

# 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:** 31 OCTOBER 2018

**MEETING STATUS:** PUBLIC

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

**SUBJECT:** BRIEFING ON LEARNING PARTNERS ADVISORY AND DISTRICT ADVISORY COUNCILS

**COMMITTEE:**

Alan McIsaac, MLA Vernon River-Stratford [Chair]  
Hannah Bell, MLA Charlottetown-Parkdale  
Hon. Paula Biggar, Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy  
Hon. Robert Henderson, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries  
Sidney MacEwen, MLA Morell-Mermaid  
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque  
Hon. Robert Mitchell, Minister of Health and Wellness

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Hon. Pat Murphy, Minister of Rural and Regional Development

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

none

**GUESTS:**

Education, Early Learning and Culture (Hon. Jordan Brown) Learning Partners Advisory Council  
(Kathleen Flanagan, Ghislaine O'Hanley, Bill Whelan)

**STAFF:**

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research and Committees)



The Committee met at 2:30 p.m.

**Chair (McIsaac):** – economic development. Today on our agenda we have basically two parts. We have two presentations and about a 15-minute presentation, I believe, in both, and then some questions and then we'll move on to the end. We have to work on our existing work plan and review requests for briefing. So, we'll do that homework after the presentations.

I ask everyone to check their phone; make sure it's at least down to vibrate. If you have to make a call you're quite free to leave for a few minutes.

Anyway, we want to welcome the co-chairs of the Learning Partners Advisory Council; Kathleen Flanagan and Bill Whelan. As I said, we'll let them make, I think it's about a 15-minute presentation and turn it over to you. Then we'll take questions and ask you to bring questions through the Chair if you don't mind.

So, Bill, you're leading.

**Bill Whelan:** I'll start now. Yes.

Thank you very much.

**Chair:** Just a second; I have to get an adoption for the agenda. Apparently, I skipped that part.

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Do we have agreement on that?

**Ms. Biggar:** Agreed.

**Chair:** Good, thank you.

**Bill Whelan:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd first of all like to thank all of you for the invitation to present. This is the first presentation of the Learning Partners Advisory Council to a standing committee in government. So we're pleased to be here and share with you what we've been talking about in our conversations.

My name is Bill Whelan and co-chair of the Learning Partners Advisory Council. I am a physics professor at UPEI and chair of the

physics department. I think I found my way to the Learning Partners Advisory Council – at least the trajectory – based on my previous work with the PEI Home and School Federation at the local level and provincial level, and as co-chair of the Education and Governance Commission in 2012.

I guess most importantly, I'm an educator and I'm a learner and that's why we're all here.

I'd like to introduce my co-chair, Kathleen.

**Kathleen Flanagan:** I'm Kathleen Flanagan and I'm an international consultant on early childhood education. I, unlike Bill, that's probably what drew me even to apply to be a member of the Learning Partners Advisory Council, because the work was focusing on learning from the early years, right through all stages of learning until senior citizens.

I am based in PEI; I typically work with other provincial and territorial governments. I've worked in many countries around the world, focusing on both curriculum and strategic policy and development. I did develop the national kindergarten curriculum for Egypt a few years ago before the Arab Spring and I'm happy to report that they are still using the curriculum even through all the turmoil.

I've worked in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, and as I said, across the country. I've done a fair bit of work in PEI. I completed a report back in 2010 that revised the early childhood development system, developed the early learning curriculum framework for PEI, as well as for Nova Scotia and I'm currently working with Yukon to develop theirs.

I'm going to stop at that and we'll get into our presentation.

**Bill Whelan:** So we do have a – I think you all have a copy of our PowerPoint presentation, so we'll just walk through that with you and provide comment.

We'll start with the mandate of the council and the mandate is really focused on providing insight and advice, and it's providing insight and advice to all Islanders on ways to advance learning excellence,

ways to better support learners from the early years, through the public education system, post-secondary system, and workforce and in the senior years. All of this is really to support the wellbeing and long-term prosperity of Islanders, which collectively will support the prosperity of the province. It is a rather broad mandate, as you can imagine.

The council was established in January of 2016. There was a call for membership in late 2015 and we had more than 95 Islanders at that time apply to become a member of the Learning Partners Advisory Council, so we were very pleased by the turnout. What it sort of indicated, at the time, was a need or a desire to input and to provide advice and insight on education and learning in the province, so that was certainly good to see.

Participation is voluntary. If I look at that inaugural council and the makeup of the inaugural council, there was very good geographical representation, very good representation from different sectors; people were there as parents. People were there – their expertise in the business community; as educators, members of community organizations. We now have some new Canadians on the council.

The main role of an individual member on the council is as an individual, so folks are there to provide their own individual advice and input. There are currently 22 members on the council and we have three ex officio deputy ministers from the departments that are listed in the presentation, and I'll talk about the value of having the deputy ministers involved in the conversation.

In terms of what we do as a council, this is a list of areas in which we provide advice. I'll touch upon just a few of them. We went through an exercise within the council of identifying what we believe to be important directions in priorities for learning for the province. We also have engaged with the general public on their priorities for learning and education in the province.

We have an opportunity within the council to advise on ways to integrate services to better support learners and I think that is really facilitated and made possible by the deputy ministers from the three government departments participating on the council. I

think that's one of the real hallmarks of the council and the work we are able to do and will continue to do.

We advise on pathways to employment and on leadership; thinking about how effectively learners transition from one learning system to another and how they transition in and out of the workforce, and how they need to be supported in those transitions.

Ultimately, we are looking at a view of helping in some way to build a stronger culture of learning in the province. There is a culture of learning in this province, but it can always be advanced. It can always be improved and we're very much interested in doing that.

Thinking about the unique aspects of the council, as I mentioned earlier, the mandate is quite broad. Learning over the entire lifespan from infancy to seniors, there are very few groups in the province with a mandate this broad. There are very few groups in the province with a mandate to advance learning in learning excellence in the province; thinking of a group of volunteers across the province that are able to do this, so that's a unique aspect.

There is currently a broad representation on the Learning Partners Advisory Council from across the province; good geographical representation. Folks with the background, the expertise and the talents with which to do some important things in this province regarding learning and education; committed individuals, they commit a lot of their time and energy to advancing our work.

We have a level of autonomy which is critically important. We receive tremendous support from Executive Council in the form of Wendy MacDonald, whom most of you know; many of you all know in terms of the tremendous support that she can provide in a group like the Learning Partners Advisory Council. But we operate at arm's length from government. Kathleen and I are here as individuals representing the council and providing oversight and helping to explain what the council is doing.

Another unique aspect is the three deputy ministers being involved in the council in terms of the ability to enhance, support, facilitate greater collaboration and cooperation across those government departments, all of which have a mandate – a part of their mandate – to support learning and learners.

In terms of the activities to date; we have been involved in a number of discussions. I list the topics of the discussions in the presentation. We've looked at trend shaping education globally using OECD data. We've looked at learning metrics in the Province of Prince Edward Island and analyzed those as a council. We've looked at the way schools are organized in the province. We've also had a number of conversations – important conversations – about how to better support learners as they transition from one learning system to another. Also, how they transition from one grade to another, one learning level to another, how they transition from home to school, from home to post-secondary.

We've engaged with, and had conversations with, a number of organizations and groups, including the Principals Council, very early on in the formation of this council. We are connecting with the district advisory councils through Ghislaine O'Hanely, who will be presenting later today. We connected with the leadership of the Public Schools Branch around common assessments and the new student well-being teams that are now being deployed out in schools in the province. We connected with the Youth Futures Council in terms of reviewing and providing feedback to the 2017 YDAY Report. We connected and partnered with Education 2020 and Don Glendenning on different ways to enhance learning partnerships in communities and we've also engaged with the public in the fall of last year in Learn Day.

In terms of looking at accomplishments to date; our first output as a council was a discussion paper in January 2017, which was titled *Ambition, Excellence and Prosperity, Priorities and Direction for Learning*. The purpose of this paper was to engage with Islanders on the topic of learning and learning excellence. We asked Islanders to consider what we're doing well; what could we be doing better collectively.

Ultimately, we were hoping that this discussion paper would start a conversation to inspire all Islanders to think big, to identify actions that would help better support learners.

In terms of the overall goal or outcome of this; we saw this paper as a way to nudge folks perhaps to think a little bit differently about our learning systems. To nudge Islanders to think about ways in which we can create greater collaboration and cooperation among our existing learning systems, more permeability among learners and educators. And, overall to take a more holistic view of learning as a single province-wide ecosystem, rather than in the current sectors, and in somewhat silos, they currently exist.

We've identified a number of themes that came out of that discussion paper. We were focusing on learner well-being, learner transitions and learning partnerships.

I'll pass it along to Kathleen.

**Kathleen Flanagan:** One of the other things that we've taken on as a council is sponsoring something that we've called Learn Day and we were inspired by the youth of the province and their success with holding YDAY. So following on the discussion paper that we had posted online and invited public participation and comment on, we decided that we would sponsor an event and that it would be hosted open to all Islanders.

In September of 2017, we hosted Learn Day and this was held at the Holland College Centre for community engagement. Islanders were invited to participate in the day; it was a prior registration, kind of a process. But the invitation was open to all Islanders and we were really pleased to see that there was a great mix of people who did respond. So the 110 participants during Learn Day represented youth for students, young adults, teachers, parents, business people, people across the spectrum of the Island. Learn Day really focused on the ultimate goal of motivating and asking citizens of the province to come together and to talk about learning and how could we approach learning in a new way; what were some of their ideas.

There were a number of community conversations at every table and those ideas were then fed back to the Learning Partners Advisory Council. What we ended up doing was pulling all that together in a one-page info-graphic. There's a picture on your slides, but it's also on the Learning Partners website. Those ideas were then used to inform the further work of the council and also have had an impact on some of our current work, which I'll get to in a few slides.

So, out of Learn Day, one of the things that came from all of the community conversations was the idea that was common to many of the tables: well we have ideas on things that we'd like to do, but how could we go about doing that. With the collaboration of the three departments that are represented on a council through the deputy minister sitting exofficio – and I should say that those three departments also helped to sponsor Learn Day itself. With the collaboration of those three departments for the entire initiative, we announced the open call for applications for Learn Grants. There were 12 grants that were funded in the end. There were a little over 20, maybe 24, applications that did come in to the Learning Partners Advisory Council. We partnered with Education 2020 to review and decide on the 12 who would receive that funding.

Those project details are on the council website, so I won't go into all of the different projects that were funded. It wasn't a huge amount of money; it was \$840, the same amount to every group that received funding, but they all represented partnerships across various sectors in terms of doing something to focus on the broad idea of learning.

Just to give you one example of what was funded. We funded a project that was done through the Mt. Stewart school and the purpose was to promote reconciliation by engaging the parent community. Because as you may know, the children who are in kindergarten to grade 8, the Abegweit First Nation community, they all attend Mt. Stewart school because Abegweit is in ScotchFort. So the school works to promote that kind of appreciation of Indigenous culture and promoting acceptance and unity among students. The project was intended to: how do you broaden that from within the

school itself out to the broader community through the parents of those children.

The project extended the work to parents; invited parents to come into the school. There were some workshops on basket making and beading. That's just one example of the types of Learn Grants that had been issued.

Currently, the council is focusing on the broad strategy of how can we promote and enhance innovative approaches to learning. What the council members have done is formed three working groups looking at that broad topic of innovative approaches to learning. The working groups are focusing on three aspects of that type of innovation. One is through community partnerships and that group is focusing on the K-12 system as a start.

The second group is looking at diversity. So how does innovative approaches to learning impact our ability to understand and appreciate different abilities, different languages, culture, gender, different socio-economic factors, and how all of those things impact on learning?

The third group is focusing on 21<sup>st</sup> century global competencies. So, the move away in parts of Canada, in PEI and in many countries to look at skills like collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, citizenship and how those skills will enhance an individual's ability to learn and to work in the current environment. That working group is focusing on early years all the way to seniors.

The council has developed kind of a framework structure so that the – for Bill and myself as co-chairs of the council, we will meet with the chairs of those individual working groups to form a coordinating committee. The working groups have been up and running for about three weeks now. They are meeting on their own. We will have an update to council in January on the work that they've been doing and our intent is that there will be a report from council to Islanders in spring of 2019.

The last slide just gives you some practical information on how and where to find information about all of our meetings, information about what the council has

done. It's on our website and so this is available to all Islanders to contact the council and to be in touch with us on the priorities and the accomplishments to date.

**Bill Whelan:** If I could just sort of add to that, and as co-chairs we would encourage all Islanders to take a look at the information on the website. All our agendas, all our meeting discussion notes, all date and information that's been shared with the council or outcomes, accomplishments of the council, are all on that website and we hope folks will take a look at it and get in touch.

**Alan McIsaac:** Super, great.

Thank you.

We are now open for questions and we'll start with Paula Biggar.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you very much for coming in and for the great update.

I know the great work that you're all engaged in. Just looking at your report here *Ambition, Excellence and Prosperity*, one of the words is priorities. Have you set out any specific priorities in the short-term or the long-term to date, or if you'd like to speak, maybe, to any of that?

**Bill Whelan:** If I can start – in terms of the current priority-setting framework that Kathleen had talked about – we've identified for 2018-2019, the next year, three priority areas and those three priority areas resulted in the establishing of three working groups that we had mentioned.

The one priority area deals with community partnerships, so as a council we've had a number of discussions about community partnerships and we believe that there are real opportunities on PEI for there to be, maybe, enhanced collaboration and cooperation among the formal education systems, thinking about schools and the informal ways in which folks learn in communities.

Where are the real interesting opportunities where, thinking of the K-12 system, schools could partner with communities? That's happening. It's happening in very meaningful ways across the province, but

we'd like to see more of that; putting the learner at the centre and ensuring that there are innovative and important supports put around the learner, both while he or she is inside a learning environment – formal learning environment – for example, a school, and also in the community.

**Ms. Biggar:** Just a follow-up on that – thank you. I'm kind of coming – having been engaged in the system as a parent but also as an educational assistant, I'm interested in talking about that innovative way of learning because every student learns differently and the experiential learning and exposure to different industries – and is there a way that you might be looking at incorporating that as part of a workplace experience where they could be getting their credits for doing that, or so many hours?

I know looking at the cadet program, for instance, the cadets that train in the summertime, I think it's a great way that we've moved towards having that count as a credit towards their high school, but is there any kind of discussions around that kind of innovative, on-the-job industry exposure?

**Kathleen Flanagan:** I can answer that.

One of the other priorities has to do with 21<sup>st</sup> century global competencies and as I mentioned, we're looking at that across all learning stages, whether it's early years to seniors and so that group is looking at what are global competencies? Where does this come from, and what is the research saying about this? Is this a good thing? Or, maybe it's not. We want to make sure that we take a balanced look at what the research is telling us about it.

But then we're also looking at what is currently happening in PEI and what's happening in other places that aligns with this approach of global competencies? That group will be making some specific recommendations, but at this point has said: We need to do this analysis and this exploration of what the research is telling us before we come to the point of what those recommendations might be.

But we are hearing from employers who are on the council and people who work with employers, and they're saying: We are looking for people who have these kinds of

skills. Whether they know algebra is probably not that important to us, and so how do we shift that kind of focus to those kinds of competencies that will really lend or allow students and young adults and seniors, as well as early, young children, to develop that critical kind of thinking that will then sustain them through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Bill Whelan:** If I could add just a quick comment to that; as the working groups roll out and get established, part of the terms of reference of the working groups includes rounding out the cast of working group members. So each of the council members have identified what working group they would like to be involved in, but the terms of reference for the working groups allows them to add members from the community to ensure that the conversation is as robust as possible and it's getting informed by multiple perspectives.

We're really looking forward to the work of the working groups, and I can tell you the members of the council are very excited about the path forward.

**Ms. Biggar:** I could keep going (Indistinct)

**Chair:** It's okay. Well we may come back to you then.

Robert Mitchell.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thanks very much, Chair.

Excellent presentation today.

My question is regarding the discussion paper that you put out and did you reap the reward or garner the input back that you had intended for that paper to seek from Islanders? I guess, in kind of a – to get right to the point – did you get the type of quality and quantity of responses that you would expect and from that, you'll be able to shape your work going forward as a council?

Are Islanders as engaged as we certainly hope that they are in regards to education for our young people in PEI?

**Bill Whelan:** Reflecting back on the comments from the general public that we received on the discussion paper; the discussion paper was launched in January in

2017. There were opportunities for Islanders to input online. I would characterize the response as limited, but I would also characterize that the limited response that we did receive was a very high-quality.

Reflecting back on some of the advice or the insights that were expressed in those responses, they were thoughtful, meaningful, detailed, and I think provided very good direction for the council in terms of our consideration of the priorities that we had put forward.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Would that be a practice that you might entertain revisiting again just to kind of reach out again now that people will probably have a little more awareness that you're out there, you're doing this type of work? Would there be a point in time where it would be worthy to try it again?

**Kathleen Flanagan:** It was one of the priorities or the purposes of hosting the Learn Day to reach out and media were very good to advertise that Learn Day was coming and people could apply. Media were also very good to help advertise that the learning grants were open for application. There were – not all – but some of the Learn Grant projects were profiled in the newspaper or on radio just depending on what the kind of work was.

We're hoping that with the working groups by bringing other Islanders on to the working group structure, not to the council itself, because there's a membership structure to that, but bringing other Islanders on to the working groups and then bringing that information back out again will continue to engage with the broader public; because in relative terms, we're still fairly new.

**Chair:** Sidney MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks, Kathleen, thanks Bill.

You guys started – when was it again, 2016?

**Bill Whelan:** Yes.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Like early, late?

**Bill Whelan:** The council members were approved to start on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Right, yeah, and then it kept going.

**Bill Whelan:** The inaugural council; the members were approved just (Indistinct) January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

**Mr. MacEwen:** That's right, thank you.

When was the Premier – so the Premier was first announced as a co-chair with you, Bill, when did that change?

**Bill Whelan:** I can't remember, it was October or November 2015 that the announcement of the new advisory structure in education was given and – I can't remember at that time whether – I was certainly named as co-chair at that time, but I believed the Premier and I were named as co-chairs at the initial announcement of the new advisory structures now.

**Mr. MacEwen:** No, I was just wondering when it changed –

**Bill Whelan:** Oh it changed –

**Mr. MacEwen:** – for Kathleen.

**Bill Whelan:** Oh sorry, it changed effective January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. So the Premier served out a two-year term as one of the inaugural co-chairs.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you.

I know one of the initial criticisms right off the bat was how we wanted an arm's length agency, but it was (Indistinct) having the Premier co-chair certainly didn't appear that way, so that's positive.

There's a fantastic group of people here on this advisory. All of your guys' time; the whole group is impressive. No doubt it takes up a lot of their time; it takes up a lot of your guys' time, the resources, the effort. We're a few years in now, I know that the first big project was the Learn Day and we see the current work of three, kind of priority areas, that you're moving forward on.

Bill, you've been around this stuff for a long time; Kathleen, you too. Is it worth it? And when I say that, I mean that very respectfully, because we're tying up a lot of time and now we're going to go into sub-

committees, we're going to engage a whole lot of other really good people. But I think it's a legitimate question to ask if we're tying up that much time of these good people. I can ask a couple of questions: One; is it worth it? Are the suggestions you're putting forward being listened to? Are we seeing the actions? We say relatively new or two years in, when do we want to see the progress? You gathered a whole lot of information, the Learn Day thing was good, we can debate whether or not the Learning Grants should be happening in our schools anyway, a lot of those projects. I mean the project you talked about in Mt. Stewart, that stuff goes on every month. In Mt. Stewart, they're doing fantastic work there

So I guess my question is: I put that out to you objectively, is it worth it and are you seeing what you guys want to see out of it?

**Kathleen Flanagan:** Well given the amount of time I think that Bill and I have put in; I think it's obvious that we both think it's really worth it. I would say probably the same for the members around the council because we're all volunteers and so everybody is busy. I think unless this was a high priority for the people around the table, they would not be continuing to participate.

I think one of the unique things about the council and Bill spoke about this earlier, is that it's a range of ages. We are not focusing only on the public school system, we start with early years and we go until the seniors college, a program such as that and we are looking at learning across the spectrum. We, on the council, are finding that we are learning from each other. We're listening to business people, we're listening to people that are working with the new Canadians; we're listening to people who work with people who have various types of disabilities or challenges in their learning. We're hearing from what we do with very young children, we're hearing about people who are now out of the work force and so what does learning mean to them.

I think we, as council members, are fascinated by the conversations and the new ideas that we're hearing from each other around the table.

I think when the Premier was there; I think his presence, initially, elevated the concept

of learning that this is so important. At least that's how we, as council members, felt around the table, that if the Premier could give his time to it, then it must be something that was really important. I think it really elevated the importance of the work and I think it also, by the time he left the council – and as soon as he came on – this is for two years – so it wasn't all of a sudden that he had to leave.

So from the very beginning he had a two-year term and I think when he left, it was a good time to leave as well, because the council was more cohesive, we were working together in a way that could constructively approach different issues on how we could listen to other opinions, whether it was international research or information about what was happening in PEI.

So I would say that given that more than 95 people applied to be on the council from the beginning and that we have people who are renewing their terms to be on the council, that it's worth it.

**Bill Whelan:** (Indistinct) so I support what Kathleen stated. I'll go backwards in terms of the comments. In terms of the Premier's involvement as co-chair, I think it was exactly the right decision for him to be an inaugural coach here for the reasons that Kathleen just very clearly articulated and it was also exactly the right decision to leave after – finish out the two-year term and step away from that role – I can say once the council had some legs underneath it and some traction and certainly some better direction.

In terms of: Is it worth it? Building on what Kathleen has stated; when we went through the first renewal round of the council, ten members of the councils terms were up. We had staggered membership just so that we wouldn't get a big turn out over in one year; but of the 10 council members whose terms came up, half of them wanted to continue. We're seeing that again now. We'll be going through a second round of renewal at the end of December. In fact, we're right in the middle of that right now. Many of the council members – currently the majority who have responded back to us whose terms are ending want to continue.

It's one thing for Kathleen and I to say that we think it's worth it, but we have council members, the majority of them saying it's worth it. So that is great support for the work we're doing.

**Mr. MacEwen:** That's wonderful to hear that these people are still engaged, but I'd like to go even further than that. Are we seeing the results, Kathleen and Bill, we want? As an MLA I'm involved in all kinds of committees and I'm learning a ton and I'm learning from other people. But at the end of the day, are the constituents benefitting from that? Are we actually pushing those ideas and getting them out there?

A couple of questions, if I can, Chair: Is what you're learning affecting change? What's your connection to government at the end of the day? We're arm's length, how do you affect change? What's the connection back? Were you recommending that's being implemented? And, what I'm really curious to know: What are you recommending that's not being implemented or that's being slow?

I don't disagree having the Premier on for a couple of years was probably good to get things going. Having him step away is also good to move on. The resources: Are we moving fast enough? You mentioned you have Wendy; do we need more resources to put towards that to affect the goals you want?

I'll leave it there. What is the connection to government and are they listening and are we seeing the goals that we need to see? Honestly, if it's a five-year process, let us know. But are we going to start seeing the change that we need?

**Kathleen Flanagan:** I think your question is: Are we seeing any concrete impacts of the work of the council?

I think one thing to remember is that we don't necessarily report to any one government department, we're reporting back to Islanders. I think that in the initial stages of the council's work where we brought different perspectives together where we examined international research as well as PEI data, we were exploring and giving some analysis to what we saw as

issues related to learning and learning across the spectrum, so we're not really just looking at the school system.

I think when we sponsored the Learn Day and the Learn Grants; we were branching out even more engaging with the community and bringing people's ideas forward. I think that the current work with the council with the three priorities for community partnerships, diversity and 21<sup>st</sup> century global competencies will be the first time that we, as a council, are actually making a concrete recommendation.

We've been engaging people in the discussion bringing forward new ideas, but the working groups will actually make some recommendations. They may make a recommendation to a government department; they may make a recommendation to one of the post-secondary institutions. They may make a recommendation to community organizations. The recommendations could be anywhere, because that's one of the, I guess, different things about the council, is that we report to Islanders. You could ask me the question next summer and I'll tell you what our recommendations are in the spring.

**Mr. MacEwen:** You both know it, I mean no disrespect with my comments, what I'm trying to say is, we've got a wealth of good information here and I don't want to be screwing it up, I want to be taking advantage of what we've been able to pull together here. I guess that's my question: if it's bringing this up together and if it's just recommendations that are going out there, but we want to see change. What did someone say; we're starting to come through some transforming with changes in our education system. You've got the right partners that are lined up.

Bill, you know I'm an efficiency engineer and that's what I'd like to see, long drawn out processes, although I know it has to take time to get everybody to get together, but that leads to a lot of inefficiencies. Do it right; how do we get there as quickly as possible? How do we get the right information in the decision-makers hands? We have three of them here today from around Cabinet. Are they getting the good

information that you guys are collecting? Or, are we just going to produce reports? I guess my point is: we need to take advantage of this good nucleolus of people and knowledge and not just let it waste. Like I said, will be my point to encourage that and keep up the good work. But that stuff should be getting in these people's hands.

**Bill Whelan:** I agree completely with your comments on efficiency, action and actually getting things done. Well I can say with confidence, the members of the council would share that belief.

As Kathleen just stated, the work of the council through the working groups that have been established, I mean the working groups will have the ability based on their own direction to put forward a recommendation, to put forward a strategy, suggest some action to be undertaken by someone, or some organization, however that's directed.

I will predict what will happen, or what I anticipate, or what I hope will happen, is as these working groups get established and start connecting with Islanders – and again as I mentioned earlier – within the terms of reference, the working groups are encouraged, the council members are encouraged to bring more folks in in those conversations. As that structure matures, then the path to action implementation may become more clear. Because as you engage with, and collaborate with community partners who will likely be part of that larger conversation, then you are also helping to facilitate and support the actions that will come out of those recommendations. I think that's where the real magic can happen as we move forward.

But I do support Kathleen's comment that we're in the early stages of providing the type of advice that we were mandated to provide. We've had a lot of very very rich conversations and now we put a structure in place to be able to move forward in a more (Indistinct) more efficient and effective ways.

**Chair:** Hannah Bell.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you, Chair.

Just a clarification on that structure, Bill; because you have the mandate as to the council the way you have the working groups that include members of that council, when they come back with recommendations, they're coming back to the council?

**Bill Whelan:** Yes.

**Ms. Bell:** And then the council would then recommend those forward, is that correct?

**Bill Whelan:** Yes.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you.

Another question, Chair, regarding that you have a mandate to meet a minimum of three times a year; I'm hoping that your website is not quite up-to-date because it's just showing one meeting for 2018 so far, have there been additional meetings this year?

**Bill Whelan:** We've had four meetings in 2018 so far.

**Ms. Bell:** Fantastic, okay. Yeah, I thought perhaps it was a little bit behind.

**Bill Whelan:** I actually thought it was updated, so I thank you for that.

**Ms. Bell:** As well, there's three or four different places I think that sometimes –

Chair, if I could ask a question in relation to the growth and the shift and change as you mature as an advisory council.

Looking at the original sort of discussion presentations back in April 2016, there was a really sort of strong conversation about what were the goals and the actions and the direction of the LPAC at that time. One of those things that really caught my attention was around social innovation labs which come out of the MaRS Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto. One of the processes of social innovation is that you are doing it, what you talked about, which is the research and the gathering of information, but you also are experimenting and solving.

**Bill Whelan:** Yes.

**Ms. Bell:** What we see now in 2018 is much more a language around strategy and

planning. I'd like to hear sort of whether that direction has shifted from that idea of social innovation, or are you still on a very long runway?

**Bill Whelan:** I would say that we've sort of put a pause on sort of the social innovation approach currently, even thinking back of the last couple of years. When the social innovation lab framework was presented to the council there was a lot of excitement about that. We sort of thought that we're going to throw a whole bunch of ideas in the sandbox, start playing around, we're going to reiterate and look at ways in which to improve things that we were interested in as a council.

But then it became quite clear that we still needed to do a quite a bit of thinking and investigation and look at information, look at the research on particular issues or areas that we are interested in pursuing.

I would characterize the social innovation lab framework as something that the council is very interested – at the time was very interested in – and I would say that we will likely revisit that approach once we're in a position – I could see that approach dovetailing quite well with the working groups. As the working groups start rolling out within their own mandate they sort of define and refocus the particular priority that they want to look at.

Then my understanding of the social innovation framework, that's the time where you could think about looking at stage one, the current state, of a particular issue, then looking at ways that you could adapt that current state. Measure how progress is being made and then going through an iterative structure to be able to improve things.

I don't know if that's directly answering your question but there's certainly a lot of interest in the social innovation network approach.

**Chair:** Hannah Bell.

**Ms. Bell:** (Indistinct) ask another question which follows up from that and it is that, that it's – and I think it sort of connects to something that my colleague has said, is that there is an understandable need to identify, to spend that time gathering information and

clearly identify and articulate where are we now. But there's also an appetite to see, that then from that, we can make a clear statement of even: this is the general direction of where we want to go to achieve change. It's quite challenging for people outside that system who are not involved in the day-to-day and know how much work it takes to gather that to say: Well where are you going?

Part of that what is attractive about something, that even a broad framework around social innovation is that feeling if you can articulate the problem that you're trying to solve. Because some of the challenge with this is that it's a lot of talking and not a lot of clarity on: what are you trying to achieve, even in a general basis and how are you going to know.

So, to hear you speak about identify and then perhaps adapt and then measure, is encouraging, but that's also something that needs to get outside the space perhaps where you are, and help people like us and the people that we're speaking to and (Indistinct) around this, get a better grip on that. It would be very encouraging to see, perhaps more clarity.

**Bill Whelan:** If I can comment on that.

I mean I agree with your comments; they're very fair. I think where we initially struggle with the social innovation network approach was: Where do we focus? The mandate is so broad, learning from birth to the senior years. The conversations we had around adapting or delivering on a social innovation network approach, I think where we struggled and fell down a little bit was: What do we focus in on first? I think that the working group structure that's currently in place will allow us to focus in better to your point and to be able to – I've envisioned each of these working groups would – there'd be some development of a social and innovation framework within each of the working groups as they move forward.

I think that inability to focus because the need was so broad was a challenge and now we've decided as a council that we accept the broad mandate and we don't – the council doesn't have an end point at least at this point – so we need to put structure in place to identify priorities on an annual basis

and then address those priorities and provide recommendation and advice on the priorities.

**Chair:** Paula Biggar.

**Ms. Biggar:** Just a couple of final questions and I guess it does tie in with the social innovation piece focusing specifically on literacy, adult learners. Having had the advantage myself in my own community to take advantage of adult learning opportunities, which encouraged me then to take that next step, where are we focusing – and I hope we will focus whether it's working with community partners or post-secondary education institutes – on reaching out into our communities to have that access to whether it's the adult GED or very basic literacy training, I think we still need to be addressing that and I'm sure that's not a surprise to you. Where are the opportunities for the people to be able to get that in their communities?

Looking and recalling my own experience being an adult university learner, having opportunities for satellite universities in our communities, university courses and to have that maybe discussion with some of the post-secondary education, if you're living in Tignish or (Indistinct), we used to spend four hours of our day traveling to Charlottetown to go to UPEI, but if we could get 10 people that would take that course and then UPEI would come up to Westisle for us. I'm hoping that that – because we're talking about birth to seniors, I'm going to say – that we incorporate that in part of our discussion and engaging in our communities. I'm sure there are opportunities there to do that.

I don't know if you have a comment on that but it's a recommendation per se.

**Kathleen Flanagan:** It's a very good question because people around the table have brought these issues up over and over again.

As a council member coming from DeGros Marsh PEI, which I don't know if anybody in the room actually knows where DeGros Marsh is, but I certainly hear what you're saying about travel and so on for people in rural communities and needing to be able to

access those kinds of opportunities for learning.

I have heard some of the discussions within the three working groups and it's those kinds of things that are coming up. How do we encourage and ensure that all Islanders have equitable access to the kinds of learning opportunities that we're talking about and bringing forward? I think those kinds of concrete very practical ideas are right now at the working group level. I think the intent to expand those working groups to bring people in from communities, as to how we get all those perspectives, will bring that forward. That's the continuing work that we're at right now.

I think just in reflecting on some of Bill's comments and on some of the recent questions; we've come from a group of people that barely knew each other to talking about: what do we mean by learning and what does that encompass? It was a very broad vision and very high level discussions which have consistently narrowed down over the two years, two and a half years that we've been together as a council in terms of; these are all of the possibilities for learning. As Bill said, it's just so broad. It became like, almost a paralyzing effect that; so where do you begin, what do you do first.

I think that when we pull together as a council to put out that discussion paper and then from that we broadened it out to bring the community in to say: Okay, this is what we're thinking in terms of direction, what are you thinking? So the Learn Day helped to even refine that more in a more concrete way, the Learn Grants got people working together because all of them had to be partnerships. The discussion and the ideas that came forward, both from Learn Day and from the Learn Grants, have kind of synthesized into the priorities the council is now focusing on. I think it's been a process to come to that real level of concrete thinking. Not to say that next year there will be three different priorities.

Transitions is a huge issue to deal with, whether, as Bill said, going from grade to grade, going from home to an Early Years Centre, leaving university and entering the workforce. We know that the Youth Advisory Council has been talking about that kind of a challenge, or when somebody leaves their paid employment. That's a

transition and then what. That could be another priority for next year. But this year we have realized that as a council, if we want to do something in a concrete and a real active kind of way that we need to be focused in what our priorities would be. That's where the working groups came from.

**Ms. Biggar:** Just a follow-up comment.

Not to say that there isn't opportunities through the university for distance education; I know they offer, certainly web-based education, but I think we have a concept of telemedicine, so we could certainly incorporate that into our communities for tele-learning, whether it's at Westisle or whether it's at Souris High School. The technology is there, so let's open the doors to those that want to learn and provide those opportunities for them.

**Chair:** We're quickly running out of time here. I just have a – I don't know if it's a quick one or not – but I notice when your council advises on; the priorities and strategic direction for learning and learners and also pathways to employment and leadership. That's, I guess, my – kind of comes very often to the fore for me. I know just in church the other day I was talking to two young ladies who were in grade 11, they have a vague idea of what they would like to do, but they're in grade 11. What are they going to do after grade 12, they're not sure. To me, that should be known a little more than that. I had a gentleman in my office the other day, he has an honours in chemistry, he has a masters in science, went back and got a biology degree, he cannot get employment and he's thinking of going back to university.

How do we connect it so that our kids you talk to can build a transition, coming from grade to grade and that sort of thing; let's look at where are the possibilities. Here's your interest; where are the possibilities and link these up so that we do not just go in and waste the first year in university just on the experience and ten grand of mom and dad's money, or the banks or whatever, but make sure they're focused a little more coming out of high school so they don't get through to university and find out that's not really what I want to do. But how do you bring this whole education thing piece together at the

individual level, that's the thing, because everyone is different to some degree. But that to me is a little bit frustrating when you talk to the girls that I talk to the church and I talk to this young gentleman in the office.

Anyway just – I know you may not have the full solution, but if we can be working on that, that would solve a lot of problems, I believe.

**Bill Whelan:** Do we have time just for a quick comment on that?

**Chair:** Sure.

**Bill Whelan:** It's certainly an issue that I see in teaching at UPEI in terms of the first year students; even in upper year students, still trying to determine where they want to land from a career perspective.

I look back on some of the language in the discussion paper from 2017 in which the council, I guess, characterize it as a nudge to Islanders to think about a more holistic view of learning, a learning ecosystem for the province where there is more collaboration and cooperation, maybe connectiveness among, let's say, the post-secondary institutions and the public school system, maybe, specifically in high school.

It's important to get good information and data on careers into the hands of young learners at the high school level. I was at Montague Regional Senior High and I know Sidney MacEwen was there as well for their career day yesterday, I believe, and I think they were on the order of 70 different individuals there representing different career paths. In talking with students in grades 10 to 12 at that career day – these were students interested in physics and in engineering – I did get a sense that many of the students are really not sure what direction to go in, but that's not all that surprising.

I think what the learning systems need to be able to do is to be able to provide support to learners at that age, well you know at high school and the post-secondary age, specifically to your question, that allows them to tap into their interests, their talents, their aptitudes and maybe find a way to help them recognize those. I'm not sure if students necessarily know what their core

talents and aptitudes are and I think we could collectively do a better job at that. I think system-wide – and this was language that was presented to the council by a council member and I liked it so I'll repeat it – that when we think of all our learning systems, we need to create more on-ramps, thinking of a highway analogy. There need to be more on-ramps and no off-ramps and I believe that, and I think that's something that we need to keep our eye on.

**Chair:** Right on.

I think we are out of time and we could go on discussing education for a long time, but anyway. I want to thank Kathleen and Bill for the presentation and for the questions from the panel.

We are going to take about a two minute break here while we change up for the second half.

Thanks so much, again, for the presentation and answering our questions.

**Kathleen Flanagan:** (Indistinct)

**Bill Whelan:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Great.

[Recess]

**Chair:** We will call our meeting back to order, and I would like to welcome Minister Jordan Brown and Ghislaine O'Hanley. You have a presentation, I understand, so we'll do the same system. Take that – we'll hear the presentation and then we'll take some questions until, I'd say, about 4:10 or 4:15, at which time we'll stop for other business.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Great, Chair.

If it's all right with you, I think what our preferred approach would be is to run through the presentation in its entirety and then do the questions afterwards, particularly (Indistinct) to time.

**Chair:** That's great. Yeah, we can do that.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Maybe I'll make a quick introduction and then turn things over to Ghislaine to run through the presentation.

Firstly, this is Ghislaine O’Hanley. Ghislaine was – how long have you been on? A year?

**Ghislaine O’Hanley:** A year.

**Mr. J. Brown:** A little over a year?

**Ghislaine O’Hanley:** Just a year; a week longer than you.

**Mr. J. Brown:** There you go, yeah.

Ghislaine’s primary function is to interact with and kind of be the facilitator for the district advisory councils and the councils generally, as with our department and our office.

I think what I would say generally about the district advisory councils in particular, is that we are really, I think, at this point in time, starting to see them take shape. We are starting to see a number of the initiatives that they started talking about roughly two years ago, be adopted and really become accepted and successful, and that, I think, is starting to drive more interaction with the district advisory councils with community groups like home and school through the district advisory councils. I think overall, it’s starting to demonstrate to us that there’s kind of a clear role for them to play in the education system.

Ghislaine is going to go through this in more detail, but some of the things that I would look to in terms of characteristics of the DACs and some key successes; the DACs – the big thing – the kind of (Indistinct) for them is to focus on learning as opposed to school operations and it really allows us to do that at a school level in a way that was not done before.

The home and school has been great at that, but this allows the perspective in a focused way to shift to that school level. What is the community feeling and to put forward in a coordinated way that message and to have those conversations in a coordinated and in a sustained way.

Some of the key pieces – and again, Ghislaine will touch on these a lot more – that have come up that we have started to do work on would be the student wellbeing

teams; a huge piece of our current work that we’re doing as a department.

Transportation improvements, particularly in the western DAC, we saw a profile story in the media here recently in relation to Ashton Grigg, a student that was kind of the lead of that initiative.

School food initiatives which really has been a joint home and school DAC push, and we are working fairly hard on that right now with a hope of seeing some more come out of that.

School psychology action plan has been something that’s been a focus kind system-wide. But again, it was a focus of the DACs. New recourses, teaching recourses, EAs, youth workers, a lot of those different things have been advocated for at the DAC level.

So, I find them to be tremendously valuable. I’ve been out to meet with each of the DACs in the year since I’ve been here. I find every one of the meetings to be very insightful and super productive for me. It’s really where you go to get the real substance of what we can be doing and I find them to be a tremendous help to me.

So with that, perhaps I’ll turn it over to Ghislaine.

**Ghislaine O’Hanley:** Thank you Chair, thank you members for the opportunity to present to you today on the work that I’ve been doing for the last year with the district advisory councils.

I’ll just run through some information around the councils and the work that we’ve been doing for the last year, and again, if you have any questions, I’m happy to take them at the end of the presentation.

So, the role of the district advisory council – they have four main pieces around that – is to advise the minister on education issues, specifically to their district, but also provincially as well. They do that by identifying educational priorities in each district.

When they meet they find common ground on things in all of the schools, because each council is made of up all of the schools in the district, so they talk about what could be

common across the district and not just a one school issue.

They engage school communities and discussions. The membership goes back to their school communities after the DAC meetings and brings back what we talked about there and asks them to contribute more information as well and bring that back up.

There is this really nice pathway of conversation that's happening between the DAC membership and the communities and to foster collaboration among school councils, home and school associations and the community. They're really that linchpin to their school community and the community in general that they represent.

The membership – there is seven DACs across Prince Edward Island and they represent all of the 10 families of schools. Some of the smaller ones were amalgamated together just to bolster the membership, because the Souris family of schools only had one school so they partner with Morell.

Kensington and Kinkora are together and Charlottetown recently came together and Colonel Gray family of schools and Charlottetown Rural Family of Schools are combined into the one Charlottetown district advisory council.

Each school in a DAC has a parent representative and every high school has two student representatives.

The membership is chosen through home and school and the school community. They decide their own process of how people are chosen to be put on that council. Also, the regional director for the PEI Home and School Federation for the district sits on the advisory council.

We invite members of the community to sit on sub-committees. Several of the advisory councils in the last year have created their own sub-committees based on focused priorities that not the entire group needs to work on, but they can work on separately and bring it back to the council as a whole. We invite members of the community who may have expertise or input or interest around that issue to come and sit on those committees.

The members have either have a one or a two year term – currently the students serve a one-year term and the parent members serve a two-year term. You are eligible to renew for one extra term.

All the meeting notes that come out of each meeting are published online on the government website. There is a Family of Schools District Advisory Council main page. Then on the side bar each Family of Schools District Advisory Council has its own page as well. The meetings are up to date as of the spring. I just started my fall round of meetings. So, once all of the meeting notes have been approved by the committee they will be posted again. The most up to date meeting notes should be there by the end of the month and everyone is welcome to go there and have a look at what we are talking about.

I want to focus right now on some of the accomplishments that have happened in the last year that I've been working with the advisory council members. The minister touched on some of them already but I'll go into a little bit more detail on some of them.

One of them of course is the well-being teams and the success we've had around that. The Montague and the Westisle DACs were really key in identifying the need for more student mental health supports two years ago. From that came the idea of creating the student well-being teams.

There was a demonstration project last year in the Westisle and the Montague Family of Schools. Each team as you, I'm sure will know, is made up of a comprehensive school nurse, a mental health clinician, youth workers and an outreach worker. That has been met with great success, it rolled out again into Bluefield, Morell, Souris and the Colonel Gray family of schools this September. In September 2019 it will finish its roll-out all across Prince Edward Island so every family of schools will have its own dedicated well-being team. That came from advisory council members really advocating for more student mental health supports.

Transportation in the west is another piece that I worked a lot on last year. Meeting with that advisory council, they identified some gaps that they felt they had in their district around transportation for students,

both extra-curricular and getting to school in a timely matter.

They struck a sub-committee and invited bus drivers, parents, students, principals and interested community members to come and sit on that committee and talk about solutions that they could offer to the Public Schools Branch and the ministry around how to solve that problem; a solution that came fairly quickly, actually, through that collaborative process.

There was partnership that happened between the Public Schools Branch and the Minister of Rural and Regional Development, who isn't with us today, but we thank him for their contribution to create a pilot program this year to run two after school busses that generate from the Westisle School; one goes north and one goes south.

They pick up students at the intermediate schools and drop them at the elementary schools in different communities to allow the opportunity for more student involvement and extra-curricular activities. They also established an additional bus in the Tyne Valley-Ellerslie area to reduce travel times for some students.

Ashton Grigg, who the minister mentioned, actually sits on that advisory council and takes that bus. She said at our first meeting this fall that it has completely changed her school life. She gets up 30 minutes later, her bus ride is shorter, it's more comfortable and it just makes her whole day much more positive. She said when she gets to school she's ready to get into class and learn because it's a much more inviting way to get to school.

School food. Again, as the minister mentioned as well, there has been a lot of movement on school food. This started as a resolution from the Montague Consolidated Home and School back, four years ago I'm going to say, I'm not sure, but I think it's four years ago and a lot of work was done at the home and school federation level and the Public Schools Branch.

The department of agriculture funded Morgan Palmer to help develop some framework around accessing more healthy local school food and that work continues

on. The DACs across the province all support the work that she's doing and we're very happy to see that her work was continued this year and expanded and they are all looking forward to updates in the recent rounds of meetings I had this month. They all wanted her to come and talk to them about school food, what's going to be happening in their area, how they can help and really move that forward to access healthy Island food in Island schools.

Another piece that the advisory councils are involved in is policy development and review. From time to time when the Public Schools Branch is either reviewing old policy or creating new policy, before it goes to the board, it goes to the DAC membership for input and they have an opportunity to take that back to their school communities, to their communities in general, to gather any input that they may have on any policy revisions or creations. Some of the ones that they worked on in the last year were around the alcohol and drug use policy; it was just revised last month with the introduction of cannabis as a legal substance so they revised that.

Safe and Caring Learning Environments was a new policy that was created just this year and they played a piece in that as well.

They also play a role in ongoing review, so right now there is report card review that's happening for the report cards from K-8. I think there are 15 different models being used right now and the department is looking at streamlining that into a model that best suits the needs of students and teachers and parents. So, they are doing a consultative process which includes the DAC membership around what do parents want from a report card? What do students want from a report card? That is ongoing and they will be part of the stakeholder reviews around that.

They also were encouraged to participate in the Provincial Student Common Assessment Review that is coming happening right now with RMJ Assessments. They had opportunity to meet with those people directly, as well as participate in the online survey that was shared with all Islanders and we encourage them to share that with their broader communities that they are all connected to as well.

A focus provincially for a lot of the advisory councils is around how to best meet student needs. That is a constantly-shifting ground, but some of the ways that they look at trying to offer advice to the minister is around insuring there's are more teachers, more EAs, more school physiologists, and even in the last year there has been a lot of forward momentum on those particular pieces around creating more teaching positions, more EAs and youth workers, and workplace assistance and there is now a full complement of school-based physiologists at the Public Schools Branch with the commitment to reduce the wait time for psych-ed assessments to less than a year within two and a half years. So, lots of forward momentum and, I dare say, it's because of the push the government and the branch received from DAC membership and their role that they play in moving programs and policies for learners forward.

My work with the advisory councils this year is really helping them focus on where the priorities are for each of their districts and how they can help best inform themselves, so they can give some solid advice to the minister and the branch, and the department around how they could move forward in certain areas. One of the things that I'm hearing about is flexile learning and flexible schools days. In the previous presentation, you had some questions around ways that students can better engage around career planning and trying things out. Certainly, the student voice on these advisor councils are all saying they would like more opportunity to experience more things in high school and to be able to make better informed choices themselves around their career path. How that happens? They don't know. But, we're working on some recommendations we could make by the end of the year to the ministry around that.

Healthy, local food in schools, again, is another pan-provincial focus; they are all very interested in having school food not only just be a meal that students have at school every day that is healthy and local, but also embedded in curriculum, participatory from the student's point of view, really involving community partnerships, involving parent partnerships and really creating a whole ecosystem of healthy food in schools.

Two of the advisory councils are really interested in trying to formulate some guidelines around homework for the early grades, from K-6, in particular.; trying to create some homogony around amount, volume and time spent on homework in the early grades and they have done a lot of work and research around creating a framework of what they think could be some recommendations to the ministry around having some guidelines in place for teachers.

Social-emotional learning curriculum; the PATHS Program had been really successful at Central Queens and Parkdale Elementary. Advisory members have seen that and have brought it up at the table, saying it would be a real benefit to all Island young learners to have a similar program in all Public Schools Branch schools at the elementary level, to really address social-emotional learning as early as possible, thinking that it may reduce the need for interventions in the later years.

Another issue that I also am hearing about is using common assessment data and class composition data to identify priorities, and that advisory council members are really interested this year in digging into as much information that they can get about their district and their district's students so that they can have a really clear picture of where they could be focusing their priorities, and whether that would mean more literacy coaches, or whether that could be advocating for some social programming in community that may address some educational needs.

They're really looking for some harder data and some context around that data because numbers don't always tell you the full picture. We're working with department members who will come to the advisory council meetings and go through those pieces of information with people and give them, not just the knowledge, but also the context around what those numbers mean to their students in their communities.

Staffing allocation, based on student need and not necessarily just on the school population and looking at allocations to smaller schools, ensuring librarians are in schools and really working with the ministry to make sure that student needs are getting

met across Prince Edward Island no matter what community that you're in.

The advisory council members, just as my last piece here on their priorities, are very interested in collaborating with each other. Last year it was sort of a: Let's gather around and look at our district and see what we can identify. And this year it's: Let's also look to our broader community across Prince Edward Island and see where we can find commonalities with other districts, and perhaps there's strength in those numbers. They're looking for opportunities to work together on their priorities and engage more parents in learning, and really reaching out to me, as their liaison, to help find those guest experts and board members and staff who can come to their meetings and really help inform them about their priorities.

Some things that we're learning together, is that they want to meet more often. The original mandate for the district advisory councils what to meet three times per year. We find – they find – that that's not often enough to really dig in and get the work done that they want to do, so this year we are meeting as often as needed. We're striking sub-committees where they're needed. Those meetings are happening as well. They really want to use that opportunity to dig really deep into issues and priorities for their district.

The students on these councils are – they lead the charge and the change. They are the voices at the table who are living this every day, and as a parent you can have one perspective but as a student, you may have a different one. These student voices have been really key in identifying changes that would make their educational experiences more robust, is the word that we've been using, and that's what they are telling us is: They want more. They want more opportunity.

Certainly in transportation, in school food, in resource allocation and all of these things that I just discussed, the student voice is leading that. It's not specifically parent-driven.

They're becoming more informed about learning in general on PEI. As mentioned earlier, I'm also a liaison with the Learning Partners Advisory Council. I sit on that

council and I'm connected to the Principals Council and attend those meetings, so I'm the linchpin between those three councils and help inform them of each other's work as well. They wanted to have more connection to branch staff and board members. Actually the last two meetings that we had, two of the board members were able to attend and they really enjoy that direct connection with those community members, and that will be continuing with board members attending as many DAC meetings as possible.

Really, this year they're building their focus and they're really advancing their mandate and digging into the issues that are important to them and their learners in their community.

With that, I'm available. I work out of, both, the Public Schools Branch and the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture in the Summerside office, and I welcome anyone's comments or conversation at anytime and if anyone has any questions for me, I'm happy to answer them.

**Chair:** Great, thanks so much for the presentation.

**Ghislaine O'Hanley:** You're welcome.

**Chair:** I just want to say first off, even from the first presentation, where you have three departments involved and I like the idea of the hub, or whatever you might call it, where the different departments are getting involved. This time you see it with the wellness and even the local food in schools. I know that was health and agriculture, as well as education and of course everybody is looking to finance to get involved too and that's a big part of it too, but it's so nice to see that education is not just a straight line. It's everybody involved in it so it's great.

Thanks again.

**Mr. J. Brown:** If I might say, Chair, the impact in the community, too. The student wellbeing teams are a prime example of that where we have my two departments, justice and education, and then a huge contribution from health and you see the community impact reaching right through, frankly, every department in government,

particularly, family and human services, where you're able to kind of get upstream of some issues that might traditionally have taken huge amounts of bandwidth later on.

**Chair:** That's the way it should be too. It's great.

Paula Biggar, please.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Chair.

A couple of things, if I could take up couple of minutes or a couple of questions; first of all, thank you.

**Ghislaine O'Hanley:** You're welcome.

**Ms. Biggar:** I think it's evident there's a lot of great things happening and have been happening. I'm not sure if we hear all that much about it. Sometimes we only hear the negative stuff that's coming out of what's happening and maybe we need a report card that we can get out there of what has been accomplished through the actions of the advisory council and working with the education. I think bringing that tenor down of combativeness. There was a bad period we went through, obviously, but I think we've come passed that and how do we change that focus and make sure people know that good things are happening?

That's just kind of a comment and also, congratulations on the bus, I'll say, my area. It's been something Minister Henderson and I have talked about long before we were in these seats, always. I know when my own children went to school there were buses after school and then when they were cancelled, it made a big impact. I did see a mom from my area the other day whose daughter is now taking that bus and people are saying the numbers are increasing because they want to make sure that continues. It's made a big impact on parents because a lot of parents from my area work in Summerside, so it's very hard to make sure their child is engaged in after school activities when they can't be there.

Congratulations on the work that's been done on that, and of course Ashton is in my constituency and she's very proud for her participation in that too.

One of the things I've had – and this may have been a topic that may come up or maybe has not come up yet, but it's a very sensitive topic – in my engagement with young women in high schools, there's been a lot of focus on dress code, I'm going to put it that way, and I don't know if that's been a topic that's come out. It's come out in my engagement with young women; almost a double standard of dress codes and how they are very anxious on what they have to wear or being very conscious of every little piece that they have to – it is a very stressful piece that I've had in engagement with young women, that they do find that very stressful and whether you might accidentally show a shoulder and be chastised for that or. Today's fashions are a little bit more liberal, I'll say, than they used to be maybe when some of the dress codes were put in.

It is a very high-stress thing, through, from talking with young women and with some of the mothers, as part of my discussions as Status of Women. It's been a topic that comes up. I don't know if your advisory group at the high school level have brought it up, but it is something that's there as a stressor within the schools, that I've heard, and I just want to bring it to the table here today on behalf of all those young women who have brought it to my table, but I think it's something that making sure there aren't double standards and –

[audio malfunction]

**Ms. Biggar:** – are different dress codes for different parts of the population of the school, I'll put it that way.

I think moving forward, there's a lot of great working going on; I congratulate everything that is happening. We can always make improvements, and I think having this engagement between community and department and school boards are very important to keep that communication going.

So, great work. We have lots more we can do, I know. But, that's all I have to say and thank you for being here.

**Ghislaine O'Hanley:** Thank you very much.

**Chair:** Rob Henderson.

**Mr. Henderson:** I have a couple of points I guess I would like to discuss a bit, with a few questions on each.

My first issue is around the bus issue. I really commend the district advisory councils for making those things happen. From my perspective, even before I get into politics, we were impacted by that where I live and in the end, both of my daughters had to drive to school because it just wasn't convenient at all for where we worked, my wife and I worked, to try to get the children and they were teenagers at that point.

I'm a little concerned that funding for those extra-curricular buses is funded through rural and regional development is it?

**Ghislaine O'Hanley:** Yes.

**Mr. Henderson:** So, my question to that is: Why is that? Why is it that part of the educational system and is there any movement that in future going to actually have that funding? Because that would give me a better sense that there is going to be a longer term of commitment, because you are looking at quite extreme distances when you are looking at Westside to students in my area. So minister, can we get some feedback to where that may lead?

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

**Chair:** Mr. Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thanks, Chair.

So, to be clear on this, and I'm going to make two kind of categories and comments on it.

One is we are here today to talk about the DACs and their process. The DAC work that was done in relation to this was firstly to identify the issue and to put a process around the discussion of the issue. Just to demonstrate how I think the DACs have been successful in doing that, they were able to take an issue that everyone was saying: Oh well, you know, subjectively the bus rides are too long. Well, okay, great. Everybody says that that goes on the bus. We would all like to walk out of the house and right into the front door of the school.

So, what they were able to do was to go to bus drivers and get their input. The bus ride is this long, we might be able to change it by doing x, y, or z. They had the Public Schools Branch in, I think, three different times to talk about what they might be able to do within the typical purview of the different routing methods that they would have, they would look at different possibilities in terms of busing and how that might typically work. And through all of that, you get a much more objective sense of things and figure out where you might go.

And of course, there are two different bus pieces to this, there's one that is, what I'm going to call the late bus, and then there is the actual bus route into your community. So, just to be clear, we are talking, I think, about the bus route into your community.

But the big piece of that, on an ongoing basis is to demonstrate that that is something that needs to be done within the parameters of good, solid, based on evidence, busing parameters. And it is that Public Schools Branch that arrives at that determination, so they were happy to get some support through that department this year, and I know that minister was a great advocate and I know that yourself and Minister Biggar were great advocates as well for that to happen, so we will see demonstrated based on the success of it this year what happens.

I will say too, that the Member from Morell-Mermaid, we had discussed busing issues in his area this year. I had encouraged him to take them to that DAC rather than to have them just presented anecdotally on Facebook and that kind of thing. This is a great form for communities to rally around these kinds of issues and to present to us what they feel is important in their communities and to get some objective evidence and feedback around it.

**Mr. Henderson:** Well, I guess from my end though, as a parent, as an MLA, and as a minister; I have brought this up to successive ministers and have brought it up to the school board trustees, but the district advisory councils got it done. Why couldn't the others have gotten it done? As far as antidotal evidence, it was very obvious, and even the impacts that one had the other.

So as an example, if a lot of parents were providing a vehicle for their children to go to the Westile Family of Schools, well that made the regular bus route not as busy, right? And they said: Well, maybe there's not as many kids in this area. It was changing the whole dynamic, so when the late buses were provided then children were actually going to go on the regular bus because they knew they could get back home, and then it wound up making it too busy – so you want to have an extra route in that Tyne Valley-Ellerslie area, which was all fabulous.

I think it was the right thing to do. I'm just saying why couldn't the school board have gotten that done when the – yet the district advisory councils were able to get it done? Was it all a money issue? Is that the success of these – is this initiative is more about good ideas coming forward? Or is it really a case of money?

**Mr. J. Brown:** I think it's all relevant. It's all relevant in the discussion and trying to figure out where – the Public Schools Branch, to be frank, in this particular case, does not have infinite resources –

**Mr. Henderson:** Okay, I get that.

**Mr. J. Brown:** – so they have to figure out: Okay, am I going to put money into a bus run or bus runs to do a certain thing, or am I going to put money into, as an example, a teacher in that area or a teacher in a different area?

All of these things all route back to the best learning experience for our students, and I think really the piece that the DACs were able to offer here for us as the ministry – and again, I was happy to work with yourselves as MLAs and ministers from that area to hear the DAC and to move this forward, but what the DAC has offered in terms of the process and in terms of the interaction and advice we were able to give back to them, and to move the matter forward was that they were able to build a solid case as to what needed to be done and what they wanted to see.

When you hear from the DACs, the community level: We would like to see this in our community. It's somewhat the equivalent of having trusted folks from the community that have gone out and done a

tour around to find out what people are going to say about something, presenting that idea to you. They're saying: We want this. And so that's pretty solid evidence from them that they want it and it's not just individuals that are saying a certain thing and a different individual might say a certain different thing.

**Mr. Henderson:** Well I guess (Indistinct) I certainly want to thank you as minister and thank the district advisory councils in that area and Ashton Grigg too, for listening and seeing that it happened, so commend you on that.

The second issue that I want to discuss a bit more and it comes back to the student assessments and from that perspective, we hear lots of comments and lots of ink, as was bestowed on this subject by Paul MacNeill in the graphic and I'm sure he'll be reading the transcripts here on this. He seems to believe that that's a waste of money. It's not relevant and things of that nature. I would argue the opposite of that to a certain degree, but from your perspective as the district advisory councils and their inputs into the school and student assessments, where do you see – what's the rationale of why you're doing that and is Paul MacNeill wrong? What's the argument to why it should be continued?

**Mr. J. Brown:** I might take this one too, Chair. Thanks.

Again, I'm the minister of education. I'm not necessarily the be-all-and-end all in relation to assessments so we'll perhaps start from there. I have been known to disagree with Paul MacNeill from time to time and we generally do that in a congenial way.

The thing, again, with the district advisory councils that they offer that might be different, say, than Paul MacNeill or myself or whomever, is what I'm going to call a unified perspective. They are able to go out there. They are able to have a conversation with their community about things like assessments and demonstrate what they feel the issues might be with them, where they feel there might be strengths with them, and then they'd provide that feedback as a group, which again is different than getting a bunch of individuals providing you with their own independent feedback.

Everybody's got opinions and we all know what the expression or the anecdote about opinions is, but this is a group that's saying that we have done our homework and that this is what we think, and usually when they're doing their homework they talk to a number of different experts that would be able to inform them and then they come back. It's particularly valuable when you have seven DACs doing that across Prince Edward Island, and in this case feeding that information up to experts that are reviewing our assessments over all.

I'll be clear in saying my view of assessments is that they are absolutely crucial. They are really an element in a circular approach we have in our education system right now and without them, you would be at a loss, I think, as to where to devote your resources.

**Mr. Henderson:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Well thanks, minister, and thanks, Ghislaine.

We really appreciate the presentation and questions and answers. We have run to the end of our time here. It's almost bang on, so that's terrific. Again, we want to thank you for coming in, and for both presentations today, both excellent.

We're going to take a two-minute break while we allow you to move on, and then we'll get into our other business.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Great, thanks.

**Ghislaine O'Hanley:** Thank you.

[recess]

**Chair:** – with the rest of our agenda here.

We want to review quickly the existing work plan because I know there are other events going on this evening. I'm going to turn it over to Ryan to run us through that quickly, and we'll take direction for our next meeting.

Ryan.

**Clerk Assistant (R. Reddin):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

So you have a document in front of you, the work plan summary of the committee. It looks like this. The first table on the document is just the topics that this committee has already agreed to examine, and any priorities assigned to them.

We just did the top priority just now, and then the second priority would be input on Bill No. 100, *An Act to Amend the Employment Standards Act*, which was an act that addresses whistleblower protections in the private sector.

Last time around, the committee identified that as a second priority and reached out to chambers of commerce and the federation of labour, and one chamber of commerce and the federation of labour is interested in appearing. So unless the committee changes its mind in terms of priorities or what not, that would be the groups that I would work on scheduling next.

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Minister Biggar.

**Ms. Biggar:** I'd like to hear on what the regional economic advisory councils are up to. Do we have to leave that at number seven?

**Chair:** It's the choice of the committee. We can move it around any way you wish.

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

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct) good idea.

**Chair:** Is there a seconder (Indistinct) –

**Ms. Bell:** Chair, I would also agree on that.

**Chair:** Everyone in favour of that? Making number seven our next priority?

Any other comments, questions?

Yes, Matt.

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

The only other thing I would like to see if we can get it bumped up for priority is the Internet backbone, what's going on right now. We're still getting calls. We started the conversation three years ago on the high-

speed Internet and we're still really no further ahead, so if we could get an update of where everything's at –

**Chair:** Okay.

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** We can look into that where they are, Matt.

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Other direction?

**Mr. MacEwen:** Just, Chair –

**Chair:** Sid MacEwen.

**Mr. MacEwen:** – working on the, those economic development councils. If the other two people are ready to come in before they're ready –

**Ms. Biggar:** Oh, yeah, sure.

**Mr. MacEwen:** – (Indistinct) hold up, get –

**Ms. Biggar:** Sure.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Either or, whatever. Whoever's ready first, get them in.

**Chair:** So then we'll deal with number two, or seven and two, in either order, whoever's available, and we'll check into the question raised by Mr. MacKay and put that on our list as well. Okay?

**Ms. Biggar:** Okay.

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

**Chair:** Anything else for today?

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

**Chair:** Great, meeting adjourned.

Happy Halloween.

The Committee adjourned