the Provincial Emblem?

**Isaiah Williams:** Yes we did.

**Ms. Casey:** You took a look at the provincial emblem and you saw what it's made up of, the helmet and all the symbolism that's in our provincial crest. I'm wondering, when you did your research on the red fox and you looked at this emblem and you saw that the two supporters on the side of the emblem were silver foxes, how did you chose that you wanted the red fox versus maybe, the silver fox, that is already on the emblem?

**Alex Beck:** I think – or we thought anyways – that red foxes seem to be a bit more common. I haven't seen a silver fox before but I have seen lots of red foxes. I know the silver fox is on the emblem but I think a red fox would suit well, too. You seem them more often; they seem like a bigger part of our culture.

**Ms. Casey:** Mr. Chair, I have another question.

**Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Casey:** What did you learn when you looked at the emblem and when you were doing your research and it said that the silver fox were rare, what did you find out about the fox industry?

**Alex Beck:** What we found out about the fox industry is that silver foxes were rare. But the fox industry – especially red foxes – is one of the big, whatever you want to call it, companies or corporations that made PEI well known. Basically, as we said here, put us on the world map just to say. We were

known for our foxes and all of our fur trades and stuff.

**Ms. Casey:** One more question, Mr. Chair.

If Prince Edward Island were to adopt the red fox as their official animal, would you see it changing the emblem of Prince Edward Island and having the red fox displacing the silver fox on our emblem?

**Alex Beck:** I don't know. A red fox seems like it would be a good idea, but the silver fox is still cool. They're still here, they're just not as in as big of numbers or as common or as well known as the red foxes.

**Ms. Casey:** Great answer.

Thank you for your presentation.

It's really rare to have students come in and present to us; we're going to see some students after your presentation from the University of Prince Edward Island. But thank you so much for all the work you put into this project. I enjoyed the presentation.

**Alex Beck:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you.

I'll now call on the hon. Jamie Fox on foxes.

**Leader of the Opposition:** I'm not going to express my opinion. I actually did know myself that there was no animal for PEI provincial animal.

The only point I want to make is I want to thank all the students in the class and the teacher for becoming involved in this process. I think this is very important when the students of our province become engaged in the political machine of the Island and how we work as legislators in here. I want to thank you for coming forward and becoming part of the process.

Thank you.

**Chair:** Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you.

I would also like to congratulate you guys; this was a great presentation. It was very well put together and very well done. Alex

and Isaiah, you're great speakers and I particularly liked how you worked together to help each other through your presentation; it's great team work and that will see you a long way in life. I congratulate you for that.

I would really like to know – I see that you brought in a couple of – it looks like paintings. I'm wondering if somebody can show us the paintings and explain them to us.

**Connor Cheverie:** Connor Cheverie.

These are the paintings that we did through the PEI ArtSmarts Program with David Trimble last year. This was our part in the making of this red fox Legislature thing, and this took us a month or two to paint these paintings. They are made from recycled materials, this is like an old door frame, it's cut up and then we made the frames out of (Indistinct) boards and David Trimble brought in all the paint and showed us a lot of stuff about how to paint the red fox, because he's done it multiple times before.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Chair, can I ask another question?

**Chair:** Okay, go ahead and then Kathleen.

**Mr. J. Brown:** I'm just wondering: Was this the first time that you guys learned to paint?

**Connor Cheverie:** In school, yes; like paintings like this, yeah.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Do you think you will continue to paint after this?

**Connor Cheverie:** Maybe.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Maybe? Great. Well, great work guys. Those are excellent paintings. I'm pretty sure I couldn't do anything like that, so excellent work.

Thank you very much for coming in today, and to all of you students and Ms. Arbuttle for taking the time to come in and teach us this great lesson and show us all the work that you've put into it.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Great, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was just going to follow up. I didn't in my closing remarks – I would like to thank Ms. Edwina Arbuckle. It's so important for students to be able to actually come and see what is done in the Legislative Assembly and you had an idea in a classroom, and to follow it through to take it to the Legislative Assembly is so very important. It's important to have young people come into the Assembly and see what we do and how the laws are made. Thank you, Ms. Arbuckle, for taking your class and inspiring us to do better here in the Legislature.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Chair:** Steve Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** I just want to make a motion, I guess, under the advice of Ms. Arbuckle's grade 5-6 class; that we send a letter to the appropriate department – which I don't know what it is, that's why I said 'appropriate' – asking them to explore adding the red fox as the provincial animal to our emblems act.

**Chair:** Question.

All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** Aye!

**Chair:** Contrary?

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Good job.

**Chair:** Any other member wishing to speak?

We can give you – Alex, would you like to say a closing remark before we close?

**Alex Beck:** There's not much that I can think of besides thanks for giving us the opportunity to present this idea and being behind it and asking questions, especially making us understand what this is and make us answer questions so that we can understand this more and hopefully this becomes a thing.

**Chair:** On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you very much –

**Ms. Casey:** Chair?

**Chair:** Oh, Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** I'd just like to – thank you very much, Chair.

Meadow down here on the end, she has a great painting there and I'm just wondering, Meadow, if you can get up and show that painting to the folks on the other side. I'm not sure if they got to see it and perhaps kind of explain it a little bit too, if you could?

**Meadow Papp:** Meadow Papp.

Last year, we painted these paintings in grade 5. It took us about a month or so and we used – we recycled it from, like Connor said, old doors and I think the frames were wood or something?

**Unidentified Voice:** Yeah.

**Meadow Papp:** And they were wood, and we used wires in the back to make a carrier for it and that's pretty much what we did.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Great job, Meadow. Thanks very much, and sorry. I mispronounced your name. I'd heard it wrong earlier, but thank you very much for that. That was great.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Thank you.

You fellows are pros at this. You fellows are really good. We're an extension of the Legislature and normally we don't allow props, just when you visit us in 10 years' time, so you know. I was going to say everybody take a peak on your way out, but you fellows have just been absolutely wonderful here today and this is one of the best committees I have ever chaired. Your presentation was wonderful. It was a joy to have you here.

When I was growing up in O'Leary as a kid, just a couple of years ago, if we seen a red fox once a year, once a year possibly, maybe once every two years, that was a big treat. Now, I see them on a regular basis in the City of Charlottetown here quite often. I see them every day, but I'm still amazed. I'm still looking and if I'm driving in the car with my wife I'll say: Sylvia, look! Even today, I haven't lost the thrill of seeing a red

fox, even though they are quite commonplace today.

I want to thank you very much for coming here today. You've done an excellent job and I wish you well. We'll follow you with interest, the committee, and I imagine you will follow us too, to see how we've done today on your behalf. Thank you for coming.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to declare a five minute recess so that committee members can say hello to you and you can take your leave. Okay?

**Mr. J. Brown:** Chair?

We might just mention to them too, you'll be able to find this on the Internet after you're done here too, so you can watch your presentation when you go home or in your class or whatever. I'm sure the clerk can point you to where to go for that if you don't know already.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Brown.

We will adjourn for five minutes; 10:45 we'll start again.

[Recess]

**Chair:** Our fourth item of business is the briefing of policies and priorities for the 2017-2018 school year by Taya Naburrs, vice-president of academic and external and Colin –

**Colin Trewin:** Trewin.

**Chair:** Sorry, I'm a little rusty on your names, but it's all good. You were here earlier; you heard just to mention your names before you begin your presentation.

Do you want to go right through your presentation first and we ask questions after?

**Taya Nabuurs:** I was thinking it might make sense to have questions after each section. I can prompt whenever that is.

**Chair:** All right. How long is your presentation?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Approximately 12 to 15 minutes.

**Chair:** That's great.

Just mention your names and begin.

**Taya Nabuurs:** My name is Taya Nabuurs. Again, I'm the VP of academic and external for the student union.

Thanks so much, everyone, for having us here today. It's certainly a tough act to follow now. We might not be as adorable but hopefully our presentation is just as intriguing.

I know a lot of members are familiar already with the student union but just to give a bit of a background; we are the only student-driven organization in Prince Edward Island that dedicates resources to the advancement of post-secondary improvement and advancement, at both the provincial and federal levels.

Additionally, we are the sole collective voice for students recognized by the UPEI Board of Governors, which is the governing body of UPEI. At the student union, a grass roots approach is taken in order to identify the pressing concerns that face our membership of roughly 3,900 students. Policy consultations are held by the student union annually, at which the general membership is invited to come together for a large scale consultation and collaboration session. We focus all our policy development work around the principals of affordability, accessibility and accountability in post-secondary education.

It is the opinion of the UPEI Student Union that issues exist within post-secondary education. While we continue to make strides in the right direction, we need to continue the progress if we want to create prosperity in Prince Edward Island.

**Colin Trewin:** Hello, my name is Colin Trewin; I'm the policy and research coordinator at the UPEI Student Union.

While a great deal of the policy development and recommendations over the years have been focused on the topic of student financial aid, our consultations have demonstrated that students at UPEI were facing a number of non-financial barriers to post-secondary education as well.

For example, mental health support was ranked in a UPEI Student Union survey as the number two concern of students ranked just barely below the student financial aid by a difference of only one vote. The province should be ensuring that its efforts in improving mental health and wellness on Prince Edward Island take into account the particular barriers faced by university students.

Secondly, in light of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the provincial government must demonstrate its commitments reconciliation through dedicated investment to our on campus indigenization efforts as recommended in the calls to action of the TRC.

Lastly, PEI must follow the example of other provinces across Canada in making a commitment to eliminate campus sexual violence by providing external oversight of sexual assault policies at its post-secondary institutions.

The government of Prince Edward Island has made some significant strides in recent years towards additional aids of students struggling to finance their education. It is now time to look beyond those financial barriers and ensure that post-secondary education is accessible for all.

**Taya Nabuurs:** I'm going to expand on the topic of mental health funding for students.

We know that mental health in Prince Edward Island is a major topic of concern right now in public discourse. But unfortunately, it seems as though post-secondary students have not been as included in these conversations as we would like them to be.

University students are a key demographic when examining mental health services in the province. They face a number of unique challenges which put them at a greater risk of suffering from mental health issues. In fact, the majority of mental health illnesses tend to surface between the ages of 18 to 24, and furthermore; the suicide rates amongst university-aged youth have tripled since the 1950s.

Combined with the additional difficulty students face when they find themselves distanced from their established support networks as they are living away from home for the first time, as well as the additional stresses of the tremendous academic and financial demands that come along with higher education, the necessity of well-rounded and substantial mental health supports for students cannot be underestimated.

The Province of Alberta has proven itself to be an extremely positive example this year in regards to supporting student mental health services. Earlier this fall, the government of Alberta announced 25.8 million in funding over the next three years towards mental health services on its post-secondary campuses. Furthermore, Ontario also announced in its 2017 provincial budget that it would be increasing its yearly investments to student mental health supports by 15 million per year.

We'd like to see Prince Edward Island follow in the footsteps of other provinces across the country in making meaningful investments in the mental health and wellbeing of its post-secondary students. The availability of robust and timely mental health services is crucial in ensuring that students receive the supports they need as the likelihood of encountering mental health issues increases and that they are provided with the tools that they need to manage their mental health moving forward in their lives.

Therefore, the UPEI Student Union asks that the Government of Prince Edward Island invest in a per-student funding model dedicated to supporting post-secondary student mental health and wellness initiatives.

At this time, I'll take questions on this topic if there are any.

**Chair:** The floor is open.

Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Taya, for being here, and Colin. I absolutely agree, Taya, the mental health has sort of reached a much higher level of discourse recently in our province and

elsewhere, and with good reason. I know many students, many who are suffering from anxiety and stresses for all the reasons you described. It's a time of great change in your life; new responsibilities and freedoms and the academic demands, and all of those things together make your, as you said, your cohort of just a very vulnerable population.

I listened to a lady yesterday, or perhaps the day before, who was advocating for a Maritime-wide approach to access to mental health. If I remember right, she estimated that it would cost \$90,000 in order to – or maybe it was \$900,000 – I shouldn't even bring a figure up because I wasn't listening closely enough, obviously, to remember, but it was a significant amount of money.

I have two questions. One is, you talk about your recommendation is for a per-student contribution from the province. Do you have an idea of what that figure might be?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Yes, we have been – this is something that we have been deliberating on quite a bit. It's something I've been working with the staff at student affairs to try and get a bit of an estimate of what the costing estimates are because there are a number of initiatives right now that are being proposed and I was working with Trina Smith from student affairs to get an idea of what those budgets might look like.

Based on where our students have identified most of the gaps, and where we see gaps in services, it's looking like we're going to propose a \$75 per-student investment. It is a significant amount of money. We have 4,400 students at UPEI, but there's quite a lot that needs to be done and I think it's very important that we make the investments that we need there.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** You would be as aware as everybody else about the porosity of mental health resources here on Prince Edward Island for the general population, and the wait times that exist in order to access that. As I understand it, those wait times are not as excessive on campus, but it's still you're going to wait for a week or two in order to see a councillor.

My question is: The funding that you're suggesting, the \$75 per student, would that be specifically for on-campus resources or

are we talking about expanding the mental health resources across the province?

**Taya Nabuurs:** That would largely be for on-campus initiatives. Granted, there are a number within some of those initiatives. There's definitely a gap right now in terms of transitioning students from the resources that they can access on campus into accessing resources in the external community once they leave the university, because that's something that's been identified as a huge issue and so we also want to ensure that we're helping students with that process as well. But this funding, we're hoping to see it particularly moving towards post-secondary students just because there are so many resources and so many needs on campus.

While it is a large investment, in terms of ensuring that students, as they are coming up to so many potential issues with their mental health, that we are giving them the resources they need right out the gate so that they can begin to develop the tools that they need to manage their mental health moving forward and therefore lessen the burden on the healthcare system in future years.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Taya, is there any aspect of this that would be an educational component in, for example, students who arrive at university perhaps unaware of the dangers, the mental health perils that lie ahead, potential perils that lie ahead? If so, with that educational component, do you imagine that being provided through the student union or through some other (Indistinct)

**Taya Nabuurs:** In terms of educational initiatives, what we're looking at right now as a current model would be a collaboration between the university and the UPEI Student Union. Because, certainly, the university student affairs has the expertise and the resources in terms of what those educational initiatives should look like, but the student union does have the reach and that extra additional connection with students so we're looking to combine efforts to ensure that we're kind of hitting everywhere that we need to.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Steven Myers, Kathleen Casey and then Jordan Brown.

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you.

I just have a couple of questions. There's no question that there is a serious issue with mental health right across Prince Edward Island. I'm wondering, you used the stat of tripled since the 1950s. How does that compare to other age groups?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Honestly, I don't know if I have that –

**Colin Trewin:** It's more severe for –

**Taya Nabuurs:** More severe?

**Colin Trewin:** – the 18-24 demographic.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Okay.

**Mr. Myers:** It's the highest?

**Colin Trewin:** Yeah, it's the highest demographic.

**Mr. Myers:** I don't know if you know the answer to this or not, but there has been – I'm pretty sure I've heard in discussion over time that we don't necessarily record suicides as such in Prince Edward Island, so we might not actually ever have accurate data to support what we all actually know.

Do you know how accurate the stats are here for Prince Edward Island?

**Colin Trewin:** That statistic that we took was North America wide so we don't actually know specifically for Prince Edward Island.

**Mr. Myers:** Just one more question.

The initiatives you talk about for the funding model, what types of initiatives are you looking at?

**Taya Nabuurs:** There's a number of things within that. Largely, what we're trying to expand on in terms of our mental health services right now is peer support programs because that's something that the staff at student affairs has – they collaborate quite often with other universities and other initiatives and experts, and it's something

that is being more widely recognized as being very effective in terms of helping students with their mental health because sometimes people are more comfortable talking to their peers. One of the proposed initiatives that we're looking at is trying to hire students to be peer supporters within student affairs and through that, of course they would be supervised by someone, a councillor at student affairs as well.

But, that would also be able to increase our student employment at UPEI. We would be able to give students who are studying at UPEI experience, hands-on experience through that, whether or not they're studying in psychology or a related discipline. That's one main area we're looking to expand on in different ways.

Of course, there's a number of educational initiatives as well that we'd like to bring up just to make students aware that there are supports available and also dealing with some of the stigma that's attached to mental health as well is certainly a challenge. So, there's some educational initiatives there as well. But, a large component is getting the staff that we need right now.

At one point last year we were operating with one councillor for all of our students and with that, the wait times were increasing at rates that we definitely don't want to see them. So, some of those initiatives are related to staffing issues as well.

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Taya, what services already exist at UPEI to support students with mental health issues?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Of course, we have councillors on staff at the university, so as students who do wish to speak with a counselor, have access through student affairs.

But in the conversations I've had with staff and those involved at university, there is a desire to expand, not just on treating mental health illnesses as they come up, but also

promoting mental health wellness in general. We know that of course not all students are mentally ill, but they all do have mental health of course. There's also efforts to promote mental wellness in general, so there's initiatives such as the campus life lounge, which makes efforts to host events which are meant to – there is a number of reasons, but largely to reduce stress so they have different game nights and movie nights and things like that just to try and get students out of dorm rooms, meeting with friends. It's also really great for students who might be feeling isolated. We have a very rapidly increasing international student population and we notice that they're facing some particular struggles when it comes to mental health, and of course, isolation as well.

There are initiatives such as what goes on with the campus life lounge in terms of helping those students connect with the community and the resources they need, so we're looking to expand on initiatives like that as well.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Jordan –

**Ms. Casey:** Sorry, just a follow-up.

You're saying you're looking at doing preventative measures in order to help with the student?

**Taya Nabuurs:** It's kind of a two-sided approach. One, the preventative side of things, but as well, having the resources that we need to, of course, deal with the mental health (Indistinct)

**Ms. Casey:** Thanks.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Chair:** Jordan Brown followed by Matthew MacKay.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I was interested – you addressed this, I guess, in part in response to Steven Myers' question. I was interested to hear that there is a desire to work, particularly with the psychology department in a proactive way to

develop an approach to this. Before I'd heard that, the question I was going to ask was: with the nursing department and probably with psychology and I don't know what is at UPEI in terms of a clinical psychology education – but we face tremendous shortages in both those areas in the mental health field.

To my thinking, there would be probably a great advantage to see if we could work with those students and the faculty that are there in those fields to try and get some hands-on experience to effectively demonstrate to these individuals what it would be like to work in that field and hopefully to help them gain an education and ultimately to come back here to Prince Edward Island and practice in that field, which is really something that we need to start to figure out how we're going to address. I think our educational institutions and probably the student body has some responsibility to figure out how we're going to do that, too.

I don't know if you have any thoughts or comments on that or whether it's being addressed already, but I throw that out there.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Actually, the university just recently announced that they are starting a doctorate in psychology degree at UPEI now. We are looking to – I suppose grow our own so to speak – in the sense that we're looking to foster students through that program and to actually teach clinical psychologist at UPEI. An initiative such as having peer support programs where students who are studying in those programs can actually practice and get work experience at the university while they're in those programs. It would be a tremendous benefit to them, to the university and of course, to the Island as a whole, because those students would then have tremendous experience when they look towards working in Prince Edward Island.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Right. I just want to follow up on that. Do you – I guess you kind of indicated that there is some level of working together in different – what I was curious about was on that front – I mean we had a presentation to a different committee that I chair, a health and wellness committee, indicating that there is a lot of work being done right now over, I think they call it telehealth, but it's like basically a secure

connection with a screen and all that stuff – I’m wondering if there’s been any kind of overtures to other educational institutions where there would be a teaching hospital, as an example, to kind of enable that approach right up to the top echelons of students that are learning how to practice in the mental health fields right down on through to the services that UPEI currently does offer to its students in terms of psychology and nursing and related fields that we could perhaps be tapping into.

**Taya Nabuurs:** I don’t know if I can answer your question fully just because of all that they are very much at preliminary conversations, but there actually is a transition happening at UPEI right now with our mental health services and our health services in general – a lot of the mental health services from student affairs are now moving under the leadership of the Dean of Nursing. My understanding of what a large portion of that change is going to entail is ensuring that students can have hands-on experience at a health clinic at the University of Prince Edward Island, whether or not that’s with nursing students who are involved with both, mental health and physical health services in one body at the UPEI health centre.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Matthew MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to Taya and Colin for both coming in.

(Indistinct) of my question, I’m just reviewing the presentation is on the sexual assault cases. Am I right in saying that there was a survey done by the UPEI Student Union and this was an issue that was brought up?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Sure. Perhaps I should add –

**Ms. Casey:** Are we going to get to that section?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Yeah, perhaps maybe what I’ll do is I can present the other two topics and then I can answer questions.

**Mr. MacKay:** Okay, that’s (Indistinct)

**Taya Nabuurs:** To expand right now – so we do as I said, our initial policy consultations. What we did this year as part of that was an online survey as well, because it’s a very easy and accessible way to get to our students.

We provided a (Indistinct) question where as we identified a number of different themes. For example; student financial aid, mental health supports, indigenous students and equity seeking groups. We asked students to rank those based on what they thought was the largest issue that they were facing at university, or anything that they thought the UPEI Student Union should focus its attention on. But none of those themes actually included sexual violence on campus.

What we saw was there was a comment section at the end of the survey where students could provide their feedback if there was something they thought that we had perhaps missed in the above rankings. A number of students out of those that we had responses from consistently indicated that sexual violence on campus or supports for survivors was something that was of concern for them. That was particularly interesting for us to see because it was an unprompted question; it was something that was very consistent between all the responses of students. Therefore, it became a priority of ours this year.

**Mr. MacKay:** I might just go back to that, Chair, after – have a few questions later on.

**Chair:** Sure, (Indistinct) first and after that section.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Robert Mitchell, is yours related to this section?

**Mr. Mitchell:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Chair recognizes Robert Mitchell.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I’ll keep it fairly quick and thanks both for your presentation thus far.

Taya, my question is: In the survey, were there identifiers that said – obviously it was ranked pretty high, number two, I believe, behind financial assistance – was there any

identifiers to say: it's your freshman students, your first year versus your fourth year? Is there more anxiety in the year one, being away from home from other provinces or other areas, internationally or wherever? Is it more prevalent, like year one, if you were to come up with supports, is that where you should focus, or is it constantly over all years at the university? I'm just wondering that.

**Taya Nabuurs:** That information we weren't able to glean from the survey that we conducted ourselves. But after we got those results in terms of knowing it was a priority of students, I then reached out to a student group on campus which is called Jack.org. It's a student society which works to advocate for better mental health services, and also eliminating stigma. I know that they're very involved in outreach efforts on campus and I wanted to get a better idea of where the gaps are and where we could potentially focus our attention.

Something that I did hear was that first-year students do tend to come up to additional barriers and research tends to demonstrate that as well, particularly students who are perhaps living away from home for the first time who are trying to adjust to all these new changes. They do certainly face some particular challenges and that same information was reflected in conversations I've had with staff at student affairs as well.

Of course we know that there are certain demographics who are particularly affected. So we would like to ensure that we're focusing resources there as well, but of course it's important that we focus our attention on expanding that as well.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I know you're aware, as of just recently we're putting more supports, I'll say, in the feeder schools for your university, but it will be some time before you bear positive results of that. Maybe down the road things could help in that regard –

**Taya Nabuurs:** - focus our attention on expanding that as well.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I know you're aware, as of just recently we're putting more supports, I'll say, in the feeder schools for your university, but it will be some time before

you bear positive results of that. Maybe down the road things could help in that regard. I know we're a long ways from there but it is a difficult time in ones' life when you're kind of out of home for the first time and in there. The focus on it, it's something that we need to have a look at and address. Appreciate you bringing it.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Something, just a further comment on something that we noticed as well when I was kind of doing a bit of my preliminary researches. I know the province is working right now on a mental health and addictions action plan – I did quite a few readings through that just to see if there was any focus on supports for post-secondary as well. I noticed there were quite a few supports for the K-12 system which is excellent. It's of course very important, but post-secondary institutions are key demographic. University students are facing a number of particular struggles and barriers, so we would like to see some further consideration for that as well. We'd love to help collaborate on how we can expand those proposals as well. We really encourage consultation moving forward.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thanks.

**Chair:** Taya, I'm kind of relying on you that our questions don't get ahead of your presentation.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Sure, yeah.

**Chair:** If you could go on to the next section and when we get back, Matthew MacKay first on that.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Sure. Maybe what we'll do, we'll just go through the next two sections and we can take questions on it at the end, perhaps, if that's (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Sure and Matthew MacKay will be first.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Okay, excellent.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Colin Trewin:** Our next discussion is inspired by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and implementing their calls to action at UPEI.

We see consistently that indigenous youth are not obtaining post-secondary educations at the same rate as non-indigenous youth. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada noted in its research that while 9% of Métis youth and First Nations youth go to universities of certification, only 3% of registered Indian youth and 2% of Inuk youth have the same level of certification. In comparison, 19% of non-indigenous youth had university certification. This data begins to demonstrate the tangible reality of post-secondary education in Canada and the barriers faced by indigenous people of this country therein.

Every effort must be made to make university environments more welcoming for indigenous students if we hope to see any change in these numbers.

In recent years, the University of Prince Edward Island has begun to show a greater commitment to indigenizing the institution. There are a number of references to the indigenization of UPEI in its 2013-2018 strategic plan which provides a long-term vision for the institution.

While UPEI has shown a great initiative and vision for acknowledging the importance of indigenous (Indistinct) our campus, there is much more work that needs to be done. These ideas need to be put into action and the constant roadblock that comes up in every committee, advisory circle in meeting this funding, there are a great number of people at UPEI who are trying to push forward a number of initiatives but are struggling to get anywhere because of these funding struggles.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission took an enormous six-year endeavour to develop a framework for a path towards reconciliation. The calls to action outlined in their report are calling on involvement from all segments of society moving forward these initiatives with a number of these calls to action, particularly calling on a need for reform at our post-secondary institutions.

Call to action number 62, in particular:

Calls on provincial governments to provide the necessary funding to the post-secondary institutions to make possible the changes that need to happen.

Canada has a moral and legal obligation to address these calls to action and address the barriers imposed on its indigenous people.

The federal government has begun to take action on these obligations; allocated \$341 million in 2014 for the post-secondary student support program supporting 20,000 First Nation Inuit students. The Province of Prince Edward Island must also play its part in addressing these obligations and demonstrate active and (Indistinct) dedication to the movement towards reconciliation.

The UPEI Student therefore recommends:

That the Government of Prince Edward Island establish a reconciliation fund dedicated to assisting the University of Prince Edward Island implementing the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they relate to post-secondary.

It is also of crucial importance to note that we further recommend any and all efforts to support indigenous students on Prince Edward Island. All decision-making must be generated from within the First Nation communities of Prince Edward Island.

**Taya Nabuurs:** From there, I'll move on to the next topic.

The third and final topic we will presenting today surrounds the topic of sexual violence and its prevalence on university campuses. Even without being specifically prompted for feedback on issues of sexual violence on campus, a survey done by the PEI Student Union as part of its annual consultations on advocacy priorities, saw a significant number of students commenting about sexual violence and support for survivors was a concern of theirs and something they hope to see government and the university address.

It only goes to show that while cases of sexual assault may fly under the radar due to lack of data being reported by post-secondary institutions, sexual violence remains a great cause for concern. Sexual assault continues to be the most underreported crime in Canada and post-secondary campuses are particularly affected.

A CBC investigation examining sexual violence on campus indicated that overall, experts say the number of students reporting sexual assault to universities and colleges is well below the national average. Not only is the crime underreported, but post-secondary students are also particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, as 47% of all sexual assaults are seen in women aged 15 to 24. Given that the vast majority of university students are within this age range, it may come as no surprise that some surveys indicate that one in five women will experience some form of sexual assault while attending an institution of higher education.

Prince Edward Island is one of only a few provinces in Canada with no legislation or other government authority mandating sexual violence policies on its post-secondary campuses. British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario have all recently enacted legislation providing guidance and oversight for post-secondary sexual violence policies, while Nova Scotia has signed a four-year memorandum of understanding with its universities and colleges.

Quebec has also recently announced a framework for legislation to pass through the Quebec National Assembly by fall of 2017, supplemented by a \$23 million investment over the next five years to support its zero tolerance stance on campus sexual violence.

These government initiatives do not just touch on the need for clear and equitable reporting frameworks for dealing with cases of sexual assault on post-secondary campuses, but they also provide guidance and set standards for education and prevention programming in an effort to better educate the students, provide more well-rounded supports for survivors and stop sexual assaults before they occur. Not only is this type of government initiative important from a social perspective for setting a zero tolerance stance on sexual violence, but it makes sense from an economic perspective as well.

Given that it is one of the most pervasive crimes in all Canadian provinces, sexual violence is one of the most costly crimes weighing in at 4.8 billion annually, even more costly than gun violence at 3.1 billion.

Beyond even these considerations, government initiative on the issue of sexual violence on post-secondary campuses sends a strong and clear message. Enacting legislation would demonstrate that the Province of Prince Edward Island does not tolerate sexual violence on its campuses and it is willing to support survivors and the community at large with the full support of government and the law.

Regardless of standalone sexual assault policies which may currently exist in the province, legislation provides a necessary level of accountability for post-secondary institutions. External oversight must exist in order to ensure that these policies are thorough, robust and survivor centric.

Therefore, the UPEI Student Union is recommending:

That the Government of Prince Edward Island enact provincial legislation to ensure external oversight of sexual violence policies added to proposed secondary institutions.

With that, I'll take any questions.

**Chair:** Matthew MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair.

As I'm going through the numbers are alarming. It's something, I guess, I probably didn't realize was that high of a number right now. So one in five women – I guess my questions are: Does the university have protocols when something like this happens? What's the procedure at a university level that takes place?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Actually, I've been quite involved with this topic as of recently. We have recently begun a new UPEI Sexual Violence Prevention Response Task Force. As of right now, the university does not have a standalone policy. There exists that their treatment policy which was last updated in 2007. I understand it's undergoing new updates right now, but none of those have officially passed yet. But there are, of course, protocols that go along with them. I haven't seen that document and aware of what the protocols look like. Of course, there are procedures and systems in place to support survivors. But what was

clearly evident through the consultations and the survey that we have done is that students are still identifying gaps somewhere.

Part of what the task force is trying to do is, both, look at implementing that new standalone policy to ensure that everything is very clear and the process is very robust. But it's also looking to consult with students in terms of what else they would like to see at the university and then the task force will be writing a report with some recommendations in terms of, not just looking at the policy with education and prevention programming as well.

Actually, today, we'll be hosting our first round of consultations at 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. in MacMillan Hall. If anyone is interested in attending it would be great to have you there. I've had so much interaction from students who are interested in being involved in that process because they have something to say. Also, will be launching shortly, hopefully in the next couple of weeks, an online survey as well, focusing on getting a better idea of what the campus culture is. As we know, it's very underreported and it's not something that's often talked about so we're trying to get a better idea of exactly what kind of culture exists at UPEI and where the gaps are.

**Mr. MacKay:** I guess the main thing that concerns me is students don't feel comfortable taking this to light, right? There's 92.3% that walk free and don't say anything. I guess looking back, and we've talked about the mental health that was also 20 years ago – mental health wasn't talked about. Now, it seems to be a common thing and people feel comfortable talking about it and so forth.

Also, I didn't realize there was no legislation to deal with sexual assaults in university, which surprises me. I would have thought today's day and age with everything that's been on the media, there would be something in there so I'm sure that's something that we can possibly look at.

Going back, I guess, to your survey; how many have done the survey? How many students took the time to do it?

**Taya Nabuurs:** I'd have to double check to be sure, but I believe it was somewhere

around the 600-700 range of students that completed the survey, and I did a count a while back trying to go through all of those comments to see how many touched on sexual assault. It was approximately somewhere in the 75-100 range.

**Mr. MacKay:** Wow.

**Chair:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair.

I guess I'm still struggling with the number on this. What can we do in the immediate future to make sure that, I guess, as legislators – as the universities get a hold on this, that this doesn't continue happening? It bothers me to see that 97% of people are uncomfortable bringing this to light and if somebody is getting away with this, they're going to continue doing it.

I guess, in the near future what would you like to see us do as a committee that might be able to help speed the process up?

**Taya Nabuurs:** It's certainly a hard question because it's a very persistent – it's a systemic issue.

**Mr. MacKay:** Right.

**Taya Nabuurs:** It's going to be very hard to tackle, but I know that myself, with the student union, I've been working very hard to try and push this issue forward and the university seems very willing to work with us and do everything that they can to help make campus a safe space.

But, what we're looking for from the province, at least initially, is that legislation to ensure, that of course, the university is working towards a policy, but in particular the Ontario legislation I would recommend as a real role model. It mandates things like education and prevention programming. It doesn't just touch on necessarily exactly what the process looks like, but mandates the universities to do that as well because that's a huge component.

The policy, of course, is very important but without that additional education and prevention programming, it won't go as far as it needs to, and of course the idea is that we want to stop sexual assaults before they

occur. We don't want to just be reacting to what's happening; we want to be preventative and we want to be proactive in that process.

That's what I'm hoping the legislation will help ensure.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you very much.

**Chair:** Steven Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** All right, thanks.

I just have a question on, I guess, how you came up with your top three here? Was it all based on your survey?

**Taya Nabuurs:** Yes.

**Mr. Myers:** It was?

I guess I know a lot of students at that age and I have a son who is very close to that age so I know a lot of kids in that age group just by growing up by a lot of them, and a lot of what they're telling me is they are the burden of the debt load, the high tuition cost, having to choose between eating Kraft Dinner or some other cheap option. Are those still issues? Because when I see the truth and reconciliation one here, while I know it's a national issue, I would be shocked if any of the young people that I talk to would think this is more important than the fact that they don't know if they're going to eat Kraft Dinner or nothing tonight.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Absolutely, and of course it's important to note that student financial aid was still the number one concern in that survey.

**Mr. Myers:** Okay, good.

**Taya Nabuurs:** The only reason that you don't see it in the policy statements that were developed today is because the UPEI Student Union does currently still have a number of policy statements in place and things that we're advocating on in the realm of student financial aid.

Basically, the idea, student financial aid is still something that we're – it's a priority this year, but it's just not in the policy statements because we wanted to develop recommendations in new areas, but of

course we're still very much advocating on things like the needs-based grants proposal that we brought forward last year, open educational resources because textbook costs are rising at an absolutely alarming rate, so we're absolutely still advocating on those things.

**Mr. Myers:** I'm just wondering if you could send the copies of those financial ones to me or the whole committee if they want them, just because with the Legislature opening there might be something that we can put some pressure on because it's the one that I hear about from my neck of the woods, at least, continually and I really don't have an answer because I do understand and I do understand that the costs are burdening and I hear people talking about: What are my options if I don't go to university?

I think we're almost at that cusp of people deciding no, because they can't stand the thought of coming out with an \$80,000 debt and they can go to work in Alberta now, which for anybody who is as old as I am remembers when Alberta dropped in the 1980s. It can happen again and it left a lot of people kind of in the lurch. A lot of people who had gone out there at that point, they would be in your age group, there was just nothing suddenly. Sorry, I didn't mean to date you. I could tell by the look on your face that I've dated you.

**Chair:** He's speaking next so be careful.

**Mr. Myers:** I'm good. That's good.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah, be careful.

**Mr. Myers:** I would appreciate it if I could have that; that would be awesome.

**Chair:** Robert Mitchell.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thanks again, folks.

I guess following along with Steven's comments there, I think probably all Islanders realize when they're in university it's a very financially trying time. With your survey, it may be assumed that everybody knows that: What else is on your mind? If they picked the next three.

I, like Matt MacKay, it's completely alarming the numbers that you have in

regards to sexual violence. Matt asked in the short term, what can be done? I guess for me, I recall and I remember seeing commercials and I don't think it was from UPEI. I think some of them were from UPEI, but there were other universities in the Maritimes that were kind of running, I'll say, commercials or advertisements.

Is there any kind of a campaign, a consistent, continuous campaign within the boundaries of your university that it says: I know this is an old cliché term: No means no. And continuously messaging that out so that it's continuous on people's minds that no means no, don't go there, this is out of bounds. In the short term, does anything like that continue to go on at UPEI on the campus, in Murphy Centre, in the MacDougall building? Are there all kinds of poster signs and just reminders of things like that?

**Taya Nabuurs:** I remember, I believe it was in my first year, I'm in my fourth year now at UPEI, there was a campaign similar to that. I believe it was something along the lines of a 'no means no' campaign and it was posters across campus that featured students and basically a thing that they would not tolerate sexual violence on campus, was essentially the premise.

There are a number of other initiatives. Of course, we have the bystander training program which exists, but unfortunately it's not available to all students. There are a lot of funding issues. To my understanding, a lot of funding was actually cut to the bystander training program this year and it almost wasn't going to happen, but student affairs is graciously doing it off the corner of their desks right now, basically.

But, what we're not seeing is consistent efforts and that's kind of when I talk about wanting to see more in terms of education and prevention, I want to see every year that the university is going to be doing something to educate students. The student union, actually this year, kind of took it upon ourselves to do something similar because I think it's something – 70% of sexual assaults that occur on campus happen within the first eight weeks of school. So what we did the second week of school kind of to try and get students as soon as they're trying students as soon as they're coming

through the door was a consent week campaign. So educating students in terms of what consent means, what that looks like, and also of course making them aware of supports that exist if they have been sexually assaulted.

That was something that we took upon ourselves, but of course our resources are much more limited and we'd like to see things like that expanded and things like that happening at the beginning of school.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah, and I think that would be a very key point. I think the university, obviously within their protocols, should be very supportive of a system like that too. When you mention that, I think it was about four years ago when they put the alarms back in service out, that was kind of what spurred the campaign, I believe.

But having said that, I certainly don't mean the four boundaries of the university either. Let's be clear, there are other areas where students live all across Charlottetown where things can happen.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Mitchell:** It's not within the confines of the university. I think you need to have a broader range thing, but it would be a good – if it's not going on – a good start to get it back on just to kind of put out that gentle reminder that: Hey, this is not acceptable and it won't be tolerated and there are consequences.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Those are the parts of it.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Yeah, and essentially what we're kind of, I guess, looking at in terms of the province's involvement, is just ensuring that there's more of an onus on the university saying that the government would like to see these types of initiatives and providing that.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah, perfectly understandable.

Thanks very much.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker followed by Jordan Brown and then Kathleen Casey.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

What I find interesting about your three policy areas that you're focusing on this year are that they're all delicate, touchy issues. Obviously, and having gone to the student union offices and sat down with your predecessors and talked about – and it's always three priorities. I think that's a good way of doing it. In the past they've been largely nuts and bolts issues so this is a real – I think it's a very brave departure to do this. I appreciate the fact that you're here today willing to talk about this.

Our society is changing rapidly. In all three of these areas, whether it's mental health or indigenization or dealing with sexual assault, talking about sexual assault, all of these things have, just in the very recent past sort of had a very bright spotlight shone on them. I think we haven't yet realized what – how complicated this is; to move from the right words, and there are a lot of people using the right words, and talking about the right things. Again, whether it's mental health or sexual abuse or indigenization, but actually moving that to appropriate action and making a difference, and we're at the cusp of, we're now willing to talk about it in a way that perhaps weren't in the past.

We see very little, or at least I see very little evidence, of true concrete practical action to change this. When I think of sexual assault and mental health issues on campus, you talked about the systemic problems that exist in campus culture, not just in UPEI, of course, everywhere. That's perhaps most exemplified by the frosh week, or the students' initiation to campus.

Now, I'm an old guy and things have changed a lot since I started university, but it strikes me that if anything, that we've moved the, sort of, features of those initiations into post-secondary life are not, in any way, helping to change the culture or the attitudes towards mental health and sexual abuse.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are on the perpetuation of this tradition of having a sort of blow-out week when you arrive on campus?

**Taya Nabuurs:** I will say that, honestly, I think that the attitudes, particularly at UPEI,

I don't know if I can speak to certain other universities, but in regards to what we do what's called a new student orientation.

The university has made a tremendous amount of changes in regards to what that looks like. I've been very involved with the new student orientation the last few years and it doesn't, I wouldn't say, look like your typical frosh week. It's not even often referred to as a frosh week. People call it NSO. That's the typical term.

Honestly, I will say, that I think the university has done an excellent job in ensuring that that's a fun, safe environment for students. The student union is also involved in helping out with that, but even our new student orientation leaders, they receive the bystander training that I spoke about, in terms of understanding how they can play a part in preventing any sexual violence that may occur and how they can help those who may be in need and be on the lookout, so to speak.

I've participated in many events through the new student orientation, and there are certainly efforts to ensure that those are very safe spaces. The only thing that, I suppose, is the biggest concern for us is what we are starting to hear from students, is that they're still experiencing issues. The biggest trouble, perhaps, with this is that we don't, I don't think, have a great grasp in terms of how large the issue is because we can't look to statistics because it's underreported. Students don't tend to talk about it very much, but we're still hearing consistently that students are experiencing issues.

That's kind of what we're trying to do with some of the consultations, of course, that are happening today, is get a better idea of what the issues are and how we can help. But, I wouldn't necessarily, I don't think, look towards the frosh week at UPEI because I think there have been great strides made there. We're looking to kind of expand our focus a little bit broader.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thanks, Taya.

That's really refreshing, and reassuring to hear that. We sort of skipped over the indigenous aspect of this. I don't think there have been any questions related to that, at all.

Again, when I think about that and the difficulties in implementing practical steps, and what I find – one of the things I find interesting about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is that they're not called recommendations, they're called calls to action. There is a real insistence that this needs to be something that becomes practical.

In terms of the student union on Prince Edward Island, do you have any Aboriginals who are actually on the union?

**Taya Nabuurs:** As of right now we don't have any students who have self-identified as indigenous on our council. That is certainly an issue that we have faced and something that I mulled over a lot when working on this policy statement because, of course, we even include in our recommendation, it's so incredibly important that when we're talking about these issues that that is coming from the indigenous population. You might hear the hash tag: nothing about us without us. That is something that we are really wanting to embody.

At the same time as we're making these recommendations we are making efforts to indigenize our own practices. I work quite consistently with staff and students at the Mawi'omi Centre on campus. They are who informed this policy statement.

Of course, based on research that I could do, there were ideas I had for different ways we could go, but at the end of the day they said there are things on campus that we want to see changed and this is what we want you to advocate on. Of course, that's where we went and why everything that we do is informed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because I'm ensured that that advice and those calls to action have come from the indigenous populations here.

Yes, it's a great question and I can assure you we are trying to do what we can to indigenize our own practices. I'm trying to get some indigenous representation on our advocacy team, and to help, kind of, inform the work that we do there.

Of course, I have an indigenous representative on our taskforce, as well, that's working on the sexual violence policy.

It's baby steps, but we're trying to get there, as well.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Taya.

**Chair:** Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to go back, a little bit, since we have you here. I appreciate it's not part of this year's presentation, but I know you and I have talked about it a little bit before, and talked about it with other members, as well.

I'm curious as to how the new EI policy in relation to funding, as we heard that's constantly an issue for students. It's something that leads through to another number of issues. I'm wondering how that's assisting students in going through their education. It's something that at this level we've certainly pushed for and the minister that's responsible for that has pushed for. The federal government has made a great announcement in that regard. I'm kind of curious to hear how that's working out at the ground level at UPEI.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Yes. This is actually something that is very much on our radar right now. Particularly, because I, for days, had many students coming up to my office to ask questions about it and to get more information, and some had issues, as well, with the program.

What we did, actually, is I had Colin kind of do some research and compile some of the information we were getting from students and reach out to staff, as well.

Maybe I'll turn to him to talk about that report.

**Colin Trewin:** One of the main criticisms we got for the new system and how it has been implemented is the hour requirements for the economic zones on Prince Edward Island, where two students could work the same job in Charlottetown. They could work entire summer long; 600 hours and only the student who has a family home in a rural community outside of Charlottetown would be EI eligible, as opposed to somebody who

has a family home in Charlottetown who would not be eligible.

That's one of the programs that we – or criticisms that we mainly get, especially from Charlottetown residents, and Stratford and Cornwall, as well, who are also in the economic zone. As well, there are problems with the EI system as it relates Career Connect where you're only eligible to apply for Career Connect within one week of the end of your summer contract. People who are trying to plan whether or not they're going to have that supplementary income during the school year have a really difficult time anticipating whether that income will be available to them.

That is really challenging for students who are trying to organize their finances for the coming school year.

**Taya Nabuurs:** It's an incredible initiative, and we were so thrilled to hear about it because we know there are so many students who are sacrificing their academics right now and taking on part-time jobs and some even full-time jobs while they're taking a full course load at university, and that's particularly stressful for them.

As Colin mentioned, the only thing that we are concerned about is how EI and the way that it's structured applies to students because it's not necessarily equitable right now.

For example, you could have two students who are at UNB law, for example. They are potentially roommates. They are living together. They pay the exact same rent. They have all the same costs. They have all the same tuition costs, but if one's parents live in Belfast and the other in Charlottetown, one might be eligible for EI whereas the other is not.

The difficulty with this is that, of course, this is on the federal side of things. The Career Connect program through Skills PEI is a provincial initiative, but in terms of how the program is administered, it's through the federal government.

What we're doing right now is we work with the Canadian Alliance of Students Associations on all of our advocacy efforts at the federal level. I'm actually working

right now on a proposal to bring forward to that group, in order to make some proposals for changes to how EI applies to students in their context to make it as equitable as possible, and propose some changes that can make it a better system for them.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Can I just follow-up on that?

**Chair:** Yes. Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for that. I know, and I appreciate it's kind of early days in this and this is the same kind of input that I'd get back, kind of, at the constituency level.

One point, and then one further question, I guess, for you. My understanding of it was, and perhaps I'm wrong in this, or maybe there is some lack of clarity there. The eligibility actually attaches to where the position was held.

You could actually be from Charlottetown but work in Tignish or whatever, and that would be how that would work out. I'm not sure on that, but I just kind of point that out.

The question I do have related to that, though is: Do you have a sense of how that breakdown works amongst the eligible population at UPEI in terms of who is getting it and who is not getting it just because they don't have enough hours?

**Taya Nabuurs:** I think we might be, unfortunately, a little bit too early in the stages, I think, to say for sure.

I've spoken to a few students who said that they have – it's a bit of a process, of course, to apply and get through that process and whatnot, so I am hearing of a few students who have gone through the process and are awaiting that.

Perhaps, it's something we can look into for second semester to see how many students are benefitting from this program, and how it's affecting different demographics.

Just to touch on the eligibility – I did have a meeting with a staff member at Skills PEI just to learn more about the eligibility and the information that was communicated to me is that it is based on permanent

residency. Of course, students – it's wherever their family home is so in terms of the eligibility, to my understanding, it was based on permanent residency.

**Chair:** Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Okay, thank you.

I'll just say, too, I mean as a statement you know from the committee – I would be interested in having your guys follow that on if you are interested to do that and come back to the committee sometime in the second semester or whatever.

**Taya Nabuurs:** Absolutely. We'd be happy to do that.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Taya, I'm just following up on how financial situations can lead to mental pressure, or pressures, added pressures to a student.

Can you comment – I know Jordan has commented on EI while attending university, but can you comment on how the George Coles Bursary that an Island student would receive in the first year and then the graduate bursary they would receive in their fourth year, how that's impacted, I'm sure positively, how that's impacted students attending UPEI?

**Taya Nabuurs:** I mean the George Coles Bursary if, of course, hugely helpful in students in receiving it in lessening that financial burden. One thing that is just kind of on the side of Career Connect that's interesting is; I have been hearing from students that they're being told when they're applying for EI that they will not receive therefore, the George Coles Bursary if they're going through the Career Connect program.

There seems to also be a little bit of miscommunication right now because students are hearing different things, but I did attempt to verify with someone in government to see whether – and what I've been told is that students who are eligible for Career Connect will not receive their George Coles.

The justification has been that students who are collecting that EI throughout the school year will receive more in that than they will in the George Coles. Of course, that's understandable, but there are a couple of things to note there. One would be that the amount that students get each year does vary. It's \$400 in second year, for example, and \$600 in the next year, and then I believe it's something \$2,200 in the –

**Ms. Casey:** In the fourth year –

**Taya Nabuurs:** – fourth year.

Of course, that is going to vary from year to year as well. Additionally, whereas, of course, we know that EI is a federally funded program, I would like to stipulate that if the province is going to be saving that amount of money and not giving those students their George Coles Bursary, that that money is being reallocated somehow else to student financial aid for students.

**Ms. Casey:** Great, thank you.

**Chair:** Any other members?

Any other questions?

Matt MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair.

In closing, I guess, I would like to make a motion on the recommendations from the student union that the Government of Prince Edward Island enact provincial legislation to ensure external oversight of sexual violence policies at its post-secondary institutions.

I'd like to put that as a motion and send it to the powers that be for a letter. Send a letter to them urging them to take a look at that as soon as they can.

**Chair:** Okay.

Could you just repeat it for the clerk, please?

**Mr. MacKay:** Yeah.

**Ms. Casey:** It's in their presentation.

**Mr. MacKay:** It's in their presentation, but I guess, committee of education, economic development recommends that the

Government of Prince Edward Island enact provincial legislation to ensure external oversight of sexual violence policies at its post-secondary institutions.

**Chair:** Discussion? Question.

All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** Aye!

**Chair:** Contrary?

Motion carried.

Are you all set? Are you okay on that?

**Clerk Assistant:** Yeah.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Sorry, just also following up on another recommendation the student union has presented to us, I would move that the Government of Prince Edward Island invest in a per-student funding model dedicated to supporting the enhancement of mental health and wellness supports and initiatives for post-secondary students on Prince Edward Island; that the province would explore that.

**Chair:** Explore it because that's a budgetary thing.

**Ms. Casey:** Yes.

**Chair:** We can't recommend it.

**Ms. Casey:** Yes, but we could ask them to explore or consider it in their upcoming budget.

**Chair:** Question.

All in favour of the motion as presented?

**Some Hon. Members:** Aye!

**Chair:** Contrary?

Motion carried.

**Mr. Myers:** Chair.

**Chair:** Steven Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** I'd like to make a motion today based on the testimony that I heard that this committee sends a letter to the four Island MPs asking them if they still support changes to the EI zones that they supported prior to the last election, to help alleviate the student issue with the EI that we heard today.

**Chair:** Discussion?

Question.

All in favour?

**Some Hon. Members:** Aye!

**Chair:** Contrary?

Motion carried.

I realize you have another appointment at 12:30 and it's 11:50, are there any closing remarks that you would like to make?

In fact, I'd like to thank you, on behalf of the committee. You're very knowledgeable. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for what you guys do out there for the university. To look after them out there because we know there are a lot of pressures in every which way on your students. Thank you for being their advocate here today, and as you continue that role is there anything you would like to say departing?

**Taya Nabuurs:** As a closing remark, I suppose I'd just like to extend a tremendous thank you for the act of listening and discussion that we've had here today. We really appreciate everyone taking the time to listen to our concerns.

We do our best to ensure that we have a good grip on students and what their concerns are and we try to advocate on those as best we can.

Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Colin Trewin:** I'd like to just reiterate that as well. Thank you for allowing us to be here and present our points. Especially, with these motions of support, thank you very much.

**Chair:** All right.

Thank you so much and you may take your leave.

Committee members – we'll just let them take their leave.

In regard, like we're meeting again this afternoon, I want to thank you all for this double committee meeting on one day. This here – what we have put out, I've asked the clerk to bring these topics out. We have about 15 topics. We only have one rated high – rated as a low priority. On (m), we're kind of awaiting a date. The minister has agreed, the hon. Mr. Gallant has agreed to come; we're just waiting on a date.

If you could think about your priorities, we could do this a number of ways. What we're trying to do is we're just trying to get the topics at a manageable level for the clerk and I so that we can have a quality, we can finish them off in a quality meeting. We just don't want to be spread out so thin that we're not providing a quality conclusion.

Go ahead, Matt MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Just a question on that: Out of these topics, can we get an update, even if it's this afternoon, on the letters that were sent out and the responses and if some didn't respond, so that we can prioritize a little better?

**Chair:** Can you provide that by this afternoon?

**Clerk Assistant:** Sure, I can do that this afternoon.

**Chair:** Okay, all right, yeah. We'll do that.

Give it some thought. We can do it a number of ways. We can have a discussion ranking them, or after that discussion we can have each individual, rank them; and then the clerk goes through them and ranks them as a majority sees fit, sort of thing, a consensus.

We're open to suggestions but we're just trying to get a handle on it, so we deal with these topics for the presentation to the Legislature this fall. We're just kind of concerned. A lot of times when we have new business and people bring up topics that

are viable topics and all that, but we can only do so much considering the workload.

That's all we're asking. We invite your indulgence in that regard later on this afternoon when we bring up new business. I'll bring up new business now because it's on the agenda, but I'm not expecting to hear anything because we'll have new business again this afternoon. Is that okay with everybody?

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Casey:** Okay.

**Chair:** All right. I'll see you all at 1:30 and thank you for –

**Clerk Assistant:** We need a motion to adjourn.

**Chair:** I need a motion to adjourn.

**Mr. J. Brown:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Jordan Brown, motion to adjourn.

**Mr. Dumville:** I thank you for this morning.

We are adjourned.

The Committee adjourned

# PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

Published by Order of the Legislature

## Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development

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**DATE OF HEARING:** 18 October 2017

**MEETING STATUS:** PUBLIC

**LOCATION:** LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

**SUBJECT:** BRIEFINGS ON WAIT TIMES FOR CHILDREN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS; PROVINCIAL AUTISM SERVICES

**COMMITTEE:**

Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, Leader of the Third Party  
Jordan Brown, MLA Charlottetown-Brighton  
Kathleen Casey, MLA Charlottetown-Lewis Point  
Bush Dumville, MLA West Royalty-Springvale [Chair]  
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque  
Hon. Robert Mitchell, Minister of Communities, Land and Environment  
Steven Myers, MLA Georgetown-St. Peters  
Chris Palmer, MLA, Summerside-Wilmot

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

none

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Mermaid

**GUESTS:**

Education, Early Learning and Culture (Hon. Doug Currie, Carolyn Simpson); Public Schools Branch (Julia Gaudet)

**STAFF:**

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research and Committees)

Edited by Hansard

The Committee met at 1:30 p.m.

**Chair (Dumville):** Call the meeting to order and I'll ask for an adoption of the agenda.

**Ms. Casey:** So moved.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

I'd like to welcome Minister Currie here today, and Julia Gaudet and Carolyn Simpson. Welcome.

Just talking to the clerk, I understand that you'd like to go through your presentation first, hold questions till after? We'll try to attempt to do that. The only difference will be if somebody wants clarification. We might just interrupt you for clarification. All I ask is that before you speak, to give your name for the recording.

The floor is all yours. You may begin now.

**Mr. Currie:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank the standing committee for inviting us in. With me are Julia Gaudet from Public Schools Branch and Carolyn Simpson from my department, who oversees early childhood education.

I would just like to take this opportunity just to – today we'll be providing some updates, particularly in our approach to where we're going with psycho-ed assessments, which has been raised on the floor of the Assembly over the last number of years. We'll also update how we responded to the items in the autism action plan that was presented a number of years back. Some clarifications, some updates on where we are.

I know that there are some questions on the Learning Partners Advisory Council and the District Advisory Council as well, and some discussion around policy around head lice as well. We're looking forward to sharing the conversation with members of the Assembly and we'll start with the presentation with Julia.

**Chair:** Just to interrupt for a moment, I'd like to welcome Sidney MacEwen here today as he's sitting in. He's not normally a member of this committee, but you're welcome, Sidney.

You may start your presentation, Julia.

**Julia Gaudet:** Okay, thank you.

I'm Julia Gaudet, and I'm Director of Student Services with the Public Schools Branch. Thank you for your interest. Thank you for your invitation to be here.

We've put together some slides that I hope will introduce you to some of the successes and challenges we've had around staffing of our psychologists, and also some of the efforts that we've been participating in to try to fill some vacant positions.

We collected some bullets here which I hope will help you understand the current scenario and the background leading up to that.

Over the past 10 plus years, PEI has experienced significant challenges in filling our vacant school psychologist positions. That's in part because there are very few institutions across the country who are still offering school psych training, and of those that are doing so, there are limited seats available for students to participate in those programs.

The growing awareness, I think in terms of the importance of early identification and appropriate and timely intervention for students with Learning Disabilities, has meant that there's more of a demand to have those positions filled, and filled in a timely manner.

In response to that, we are working both on local and regional efforts to better inform potential applicants, to make sure that we're offering competitive incentives and to ensure that when we do have an interested candidate they are coming here and coming to stay and hoping to build lives on Prince Edward Island so that we end up with a long term plan to address the shortage.

Our current situation: Of the 8.4 school psych positions that we have at the Public Schools Branch, 6.6 of those positions are filled with permanent employees. We do have 1.8 vacant positions remaining from that, and we also have one psychologist who is on a leave this year.

School psychologists are trained to provide the scope of practice that includes assessment and diagnosis, and crisis response for school-aged students. We've run into a bit of a challenge with that because it's a bit cyclical. The nature of the wait list has meant that we have to focus all of our time, all of our school site time, on addressing that wait list, and so we're not able to have our school psychologists fulfilling the full scope of their training and practice.

At less than full staff, we've done really well, I think, to be able to hold the wait list where it has been for a number of years, approximately 3.25 years. The average assessment takes anywhere from 10 to 30 hours, depending on the complexity of the case.

We have psychologists traveling to schools to see students. Sometimes the student may not be there, so they have several assessments running open at one time in a certain school so that they can make the best use of their time; but there are fatigue factors with students, there are co-morbidity issues with certain diagnoses in certain situations, and so it's hard to say just how long an assessment will take, but that's the average.

Our ratio, with respect to our psychologists to student population, is one to 2800. If we were fully staffed, that would be down to one to 2200. The ideal is one to 1000, and to give you something to compare it to jurisdictionally, Nova Scotia is approximately one to 1800.

Over the past three years we've hired three permanent psychologists – two of them are from out-of-province – and our psychologist team report being feeling really happy, very well supported, and they work very well as a team. It's considered a great place to be, a great place to be a school psychologist and a great system to be part of.

One of the things that I think has been really advantageous to us is our consultation process, and that ensures that while the wait list may be 3.25 years, a student doesn't need to wait 3.25 years to be able to have some input from a psychologist.

In fact, that psychologist is able to weigh in within that first six months, to see the case on paper, to be able to have valuable conversations with other professionals in the school who know the student and who are able to carry forth some suggestions.

In the last two years, approximately \$200,000 has been spent on increasing our resource, our material interventions, so that we're able to provide students with the intervention that is best suited to them. No longer are we grasping for the one that's handy to us. We're not choosing from a limited variety so that students might have been getting an intervention tool that may or may not have been the most effective for them given their learning profile. Now we have increased the training and we've increased the library of resources that we're able to choose from, so we're really pleased to have that and to have had that investment.

Another factor that comes into play is the supervisory guidelines that are imposed by the PEIPRB, and that's the registry body for school psychologists and for clinical psychologists here in Prince Edward Island. If you are coming to Prince Edward Island, you need to be registered by that body and there is, much like other provinces, there's a supervisory time period and an internship time period prior to graduation, but post graduation, there's a supervisory period that's quite lengthy. They are supervised for 24 months post graduation and that supervision is taken on by a resident psychologist.

That would mean that to take on a student as an intern or to take on a new graduate, it takes almost the equivalent of point two of our existing psychology roster in order to be able to provide that supervisory governance. It's a very rigorous registry process and the guidelines around supervision are very strict.

Just recently, we've had another meeting with Dr. Philip Smith who is the registrar of the PEIPRB, the registry board, and we did that hopefully to get a better understanding of that registration process, to get a better understanding of what our potential candidates would be looking at in terms of possible barriers to coming to Prince Edward Island, and to make sure that we weren't making assumptions. It seems that the PEIPRB is very anxious, as we are, to

have new candidates come to PEI and they're very willing to try and support that process. We were also able to have some valuable conversation with Dr. Smith about different trends across the country and some ways that we can continue to work together.

I think our efforts have been positive. Having been able to hire three full-time permanent psychologists over the last few years has been a success. Unfortunately, other years we've been able to hire out and to contract out some services from private psychologists. That's not been possible this year, although we have had a tender out there for interest. They, too, have their wait lists and depending on who the psychologist is, there are wait lists anywhere from six months to two years in the private industry as well.

What I have put up there is just a little snapshot of looking at; if I was a candidate coming to Prince Edward Island what would be some of the advantages to being here as well as some of the challenges? Some of these I've touched on. Our team reports feeling very supported and valued and respected, and some of the other provinces that's not what's being reported by the school psychs. So, I think we're quite pleased to be able to say that they feel very fairly paid; we offer competitive pay so that has not been an issue. A great advantage for our school psychs is the fact that they work on a 10-month contract and that's been very appealing. The majority of our school psychologists are young mothers and that's been something that has been an attraction for them, to come to these positions and to remain in them.

Opportunities to collaborate as a team; we fully support that. We don't require a PhD. In fact, our preference to date has been a school psychologist although we're very open to a PhD, a clinical psychologist. We found it very important to make sure that the psychologist is familiar with an environment that's education-based. We've learned that we can provide that so opening our doors to a clinical psych is certainly something that we're open to as well.

We have a very innovative consultation process that I'm going to go through a little bit later. We also have a letter of understanding in our collective agreement

with PEITF that allows psychologists to offset their March break. So if they chose to travel, for example, at another time of the year they're able to work on casework during March break and they could do report writing during March break. That's a break that we don't offer to just everyone and so that seemed to be kind of an olive branch that, again, makes us a little bit more appealing in the market.

In addition, we've made arrangements to allow our psychologists who are on an operative day set to work up west, for example, or down east, we've given them the opportunity to work closer to their home when they're working on paper work. Every little bit that we can do to make it a more kind of a (Indistinct) working environment, we've done.

Conversely, some of the challenges that face us – and an asterix identifies that those are challenges elsewhere in Canada as well – we in PEI have extensive travel that's required for our psychologists when you only have a few and we have a pretty broad geographic area, there is significant travel. Our roster of psychologists right now, they reside in the Queen's County area, so for some of them, they're travelling a lot.

We are, because of the wait list, forced to be solely focused on assessment and that's not appealing. If you've gone to university and you've trained to be a psychologist and you have a repertoire of skills that represent a full roster, including therapy and crisis response and you're only doing assessments, that's not an appeal. So we're looking at ways to try to circumvent that.

There's certainly some continual stress and pressure that is added when there is a wait list, and the public is very anxious to see that wait list addressed. Our psychologists report coming into a school and there's that kind of split reception. People are very happy to see them, but they know that when they walk in the door they feel like they're bringing less than is needed and so that's a challenge in itself.

Our ratio is less than the national recommended ratio. We do have a limitation on our school psychs right now that we continue to revisit. It has not been a deal breaker in any negotiations we've had with

new candidates, but right now our school psychologists can do private practice for therapy and assessment only on non-school aged children, because we would not want a conflict of interest where they are doing private practice on the same population for which they're working for the Public Schools Branch.

Then, under the current act it is a bit of a deterrent, in Prince Edward Island and I believe Ontario, as well. If you are a graduated school psychologist when you come to Prince Edward Island you receive the status of a psychological associate. You relinquish your title as a psychologist and you take a tag of an associate. A clinical psychologist retains the full clinical title and so that's not been something that's been happily received by out candidates. Our existing psychologists have been grandfathered in and so they do have full psychologist titles.

Recruitment and retention initiatives; in order to address some of those challenges we have been working hard. We've been visiting with UPEI and continue to do that and continue to look forward to doing that to be able to highlight career opportunities within the board –

**Chair:** Could I excuse you for a minute?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yes.

**Chair:** I have a couple that wanted clarification.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure.

**Chair:** Sidney first and then Jordan Brown.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

There's a ton of information here. I'm wondering if you have copies of all of this. The slides are – there's a lot of information on your slides. Do you have copies that we could (Indistinct) –

**Julia Gaudet:** I can provide you with copies and I can provide you with a digital copy. Do you mean right now?

**Mr. MacEwen:** Yeah, like there's a ton of –

**Julia Gaudet:** I have a copy that I could have copied for you.

**Clerk Assistant:** (Indistinct) copies?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yeah, sure.

Yeah, that's the whole thing (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** The one with the answers.

**Chair:** That was yours, Sid?

**Mr. MacEwen:** I have a clarification question as well (Indistinct)

**Mr. Currie:** We're open for solutions. I'm waiting for solutions today.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Currie:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Clarification question from Sidney and then Jordan Brown.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

Just on the previous slide, if you don't mind. On the challenges side, it says: Ratio less than national recommendation. Can you explain what that is?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yeah, so our ratio – the national recommendation is 1 to 1,000.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Sorry, the child psychologist to students?

**Julia Gaudet:** That's correct, yeah.

Currently, if we were full – if all of our positions were fully staffed we would be at 1 to 2,200 and so when we're out recruiting and they say: Well, how stressful is it to work there? They're asking about our ratio, and so that would be a challenge for us. We want to be honest and up front, but it is a challenge. Does that answer your question?

**Mr. MacEwen:** It sure does.

So you're saying if we were full complement it would be 1 to 2,200?

**Julia Gaudet:** That's correct.

**Mr. MacEwen:** So what is it right now then?

**Julia Gaudet:** 1 to 2,800.

**Mr. MacEwen:** 1 to 2,800 and they recommend 1 to 1,000?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yes.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Clarification, Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you.

Just on the last – the point under the one Sidney was just asking about there: Under the current act, new master level candidates – so if for example you had a person that was working in that role in a different province, like that we're trying to recruit here, would they be grandfathered or would they –

**Julia Gaudet:** Each province is a little different. There are a few provinces and I believe and I may stand corrected on this, but I believe in, it may be BC and Newfoundland you're still able to retain your school psychologist title. Some of the more central provinces in the middle, you relinquish that, as well. That's not us, that's the PEI registry board for psychologists and the national registry board for psychologists that deal with that, that's just a reality for us. We're not the licensing board here on Prince Edward Island.

**Mr. J. Brown:** What – full disclosure, I can give you a for example. My brother's father-in-law is a master's level psychologist who was a school psychologist and is currently doing just assessments in Saskatchewan. He done them in Newfoundland, actually, and I think he did them in Alberta for a period of time, as well.

If he was here today would he be a –

**Unidentified Voice:** Psychological associate.

**Mr. J. Brown:** – psychological associate, or a –

**Julia Gaudet:** If he came here today he would need to apply for licensing to the PEI

PRB and they would identify what designation he would get. I can't answer that; it would really depend – and I'm not even sure of all the criteria they would use to make that decision.

**Mr. J. Brown:** If you get somebody like that, recognizing that we're looking for 1.8 more people to do these assessments, do we say: regardless of whatever you were, if you're good enough for somewhere else, you are good enough for here, or do we –

**Julia Gaudet:** It's not a deterrent. Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you for asking that. We're happy to hire a candidate, or sorry, an associate.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Yeah.

**Julia Gaudet:** That doesn't mean that they're any less marketable or that they're paid any different to us. It's just a deterrent in that they may lose a title that they held in another province.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Okay.

**Julia Gaudet:** Okay?

**Mr. J. Brown:** Yeah, great.

**Chair:** We'll go to Peter Bevan-Baker then Sid for clarification and then we'll try and move on.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure.

**Chair:** Go ahead.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you and mine is a follow-up, actually to Sid's question and it's to do with the ratio of psychologists to students. You mentioned that fully staffed will be one for two –

**Julia Gaudet:** I rounded off, but yes –

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – 2,200 approximately. In Nova Scotia, it's one to 1,800. What about the other Maritime Provinces, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador?

**Julia Gaudet:** I believe they're similar, but I would have to –

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – similar to –

**Julia Gaudet:** – check to be able –

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – Nova Scotia?

**Julia Gaudet:** I believe so.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Okay. So they're all – they all have better ratios –

**Julia Gaudet:** I'm going to take Newfoundland out of that because they operate differently.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Okay.

You've mentioned a couple of times about the three hirings that you've done in –

**Julia Gaudet:** Yes.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – the last few years. Were they new positions or were they replacing exiting –

**Julia Gaudet:** Replacing.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – okay, so none of those positions was a new position?

**Julia Gaudet:** No. We haven't – the amount of school psychologists we have approved to us, in our budget, has not changed.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Is there any goal or desire to improve the ratio of students to psychologists in the upcoming future? If we're more than twice what's recommended nationally, suggests to me that that's an area where we should be trying to do better.

**Mr. Currie:** Obviously, this exercise clearly indicates that the current complement of psychologists will need to be enhanced. That will go through the budget process and moving in over the course of the next (Indistinct) but you know we recognize that and the numbers clearly show that.

After meeting with Dr. Philip Smith, it became very clear that there's a very rigorous level of standards to be able to practice here in the province. Which, when I challenged him, respectfully, challenged him on that, he was very consistent with this, this is a reality in respect to the national and North American standards. With that, on the enhancement of the complement, but also, I think that, we inside government need to be

more aggressive in respect of the recruitment and the retention.

On the recruitment side it's very difficult for the Public Schools Branch to be solely focused on recruitment. I think that in meeting with the ministry of health, obviously the office of recruitment and retention; we had meetings with their deputy and their minister looking at ways that we can use those resources.

When they're out in the field visiting post-secondary institutions, particularly, in Ontario and in Atlantic Canada, look at ways that we can start conversations about return in service and incentives to capture their attention. If you look at the approach that other provinces and jurisdictions are taking, they're starting to do the same thing because they know the challenge in identifying and finding.

The other challenge with is, is that when you attract a psychologist there are certainly standards and requirements. They have to do a certain level of actual work with children and families. It just can't be about assessments. That's a bit of a deterrent, and a bit of a reality in respect to what they're required to obtain to be a fully licensed psychologist here in the province.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Chair, I have lots of questions, but they're not clarifications, so I'll save that –

**Chair:** I'll go around and come back –

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – so I'll save them –

**Chair:** – to you.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – until later.

**Chair:** Oh, thank you very much, Peter.

Chair recognizes Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm just trying to clarify the number of students on the waitlist right now.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure. The number of students on our waitlist right now is 435.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Four hundred and thirty-five.

**Chair:** Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Minister, this spring, I think, it was confirmed that there was 330. Would that be correct, this past spring?

**Mr. Currie:** I may have said 330, but obviously, the accurate number as of today would be the number that has been just shared.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Have we gained, like, my question is: Have we gained 100 since the spring?

**Julia Gaudet:** I can't speak – I didn't check what the number was in the spring. It does make sense that there would be new referrals, so the number that was given in the spring may have been open cases versus ongoing cases. There may be a discrepancy there.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay. Chair, on more –

**Chair:** Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

On your advantages it says the 10-month contracts –

**Julia Gaudet:** Correct.

**Mr. MacEwen:** You had mentioned that's probably to go along with the school year –

**Julia Gaudet:** Yes.

**Mr. MacEwen:** – I'm expecting. Do we offer them work for those extra two months if they want it? Are we trying to get the waitlist down and that by saying, you know, maybe someone actually does want to do it part-time or –

**Julia Gaudet:** Certainly that's been talked about. They're very aware that if they wanted to – they are 10-month employees, but we would be happy to contract them for the months that they are not. They are not interested in that, and in fact, have spoken quite passionately that that is one of the things that keep them here.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay.

**Chair:** Clarification?

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

**Chair:** We have one more for clarification. We have Steve Myers, but after this one we'll let you proceed –

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure.

**Chair:** – with your presentation. I'll ask all members to keep track of their questions. We don't want to miss any of your questions.

Steve Myers, clarification.

**Mr. Myers:** Yeah, it's just a clarification on the numbers. There are 435 on the list and you're wait time is 3.2 or 3.25 years. How many do you actually get to see in a year?

**Julia Gaudet:** It depends on the complexity of the referral.

**Mr. Myers:** How do you know that you're 3.25 years behind then?

**Julia Gaudet:** It's a ballpark. We've never been able to –

**Mr. Myers:** So what's your ballpark on how many people you would see in a year?

**Julia Gaudet:** Our ballpark right now – so what we do is we pick targets and our target right now is that by June of this year, of this school year, so June, 2018, that we would have completed to the point of March, 2015 referrals.

**Mr. Myers:** Which is how many?

**Julia Gaudet:** Again, it's a referral. Sorry, it's a ballpark. We don't know. It really depends how complex the referral is.

**Mr. Myers:** So how many is that?

**Julia Gaudet:** I'd have to do the math. Sorry.

**Mr. Myers:** How do –

**Julia Gaudet:** I can't do it off the top of my head.

**Mr. Myers:** How do you figure – like I figure you have to do 135 a year just to keep your 3.25 waitlist?

**Julia Gaudet:** Some years, we're able – there are years when we might have psychologists who are able to plow through 30. There are other years when they may not be able to plow through that many. It really depends on each case.

**Mr. Myers:** Okay.

**Chair:** Continue, Julia.

**Julia Gaudet:** Minister Currie spoke a little bit about some of these initiatives, but what I'm hoping to do is to touch on a few of things that we're doing to address that shortage. Then, I'd really like to spend a few minutes explaining to you what happens when you're on that waitlist.

Definitely, we've done some of these things with respect to having the conversations with health. That is a new, kind of, strategy that we're trying this year to have some collaborative conversations around our efforts with the office of recruitment and retention.

We are exploring the possibility of sharing a position with a pediatric clinical psychologist where that person may be able to receive referrals from the department of education for assessment, yet, do the other piece of their work under the health title.

We are looking also, at – we're trying to provide a supervisory experience for a new candidate is difficult because there it's assessment only. Perhaps they can do the therapy portion of their training, have that supervised and have that happen within health.

Some of the other initiatives, the smaller things that we're doing to try to be a little bit more attractive would include; looking at, perhaps, a return-for-service agreement with the new graduate. Maybe looking at purchasing seats at Mount Saint Vincent, which are near and dear; they don't have very many of them. Looking at, perhaps, a loan forgiveness arrangement where we take a new graduate who is finished their training, has amassed a loan in order to become trained as a school psychologist,

and we're able to give them a portion of money to go toward that debt in return for a promise of service at a set amount of time.

We're looking at some possibilities of rotating a few of our positions to be a full scope of service role so that it's more appealing to candidates as well.

There are some smaller incentives listed there as well. NASP, which is the National Association of School Psychologists, put on a very informative conference once a year. It's expensive to go. There's travel involved, and there's time off task, time away from students, but being able to support that endeavor is something that I think would be appealing to candidates.

There are expenses that go along with being registered and licensed. Perhaps we will look at covering those costs as well. So those are just some of the initiatives that we're looking at.

I think what – when we looked at what's the most important piece of information that we can give you in terms of some of the questions that you will get, it's what happens during that time period when students have an identified need, they are placed on the wait list and the clock is ticking and time is passing and it's valuable learning time. We wanted to make sure that you understood that there's a lot happening in that time period.

We do have a consultation process that has proven to be quite effective. What happens is trained resource teachers – and they have received additional training for this – do some academic achievement testing and they collaborate with some of our school psychologists, our inclusive education consultants, OTs, school-based professionals, and we get together and we decide who is the profile of this student and what kind of efforts can be made to try to address the gaps in those learnings in the interim.

Sometimes that involves the efforts of the school therapy OT, and that has been proven to be really effective in addressing students who are having challenges with writing and preempting what may later develop into a learning disability and maybe a need for

further psych-ed assessment, so that's been very helpful.

We now have the student wellbeing teams that we're able to tap into. Not all of our assessments are around academic achievement. Some of them are addressing mental health concerns, and with those supports now available to us we're able to intervene in that way as well.

We have a number of evidence-based interventions that we're now using, so what we're seeing is a student who in the past may have sat on the wait list and not had the appropriate intervention, we're able to administer those more effectively and in a more timely fashion.

In terms of the sequence of events, what happens is there's an initial classroom support. You've all seen that in your schools. Where a student is struggling, we try to get the teacher to support, we try with extra help, we try with smaller ratio instruction, and the teachers often do what we call level A assessments. That's assessments that you don't need a huge amount of training to be able to do. Sometimes you can do many students at a time, and it gives you an indicator of how the student's doing. Sometimes that will address the issue. Sometimes it doesn't.

We will then go to an in-school resource referral, where we're able to get more consultation with the subject teacher and someone who has more training in intervening. That resource teacher might be able to do level B assessment. So those academic achievement assessments, we take those achievement results, we look at the profile it generated, and we match it up to some of the evidence-based interventions that are able to be supporting lapses or lags in those areas.

We also bring in board-based consultants to help. We have inclusive ed-consultants, we have counselling consultants, we have OTs, we have SLPs, and all of those individuals play a big role, particularly in the literacy piece and the literacy acquisition when children are young. They don't need to wait for a referral for an ed-psych consult to come up on that ticket line to be involved, and we don't wait for that.

We do a vision and hearing check and we've found that that's incredibly important, and in many cases it's caused to be the reason that the student is struggling, and so that very piece can be – you know, we can resolve this in follow-up action that can address those learning challenges.

After that, there is a psycho-educational consult while your school might say: We've tried all of this and we still are concerned that we're missing this. At that point that consult is had, where we have that conversation with the school psychologist, and even deeper recommendations are made, and perhaps a level C referral is submitted at that time.

The last step, of course, would be a re-evaluation, which is something that comes up 3-5 years post the original evaluation.

We did a couple of scenarios that might help you understand what that looks like, and I can walk you through these just briefly.

If you had student A, who might be a grade 3 student, has significant reading and writing problems, so the teacher and the parent report that and they get together and they have some conversation about that.

The resource teacher probably would do some academic assessment. Maybe they find out that the child has strong skills but reading and writing fluency are problems. So the student reads and writes in a slow, laborious way, and that's getting in the way of them progressing with their studies.

With this, an in-class, resource-based support would probably be implemented, and they use some interventions and strategies and they try to remediate that gap or that challenge. The team, if that's not making the gains that they would like to see, then would refer them for an ed-psych consult.

As part of that, the vision and hearing would be formally tested. In this particular case, the hearing results are within normal limits, but maybe the vision assessment finds concern, maybe eye movements or visual acuity issues. That prompts a further referral to an optometrist or an orthoptist – I can't say that word.

The result of that is that a little further down the line, we realize that this student doesn't need to be placed on the list for assessment because it was in fact a vision issue, and it's not one that requires full assessment. So not every student who's on that list needs that assessment, and not every student that's on that list results in that, but frequently they do. It's one of the reasons why the vision and hearing test is so important to have.

We did do a second example. In this example it might be a Grade 5 student who has a significant reading and writing problem, attention problems, work refusal, can't stay still, blurting out, all of those things.

The assessment by the resource teacher confirms a below average reading and writing. The behaviour plan maybe is tried, strategies are put in place. Again, not seeing the gains and the decision is made to refer for a psycho-educational consultation. Those pre-referral steps are in place. We need that level B assessment, we need the vision and hearing, but no concerns, no answers are really found.

A consultation with the school psych service is held and they try new strategies. They suggest maybe you need to go about it and use this person's involvement or you need to have a pediatric referral. That happens and the student is on the waiting list, and while that student's on the waiting list some targeted interventions and appropriate assistive tech and adaptive strategies are in place, and there's additional suggestions as well from the OT or perhaps from the SLP. Each bit of that information helps us to better understand how to intervene effectively.

Eventually, the psycho-educational assessment is completed and a specific learning disability is diagnosed. Much of those recommendations are going to be far more student-specific, and a plan can be revised and fine-tuned to reflect what we know about that student, because an assessment is not just going to tell you the challenges that the student had with learning. It's going to tell you how the student learns best, and so we're able to go back and say: Okay, that's what we're doing, line up what that student needs and

how can we tap into their strengths and not just focus on their area of challenge.

Those are just quick snapshots of what it might look for a student. I guess the important thing is to understand that during that 3.25 years, and even prior to that, there's a lot going on. This is just – it's the back page of one of our psych guides, and it points out – I don't know how well you can see it there. It points out what happens with respect to – we do have some students who follow through and perhaps they are referred, but through the consultation process their issue is addressed.

We have other students who that issue is one that, through the prior or the earlier steps, it's not addressed and they do need to go forward for further evaluation, and then we have the re-evaluation that happens. So it's a pretty complex – it's a busy time, those 3.25 years, and we don't want anyone to walk away from this thinking that nothing is happening.

Our resources programs in schools are well-staffed. Our resource staff are well-trained, and they are well-resourced, so with the material kits and interventions and we are following evidence-based practices, and so I think our students are being well-served.

So, yeah, happy to answer any questions if anyone has any.

**Chair:** Okay. Our first person on the list is Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair and thank you for the presentation and I appreciate the examples, too.

I know when I speak to parents in this situation, once they do get the help they're highly complementary to the help that the students and the family is receiving once they get into that system.

I guess the elephant in the room, so far, I think is, perhaps, private or going off-Island for assessments.

Can you, maybe, speak to the province's policy on paying for a private assessment or an off-Island assessment because our waiting list is so long?

**Julia Gaudet:** I can't really speak to that as the Public Schools Branch, other than to say that we don't fund that. That wouldn't be something within my role or our role to support. We are quite open with our parents. Timing is very important to them. When we do not feel that we'll be able to address this issue, or I guess in every situation, if – it's around informed decision-making and we want our parents to understand that there's a significant wait time, that all sorts of measures are going to happen during that wait time, but they need to be eyes wide open in terms of other choices that are available to them. We do our best to make sure they understand those choices, but we do not fund them as a board.

**Mr. Currie:** I think it was explained that there has been outsourcing in respect to access to the service, but the uptake for that has been very difficult to find psychologists outside the province to do that, so to your question.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Chair.

**Chair:** Matt MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you –

**Chair:** Sid. Excuse me.

**Mr. MacEwen:** No problem.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Sorry about that, Sid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I answer to a lot of things.

Dive deeper into that; when you say the uptake has not been great. When I speak to some parents they say they have been in touch with people, but they can't get it covered. As you know it's thousands of dollars. What have we done to investigate that? Have we – we talked about, and part of our strategy is maybe buying seats at Mount Saint Vincent, well, are we buying time from the Nova Scotia system.

Now, I know you say they're stressed too, no doubt, with their numbers, but maybe speak more to what are we doing to seek out that private assessment. Or we talk about the 10-month contract too, and the people that we have now are not interested in doing any

more, but I guess, speak more to what we've done to investigate the private aspect.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure –

**Chair:** Please mention your name before you speak.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sorry, Julia Gaudet.

First, I need to clarify. The uptake has not been great with respect to us contracting the ongoing services of a private psychologist. I don't mean that we don't have private psychologists interested in doing business with members of the public. That's not what I meant.

I do want to point out though, your comment around the 10-month, I think, I've been very, what is the right word, I just think that it's important that we not just look at recruitment efforts. It's very important that we look at retention efforts.

If the 10-month contract is something that is appealing in securing our current psychologists in their roles, I think that's a very important piece. It's about having people who are willing to come here, be part of a team and are committed to staying. Every time that they do an assessment, our students benefit, sure, but every time they walk in the door of the Public Schools Branch, all of the people in student services, and every teacher in our province benefits from their knowledge.

I think it's important to not just measure their contribution by the number of assessments that they complete, if that makes sense to you.

**Mr. MacEwen:** By no means did I mean to belittle the 10-month, I think that's fantastic.

**Julia Gaudet:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacEwen:** You're right. Retention is as important.

**Julia Gaudet:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacEwen:** As an MLA, the parents are coming to me and saying: I'm paying my taxes. I'm on a three-year waitlist. My child is in kindergarten. Now, he's in grade 1.

Probably not going to be seen or assessed until grade 4.

Why – and you mentioned about the private again, I guess that's my question: Why aren't we accessing that private service? Why won't we pay for it?

Because, as you said: it's there. And they're willing to provide it privately. Why aren't we going in and paying for that?

Even it's just to – if it's a policy decision by this government to say; we're only going to do it for this amount of time. We're going to invest this much money into it just so we can get that list down.

**Chair:** Minister, would you mind using your name each time you speak?

**Mr. Currie:** Minister or Doug?

**Chair:** Whichever you prefer. Just so we know who is talking.

**Mr. Myers:** Which do you prefer?

**Mr. Currie:** Doug.

**Chair:** Go ahead, Doug.

**Mr. Currie:** I mean the whole objective of the standing committee is to make recommendations. We do have a fiscal mandate in respect to a budget. Prior to this meeting and this conversation there was no identification of resources to be outsourced specifically for this – very open.

Part of this conversation is about suggestions and ideas that we can take back to the Public Schools Branch and the department. We are here to recognize that we have some challenges, but I think some of the challenges are just not about adding more resources and more money. Some of the challenges are pretty real in respect to attracting the actual skill set to the province.

Certainly very open to recommendations that come from this standing committee and this conversation, and I'm very open. I mean, my mandate too, is to address this and to find ways that we can take pressure off that list and support children and families.

**Chair:** Can I come back to you? Because I'm starting to run a list here –

**Mr. MacEwen:** What about just one more follow up just on this topic? Then, I have other topics that I can address later.

**Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. MacEwen:** One quick one on what he –

**Chair:** Sid MacEwen, then.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it.

You mentioned a budget issue. Is that what it comes down to for the department? Has this government and this department said: Do you know what we can't afford to do anymore than what we're doing now?

**Mr. Currie:** No.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Is that what it boils down to?

**Mr. Currie:** No, and that's not what I said. I said that we have a current envelope at this point in time. If you look at the additional investments that we've made in education, whether it be school support teams, whether it be additional teachers; there has been significant investment in all kinds of areas of education.

What I'm saying is that if there are suggestions or recommendations, certainly I, as the minister, will take a look, but we have a budget envelope that we have to be accountable to.

Prior to the budget that was debated on the floor of the House last spring; there wasn't an envelope of money identified. That's not to say that we are not prepared to go back to take a look. I guess the question is, is that is there an opportunity to outsource access to these services? You know we'd need to get some clarification and that would have to be costed, and that would be have to be looked at. I couldn't make that decision here today, but I'm very open to that.

**Chair:** Thank you, minister.

I'll come back to you.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

**Chair:** We have Matt MacKay, Steve Myers, Chris Palmer and Peter Bevan-Baker, in that order.

Matt MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Julia for the presentation. It certainly brought clarification to me.

I have got a few questions on – I'm just trying to wrap my head around it, because it's – I don't understand certain aspects of it.

Is there a number of how many students would graduate every year with psychology degrees? Or that's qualified to do this –

**Julia Gaudet:** Are you talking about –

**Mr. MacKay:** – position?

**Julia Gaudet:** – across the country?

**Mr. MacKay:** No, Prince Edward Island, as well as the Maritimes, I guess, in the vicinity. How many of our own students would be graduating, Island students every year, do we know?

**Julia Gaudet:** Sorry, with their school psych designation?

**Mr. MacKay:** That's right. That would be qualified to do these positions.

**Julia Gaudet:** I can't tell you for sure how many Island graduates there would be. Mount Saint Vincent does take on between five and eight students per year. It's a two-year course, so I assume that they're generating, 10 to 16 graduates every –

**Mr. MacKay:** Every – okay.

**Chair:** Matt, the minister would like to make a comment.

**Mr. Currie:** The University of Prince Edward Island currently does not offer it. They have a bachelor of psychology, but in order to be a trained licensed psychologist you need to further your studies.

Mount Saint Vincent offers a two-year program, but there is no current

programming here at the University of Prince Edward Island.

With that being said, through our discussions with Dr. Philip Smith, I do know that the University of Prince Edward Island right now is looking at a doctorate program. That will be determined based on the Senate and the discussions inside the – which I, as minister, be extremely supportive of.

**Chair:** Matt MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair.

Why I asked that, because we hear quite often from our young Islanders, young students that they're leaving because they can't find work.

Even though it's not offered here on the Island, how many travel and take the course elsewhere and want to come back to Prince Edward Island.

I guess that's what I was kind of curious – I didn't know if we were talking a 20-student number or a 200-student number. The reason I'm asking, I guess, is because when one of your recommendations that was going through with the loan forgiveness, which I think is a great idea, where I'm struggling with is, if there was a problem 10 years ago with this, why is this just being thought of now?

Ten years is a long time, of how many students went through the program this could have been looked at sooner. If the issue has been an ongoing issue for years and we're still dealing with it. I think something like that is a great idea.

I guess my next question is: If we're trying to bring people here what – how are we going to draw them here? What advantages and what incentives can we come up with that's going to do that in a quick timeframe right?

If this has been, if like you said an ongoing problem for 10 years we can't afford another 10 years, if a student is six-years-old, he's going to be graduating before some of these ever get rectified, right?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacKay:** I'm just wondering if we could ever find out, and it might be as simple as putting somebody on a project to find out how many students, from the Island and Maritimes are taking this program, and it's probably not too late to see if we can start negotiating with some of these students in a loan forgiveness program.

**Chair:** Minister Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** Great comments, Matt.

The conversations that we're having with the office of recruitment and retention, their mandate is currently to recruit and attract; to be out in the region and across Canada looking at attracting health professionals to work here on the province of Prince Edward Island.

Part of this discussion would be to add to their mandate, to identify Island students that would like, or want to return, but try to look at ways to attract them through returning service incentives. I don't know exactly how many Island students right now are away. I know the volume of seats at Mount Saint Vincent is very restricted and very, very difficult to get into.

We have examples of, for examples, at med school at Memorial; we have purchased seats, where we have designated a number of seats for Island students. That is certainly something that we'll be looking at.

Returning service incentives, there is currently a shortage of access to psychologists across the country. The fact that the University of Prince Edward Island is currently looking at a doctorate program and this program is a very positive step because right now, we don't train school psychologists here on the province of Prince Edward Island.

**Chair:** Matt MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** One more question: I'm just curious, is there currently a job posting for a psychologist right now?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yes.

**Mr. MacKay:** Okay, thank you.

**Chair:** Steve Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you.

This is kind of an ongoing issue and I know, I understand the staffing issues and the discussion that has been had around here just recently.

When you look at the numbers, there was 4.6 out of the 6.6 positions filled in 2015. In 2016, you had 6.6 of the 8.4, which is what you have today. In a year, in two years, for that matter, you really haven't done anything to move the markers on filling these roles.

I know that's an oversimplification of it, but at the same time when you show what your challenges are, some of those challenges – you can control and you're obviously you're not.

The one about changing the name to associates, that's a legislation change. If that's an issue, if that's what keeping children from getting the help that they need, then that is something that we can change right here in the Legislature.

When you talk about extensive travel, it's Prince Edward Island, like where would they possibly be going? You could drive – if you left Souris, you could be in Tignish in 3.5 hours. How can you say extensive travel on Prince Edward Island? I don't get it.

To me, I live in a rural community. Every day to go to the grocery store it's extensive travel then by that calculation. Everybody who lives in rural PEI is subject to extensive travel. I don't buy that as, you know, a reason for not being able to attract people.

If it is, why can't you look at having offices in districts and areas so that there isn't that travel?

I look at these things as all in your control. We met a year ago and I heard basically the exact same things as I heard here today. Completely, I think, you're spinning your wheels.

**Chair:** Doug Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** I would probably have had some of those thoughts before I met with Dr. Philip Smith.

I wish the answers were as easy as an elected official changing the legislation to a licensed psychologist. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. That is a board that is independent from government.

I was hoping that we would be able to find, through the discussions, some opportunities. For example, we have got, I think 56 school counsellors in our schools. I thought: why can't our psychologists – why don't our counsellors take some training to be able to assess the level C, but it's not that simple.

We're going to continue to work with Dr. Philip Smith to look at options and opportunities, but really, I think, there have been a number of things that have to be immediate. One, obviously, we'll cost out what it would take to make a dent in outsourcing. Two would be budgets for expanding the number of psychologists that we have in our complement. The third would be to continue to find ways that we can work with the board that licenses.

It's just not that easy to just pass a motion here that we give authorization for school psychologists to do the work in respect to level C assessments.

I would have been more optimistic prior to the meeting, but that point in time, so, anyway, we have to look at this from a number of different perspectives. How we can continue to support children that are requiring these assessments.

**Chair:** Steve Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** By my estimation, the information that I have it's \$3,500 and it would cost you about \$1.5 million to clear the list up this year. Just a quick costing.

Anyway, the – can you explain the extensive travel thing? How that's a deterrent?

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure.

**Chair:** Julia.

**Julia Gaudet:** It's – you mentioned why that that would be a reason why we can't, I don't think it – I didn't mean to present it as a reason why we can't, but it is a variable that is sometimes reported to us as something that is not so attractive.

Some of our candidates are, perhaps, coming out of having graduated from Mount Saint Vincent. They're used to living in Halifax, that area. They're used to things being close by so they want to live in Charlottetown if they are to come to PEI. Then, if their work puts them in Tignish, you gave that example; Tignish, then that, perhaps, can be something that's not all that appealing to them to have to drive three hours every day in a car; an hour and a half to get there and back if that's not something that they come from.

It's great. I'm the same as you; I have lived my life rurally and that is not off-putting for me. But it is a variable, so we are just looking at, as a whole, as a province, what kinds of things do we have that might be draws or that are attractive to people and what kinds of things could be, by some people, be conceived – perceived as deterrents.

**Mr. Myers:** Okay.

**Chair:** Chris Palmer.

**Mr. Palmer:** Thank you, Julia, for the presentation. It was very good.

I think I just have one question, around those 1.8 vacant positions, have we ever engaged professional recruiters or headhunters to go out and try to find us some people to fill those spots?

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure.

**Chair:** Julia.

**Julia Gaudet:** We are working right now with health recruitment and retention office and so that would be – this is a new endeavour for us to be working with someone whose sole job, their sole responsibility is to do those efforts and go out and kind of put feelers out and make those connections. We're excited about that.

**Mr. Palmer:** Chair.

**Chair:** Chris Palmer.

**Mr. Palmer:** Is there any kind of an accountability or expectation built into that of, working with that group, that if we don't have somebody in however many months

that we can go out to a professional headhunter and see if they have any?

I don't know that they do, but it's another option out there, and have we looked at it? I guess you had said that we haven't up until this point, but is there a mechanism that we can build in place, that we can put in place that, if we don't have some positive results soon, let's try something different.

**Chair:** Minister Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** Great suggestion. In our conversations with health and their office of recruitment and retention, to me, as the minister and former minister of health, it just makes a whole lot of sense that we use the resources that are on the ground and out in universities, whether they're at Memorial or Dal or Mount Saint Vincent in respect to expanding our ability to start conversations.

Not only just to start conversations, but to have something to have to put on the table in respect to returning service initiatives, commitments that they're prepared to stay here, support for their student loans.

We're working on that right now, but we need to be bringing something to the table, but we'll take that suggestion and recommendation into the conversation.

I appreciate that.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks so much for the presentation, Julia, and I'd like to talk a little bit about the scope of practice of the psychologists in the school system because as you said around 56 counsellors and now we have, through the (Indistinct) funding from the federal health accord, a number of public health nurses as well, specifically designated in this area.

With the school psychologists who are clearly in high demand, I was of the understanding that their work was primarily, if not entirely, related to psychological and behavioural disorders, rather than learning disabilities. But much of the presentation suggested that it's actually learning disabilities that they deal significantly with. Do you have any statistics on that as to what

percentage of their work is related to dealing with learning disabilities, dyslexia and the other range, as opposed to ADHD or ODD or stresses and anxiety and depression in children?

**Julia Gaudet:** I don't have statistics on it from our jurisdiction and I'm sure that some may be available across the country, but I don't have them and I don't think we collect them here on Prince Edward Island or in the Public Schools Branch.

That said, I'm having frequent conversations with our psych team and we're seeing almost 100% of our cases are what we would refer to as co-morbid. So we are seeing that (Indistinct) it's no longer just an issue of a student who is diagnosed with dyslexia. We're seeing a huge kind of crossing of students with mental health issues, students with learning difficulties, students with learning disabilities, students who have anxiety issues – we're seeing a lot of that kind of melting pot of variables and we're coming out with very complex assessments and complex results.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Yeah, and I have some understanding of the complexity when you're dealing with co-morbidity and all of the issues that you've just described, Julia. This is not a simple situation.

One of the concerns I have, and I'm sure you share it, is that if the entire workload of the school psychologist is in assessment and they're not actually providing any counselling – it's not that every child who is assessed requires top counselling, for example, but maybe would benefit from it. If all we're doing is assessing them and there is no integration with services beyond that, whether that's in the private sector, and you've already said that access to that is very limited for supply and demand reasons, or within government, whether it's within the health department or within family and human services, but if there's no integration there and all we're doing is assessing – I sort of go back to my dental life where you come in for an examination: Yes, you have a cavity and if we don't fix that that's not going to go away.

There needs to be an integrated approach beyond simply the assessment, and what efforts are you making to make sure that the children who are eventually assessed have access to the resources that they need to be well and stay well?

**Julia Gaudet:** I agree with you. That's a very important point and we want to make sure that we're able to follow up on the recommendations and the findings from our assessments and I think, actually, we've done a really good job on that within the last few years and particularly this year.

I think when we're making investments into our resource teachers; they are the individuals who move forward with that. We're making investments in our counsellors. We're doing a large amount of training with our counsellors, whether it's trauma informed care or what have you. We're doing some CBT training. There are a number of initiatives that we have going forward that will best prepare those professionals to be able to follow up on the recommendations of the findings. Not just those that are of an academic nature, but also the mental health findings.

We have the student wellbeing teams that are within the schools, and so there are comprehensive health nurses, those mental health workers, the school outreach workers – all of those individuals will be getting additional training and come to their positions with quite in-depth training to be able to support that follow up with students.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thanks.

**Chair:** Minister Currie for a comment. Did you want to comment?

**Mr. Currie:** No, I'm good.

**Chair:** You're good now?

**Mr. Currie:** Yeah.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Final question; and it's to do with the influx of refugees, particularly those from the Middle East, Syria and places where many of the children have experienced severe

stresses. Many of them are suffering from post-traumatic stress. Do we have psychologists and counsellors and staff who have received specific training – you were talking just in your answer to my previous question about how the training of some of the resources within the department allows children to have access to services they need. But, is there any specific training ongoing now in relation to this sudden arrival of this new need so that those children can receive the care that they require?

**Julia Gaudet:** Yes. The short answer is yes, and all of the individuals that you've mentioned; school counsellors, our counselling consultants, our psychologists, our resource teachers and even our admin support teams, all of those individuals have been included in various initiatives to broaden their understanding and make them more sensitive to some of the challenges that our students who come to us from impoverished areas and who are perhaps refugee students who may not – not only do they not have the language, but they don't have the understanding of what school is all about and they may be coming from situations that are really traumatic so we have invested in that.

We have a great EAL services branch of our student services team and they've brought in some very important and renowned and very learned individuals to work with our teams and we've been sharing that information. In addition to that is the trauma informed care piece that we've been doing with many of our school counsellors and our resources and our board-based staff to be able to deepen their understanding of who you're dealing with when you're dealing with an individual who has been in a traumatic situation.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** That's good to hear.

Thank you, Julia.

Thanks, Chair.

**Chair:** Minister Currie for comment.

**Mr. Currie:** Great question.

The province has rolled out an aggressive population strategy which I think we all

recognize that is critical for our sustainability.

Last week I had the opportunity to go to one particular school in the Charlottetown area that introduced a pullout language acquisition program and the thing that really struck me about it was that it's just how the Public Schools Branch and the department and government are responding to the changing face and the needs in schools. Now, the core of the impact is in the Charlottetown area because that's where we're seeing the growth in immigration. I was quite impressed watching the EA teacher work with the students and look at ways that we can give them the skills so they can integrate back into the classroom.

Probably a year ago we weren't even that far along in respect to how we supported EAL children. I'm seeing the system responding in a very positive way. Immigrant children, and particularly refugee children, are bringing in their own challenges, not just the language barriers. There are a lot of social and emotional issues that they've been exposed to, particularly trauma. Very pleased with the inroads that we've made to date in responding to that growth. The core of that is in the Charlottetown area.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Robert Mitchell then Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks very much for your presentation. It's extremely informative and it's a subject that, I'll be honest, is kind of completely out of my wheelhouse so thank you for the input you put in here today. I've got several questions. I'm going to try to lump it all into one statement, I guess, or one paragraph.

As a member of government today, who, back nine, 10 years ago, campaigned on kindergarten being in the school system, I'm sure that may have put more of a burden on the situation that we find ourselves in today. I don't know the ratio of students that would have need the supports of psychologists, versus those that wouldn't and I don't even know the number of (Indistinct) that we brought in about nine years ago.

But having said that, I'm sure that – I guess my first question would be: Do our early learning centres, do they help to identify in any way shape or form, I'll say, enable children that need supports to be identified sooner? That's my first question.

My second question would be: Currently, I have family living in Nova Scotia, and right now this may be implemented but they're talking about pre-K, four-year-olds coming into the school system. I would be supportive of that perhaps as well, but I want to know what would that do to add on top of the problem we find ourselves in here today, especially if we don't have enough of the experts, the psychologists that deal with that. I don't even know how many children it would be that would be influx in the system. I don't know what the ratio would be to those that would have problems.

So as somebody that would be supportive of something like that, I kind of – it's completely different from anybody else's thinking, but where would that – how much of a burden would that be putting on the system or are there early learning centre measures in place that would help us before we get there?

Sorry about that. It's a lot in one.

**Chair:** Who wants to take it? Who wants to take the question?

Carolyn?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Great question. So you've got sort of three points in there –

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah.

**Carolyn Simpson:** – that you need clarity on. From the earlier childhood perspective, and I'll speak to this quickly in a few moments around the supports and psychological assessments that do happen at the preschool level and that wait time has been greatly reduced. That's created another concern but I'll get into that a little bit later.

To answer your question, yes, children at the preschool level do receive clinical analysis and assessment in a shorter timeline than they do on the school-based side of things; however, that said, it doesn't necessarily mean at the preschool level that some of the

challenges such as learning disabilities for example could be identified at preschool. Often those aren't identifiable until children get into the school system, so there's that sort of concern as well.

The early childhood centres, the licensed early childhood centres, yes, are often the first point of contact for families and the centre directors or staff would identify this is the running record of behaviour and concern and would request that the parent potentially seek their own referral system. Then they go through in this case through public health or their doctor and on we go from there.

Very often as well, through our partnership with Health PEI and the public health nursing and the ages and stages questionnaire, children at risk are identified in one of those three stepping points and one of the interventions is access to a quality of life program. We're working to address that access through our bilateral agreement. So yes, it is identifiable in many respects at the preschool level.

In terms of responding to the numbers of kindergarten, 562 children came in 10 years ago and that number has stayed pretty consistent with that. It's certainly added some pressure points to the school system; however, if you were on the preschool wait list at the time you transition into kindergarten, a preschool psychologist will do that assessment as long as you're on that list prior to school entry.

With respect to what could happen to support children at the preschool level, I'll leave that minister to minister to have a conversation about, but we're certainly open to whatever we can do. We have 42% of our three-and-four-year-olds – (Indistinct) here is eight months – who are attending licensed programs right now.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Right, okay.

**Chair:** Does that answer your question, minister?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Does that answer your question?

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah, it does answer my question, and also the number of students

that come into kindergarten, perhaps only 500 per year times ten years, that's a lot compared to the wait list. I feel better about that we didn't completely make the numbers out of whack, so I guess – I have conversations about four-year-olds, pre-kindergarten, in the school system, so I just want to have a better handle on things when I'm having those chats.

Thank you very much for that.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you.

I have two other questioners. I have Sidney MacEwen, I have Jordan Brown, and I just want to make everybody aware that there is another presentation from Carolyn Simpson coming up so we don't want to preclude what she's going to say to us. So we can stay on this subject.

Sidney –

**Mr. MacEwen:** No –

**Chair:** – and then Jordan.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that there's other topics, and I know I sent my letter in January so I've been waiting a long time to get these questions out, so I appreciate the opportunity to do that.

Last year, I believe you told this committee that the public school branch had contracted private sector psychologists over the last two years. Can you speak to how much compensation we've provided to private sector psychologists in the last couple of years?

**Chair:** It might be helpful, who you want to address your question to.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I'm not sure, whoever.

**Chair:** Who wants to take this question? Julia?

**Julia Gaudet:** I can't give you the specific amount, but we did contract based per assessment. I believe what we were paying was \$2,400 at the time, and I'm going to ballpark that there were approximately 10, but I'm not 100% sure and that was based

on probably an average of 12-14 hour assessment time. So we were able to select maybe the ones that were not as complex as some of the other ones.

**Chair:** Sidney.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

Could you provide that exact number to the committee? And probably more than that – first of all, how long have you been doing that? Is that kind of a longstanding thing that you do a few a year or is that just something that came up once this wait list started getting long? And – I'll let you answer that first.

**Julia Gaudet:** We're always open to doing it. In the times that we have done it, it's when we've heard of someone willing, present and able and willing to do the work, so yeah, it's not necessarily a – I don't have statistics around it. I can certainly find out for you and I can provide the minister with the information around what we have contracted in the past.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Yeah, if you could bring that back to the committee.

**Julia Gaudet:** Sure, sure.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Chair?

**Julia Gaudet:** And I'm wondering, would I be able to make one correction?

**Mr. MacEwen:** Yes.

**Chair:** Go ahead, Julia.

**Julia Gaudet:** I've had some communication with Dr. Philip Smith who we referenced earlier and he was able to clarify for me that since 2015 – and I think this speaks to your question – since 2015 if you are a registered psychologist in another province and you come here, you do not lose your status as that if you're a registered school psychologist. That would be something that would affect new graduates instead. I just want to be correct in that.

**Chair:** Thank you.

Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

Minister, you had mentioned earlier that there's not a package of money or a bundle of money that was approved in the budget for the private psychologist, but yet we have been covering some private psychologists. Can you maybe shore those comments up?

**Mr. Currie:** Well, you know –

**Chair:** Mr. Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** I'm talking in respect to the budget that was passed, in respect to (Indistinct) and the MLA from Georgetown-St. Peters referred to the volume of money that it would require, first to access the resources and B, to get the assessments done.

Right now, we clearly identify that we have some challenges in respect to the wait list. Obviously, accessing a psychologist who are trained and licensed to administer those is a challenge; but in respect to what I was referring to, that we don't have a budget line in this past budget that clearly is set aside for additional assessments, that's what I was referring to.

Am I willing to take a look at certainly where we are in this fiscal to look at opportunities to support and to address these wait times? Absolutely, but I'd have to go back and take a look at where we're currently at in our fiscal. We do have a mandate and an envelope that we have to respect and adhere to.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Chair?

**Chair:** Sid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, can you also bring back what that actual budget is for the private assessments? Like, what are we spending? I know we're going to – Julia's bringing back or going to attempt to bring back how much we spent over the past number of years and when we started doing that, but what – in this year's budget, do we include that as well, what we've actually budgeted for it?

**Chair:** Minister?

**Mr. Currie:** Well, my point is that we haven't actually budgeted for a line to designate for outsourcing assessments. What I'm saying is that I'll go back into the department and take a look at what level of flexibility that we do have, because it wasn't a budget item or a line that was approved in the House. So what I'm saying is if there's an opportunity to define some opportunity, I'll do that.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Sid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

How are children chosen from this waiting list? Who decides that? Is it first in, first out? Is it based on need?

**Julia Gaudet:** It goes by date of referral.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay. So very strict date of referral, it doesn't go by need or severity or anything like that?

**Julia Gaudet:** No. Well, we've triaged to the point through the consultation process that the students who are on the list are on the list because they need to be assessed.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay.

**Julia Gaudet:** That consultation process helps us weed that out. We do adhere very strictly to the order of the waitlist. There are, very rarely, but there have been situations where, for mental health reasons, or as a result of some kind of a crisis, where we determined that an assessment needs to be repositioned in the queue. For those reasons there have been the odd occasions when we have done that, but otherwise we adhere very strictly to it.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay, thanks.

**Chair:** Minister Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** I think the scenarios that were presented by Julia in respect to some sort of on-the-ground examples of what happens when a student is referred, or has been referred, for assessment in respect to the consultations. I know from, just my experiences as a former educator and being connected to public education, there are a

tremendous amount of supports and services; IEPs in place, even though a child is on the waitlist for the formal psych-ed assessment, there is a tremendous amount of supports and resources that are put in to children in the public school system.

I think those two scenarios were a really good example of what happens in schools all across the province of Prince Edward Island. That these students are not sitting in classrooms waiting for these assessments, that there is work ongoing and supports in place.

**Chair:** Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, minister.

The reason why I asked that is because I also had parents come to me and they feel that their child might have mild needs or concerns and they're wondering if they're just on that list forever because of, if they're taking needs first. I was just curious about that.

Another question I have is, I think any principal or teacher would tell you the last few years that there seems to be a shortage of EA hours, resource hours. I'm wondering if your area feels that if the school system had increased resources in EA hours and resource hours would it help this – well, some parents talk about a crisis in psychological assessments.

**Julia Gaudet:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Would that an increase in EA hours and resource hours help any?

**Julia Gaudet:** I think those are two different questions.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay.

**Julia Gaudet:** EAs are in place in our buildings to help students who have some high-risk behaviours, who need physical and personal care, who really need help to be in the building.

What we're talking about here, for the most part, with these assessments, are students who need help with their learning and that's not the role of the educational assistant. Our students who have the most difficulty

learning deserve to have their instruction by the person with the most educational training and that's the classroom teacher.

We'll always welcome more resource teachers, but more is not the only answer. It's about how well equipped they are and how well trained they are and how able they are to do their work. I think we are appropriately staffed with resource teachers. I think our resource teachers have much greater impact now that we've broadened the depth of their training and their access to the appropriate materials.

I think that those two questions are very different, but I would have to say my answer is no.

**Chair:** Minister Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** If you look at the whole area of a special education and supports for children with special needs, I think that where we are today currently looks a lot different than it did 10 years ago, eight years ago, five years ago.

If you look at the investment that we made in the school support teams; these are supports in schools that will be rolling out this year in Westisle and the Montague Family of Schools, but over the next two years, as well.

If you look at the total number of educational assistants is at an all time high of 336 positions. We've got approximately 50 English as a Second Language staff, which was not in place 10 years ago.

If you look at the 143 special education and resource teachers, the 50 school guidance counsellors – so the supports that are in schools today have grown dramatically and are responding to the changing needs of the learner in our school system.

School is just not about a teacher and a group of students in front of the teacher, the supports are strong and they continue to grow as we continue to find ways to support the learner and meet their needs.

As a department a Friday ago the schools had school (Indistinct) days, and around social and emotional wellness initiatives in

all schools across the province of Prince Edward Island.

Things are evolving and changing in our classrooms and our schools and we're committed to responding to that.

**Chair:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Chair, one more.

**Chair:** I would like to interject, Gordon Brown, and come right back to you.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Go ahead, Gordon.

**Chair:** Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Could be a promotion.

Thanks very much, Chair.

A question, I guess, to the minister: Minister, you had referenced, I think you called it the roll-out program that's starting up in Charlottetown in relation to EAL students. I have been speaking with a number of different concerned parents in my area in relation to the kind of increasing population resulting from our population strategy and new immigrants coming into the area.

They have been talking about youth workers and programs delivered by youth workers. I'm just wondering if you could explain what youth workers are and what role they – I gather that's the right terminology, I guess I'll start with first, but assuming that it is, what's their role in this whole piece. Is that new? Is it going to expand? And, I think, generally, since you started talking about it, I'm interested to know what resources you envision having to be rolled out as immigrants continue to increase in number here, in Charlottetown, in particular.

**Mr. Currie:** The role of the youth worker, the youth service worker has been in the public school system now for a number of years. It's a role, I mentioned the functional language program that our EAL teachers – that we've rolled out the four to six week program.

In that particular program, there is a youth service worker that is assigned and their mandate and responsibility is not just – it's

just allowing them supports to understand what takes place during recess or what happens in the playground at lunchtime, just allowing them a real focus on social skill development. A lot of these children are coming from different cultures and different backgrounds, so the skill set by the youth service worker allows, obviously, the EAL teacher, to focus on language acquisition and more the technical language skill development. Whereas, the youth service worker provides supports about adjusting to school and what expectations are around interacting and sort of being a positive contributor in their classrooms, and how they exist and function. A different type of skills sets, but very important in respect to the adjustment.

What I see, government has made a very strong commitment to population growth. We have newcomers, or I call them new Islanders, coming into our province. There is an area of a window of about six schools that are seeing the most growth in the core city area. The expectation is, in my support, is that as we continue to grow our populations and the diversity in our Island classrooms, which is wonderful, I must add, but we need to support that investment with skilled trained educators to make sure that we provide for positive transitions for students, and also for supports for children that are in the school and in the classroom, particularly classroom teachers.

There are situations where we are seeing some challenges with the influx depending on the schools, but certainly as the minister we're very engaged and my staff is working very closely with those schools to look at new programs, but also, what level of additional supports will be needed as we move forward.

It's just not about the EAL supports, there are supports now that have been identified for students that are non-immigrant students that may be in a situation where we're seeing more immigrant students in a classroom, as opposed to mainstream regular Islanders that have been in the school system.

**Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brown.

We'll go back to Sidney MacEwen. After that, I don't how many more questions you

got, Mr. MacEwen, but I would like to get on with Carolyn Simpson's presentation because we're getting late in the hour.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I'll just ask –

**Chair:** It's all yours, Mr. MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** One more, I guess.

To the minister: Minister, Julia had said before that we feel that our schools are appropriately staffed with resource teachers.

Do you think that our schools are appropriately staffed with resource teachers?

**Mr. Currie:** If you look at our schools it depends on the grade level, it depends on the composition and the makeup of a particular grade of students.

In one particular year you could have a cohort of students that are very different than the previous year's cohort of students, both, socially, emotionally and academically.

I think that we have continued to invest in resources to support children. Does that say that we have, the 336 FTE educational assistants, we've sort of plateaued? It depends on population growth. Obviously, it depends on the changing face of our classrooms.

The fact that we've added a pretty significant investment in school support teams, where we have public school nurses, we have OTs. We have mental health therapists. We have youth services workers coming into the school. I think they're all skill sets that continue to respond to the culture and the learning experience for children.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Chair.

**Chair:** Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** For clarification then: Do you think our schools are appropriately staffed with resource teachers?

**Mr. Currie:** I would say we're doing to the best we can with the resources that we have.

**Mr. MacEwen:** So is that no?

**Mr. Currie:** That's a pretty opened-ended question –

**Mr. MacEwen:** It's yes or no. Is it yes or is it no?

**Mr. Currie:** I'd say yes.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** We'll go on to Carolyn Simpson's presentation.

Do you have handouts?

**Carolyn Simpson:** I do.

**Chair:** I'll ask the clerk to pass around the handouts for you, or have his staff do that, please.

Carolyn, do you wish to go through your entire presentation and have questions after, or do you wish to field questions during your presentation?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Thank you, Chair.

It would be preferable if we could have questions after the presentation. You'll see by the handout, the presentation itself is relatively short in nature.

**Chair:** Okay, we'll try to through it. The only time we'll interrupt you is if there is clarification.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you. You may proceed.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Just give us your name and –

**Carolyn Simpson:** My name is –

**Chair:** – the floor is all yours.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Sorry, my name is Carolyn Simpson and I'm the director for early childhood development with the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Part of my responsibility is specific to autism services. Provincial autism services, primarily in preschool, and the school-age funding program. There may be questions that may be more appropriate to Julia if they're school-based questions, where mine is the school-based funding.

Excuse me for reaching, Minister.

**Julia Gaudet:** Do you want me to do that for you?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Thank you.

To set the stage and to give some context by what we mean by autism and the autism spectrum disorder. It's a very – it is just that, it's a spectrum ranging from children who would exhibit very minor behavioural changes to children who would exhibit quite extensive behavioural changes, so from very mild to very severe.

Health PEI, because we work so closely, as I had mentioned earlier with Minister Mitchell's question, we work very closely with Health PEI who are actually the team responsible for diagnosis of children with ASD in the province.

There are two clinical psychologists currently around also with the pediatricians, and the occupational therapist and PTs as well who are involved in that very comprehensive screen of children prior to diagnosis.

Not all children, who are referred for screen actually receive the diagnosis, so that is an important distinction. I know that somebody is going to ask me what that number is. I don't have it, but I certainly can find that out if that's the desire of the committee.

The school-based services are provided both through the Public Schools Branch, for which Julia is the representative and also with the French Language School Board. The resource, the autism specialist who works with the 13 children in the French school board is actually a member of our team within the department. It's structured a little bit differently than it is through the Public Schools Branch.

Through the work within our division we have the IBI. You'll hear that term. That's

the Intensive Behavioural Intervention program. That's the program for our preschool children. Upon diagnosis through to school entry that's the intensive upwards of 25 hours of intensive support per week. Not all children require that. Remember it's a spectrum of need, so minimal number of hours is 10, a maximum number of hours is 25 and that is assessed and reassessed through our staff on a regular basis. We're very happy to say that children graduate from that program and no longer require service, so that's the best case scenario.

We also offer an intensive kindergarten support. Back to Minister Mitchell's comment earlier: What was some of the impact to the transition of kindergarten into the public school system?

One direct area was around support for children with autism. Prior to moving kindergarten into the school system those same children would have been receiving support through the IBI program. We didn't want to have that lost and have that negative impact for children. The Intensive Kindergarten Support program was put in place at the same time as that transition.

What that means is that the early childhood people in our department will follow those kindergarten children on a consultation basis and work really closely with the teachers and – classroom teachers and resources teachers and such to provide that support for that cohort of children in the kindergarten world, and before they transition over to Julia's team.

That transition can happen either midway through the academic year depending on the success of the child. It may, however, be in the latter part of the year. Our service stops at the end of the kindergarten year, regardless.

I'm also responsible for the school-age funding. This would be – you may know of families who have accessed funding to allow their child to have programming that happens outside of school. That is to – intended to help maintain their skill development, be their academic skill development, but primarily, primarily and, as well, focused on their social-emotional skill development.

Julia and I, clearly, would be responsible and work closely together there. Julia would receive the application, make approval, it comes through my office then for contract and funding support.

Thank you.

I just want to set the stage, too, around – we were asked to give an update on where we are with our work with persons and children with autism spectrum disorder. We tossed around, often, where are we with the autism strategy.

I think it's important to recognize that in 2009 the minister of the day, who happened to be Minister Currie, thank you, minister, asked for us to do a very intensive review of our supports and services across departments for children with – specific to children with ASD. It was the department then, the department of the minister of education and early childhood development.

That did happen and as a result of that there were recommendations brought back to government as ways that we could be more effective and streamline our services and better reach and support children, which is really what we're all about.

Of the recommendations that were brought back to government for their consideration we actioned those that were going to result – we moved on those that were going to result in actions and clearly have been having positive results for children and for students.

We focused on wait times for diagnosis and delivery of services. We focused on our collaborative efforts and working together so that children and families were not lost in the system because that was something that families sometimes would struggle with, and we worked on how could we improve our internal and external communications. We worked on how we are supporting our families.

Thanks, Julia – just need to say that, that's a fluid effort. That is not something that you can just check and say that that's done. With every child and family you met, as the minister spoke to earlier, the needs of the families are different. We can't presume that what we have in place or assume what we have in place today or yesterday will fit the

family of tomorrow. We always need to be very mindful that the needs of the families are – they're unique to their specific story of living with a child on the spectrum.

I already talked about that our focus on the actions that were presented back to the minister of the time were, we were really wanting to ensure that we were making a difference in the delivery of the identification and then delivery of service.

I've talked already a little bit about what we offer through the department, so as mentioned: the preschool program, the IBI program, the IKS program. I'm very happy to say, although if you're a parent who happens to be in that 10-month bracket that for you is a challenge, but we did at one point in time have a two-year wait list to get into our program for service; and when you're two and three, two years of your life is significant.

I'm very happy to say that that wait time is now reduced to up to 10 months, and I put that up to 10 months. Actually, in reality, we have many children who access our service within 4-6 months, but there is the outlier that could be 10 months and there are variables around that. So we're really happy with that, and we will see that change with the introduction of two new staff people. The positions are currently posted, so that will even improve.

With the addition of Health PEI with the additional psychologists, of course their wait time's improved and at that point in time we weren't able to maintain the speed for which we provided service, sort of the wait had shifted; however, we introduced back in the day two specialists and brought it from five to seven and now we're going from seven to nine or six to eight, I'm sorry, and we're going up to 10.

There are currently 54 children receiving support through our program; 31 of those children are in the IBI or that more intensive program, and 23 children in the kindergarten program. I do say currently, because quite literally, children come in and out of the program. That's as of September 28<sup>th</sup>, those numbers, so if you were talking to somebody it might be a little bit different today. Again, that's going to increase from 54 to 72 with the two additional specialists.

We have 28 children on our wait list for IBI services or for early years autism services which would catch both IBI and IKS, and we'll drop that down by 18 very, very soon.

As of September 28<sup>th</sup>, we have 159 children who are accessing the School Age Funding program, and just to remind you that that's for out of school support in the community to help students maintain their educational goals and objectives. Julia and I and others are currently reviewing that criteria for funding program again, back to ensuring that it's a living document and responsive to the needs of the children and families at the time.

We also offer additional supports to children with ASD or autism, through our special needs assistant grant that you may hear about as well, and that's where we at the department would fund a staff person in a child care program to help lower ratios for successful inclusion. There are a large number of children who have autism who also receive that support.

In terms of the school-based services; and Julia can speak most specifically to this, but there's currently 375 children identified on the spectrum and that excludes those children identified already in the kindergarten program.

There are seven autism consultants who provide direct support to the classroom teachers, resource teachers and others around how best to integrate that child into the classroom. Remembering too, that we have that spectrum of children, students who are more higher functioning requiring much less support to a child who perhaps is having some pretty significant needs and requiring much more attention and support.

While there are seven autism consultants sort of leading that work, there's a whole host of people that the minister and Julia have already talked about in the previous presentation who also offer support to these children – to name a few of them, resource and guidance. Through our department, within my team, one of the specialists that's on my team provides the support to the French Language School Board as well as to the early years in that we have that francophone person and there's currently 13

children receiving support in the French Language School Board.

In terms of working together, there were recommendations that asked us to pay really close attention that we weren't duplicating services, that we weren't stumbling over one another, that we weren't stumbling over one another, and we've made some incredible gains in these areas, insomuch as that the people that need to be at the table are at the table on a regular basis to iron out whatever challenges that lie before us.

We meet regularly as the department with the Public Schools Branch, with Health PEI, and importantly, with the Autism Society and parents around: what is it that we're doing, is this continuing to meet your needs, where are the challenges and how can we work together. That happens on a quarterly basis.

Outside of that, that we would also meet with – in my case, with the health people in terms of intensive support for the preschool children, we meet regularly. My team and the Early Years Autism folks work very closely with SLPs and occupational therapists. Very often the children have complex needs and other professionals are involved in the team as well, and we don't work in isolation of one another. So we're really happy about the collaborative efforts across departments and interdisciplinary relationships as well.

Then of course, the team within the department would work quite closely with Julia's team when it is time for that little person to graduate from the intensive kindergarten support over directly to the school base support. That transition plan is handled quite delicately. As you can imagine, children with autism spectrum disorder, routines and consistency is really critical, so that we pay very close attention to that transition for that child.

Where we are right now: Again, back to my earlier comment, we're constantly challenging ourselves to ensure that what we do every day when we get up, that we are paying close attention to the needs of the children first and foremost and are we responding in a meaningful way. If the answer is yes, we keep doing what we're doing. If the answer is we're not sure, we

check it out. If the answer is no, we change it.

Right now, we're looking at the funding guidelines because parents raised for us some of the challenges around some of the opportunities that they were able to access as a result of the funding guidelines and that wanting us to take a look at: Are we too narrow in terms of the checklist of options for parents? Great question, and that's currently, literally as we sit today being reviewed.

Again, wanting to respond to evidence-based programming, but the question can be alternately formed: Do we have more comprehensive evidence-based programs that need to be added to the list that currently exist – is really what we're looking at?

We are constantly monitoring the effectiveness of our service, as mentioned, because we just have to do our best to make sure children are doing okay and that we're working together to ensure such.

Thank you.

**Chair:** Carolyn, thank you for the formal part of your presentation.

We're going to open the floor to questions now, and our first questioner will be Sidney MacEwen followed by Kathleen Casey.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks so much for the presentation. There is good information in there to process.

I just wanted to clarify: We see 159 children are accessing the school age funding program, and quick math says there are 388 students getting autism services in this school. Is that what you referred to as reviewing the guidelines? Like, why do we have less than half of students that are eligible for autism funding receiving it? Is that what you mean by that?

**Carolyn Simpson:** That's a great question. No, that's not exactly what we mean. It will certainly have a direct impact. Parents were saying to us: We understand and respect that anything that those dollars fund for us outside of school must be evidence-based.

What they challenged us to take a look at was: Is your list if you will, your menu of options thorough enough, and are there are other programs that could be considered, as one point.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Another point was around the administration of the funding itself. We worked with our legal services in risk management to put in place a contract that was much more parent-friendly as opposed to a standard government contract which can be quite intimidating for businesses, let alone a mom and a dad. So the funding guidelines are being reviewed to consider those such factors.

The second part to that, I suggest, in terms of the uptake of the program, simply relates to – because there are – I can't answer exactly why all families aren't applying because that is as individual as the families. Then, the next logical question might be: Are they aware that the program exists for them to fund too?

I would suggest that many are, simply because the autism society promotes the program. I know that the school-based team promotes the program. When – because we don't work directly with children in the school system, other than through IKS our team, my team, specifically, is less involved in that.

I think it's awareness that the program exists certainly has grown. As for families' individual decision to apply or not apply, I could speak to some anecdotal reasons, but I couldn't absolutely say why we have a hundred and fifty-some where we have three hundred and fifty-some people with diagnoses.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Yeah.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Some could be, and I know this factually, some could be because the program that is happening within the school and what's happening for their child is meeting their child's needs. So that, remember, this is a program to help augment a child's plan that the family is making the decision that that is not necessary for them. I do know that – how widespread that is. I certainly couldn't respond.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Matthew MacKay. I'm sorry, Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Excellent.

Thank, Carolyn. Anecdotal evidence is the same with what I'm hearing –

**Chair:** – just in my mind.

**Mr. MacEwen:** – yes, they're probably satisfied with services they're getting in school and all that. From what I'm hearing it's probably, you know, life is busy after school when they would be accessing this. I think it's incumbent upon our government to make that process of getting that help as easy as possible.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Yeah.

**Mr. MacEwen:** You guys have heard this over and over again about having to hire someone, having to start your business, to incorporate, or even trying to find someone to hire and then, of course, it's evidence based.

Even just hearing all that, it's like, the parents or whoever it is just can't get into that, or maybe their work schedule doesn't allow for it. I'm thankful to hear all of those things are being reviewed. You even talked about trying to make a family-friendly contract.

What's the timeline on that? On those changes?

**Carolyn Simpson:** The family-friendly contract is already in place.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Okay.

**Carolyn Simpson:** From our risk management lens it's probably as family-friendly as we can make it at this point in time from our legal feedback.

In terms of the review of the guidelines, we do expect that we'll be making our recommendations to the deputy minister within the next (Indistinct) coming weeks. The next handful of weeks, I would suggest to you.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

Just one more question, Chair.

**Chair:** Yes, Sid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

If all those, just under 400 families access the funding, do we have that budget? It's probably over \$1 million, just quick math in my head.

**Mr. Currie:** Well –

**Mr. MacEwen:** That's not being spent every year.

**Mr. Currie:** Yeah. Obviously, recommendations, new recommendations, and new investments come through the deputy and then, of course, have to be part of the budget planning process. That's just how government functions.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you.

I have a couple of questions for Carolyn Simpson and then a couple of questions for the minister.

Carolyn, you mentioned during your presentation that there have been positions that have been posted and that would, when those positions are filled, reduce the waitlist by – to 10 people. How long have the positions have been posted? And is it difficult to hire people into these positions?

**Carolyn Simpson:** The positions actually were just posted either yesterday or the day before so the competition is still open.

I would have said to you that, perhaps, even four or five years that these were very, very incredibly difficult positions to fill. However, for recent years they're becoming – we're more successful in filling the positions. We are already aware of four people who will be submitting their applications. We have gone far and wide in terms of our advertisement to have people apply.

The area that, to be fair, and to respond to your question that would remain a challenge for us would be to hire that bilingual autism specialist. It's not the autism specialist skill set per se as it is finding somebody who is Francophone to fill that position. That would be a challenge.

To clarify though, that is not vacant right now. That position is filled, but that would be, to answer your question: How difficult would it be to fill those – that one would be, the others not so.

**Ms. Casey:** Okay.

My next question is, following up again, on the school-age funding. How often is this, the amount that each student gets for outside school activities, how often is this funding reviewed and when was the last time it was increased?

**Carolyn Simpson:** The school-age funding program came – oh, sorry, Carolyn Simpson. The school-age funding program was moved over to the department of the day; department of education, early childhood development about 2009. I could be wrong in the year there. It came out of the disability support program.

The calculation was made, at the time, that the numbers, the dollars that were being spent were upwards and inclusive of \$6,600 annually. Not every family utilizes that full amount. Some do, and of course, as you have mentioned, others don't apply.

The next part to your question would be: How often has that been reviewed? The amount of money, in terms of the cap at \$6,600 in and of itself has not been something that has been reviewed because it's back to parents have not been telling us they have not be able to get the services with those dollars.

What they've been telling us is that: are you sure the menu of services is open enough? They have not talked about the amount themselves being of the concern; it's what they're able to access.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey for the minister is it, now?

**Ms. Casey:** No. I'm sorry. I'm just going to follow-up to that.

The menu of services, how has that been increased? When was the last time that was increased and do you see with the increase in the menu that you're going to have to increase the \$6,600 fund.

**Carolyn Simpson:** The menu review, if you will, happened – the last time it was reviewed was 2013. It's currently being reviewed now. When that menu – and we will be making recommendations that that be expanded.

When we make those recommendations to our deputy minister that we believe, will mean that there will be additional families submitting their application. I go back to the \$6,600 maximum amount is not the issue so much as it is the menu itself of options.

Because not everybody utilizes that full amount, and many parents, in fact, most families utilize this funding during the summer months when school isn't open.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you.

My question now is directed to the minister: Minister during Carolyn Simpson's presentation she used words like 'ongoing collaboration' and 'the importance of working together.' It was also noted that throughout the presentation there were approximately 375 students from kindergarten to 12 who are accessing autism services within the school system.

Following on that line about ongoing collaboration, what is going to happen to these students, and what is the province doing when these 375 students go through the school system and they leave the school system.

Can you talk about your interaction, your department's interaction is with the Stars for Life organization and what are we doing with the 375 kids once they come out of the school system?

**Mr. Currie:** Transitions is, with children with unique needs, very important. We're seeing an increase in the instances of

students and families living with autism. We have a transition – Shelley Nelson works inside the department, who works very closely with the Public Schools Branch and who works very closely with the Department of Family and Human Services.

In respect to transitioning opportunities; as you know, you've been a big advocate of adults living with various challenges. In respect to housing, certainly we recognize that we have to work very closely with government departments and a lot of our NGOs who do an outstanding job and you referenced Stars for Life, but they're not the only ones.

It's certainly a very important area to us. We want to make sure the students that are transitioning out of the system are transitioning into meaningful opportunities as well as opportunities where they can – you've been to Tremploy, I've been to Tremploy, they do outstanding work for young adults and individuals living with a range of unique needs.

**Ms. Casey:** Thanks. Just –

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** – a few more, thanks.

I'm just wondering, maybe I could ask Carolyn if she's had interaction, if the teachers or the autism workers in the school system have had interaction with the people from Stars for Life. Do they use each other for collaboration or –

**Carolyn Simpson:** I would ask Julia to make –

**Ms. Casey:** Oh, sorry.

**Carolyn Simpson:** – specifically the school base (Indistinct)

**Julia Gaudet:** It's a good question, and like the question before, we've invested a lot of time and energy and care and tears and all of those things in these students as they're progressing for us through our system. We're certainly looking to have them graduate from our system with opportunities for meaningful, contributing environments as adults in our communities, the same as

we are for any other student and that requires planning.

We spend a great deal of time with our students when they enter our system on getting them accustomed and used to being in a school environment. From about grade 7 on, we start spending time getting them accustomed and prepared to leaving our building and to making sure that they have something to move onto.

That does include collaborating with agencies such as Stars for Life, whether it's QCRS, or any of the other day programming, as well as continuing education and pre-employment programming that's out there. We do have work placement assistance in many of our high schools that are able to support the practicing of pre-employment skills.

We have students who are on transition action plans that allow them to find some skills that will lead them to opportunities of productivity when they leave school. There's a great deal of time and energy that goes into that and I think we've made some headway, and largely that's been by connecting with agencies like Stars for Life.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you.

Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks, Carolyn.

My first question is: Is the incidence of ASD continuing to rise, and is that a linear thing or is it something more serious than that?

**Carolyn Simpson:** We currently – thank you for your question – we currently are involved with a national surveillance project, and that, the data will be released, I believe it's in January, that's going to give us our current prevalence of children being diagnosed, both from the provincial perspective, as well as the Canadian perspective.

The numbers have fluctuated. You talk about is this a linear – you have to wonder what the impact to diagnosis when the DSM

changed, so on and so forth; however, the predicted numbers and past numbers from PEI's context would be that there were children about one in 110 children.

Now that's outdated; those are outdated numbers. I don't have the current and won't until the New Year – are diagnosed on the spectrum. What I can't tell you out of that would be where do they fall within that spectrum, remembering that we're seeing ASD is just that.

What we do know through the children coming into our program is that we have many more high-functioning children. So while the prevalence or incidences seems to be increasing, also in tandem with that is children who are much more higher functioning as well.

Does that answer your question?

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Yes, thank you.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

In regards to the school age funding, one of the criticisms back in 2010 when the strategy was released was that although there was that time, I think, a modest increase in the dollars per hour paid to the tutors, it was still not enough to cover the full expense and families were finding they were having to pay out of pocket in order to augment the cost of seeking help.

You mentioned a minute ago that the 6600 is available now. A couple of things: Is that given out as a lump sum for the year, or is that – does that work out as a per-hour per-tutor? The second thing is, is that needs tested?

**Carolyn Simpson:** The application process is that the parent would make application to Julia's office to access the school age funding program under the current guidelines which are being reviewed. In that application, it's incumbent upon the parent to have supporting documentation around what the needs of the child are. That would be that level of screening and does that meet the needs of your child and qualify into the program.

Once that funding is approved, you would then go into an annual contract with us, either in a preschool or – sorry, in the school age program you’d come into an annual contract that it will be renewed on an annual basis. However, once approved for the program, unless you opt out, there would be no reason for you to no longer continue, if that makes sense. So once approved, always approved, if you will.

We do have parents who opt out of the program based on the needs of their children; however, once you receive it it’s not going to be taken away from you until you age out of the program or opt out of the program.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Okay, and is it needs tested, means tested?

**Carolyn Simpson:** No, it’s not.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Okay, all right.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

A final question: The autism strategy which was released in 2010, if you go online or at least – I couldn’t find it. There was no access to it –

**Carolyn Simpson:** Correct.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – on the page, so my question is: Is that being shelved or is it still actively being pursued? If so, how many of the 37 recommendations, how many of those boxes have been ticked?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Of the 37 recommendations that came into the minister’s office at the time, the first – there was 37 recommendations couched under about 19 headings. The first several headings were around the creation of an autism strategy. That actually did not happen, which speaks to your point of why can’t I access the strategy. There is not an autism strategy per se.

What government did and what the department did at the time was to say: We already have these recommendations that will directly move forward the mark of the children, that’s where we’re going to focus

our energies. Prior to that, there was a draft autism strategy and this group – that was outdated, which is why the minister asked for it to be reviewed, but a strategy was never actually developed at that point in time. It was a move toward the actions of the 37 within there.

I don’t have in front of me how many of those actions in terms of x number out of 37, but I certainly have that back at the office and I can provide that.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Just so I’m clear on that, Carolyn, because this was to be an update on the autism strategy, and so I guess the update is that there is none. Not that you’re not doing work, and good work, important work, but there is currently no provincial autism strategy. Is that the case?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Correct. So when I began the presentation, that was the clarity that I tried to bring forward, that I’m actually going to speak on the recommendations that were presented to the department and to government at the time, but that there is not actually a strategy that you can put your hand on to say, these are the objectives per se.

**Mr. Currie:** Action plan.

**Carolyn Simpson:** Yeah, it’s an action plan.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Can I ask if there is an inclination or a plan to develop an autism strategy, or are you comfortable with the way things are going?

**Carolyn Simpson:** Based on the dialogue that we’re having inter-governmentally, inter-departmentally and with our colleagues. I believe that the way we’re going is okay.

Does that still need to take into account some of the comments in terms of the child’s trajectory from diagnosis? So it’s from diagnosis to death if you will. Where do we need to continue to partner? Absolutely, still need to be paying attention to that, but our action plans, we believe, are very solid. We have means in place where we can explore where some of the challenges are and who we need to talk to

then, to make those necessary changes. It's about following that child and that family through their lifespan. We believe that we are quite successful in that action planning in this point in time.

**Chair:** Minister Currie.

**Mr. Currie:** A couple of comments. I have been in government for, in a number of roles, as minister. Certainly, strategy-action plan, I'm comfortable at where we have moved in respect to the recommendations. We have moved and made significant investments. I think the interface between early childhood, the department and the Public Schools Branch, as the result of the recommendations is very healthy and strong.

Does that mean that our work is done? No. I think that with the incidences and the rise on children being assessed and diagnosed with autism spectrum is a call that we need to continue to be vigilant and interfaced in respect to the work we're doing.

The recent investment by the federal government in the early childhood area, we were able to negotiate the bilateral that we identified supports and resources to go towards children with unique needs. That is the reason why we are making new investments in autism consultants and to work with the, particularly, in the whole focus around the early intervention. We see it from a zero to four right until the transition when they're participating in the Trempeleau or whether they're functional in participating in programs at university and so on. More work to do, but pleased.

I was the minister who called for the review. I was also the minister that was part of the physical medicine investments when I was the minister of health, which ramped up the need on the assessment side. I like where we're going, but there is more work to do.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Thank you.

I think where our questions are almost complete; I just have one question, minister: We moved away from a play-based kindergarten to a more structured

kindergarten. We put more, kind of, structured responsibility on the kids. Is that showing good results or did we kind of push them a little too fast when we moved it into the school system?

**Mr. Currie:** I think that any – whether we're working with psych-ed assessments or autism or any area of children with unique needs or any area of the public school system, I think we constantly have to be evaluating how we're doing and how we're performing. I don't think that we're going to have everything all mastered. I think that we have to evaluate what's working well and continue to evaluate.

Things are changing around us, particularly, when you're dealing with youth and children and families. The play-based model is a model that has been recognized through the investment through the PEI excellence initiative as one of the top early childhood areas in the country with Quebec. We have been clearly identified.

I'll let Carolyn speak to the actual curriculum in the play-based to your question around structure. Carolyn, you can –

**Carolyn Simpson:** Thank you, minister.

That's a very complicated question, actually. The play-based curriculum – play-based is something that's hard for folks to understand what we mean by a play-based approach to curriculum delivery. It's actually a strategy or a pedagogical approach in how to deliver a child's day, a kindergarten day. It's not to be presented as an either/or; this is the time for play and this is the time for the academic learning, if you will, to happen. It's in tandem.

To answer your question: Has that made a difference? Any time you can invest in 1,500-plus children you're – there's nothing wrong, at all, with that. That's a good investment to make.

Do we have some supports in helping kindergarten teachers with the foundational skills, I think, really? That is something that the department has identified and will continue to monitor, and continue to work with Julia's team around ongoing training and in-servicing for teachers around what

we mean by play-based approach and what it is not. I do think that that work continues. It's evolving.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank you, minister, Julia, Carolyn for excellent presentations here today. You can –

**Clerk Assistant:** There are two other topics (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Oh, there are two other topics?

**Clerk Assistant:** Now, or arrange another meeting.

**Chair:** Do you want to arrange another meeting, or do you want to discuss the two other topics?

**Mr. Currie:** We can arrange another meeting.

**Chair:** Another meeting.

**Mr. Currie:** Yeah.

**Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Currie:** It's getting late.

**Chair:** Does that suit the committee?

I thank you, on behalf of the committee, and are there any closing remarks that you would like to make, minister?

**Mr. Currie:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I just wanted to thank the committee for inviting us in. First of all, I want to thank Julia, and I want to thank Carolyn. The work that both of these individuals do for children and families in our province, I know, as minister, am very grateful. The issues are alive and well, but we continue to work closely with both of them, particularly in early childhood and in the Public Schools Branch to support children and families.

Julia is, I think, started her career the same time I did. Certainly, we are very fortunate to have her leading the division, which is a very challenging and very complex area in the Public Schools Branch.

I want to thank the committee. We welcome the opportunity to come back any time to update. If there are any recommendations or suggestions from standing committee, I think at the end of the day this is about making inroads and improvements for children and learning and families and we certainly welcome that partnership with all members of the Legislative Assembly.

**Chair:** I'm sorry we couldn't finish up today, but because of the questions, you know, the amount of questions that came.

**Mr. Currie:** It's good.

**Chair:** It was well worthwhile today to have you here.

**Mr. Currie:** Yeah.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, and you may take your leave.

**Unidentified Voice:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Committee members, we'll just let them pack up, but just – it's getting late and I – sometimes I'm scared to call for new business just in case more topics pop up.

As Chair and the clerk here, we have been trying our best. Obviously, we have had two meetings today trying to crowd everything in, and I'm not saying that not all topics are important, but anyway, what we're trying to do is we'd like to, because the House session is approaching very soon, we'd like to prioritize the topics as best we could. I don't know if we have time.

Mr. MacKay has suggested that he'd like an update on the letters, which we can do, or we can give copies and have you – when we schedule another meeting.

I'll just open the floor for any suggestions, but we'd like to try and make a quality report. Do less topics well, than have too many topics and just not producing the quality that we'd like to see. I'll open the floor just for a few minutes for anybody who wants to make a comment or how we should move forward.

Matthew MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Chair.

I guess just earlier this morning, I was curious to know how many people responded to our letters and who didn't respond. Ryan, could you just give us a quick update on that?

**Clerk Assistant:** Sure.

You have the subjects of committee examination before you and I'll just go down through them:

(a), the briefing on Mill River Resort agreement. The committee sent a letter requesting that briefing back in February. I have had correspondence with the minister's office most recently in September, trying to arrange a date, but I'm waiting to hear back from them on something that would work.

(b), (c) and (d) were all taken care of, either today, or at the previous meeting.

(e), briefing by a federal government tax specialist. That letter went out in September. We haven't had response from the ministry of finance.

(f), it depends whether to proceed with the briefings in (f), that depends on items (c) and (d) first. There is no further action on that at the moment.

(g), we had that today.

(h), the small school sizes, briefing from the French Language School Board, the letter has gone out to them. The minister's office has suggested talking with them directly, the *commission scolaire* directly, so we don't have a date on that, yet.

(i), scope of work on the community economic development – sorry, the regional economic development advisory councils. A letter did go out in September to them, or to the department, but the committee, at the time, did say this was a lower-priority item just to give those councils more time to work.

The briefing on protocols on head lice, that was scheduled for today, but we've run out of time, so we'll look at another rescheduling of that. We had the briefing on autism strategy today.

(l), briefing on providing an update on the PEI cultural strategy, the minister's office, the minister of education's office preferred to address that later, rather than have that on today's agenda.

(m), briefing on efforts to repatriate Islanders to fill job vacancies. We've received a response from Minister Gallant, saying they are prepared to come in and brief the committee on that subject. I put some dates to them, but they weren't available for those dates. If the committee wants we can go back and look at other ones.

The briefing on the Provincial Nominee Program, the letter has gone out for that, as well. The learning partners advisory and district advisory councils, that was, again, on today's agenda, but we didn't get to it, so that will be at an upcoming meeting.

**Mr. MacKay:** Chair?

**Chair:** Matthew MacKay.

**Mr. MacKay:** After, I guess, reviewing, we still haven't confirmed too many dates for these issues or topics anyway. My suggestion, if –

**Ms. Casey:** Most of them are done.

**Mr. MacKay:** – yeah, some of them are done. My suggestion, though if we could get Minister Gallant in because he's prepared to, and bring back Minister Currie and his staff and proceed with them –

**Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. MacKay:** – and then we can reevaluate on, or maybe even send out some letters if we haven't got any response again and see if we can set-up some dates for another time.

**Chair:** That would be great. It would be nice if we could tidy something up for the clerk, for our report to the Assembly this fall.

All right, any other suggestions?

We'll do what you suggest.

Anything else?

Okay, call for adjournment.

**Ms. Casey:** So moved.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

Thank you.

The Committee adjourned