

SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

N.S. VOL. 55 NO. 39A TUESDAY, MARCH 26 2013 1:30 p.m.

Standardized Testing

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a real question too. The Minister of Education has yet to explain why standardized testing is the way to go for our province. But in last week's thin education budget, he managed to find \$5.9 million for computer software for standardized testing. Mr. Speaker, a lot of parents are wondering where the real priorities are for this government, and teachers are wondering too. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation said it's a glaring evident that the only options have found, the minister has found are, and I quote, "... being allocated for data collection through standardized testing as opposed to classroom supports."

To the minister: how many educational assistants could have been hired this year for \$5.9 million that he's spending on standardized testing?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank the member opposite for the question. You know I've been, I've been a teacher, an administrator, and a school board member for almost 40 years, Mr. Speaker. I can't tell you how many parent-teacher-student interviews I've ever had. I don't, I can't count them: hundreds maybe thousands. One of the common themes of those interviews, Mr. Speaker, was how well is my child doing? I need to be able to know how well my child is doing so that I can help them move forward for success, Mr. Speaker.

That's the reason why we're introducing the student achievement initiative, Mr. Speaker, because for the first time we'll be able to tell parents, we'll be able to tell students, and we'll be able to tell teachers the reasons, the rationale of how we can move their children forward, Mr. Speaker. And we'll continue in that direction.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: You know I am amazed that that minister's saying that he couldn't provide

that answer in those interviews about how well those kids are doing. But we know this, Mr. Speaker, the need for English as an additional language are growing. As our province becomes more and more diverse, the needs in the classroom for supporting students who may not speak English at home are presenting teachers with challenges in ensuring students understand the material. That's why this budget fails to put appropriate resources needed for EAL [English as an additional language].

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation said, and I quote, "With the enrolment increases come the need for additional funding to support diversity, and specifically English as an additional language." Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party made a choice to fund standardized testing last week. They didn't have to make that choice. To the minister: how much support could be added for English as an additional language instead of the \$5.9 million for standard testing?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again, thank the member opposite for the question. You know, 2.3 per cent increase in operating funding is not a status quo budget, Mr. Speaker, and contained in that amount of increase, Mr. Speaker, is an amount of \$17 million to deal with current enrolment. And one of the factors in that current enrolment amount of money, Mr. Speaker, is for supports for learning, from where we get our teachers for English as a second language, educational assistants, etc.

And Mr. Speaker, there's more money in there for First Nations and Métis students as well, Mr. Speaker. So the supports to learning are present in that amount, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to do that. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, it's an additional \$10 million over last year's budget, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the minister found the slim resources for 40 new portables at schools. But the budget also flagged there are now 4,500 new students in our classrooms. Either that means that classrooms are going to be packed with over 110 students each, or the ministry's putting a drop in the bucket of what is needed to relieve the pressure on our classroom that this province is facing.

Mr. Speaker, the new resources for education predominantly went to standardized testing, a policy that no one over there has been able to explain, instead of relieving the real pressures that we're seeing in our classrooms, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister: how many more classrooms could have been built instead of spending \$5.9 million on standardized testing?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and the member opposite for the question. You know, standards are all around us. I'm sure the member opposite has a driver's licence. He needed a standard to get to that stage, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker,

we've got standards all throughout our province, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to . . . [inaudible].

Chinook School Division for example, Mr. Speaker, in their balanced literacy program, increased the reading level of their children by 21 per cent, Mr. Speaker, over the course of four years. Regina Public, using the early years identification tool, Mr. Speaker, decreased the deficiencies of students by 44 per cent over the course of a year, Mr. Speaker. Prairie Valley School Division, 23 of their 26 initiatives showed remarked increase, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, why wouldn't we want that for the best interests of our children? Why wouldn't we want that, Mr. Speaker?