

Adjournment Debate Education funding

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member for Orléans has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member from Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Speaker, earlier today, I asked the government about something that should be basic. It wasn't complicated. It wasn't theoretical. It, frankly, wasn't partisan. It was basic: the conditions in which our children learn and what this government is allowing to happen to the men and women who keep our schools clean and safe.

Parents in Ottawa are already worried about those fundamentals. And their expectations, frankly, aren't all that high or unreasonable. They expect clean classrooms. They expect safe buildings. They expect that when their child turns on the tap at school, the water is safe to drink. That is not a particularly high bar. That is the bare minimum. And yet, across the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, that confidence is being shaken. Multiple schools have reported that lead exceedances in drinking water exist—lead in water in schools.

Let's be clear about what that means. Lead contamination is not cosmetic. This is not something that you can ignore and come back to later. Lead is a neurotoxin, and there is no safe level of lead exposure for children, and yet, in Ontario, the provincial threshold for what is considered acceptable is twice as high as the federal standard—twice as high. So when parents hear that a school has exceeded the limit, they're often left wondering, "Exceeded the already higher limit? Exceeded it by how much? Exceeded it by how many times? Over what period of time?" And too often, they don't get clear answers because the other problem we have in addition to the lead is the lack of transparency. Parents are finding out after the fact. Information is inconsistent. Reporting is unclear. Confidence erodes not just because of the risk, but because families feel like they aren't being told the full story. And at that exact moment when confidence needs to be restored, this government is allowing the system to be weakened.

Today, we learned that custodians and maintenance staff in Ottawa schools are being laid off. Think about that. At a time when schools are dealing with water safety issues, the very people who maintain those systems are being shown the door; the very people who flush the lines, who maintain the fixtures, who ensure that buildings are safe, clean and functional—gone.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about water. Custodians are the backbone of our schools. They work late into the night to ensure that classrooms are ready in the morning. They support the community use of schools so that kids can play sports, so that families can gather and communities can connect. They're the quiet professionals who make the entire system work, and this government is cutting them.

Let me put this all together for you, Mr. Speaker: lead exceedances in school drinking water; standards that lag behind federal guidance; a lack of clear, proactive transparency for parents; and now, cuts to the very staff responsible for maintaining safe school environments. That is a system under strain—a system that clearly the government has no plan for.

Confidence in our schools is built on those basics—clean classrooms, safe buildings, water parents can trust—and when one of those is in doubt, confidence starts to slip. But when all

three are in question at the same time, confidence collapses. Parents shouldn't have to wonder if the water is safe. Teachers shouldn't have to question the conditions they work in. And students shouldn't have to carry that burden in the classroom. Yet that's exactly where we are.

After eight years, this government owns the state of our schools. It owns the standards. It owns the funding decisions. It owns the consequences.

So the question tonight is simple: Will the government raise the standard, restore transparency and protect the front-line workers who keep our schools safe?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): In response, I recognize the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise tonight and address the question from the member opposite.

I did want to give a shout-out to my good friend Jim Schmidt, who had run for the PCs in Kitchener Centre. Jim was a custodian and superintendent for 20-plus years with the Waterloo Region District School Board, the Catholic school board and also the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. He taught me an awful lot about how boards run and operate and maintain their schools.

I certainly agree—we owe so much to the custodians and other workers who keep our schools safe.

As the member opposite is aware, Ontario maintains one of the most comprehensive provincial testing regimes for lead in drinking water in Canada. We require that every fixture used to prepare food or provide drinking water to children in schools, private schools and also child care centres be regularly tested for lead. This isn't an optional thing. It is a requirement. It's a safety standard that's designed to protect Ontarians.

Schools are also required to routinely flush their plumbing systems and to sample and test drinking water to ensure ongoing compliance with health-based standards and, most importantly, to keep students safe.

Should lead levels be tested as exceeding provincial drinking water quality standards, facility owners—including school boards and operators of private schools and child care centres—are, again, required to take immediate corrective action. Those actions are carried out under the direction of the local medical officer of health, ensuring that focus on public health remains the priority.

Our government will, of course, continue to work closely with all partners involved in safeguarding Ontario's drinking water system, which includes system owners and operators, accredited laboratories, source protection authorities, the Walkerton Clean Water Centre and the Ontario Clean Water Agency.

I would like to note, though, that beyond simply water safety, as a government, we are making historic investments in the spaces where students learn and grow. I feel that has been particularly obvious in my area, where it seems that every time I turn around, I'm at a new groundbreaking for a school or a renovation to a school, an expansion to a school.

Since 2018, this government has invested more than \$6.4 billion in capital projects, including 179 new schools and 134 additions and major renovations to existing school buildings—which is especially important when we consider the lead question, as those renovations and new buildings are so important. Those investments have created more than 132,000 new student spaces as well as 10,200 new licensed child care spaces located within schools.

Just last week, we were able to announce an additional \$1.6-billion investment in 79 school construction projects across Ontario. These projects will be delivering approximately 29,000 new student spaces and more than 1,900 licensed child care spaces.

Ultimately, Speaker, certainly we will not be following the pattern of the members opposite on building safe, modern and sustainable learning environments for students, given their somewhat poor record on delivering infrastructure projects and maintaining Ontario's school infrastructure while they themselves were custodian.

Through legislation such as Bill 101, government is providing the minister with stronger tools to intervene when school boards fail to properly manage capital projects. We've seen that happen, unfortunately, in some jurisdictions, where school boards managing those projects have almost run them into the ground. Ultimately, these are complex undertakings that cost tens of millions of taxpayer dollars, and the public rightly expects them to be delivered responsibly, efficiently, on time.

What I can tell you, Speaker, and the member opposite, is we will continue to make record investments in our schools, including \$23 billion over the next 10 years to ensure that Ontario's education infrastructure remains safe, modern and sustainable. And we will also continue to ensure that those that are responsible for delivering these projects are held accountable for their actions, their spending and their leadership so that Ontario's students can learn, grow and thrive.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I will now call for orders of the day.

Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2026, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I'm very pleased to rise this evening in strong support of Bill 101, the Putting Student Achievement First Act, and the important school board governance reforms that are before this House.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): My apologies to the member. We will have to hold off on your presentation at this time.

The last speaker was the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler, so we have questions and answers scheduled for that time frame.

I call for questions. I go to the member from Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Hi, Speaker—or, thank you, Speaker; it's been a long day.

My question to the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler is—really, I appreciated her remarks on this important piece of legislation. I was wondering if she could speak about the important aspects in this legislation but also that were outlined in the provincial budget around the school resource officers, additional support there—obviously a money bill, so the financial component there, but through this piece of legislation and her role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education around the importance of those school resource officers.

I had the opportunity to host the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler in my riding of Perth–Wellington. We met with the Stratford police and we were talking a bit about some of that important work. Luckily, in my riding, the school boards there have kept—one of the school boards I have—the school resource officers, but I was wondering if the member can explain why this is important across Ontario.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you for the question. As I said yesterday, it's where one of my interests intersects even more with the portfolio and makes this legislation so exciting to me. Obviously, this is continuing the work done by Bill 33 to make sure that school resource officers, youth liaison officers can return to our schools.

When I was thinking about Bill 101 and some of the work that it does, I was thinking about my own boards in my region, which were some of the boards that unilaterally and in a knee-jerk reaction voted to remove police officers from schools. As somebody that believes that having police officers interacting with children in a controlled, pro-social manner—I think it is so incredibly important to make sure that we actually have the opportunity to build those relationships and not be bound by boards' ideological decisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Last week in committee, we learned that the Minister of Education didn't consult a single education worker or teacher or parent organization or trustee association.

Today we learned that the minister very quietly changed the date on a regulatory consultation so that people thought they had an additional week to submit comments, and when they went to submit comments, they found out that the minister had very quietly changed the deadline without letting anybody know.

The minister is also using this bill to shut down any capacity for people to hold him accountable in the courts.

It's very, very clear, on top of the fact that they only held one day of committee hearings, that the minister just doesn't want to hear from anybody about what's happening in education.

Why does the member think this is a good bill if the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I have to say, I do sometimes wonder what the NDP does with their time. Consultation is not simply a formal process; it's also something that happens organically. I have been with the minister on many of his visits, and I know that many of the people in this chamber

have gone with him as he has toured schools, spoken to child care operators, spoken to teachers, educators etc.

Even from my own perspective, when I go door-knocking in my area, I encounter many teachers. And I'll be honest, the number one frustration that they have all shared with me has been the conduct of the boards—in my area specifically, focusing on hiring expensive consultants while their classrooms may not be appropriately served.

So, again, I think that there's been a lot of consultation, a lot of thought put into this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I see the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler talking about hiring consultants at boards. I'm wondering where in this bill the member thinks that hiring high-priced consultants would stop under this bill.

Ms. Jess Dixon: What I think is so great about this bill is that it recognizes the fact that a school board budget, particularly in Ontario given the size and the complexity of our province, is something that really needs to be in the hands of experts—educators and experts; a co-operative aspect, I think.

When we talk about consultants and driving education forward, the idea behind this bill is, again, to get back to basics, to make sure that what we are focusing on is educating our kids—their writing, their reading, their math, making sure that they are prepared for the jobs of the future, but also really developing those neurological pathways that are so important in early childhood and in school to make sure that they're able to keep up with the more complex patterns that will be introduced to them in later grades. I think it's wonderful to have a bill that's so strongly focused on making sure that that is the purpose of education in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions? I'll go to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you, Speaker. As you can see, I'm very anxious to get into this debate, and I'll have a chance, no doubt. But I do want to ask a question to the excellent parliamentary assistant to education and the excellent member.

Building on the answer that was given to the question from the member for Ottawa West—Nepean and the listening that occurred in the lead up to this bill further to Bill 33, how does the intention of this bill and the wording of this bill reflect the importance of this in terms of putting students first along with teachers and parents?

Ms. Jess Dixon: The media and the news and this House have been full of stories of boards that have simply been running amok, where their focus has in no real way been focused on student achievement and making sure that we're actually seeing those results in our schools. So this is about making sure that we are focusing in, again, on what our education system is actually supposed to deliver versus whatever ideology or message a trustee may want to contain. Certainly, in my area, we've seen a number of conversations and actions with our boards that, from my perspective, had nothing to do with actually educating our children. This, again, is about making sure that we're focusing in on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler has said that the boards have nothing to do with educating children. Neither does this bill, so you should read it.

The other part our critic has mentioned: no consultation with any education stakeholders, essentially—otherwise people who know what they're talking about, including First Nations trustees.

How do you reconcile the lack of reconciliation as you push forward with this pretty much unconstitutional piece of legislation?

Ms. Jess Dixon: It's not unusual in this chamber to have debates where we are debating something that has literally nothing to do with the actual bill that is in front of the chamber, and I think that's one of the things that is happening here.

What this bill is about is improving governance. It is improving governance because a lack of responsible governance is one of the main things that is currently blocking our ability to deliver the quality of education that we should actually expect in this province. That is the focus of this bill. That is the purpose of this bill: It's getting rid of all of the obstacles and the ideology and the mess and the fuss and the constant conversations that are actually distracting all of our incredible educators away from the job that they go to school to do every single day, which is to educate the children of Ontario. That is the purpose of this bill: It's to focus on governance—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Next question?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I heard the member speak earlier around police in schools. My question around that is, what approach should be taken? Should they be imposed top-down, or should they be invited in in a collaborative way? This has been a debate across our province, and I think it's really important, after noting the member's comments, to really understand if it should be a top-down approach or if it should be a collaborative approach from the bottom, invited by the community.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'm surprised, given some of the comments that have been coming from the Liberal Party, to hear something that sounds so hesitant and concerned about the idea of police officers building positive relationships in our schools.

What Bill 33 did was it said that if a police service is willing to provide a youth liaison position, a school resource officer position, then a board doesn't have the ability to deny them access. I did a wide range of consultation on Bill 33 and on police in schools, and what I heard over and over and over again from every single police service and every single board I spoke to was an immediate emphasis on co-operation, coordination, achieving the same goals, making sure that we were building relationships, creating mutual respect, forming positive connections in the community. That is the purpose of this. So the idea of top-down, bottom-up—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise tonight in this late-night debate about public education. It is an issue that has really guided my journey to this place.

I want to start by quoting Thames Valley District School Board trustee Marianne Larsen, who had this to say when Bill 101 was introduced by the government just a month or so ago. Marianne Larsen, who is also a former faculty member at the Western faculty of education and,

as I said, an elected Thames Valley District School Board trustee, said, “Today, with the introduction of the Putting Student Achievement First Act ... the Ford government is finishing the work started 30 years ago, of destroying the foundation of our education system in Ontario—democratically elected school boards.”

Some of you in this place may recall the former Conservative government under Mike Harris in 1997 introducing legislation that forced a dramatic amalgamation of school boards across the province. In Thames Valley District School Board, there were actually four boards, three rural boards and one urban board for the city of London, that came together to create this mega board, a very large, amalgamated school board. That legislation, in 1997, also saw very strong provincial control over school boards, as funding moved from local ratepayers to the province, which is as it should be. The province has a responsibility to fund public education, but the funding that is delivered to school boards has to be sufficient to support the educational needs of students.

In 1997, we also saw, with those big, amalgamated boards, much less local accountability. School boards were much larger, and so that connection with the local communities that were represented within the school board was really lessened.

We also saw in 1997, with this big amalgamation, with the cut to trustee honorariums to \$5,000, an immediate crackdown on getting interested people to run for the position of elected school board trustee in these new boards. In the Thames Valley District School Board, the then chair of the board actually put out a media release asking Londoners who are committed to public education to consider putting their name forward to run as a school board trustee because they were so worried in that first post-amalgamation election in 2000 that nobody would want to run in this environment.

I was one of the people that did run in 2000 because I care deeply about public education and I understand the important role of school board trustees in being that voice, not just for parents of kids in school, but a voice for the community. Because whether you have a child in school or not, you still have a vested interest in making sure that our public education is supporting students, is enabling all children to reach their full potential and to move forward with their lives.

But to get back to Marianne Larsen’s comments at the introduction of the bill, she also says, “The legislation falsely claims that the problem in our education system lies with elected school boards and, in so doing, deflects attention away from the chronic underfunding of public education in Ontario since this government came to power.”

A lot of people who’ve been following the progress of this bill agree completely with this perspective that was put forward by my friend Marianne Larsen. This bill is a complete distraction from the real issues in our public education system: the fact that we have class sizes that are bursting at the seams. We have a chronic lack of mental health supports for students. We have kids with special education needs who are not getting the resources or the school staff that they need to be successful in the classroom. We have classrooms that are lacking the most basic supplies.

But instead of dealing with these problems, instead of investing in our education budget, which this government had the opportunity to do in its budget last month—instead of doing that, this government has brought in legislation that is all about further concentrating power not just in the government, but directly in the hands of the Minister of Education.

This bill gives the minister increased power over schools, school boards. It gives the minister the ability to decide what books are going to be used in schools, what education resources are going to be used, how trustees can communicate with each other. It gives the minister power over grades and exams; school board budgets; board communications, as I said; land acquisition and other capital projects; trustee pay and expenses. It seriously reduces the powers of trustees and school boards in their ability to represent their communities. Instead, it transfers power to an appointee of this government, a new chief executive officer—CEO—who has to have business or financial qualifications, not knowledge of our public education system, not expertise in pedagogy or the supports that students need to be successful in schools.

In the Thames Valley District School Board we have learned a little bit about what happens when the government puts responsibility for students' education in the hands of appointees who know nothing about public education. Thames Valley is one of the eight school boards currently under supervision—and at significant cost to the public, I may add, Speaker. The Thames Valley District School Board supervisor, Paul Boniferno, was appointed in April 2025 and has so far billed the government a total of almost \$240,000.

What has the public got from this investment in supervising the Thames Valley District School Board? Well, we saw the waits for psychological assessments, the wait-lists for students who have been referred to a psychologist, who need an assessment in order to access special education supports—we saw those wait times more than double under a supervisor, compared to a year ago.

The supervisor's response to the doubling of the wait times was not to do something to try to get more assessments done, to ensure that students were getting the psychological assessments they needed. No, what the supervisor did was change the criteria as to who gets added to the wait-list, and then, magically, Speaker, this artificially reduces the number of students and the wait times because they're no longer allowed to be added to the wait-list for a psychological assessment. That has forced parents to have to pay out of pocket for private assessments as they look at waits of a year or more. They have to do that in order to be eligible for the special education supports that are available.

We also heard from the special education advisory committee chair for the Thames Valley District School Board, Alison Morse, that the supervisor has increased secrecy about board activities. It has led to a complete loss of transparency, and it has led to decisions being made without public scrutiny. The SEAC chair, Alison Morse, says, "Trustees play a vital role in school boards by providing accountability and transparency through public meetings. Trustees are democratically elected and serve at the will of the local community." And since the appointment of the provincial supervisor, Alison Morse notes that there has been a significant reduction in community engagement and a real loss of transparency about what's happening at the school board.

None of this is good for students, none of it is good for families and none of it is good for the communities in which schools function.

I want to spend a little bit of time, Speaker, on two schedules of the bill that are part of my responsibilities as shadow minister for colleges and universities. The first schedule I want to talk about is schedule 4, the changes to the Ontario College of Teachers Act. What this schedule does is it allows the government to make changes to teacher education programs that override the institutions at which these programs are located. The changes can override that institution's

own academic governance. And it says that these changes can address areas such as areas of study, delivery, practical experience, timing and, really, anything else that the government would like to do in teacher education.

Certainly, we know that there is a need for more qualified teachers in Ontario. We have heard that there are over 70,000 Ontario-certified teachers who are currently not teaching and that there is a 30% increase in teacher retirements expected over the next five years, so we do have to address workforce issues around teachers. But instead of investing in improving teaching and learning conditions, which would be, you know, a way to retain teachers, to make sure that young people who train to be teachers actually go into the profession—instead of doing that, what the government has proposed in this bill are changes to allow the ministry and the government to determine the content of teacher training programs.

This is a very troubling precedent, Speaker, when the government is permitted to overrule university governance processes, faculty senates, academic councils, other governance structures that have been established—through legislation, I may add—in universities across the province. Keeping the government out of determining the content of programs like teacher education programs has been important to ensure the academic integrity of those programs, and now, with this bill, all of this will be at risk.

The second schedule that I wanted to talk about is the schedule that eliminates the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, or HEQCO. That institution has been around for decades, actually, Speaker, and its mandate is to bring evidence-based research to the continued improvement of the post-secondary education system in Ontario.

It's a curious thing—maybe not so curious—that this government decided to eliminate HEQCO. We have seen repeatedly that this is a government that has no interest in using research and evidence to inform policy. In fact, this government often makes decisions that fly in the face of good policy. So it is indeed unfortunate that this government is getting rid of the one institution that could be relied on to generate very thoughtful research and policy recommendations to guide government decision-making.

I want to now talk about one of the other changes in the bill, which deals with attendance. The minister has noted that only 40% of students in Ontario are attending school regularly. There is an issue, because kids can't be successful if they are not in the classroom. But, to get back to the importance of research and evidence, Speaker, you have to understand why kids are not in the classroom in order to take effective measures to keep them in the classroom.

I want to quote a very thoughtful op-ed by Iris Gorfinkel, who is a family physician from Toronto. She agrees: "Missing school is a pediatric crisis. Chronic absenteeism strongly predicts worse emotional skills, mental illness and economic difficulties." However, she goes on to say, "If Ontario responds to this crisis with marks"—because that's what this government has proposed with this bill, that students will be given marks for attendance—"instead of treatment and support, absenteeism will worsen."

This bill does nothing to address the real issues that are keeping students away from school. Mental health struggles, the lack of community supports—to go back to the Thames Valley District School Board and the example of the wait-list for psychological assessments—you know, not only are there very limited supports in the community with long wait-lists to access

programs, but even within the school system, kids are waiting years or more in order to get the assessment that they need to qualify for special education programs.

To wrap up, Speaker, this bill really does nothing to address the chronic underfunding of public education, the issues that so many families and students are encountering on a daily basis. The government took this bill through a very short committee process, one day of public hearings, five hours—just five hours—for the public to appear before the committee or to submit written proposals. But there were many people in Ontario who care about public education and who took the opportunity to provide written submissions to the government. More than a hundred written submissions were received; the vast majority of them were strongly opposed to the bill.

It is worrisome that the minister stated during the committee process that there's not going to be a single penny more given to school boards to cover the new layers of bureaucracy that he has created: the new CEO and the new CEDO, who has teacher qualifications, who will be working with the CEO. But there were no changes made to address some of the recommendations that came forward during the committee process: no changes to help vulnerable students; no changes to address the fact that the other thing that this bill does is to take accountability away from the government—57 clauses to protect the minister, the cabinet, against legal cases and only one clause in the bill that addresses student achievement.

This is a pattern that we have seen with this government to build in legal wording that would remove them from liability over the changes that they are making. It is a reason, one of the many reasons, that we absolutely cannot support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): It's time for questions and answers.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Speaker, last week I was at social policy committee here. I know some of the members were here as well. We heard from Mr. Anwar Knight, who represents an organization called holding parents accountable. We've heard some of the horrendous stories of what's happening in schools. Mr. Anwar Knight's son was beaten at school.

I'm a parent and I have two daughters. Before running, I spent the last seven years taking my two daughters to school every single day. Their safety is paramount for me, personally.

So, what Anwar described was that his son was beaten and there was no accountability within the school board.

But then he even told us a sadder story that was really sad, and what he said was that there's a young girl who was sexually assaulted at a school. Both her parents were teachers, but they were not able to notify the authorities or notify the school board because they were afraid of repercussions. So the grandmother had to go call the cops and had to go to the school board.

Now, what I want to ask the member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: There is no question that we are seeing a significant increase of violence in schools across the province, but the reason for that increase in violence is the lack of funding that the province is providing to schools. If you want kids to be safe in classrooms, you need to provide the personnel, the caring adults in the school who will be there to support the students. We hear about the chronic shortage of EAs, the chronic shortage of ECEs and other school board personnel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

MPP Wayne Gates: I really enjoyed your presentation, particularly when you started talking about then-Premier Mike Harris, who attacked schools and teachers, closed schools. That upset the unions that represented those teachers to a point that they had days of action all across Ontario. But the one that was really big was in Hamilton, where 100,000 people turned up—and which I attended with my sister, by the way. I'm showing my age a little bit.

Do you believe that this bill is worse than the Harris attack on education?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague for that question. I'm not sure if it's worse; certainly, it is equally bad, and it really continues the work that was started under Mike Harris to dismantle school board governance and attack the role of locally elected school board trustees in this province.

School boards are the oldest form of governance in Ontario—they predate the Legislative Assembly—because people recognized the importance of having locally elected representatives who could advocate for students and who could make sure that schools are providing the kinds of supports students need to be successful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I listened very intently to the remarks that were delivered by the member from London West, and, of course, I also listened to the concerns raised by the member from York South–Weston.

I wanted to ask, if this bill is not the solution to the safety concerns that the member has raised, what would be a superior approach to improving the crisis in our schools?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I do appreciate the question from the third party because, to go back to some of the comments I made in my remarks, there has been a legacy of chronic underfunding of public education under this government. We need to invest in our schools. More than \$6 billion has been cut from public education budgets for K-to-12 education under the Conservatives. Those cuts have consequences, and we are seeing those consequences every day in the number of special education students who are excluded from school because the EAs aren't available to support those kids in the classroom. So investing in public education would be an enormous help.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you to the member for London West for her presentation this evening. Obviously, coming from the particular neck of woods that the member represents, I would make a couple of points. Number one, when she was a trustee at the Thames Valley District School Board, I think it's acknowledged that she did a great job and represented her constituents very well. That being said, since her time here—too bad she left, but glad she's here serving. At the same time, I think supervision of some kind was needed. You may not like what happened, but, at the end of the day, the Thames Valley District School Board needed some change—ineffective management, bad management.

Does she agree, at the very least, that Bill Tucker, the current director of education—interim, filling in—has done a good job of bringing back respect and integrity to the Thames Valley—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: There is a constant narrative that we hear from this government that the Thames Valley District School Board needed to be put under supervision. But I can tell the minister, and he certainly should be aware of this, that the decision to send senior administrators to the Rogers Centre for a staff retreat was made by the director of education. The trustees had absolutely nothing to do with this. The trustees in the board are looking at what kinds of supports students need to be successful. They are looking at advocating to the Minister of Education to get the mandatory costs that they have to provide to staff to have that covered by the government. They are doing the work on behalf of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you to my colleague from London West.

We learned at committee that there are some 21,000 children that are excluded from school entirely. One in four students with disabilities can't attend for full days or full weeks. The core education funding is being unaddressed here, the shortfall of \$850 million. And the minister's response, in his answer to disabled students being left out of school, is an exemption from the attendance requirements.

I just wonder if my colleague could respond: Is there anything in this bill that you see where there are resources that would allow for students to actually attend school?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague for the question. There's absolutely nothing in this bill that will help enable students with special education needs to get back into the classrooms where they belong, where they have a right to be able to learn. This government has made it such that schools cannot provide the supports that those students with special education needs require, because, again, they are not funded to the level that they need to provide those supports.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: As many people know, and likely share my concern, there is an epidemic of mental health challenges across society and that seems to be amplified in our schools. Do you see anything in this legislation that would help to address the crisis of mental health in our schools?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: There's absolutely nothing in this legislation that is going to address the crisis of student mental health. There is nothing in this legislation that is going to address the needs of students who have special learning needs and are excluded from school because the supports aren't available for them in the classroom.

What there is in this bill is legal wording to protect the government from lawsuits from parents who want to make sure that their kids get the education they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Tyler Watt: I will be sharing my time with my amazing colleague from Don Valley West.

I'm here to talk about the Putting Student Achievement First Act, but honestly, it should be called the putting the education minister first act because everything I see in here is just the

centralizing of power to the Minister of Education. I don't see anything in here that's actually going to help put student achievement first.

I'm deeply concerned about the corporate language that is being used as of late by the minister, even referring to school boards as enterprises and things like CEO positions for the boards.

Last week, this bill had the opportunity to go through committee—a rare treat with this government, actually going through to committee—a critical stage that was meant to allow students, parents, educators and stakeholders to scrutinize its intent and assess whether it truly serves the public interest. I know that members from the Ontario Liberals put forward many amendments, and it's disappointing but not surprising that the government voted them all down.

Instead, we saw this process undermined. Rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue, the government deflected responsibility, shifting blame onto teachers, education workers, school board leaders, while limiting the very hearings designed to ensure transparency and accountability. Listen, we know that some not-so-great stuff has happened within boards, but we can't paint an entire population with the same brush.

This matters because this bill contains measures that will materially weaken our education system. It drives larger class sizes, increases strain on already overburdened educators and reduces the quality of support that students receive. The success of Ontario's publicly funded education system has been built on contributions from teachers—trust and respect for professional experience, not bureaucratic control.

Now, some suggestions of what I would think would be in a bill that is about student success: We could repair the school backlog. We could have easily used some of that \$29 million for the Premier's luxury private jet to start addressing that backlog. We should be investing in smaller class sizes and capping those because, with less students in a class, that gives the teacher more time to actually focus on providing a meaningful education. We need more supports for education workers, including ECEs, who are deeply undervalued and underpaid by this government.

We need to address classroom violence. The amount of stories that I have heard from parents and teachers and support workers in our system about the violence is really shocking. We have people that are being choked out in class. We are not addressing the violence that is going on. We're not addressing the mental health crisis that is going on. There is nothing in here about addressing the mental health crisis and providing those supports.

One of the first things to be cut under these supervisors is special education. Teachers should not be taking on so many hats. They're there to be a teacher. They're there to help teach and help grow the next generation of kids and students in this province, but they're having to be a nurse, a mental health worker, a social worker, doing all of these things instead of what they are supposed to be there to do because there just aren't enough supports. It has gotten totally out of control.

We've already seen effects caused under ministry oversight in my very riding of Nepean, and in Ottawa. Under this ministry's current oversight of school boards, we have seen the layoff of hundreds of custodians and support workers in schools. This came out today. In my riding of Nepean, this has been a major issue: 35 lead hands, two fourth-class engineers, five

carpenters, one plumber and several other necessary and integral roles, gone under this minister's watch.

Our custodians and support workers are the backbone of our K-to-12 schools. They ensure that students and education workers have a safe and clean space to learn. Lead hands oversee maintaining the school grounds, ensuring that things like ice and snow are cleared. Engineers maintain the HVAC systems and fan units, ensuring students and staff can learn and educate in reasonable conditions. These are staff members who are necessary to keep in our education system as without them there would not be a properly maintained school to learn and teach in.

Schools don't shut down at 3 p.m.; there are often community events. These leads, the majority of which received layoffs today, are responsible for that, making sure that things run smoothly. Without them there, it's just going to be chaos after school hours. They're going to continue being used by the community, by students and after-school curricular activities.

Today, though, after those layoffs were posted, there was a job posting for a senior strategic adviser to the director with a salary up to \$176,000—front-line workers gone but this. Sure, I see where this government's priorities are. You have to respect those blue-collar workers. The Premier talks a big game about this, but actions speak louder than words. Them being the first to be laid off from this is not acceptable.

What Bill 101 does is it grants the minister binding authority to set policies governing all learning materials in Ontario classrooms. It replaces localized, professional educator judgment with centralized political decisions.

I thought that the Conservatives were all about small government, not big government that is running everything from Queen's Park. And we are seeing this not just in education; we are seeing the centralization of power in many of these ministers' portfolios. This is a huge risk, because it disconnects learning from students' lived experiences. It flattens Ontario's diverse educational communities into a single government one-size-fits-all approach.

Mandating educational materials such as lesson plans and teachers' guides risks transferring teaching into a scripted activity. Students deserve a curriculum grounded in evidence and stability, not one that risks being shaped by shifting political priorities.

When I work at the hospital, I wouldn't want to be given directions from the Minister of Health on how to do my job. I was educated and trained and have years of experience as a nurse. Trust my clinical judgment. Trust the teachers and the education workers who are the professionals working on the front lines. Trust that they know what they're doing. They don't need this oversight and power grab from this Minister of Education, who clearly has a chip on his shoulder towards unions and teachers alike.

This bill also grants the minister power to set mandatory policies governing all public communications by school boards. So he's going to decide what school boards are allowed to say. I have a sneaking suspicion I know what that's going to be: "Everything is great. The government is doing an amazing job." That's going to be the communication messaging that is going to be coming out from them, this centralized government oversight of speech by publicly accountable local institutions. Trustees may hesitate to speak publicly about shortcomings in provincial policy. Board officials may self-censor to avoid sanctions. Educators silenced when

professional assessments conflict with official narratives—this doesn't improve governance; it removes early warning signs from the system.

As I come to an end in my speech here, I don't understand why, when we're going to make such major changes to one of the most important systems in this province—early childhood education and intervention is everything. It sets them up for the rest of their lives, especially when it comes to their health.

So why wouldn't you sit down with key stakeholders like teachers, like ECEs, principals, admin folks—all of the people who are actually working on the ground? You have amazing leaders like Phil in my riding of Nepean who is one of the heads at OSSTF, responsible for custodians and those support workers—those very ones that have been laid off today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Phil's a good guy.

MPP Tyler Watt: He's an amazing guy who has plenty of stories and ideas that could tell you how we can actually start to address and fix the system.

Bill 101 concentrates power at Queen's Park that has always belonged to local communities, parents, trustees, educators and students. Across four schedules, the same pattern repeats: local accountability is weakened, democratic representation is reduced and the government insulates itself from scrutiny. This bill does not put students first; it puts the minister first and calls it reform. We must understand that putting students first should not be a partisan issue. It should be a universal goal to want to ensure that all of our students have the resources and opportunity to equally succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): The member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's an honour to rise tonight to speak about Bill 101. Speaker, there's been a lot of concern about this, and rightly so. This bill is a real attack on our public education system, and I'm hearing about it from my constituents in Don Valley West, from teachers, from principals. They are very worried.

So let's just talk about the money first. As the finance critic from our Liberal caucus, that's something that I pay a lot of attention to. We know that per-student funding has fallen under this government by \$1,500 per student. And that is having direct impacts every day in our classrooms.

I've shared this story before, but in visiting some schools in my riding, they were talking about their support staff, the support workers, the education workers, and they said, "Well, this year we have two, but in September, we'll only have 1.5." Another one said, "Well, we have 1.5 education workers for the whole school; in the fall, we'll only have one." These are the kinds of cuts that have taken place under this damaging Conservative government, and they're the cuts that my constituents are worried about.

We look at the education budget: The education budget is going up by less than 1%. Guess what? Interest on debt is going up over 7%. Why? Because this government is taking us to half a trillion dollars in debt. They have got \$30 million to buy a private jet, a luxury jet for the Premier, but they don't have money to put the education workers that we need in our classrooms to support kids.

I was in another school in my riding recently. The teachers are devoted. They are devoted to their kids. I want to thank the teachers who work in the schools in my riding in Don Valley West and across our province because I know that they care deeply. I have a number of teachers in my family—aunts, uncles, cousins—and I know that they care deeply about public education because it brings such opportunity.

When I was in this classroom, I had the chance to see some kids with special needs. The teacher, of course, had a full class, and the kids with special needs—sadly, there was no one to help them. So those kids are needing that extra attention, and the teacher is torn between giving that extra attention to the children who need it and trying to carry on with the rest of her lesson plan for the other children. So these are the kinds of things that we know are hurting our education system. They are hurting our kids, and people are paying attention and they're worried about it.

It's the pattern of this government that they break something, blame someone else and don't take any accountability. We heard earlier about the number of clauses in this bill that give the government a get-out-of-jail-free card. If anything goes wrong, "Oh, no, you can't blame us." If they were so proud of this legislation and thought it was going to do so much good in our public education system, I don't really see the need for these kinds of clauses. They need to be able to stand up and take accountability for what they're doing.

We know that schools aren't safe. We know that teachers, administrators and principals are retiring at record rates because they feel unsafe, and they are telling us that the way to have safe classrooms is to have more adults in those classrooms. So, again, it comes down to priorities. We have a government that is prioritizing luxury private jets for the Premier and spending who knows how many billions—we don't know, because the government won't tell us. It's billions of dollars, potentially, to expand an airport in downtown Toronto, which may or may not be feasible, and yet we have schools that are unsafe, we have teachers who are leaving the profession, we have principals who are retiring early, and they're all talking about this. When they come to Queen's Park and meet with us as MPPs, when they come to committee to talk about this bill and budget bills and other important legislation before this chamber, they talk about what the cuts to public education have done to our children.

Class sizes are too big, and this bill doesn't fix that. Children with those exceptional needs are not getting the attention they need, and this bill doesn't fix that. It's not going to ensure that parents have a voice through their trustees. These 72 CEOs—high-paid, high-priced CEOs—it's a very strange term for an education system. And don't expect that you're not going to have big paycheques to go with those big titles. People get a big title; they expect a big paycheque. Just look at all the ministers over here and all of the parliamentary assistants. They all got big pay raises when they got their big titles.

Speaker, let's listen to what the experts have to say. Groups like the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association have raised concerns, saying that "Bill 101 would significantly expand ministerial authority across governance, finance and classroom practice."

As my great colleague from Nepean just said, a nurse doesn't need the Minister of Health telling him or her how to do their job, in the same way a teacher does not need the Minister of Education telling them how to do their job in the classroom. They said that this bill "Reduces the role of locally elected school boards, limits responsiveness to community needs and concentrates decision-making at Queen's Park."

Speaker, we know that, again, this bill is another move to centralize control and take away a voice and input from our local trustees on the ground. It was local trustees who actually brought forward the idea for all-day kindergarten. I wonder if any members on the government side would say that all-day kindergarten hasn't helped their children. Those are the kinds of ideas that come from having local voices who see what's going on in their community. Once again, this government has a hate-on, it appears, for Toronto, because the Toronto District School Board is going to get the number of trustees they have reduced to 12. So the remaining 12 trustees will now have double the number of students that they already have and try to support the parents, the needs.

Speaker, I get these calls too sometimes because parents are not getting the response they need from the supervisors. So a parent comes to their trustee, or now, in this case, they're coming to their MPP, to say, "Hey, my child—we moved part way through the year." They want to stay in their existing school. They're having some troubles with schedules and different things, and they just need some help to navigate the system. These are practical day-to-day challenges that parents and children have when they're trying to navigate the system. They deserve a voice to help them with that.

Speaker, on the topic of attendance, look, of course we want our kids in school. I think everybody could agree that that is a good place for our students to be. But you've got to look at the root cause. We know that a study by Global News found that just 40.2% of high school students attended at least 90% of their classes last year, a steep drop from about 60% in 2017-18 before the pandemic. A quote from Robyn Urback at the Globe and Mail: "There is also an Ontario-specific issue keeping kids out of class: There are not enough aides or support workers to help out in classrooms that have attempted to integrate children with behavioural challenges. Those kids are being sent home from school or asked to stay home altogether, and other students are missing class to avoid the disruptions and sometimes violent confrontation."

Speaker, we know that, again, we need adults in our classrooms to help our kids. The challenges that were caused by COVID have not gone away. We know that our kids will need more support for years to come. That's why it's so important to have those mental health supports, to have education workers in the classroom, to support all our kids, because we want all of our children, all of our students in Don Valley West and in every riding in this province, to reach their full potential. I think we need a strong public education system to do that, and this bill hurts that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I want to ask the member for Don Valley West—and I appreciate her comments and concerns, but it's no secret, because I did speak first and I have to wait my turn, that I am supporting this bill proudly. I was going to say to the opposition whip, in her submission—that member had been a trustee; I was a trustee back in the 1990s and we didn't have an issue with expenses having to be controlled from the centre. We just didn't have an issue. Maybe I'm just looking back with rose-coloured glasses at the great days when we were trustees. We propose to maintain local, elected trustees for all boards with this bill, but we have a problem with expenses.

Would the member want to allow the expense abuse to continue, or would she instead support this bill, which eliminates that problem?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank the minister and the member from Durham for the question. As a chartered accountant, I absolutely believe in strong expense control. I find it kind of ironic, to be honest, that this member is rising to talk about that tonight when his leader, his own Premier, in fact, every member of the cabinet, approved a \$29.8-million private luxury jet for the Premier. That's what I call bad expense management, bad expense control.

So for this government to stand here and say, "Yes, of course, there are bad apples, or people make mistakes on their expenses"—and those should absolutely be corrected, but let's start with the tone at the top and the tone at the top of this government is all wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I rise today as the former president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association and the vice-president of the Canadian School Boards Association because education draws people into public service.

It's really interesting because the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has echoed some of your concerns. This bill looks to:

- control education materials and curriculum resources;
- control boards' public communications, including those of trustees;
- control land acquisitions, building projects and repairs; and
- approval authority over board budget estimates.

When you see a government so desperately trying to control another level of government, what do you think of?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her question. I know that she's a dedicated public servant, and I appreciate her voice in these matters because she knows of what she speaks, Speaker.

Absolutely, silencing voices around education, silencing voices of the public school board association—and, in fact, members of provincial Parliament, who are being told that, "Do you know what? Sorry, that class visit? Cancelled. We have been told we can't have politicians in our classrooms."

Speaker, last time I checked, civics was still in the curriculum. Government matters, and if this government thinks that having an elected representative come into a classroom is about politics, it absolutely is not, unless that's what they are doing. When I go into a classroom, I am talking about the levels of government, what we do, how we work together. We talk about debate. I think it's an important part of the conversation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I wanted to reflect a little bit on the remarks from my colleague the member from Nepean. I actually shuddered when he invited the analogy of the Minister of Health offering to influence his clinical decision-making. At the same time, I've heard the Minister of Health being quite condescending towards you in this chamber and during question period. I think there is a pretty strong parallel, potentially, with what we may see with this Minister of Education. Have there ever been instances or can you point to examples in which the Minister of Education

may have demonstrated the same kind of condescension that we have heard from the Minister of Health?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to my colleague for that question. Yes, certainly. I was there that morning when we had all of the unions who came in for breakfast together and the Minister of Education gave a shockingly out-of-touch speech to all of these education workers and advocates, basically waving his finger at them and talking about what a colossal mess the system is because of them. When you start talking down to our front-line workers like that, it just fills them up with disrespect, right? They're already burning out in these jobs. They are dealing with the ongoing crisis that we're seeing in schools. They want to feel listened to, not talked at and certainly not directed at.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the member from Nepean, the critic for colleges and universities. Our government has made a historic \$6.4-billion investment into the post-secondary sector, including over \$150 million specifically to strengthen teacher education, supporting thousands of additional seats and increasing per-student funding by nearly 30%.

This bill builds on the investment by ensuring our training model is not only well funded, but also modern, efficient and aligned with today's workforce and parent needs. This way, talented individuals can enter the profession faster while receiving high-quality, practical training. So I ask the member opposite, through you, Speaker, if you claim to support students and educators, will you now support a bill that expands opportunity—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Nepean.

MPP Tyler Watt: The bill doesn't do any of that, so I will not be supporting this bill. As I said in my debate, there's nothing in here that's actually going to help students. This is all about control and centralizing power to the Minister of Education.

There's nothing in here about mental health supports for students and education workers. There's nothing in here about addressing violence in classrooms. There's nothing in this bill about special ed. There's nothing in this bill that's actually going to do what the title of the bill says it's supposed to do. So, no, I will not be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Speaker, this is to either of the Liberal members that got up to speak.

I was also a public school board trustee for the last year before I became an MPP. I was the vice-chair of our board. I can tell you that, in eight years—one of the things that sparked me to run to be a trustee was the Liberals bringing in Bill 115 attacking education workers, which was supported by the Conservatives.

Year after year after year, we were begging the Liberal government to properly fund special education, which has only gotten worse under this Conservative government. We saw a Liberal government that threatened school boards to withdraw funding if we didn't rip up agreements and stop paying for post-retirement benefits for non-bargaining units—an agreement that had been in place for decades. But I digress.

My question is, if the government is saying that this is about trustees, and some sort of untoward behaviour by trustees, why would they put in the legislation that they're protecting themselves from any type of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Nepean.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you for that question. First, I want to address Bill 115. It's something I would never support, never vote for. Our leader has apologized for it. I know there's a lot of reparations and atonement to do beyond an apology, but I'll just be crystal clear about that. We have a new generation of Ontario Liberals here, and we are here today standing up for students and education workers.

Now, getting to your question, why would they put that in the bill? They're just trying to hide. They're trying to hide themselves from accountability. Look at what's going on with the FOI system, the Premier's phone records. They just want to hide from accountability. They want to hold trustees accountable, but not themselves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): A very quick question.

Mr. Adil Shamji: For either of my outstanding colleagues, could I ask you to elaborate a little bit on how the potential reduction or changes in school trustees fits within the broader framework of this government undermining our democracy?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to my colleague from Don Valley East for the question. Look, as I said, in Toronto, instead of 24 trustees, we will have 12 now. That means that each of those trustees has double the work, the number of students and families that they're trying to support. That means that they may not be able to adequately stand up for their concerns and share their concerns here in this Legislature, and that definitely erodes democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Now it's definitely my turn. To repeat, I am proud to support Bill 101, the Putting Student Achievement First Act.

At its core, this legislation proposes to guide by a simple but non-negotiable principle, and that is that every decision that we make in education must put students first—not politics, not ideology, not institutional self-interest, but students first and foremost.

Now, that principle, Mr. Speaker, is not an abstract principle to me. As I indicated in my questioning earlier, between 1993 and 1997 I had the opportunity to serve as a trustee with the Roman Catholic Durham Region Separate School Board, now known as the Durham Catholic District School Board.

And let me explain that, because we did not have four-year terms back in the 1990s. I was appointed to fill a vacancy the final year of a three-year term, from 1993 to 1994. Then I ran for election, not re-election, in the November 1994 election, and I won by three votes—two on the recount.

Hon. Steve Clark: A landslide.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Yes. So they nicknamed me "Landslide McCarthy."

Ms. Catherine Fife: So close. So close.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Yes. Actually, the current mayor of Pickering was the trustee from Pickering on the board with me; he gave me that nickname. I also served, like the opposition whip, as vice-chair for a time during that full three-year term.

I can say that I did witness first-hand what local governance can look like when it is focused, disciplined and anchored in a shared sense of purpose. Like others who have served as trustees in the past, including, no doubt, the opposition whip, we did have that shared sense of purpose in Durham.

Trustees at that time understood their role very clearly. We were advocates for our communities. We were stewards of public trust and, above all, partners in ensuring that students had every opportunity to succeed. There was debate—there always should be—but it was debate rooted in outcomes. Decisions were evaluated through one basic question: Is this helping our students, who we're here to serve, to learn, to grow and to succeed? Because when governance works, it elevates the entire system, but when it loses focus, students are the ones who pay the price.

Now, to understand why Bill 101 is necessary, we must be honest about where Ontario's education system has been. When our government took office in 2018, student achievement was declining. Foundational skills—reading, writing and math—were not where they needed to be. Parents were confused by curriculum changes that prioritized process over clarity. Educators were frustrated by vague expectations and constant policy churn. Too often, teachers found themselves caught between parents and boards, engaged in disputes that had little to do with classroom learning.

Now, this didn't happen overnight. For decades, school boards and trustees were left to their own devices without authority, expertise or clear accountability. The result was uneven delivery, inconsistent standards and, in some cases, deep governance dysfunction. Simply put, too many boards drifted away from their core mission, and since 2018, our Ontario PC government has worked deliberately to reverse that trend. We paused failed experiments. We returned to a back-to-basics approach, grounded in evidence, and proven instructional methods. We listened to educators instead of sidelining them and we brought parents back into the conversation as partners rather than obstacles.

The results are real and measurable, Mr. Speaker. EQAO scores are rising, particularly in both reading and writing. Ontario's students are once again achieving among the highest results internationally. Educators consistently tell us that clearer curriculum expectations and better supports have allowed them to focus on what they do best: teaching. That progress happened because leadership was restored—leadership that did not shy away from responsibility; leadership that accepted that student achievement is ultimately a provincial obligation.

But governance problems at the board level did continue to undermine the progress we made. Therefore, through Bill 33, our Ontario PC government proposed, and this House approved, providing the Ministry of Education the ability to intervene earlier when boards are failing.

What we found once we stepped in was deeply troubling: trustees ignoring conflict of interest rules; capital projects spiralling into chaos; directors of education evaluating themselves and awarding illegal compensation; millions of education dollars spent on litigation, consultants, association fees and internal disputes instead of on our students and our classrooms. In some

cases, parents raised safety concerns year after year to no avail. Teachers worked in environments riddled with uncertainty and instability. And yet, once decisive oversight was applied, problems that had lingered for years were resolved instantly. That tells us something very important.

The issue is not about whether or not governance is local. The issue is that roles have become blurred, accountability has been weakened and focus has been fragmented. This is not about blaming individual trustees or staff, but it is about acknowledging that the system, as constructed, allowed dysfunction to persist.

Bill 101 proposes to correct this. The legislation modernizes school board governance by clearly defining responsibilities, restoring professional management and refocusing trustees on what they themselves consistently say matters most: representing their communities and advocating for students.

Trustees will continue to play an important role—make no mistake about that—but it will be a role with sharper focus. We will continue to have elected trustees in school boards. The number of trustees will be frozen province-wide, we propose, and in Toronto, reduced to align with comparable boards. Honoraria will be capped. Expense accounts will be strictly limited. These measures respect the public trust and they ensure that educational dollars are directed to learning, not governance overhead and not milkshakes at midnight.

At the same time, Bill 101 introduces a professional management model consistent with other major public institutions. Each board, it is proposed, will have a chief executive officer responsible for operations, finance, capital projects and human resources. And now a separate chief education officer is proposed for each board to be responsible for academic leadership. This proposed separation ensures that complex financial and infrastructure decisions are handled by professionals with the right expertise, all while educational leadership remains laser-focused on what matters most: student achievement.

Education dollars will also be better protected. Funding will no longer be used for external trustee associations or discretionary advocacy. Those are not educational expenses, Mr. Speaker, and families, parents expect better stewardship. Every dollar is redirected back into classrooms and, when it is, it's a dollar working for our students. That is what the core function and core mission of school boards ought to be. It was at one time; they lost their way. We're getting back to those basics and that core mandate.

Collective bargaining will be modernized as well. Now, with the exception of constitutionally protected denominational matters for our Catholic boards, trustees will no longer sit at bargaining tables. Professional management will lead negotiations, ensuring consistency, stability and fairness across the province, while keeping trustees out of roles they were never intended to fulfill.

Bill 101 also proposes exactly what educators have told us they need inside their classrooms. Teachers have been clear with us that curriculum expectations in recent years became too open to interpretation, forcing our teachers to spend countless hours searching for resources instead of teaching. This legislation would allow the ministry to provide standardized, approved curriculum tools that promote consistency and reduce unnecessary workload.

Bill 101 also proposes to restore province-wide final examinations for our students in grades 9 through 12, and this would ensure that attendance and participation are meaningfully reflected in assessment. That is proposed in this bill. Chronic absenteeism is a challenge that teachers faced long before the pandemic, and one that, sadly, has worsened since. Educators have told us plainly that clear, consistent expectations around attendance and evaluation improve classroom order, engagement and outcomes. These changes reflect a simple truth about life beyond school: Success requires showing up, participating and demonstrating what you have learned.

There was a great mayor of Toronto named Allan Lamport many decades ago and his motto—I don't know if he made it up, but he said 90% of life is showing up, and he was right. Now more than ever in this post-pandemic world, that is a recipe for success. That is reflected in this bill with it comes to our students, addressing the absenteeism that has lingered on post-pandemic.

Finally, Bill 101 would ensure that school boards remain focused on their core mandate when communicating with parents and the broader community. Official school board communications will be limited to education-related matters, those being student learning, school operations, safety and general community information. Parents want to know how their children are doing, whether buses are running and whether schools are safe. They do not expect boards as institutions to comment on issues far outside their mission or mandate.

Individual trustees would remain free to speak, but boards themselves will stay focused on what they are there for, that is, education, student learning, student achievement and preparing our students for the future beyond elementary and secondary education to a world that is ever changing, to careers that will emerge in the future that they will be well equipped for.

Mr. Speaker, my own experience with local school board governance in Durham taught me the value of local voices when those local voices are paired with clarity, responsibility and, as I indicated previously, shared purpose. Bill 101, if this House sees fit to approve it, would preserve that local voice. That is what is proposed. As I said, democratically elected, local trustees will continue, starting with this election campaign period, for which the registration has begun as of May 1, just a few days ago. That will continue for 2026 and beyond with the proposal in this bill. That local voice will ensure that the province meets its responsibility to deliver consistent, high-quality education for every student in every community across Ontario. That oversight will be there alongside the local voice.

It is the provincial government that has had the constitutional jurisdiction since Confederation over education. The province is asserting that very important constitutional responsibility under section 92 of the original British North America Act of 1867, now the Constitution Act of 1867. This bill respects French-language education rights under the charter. This bill respects denominational school rights under the original BNA Act and is strongly enforced today.

But at the same time, it brings discipline where there was disorder. It brings clarity where there was confusion. It brings leadership where it was missing. And most importantly, it puts our students—Ontario's students, our future, the future of this province and indeed of Canada—back at the centre of our education system.

Bill 101 consists of five schedules. It proposes to make amendments to the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, and the Education Act. That's the lengthiest part of the proposed bill. Schedule 3 consists of proposed amendments to the Higher Education Quality Council of

Ontario Act, 2005. Schedule 4 addresses the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, and schedule 5, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014.

The bill is based on thoughtful reflection, on listening to educators and to parents and to the students that the boards are there to serve. It reflects what we have learned from the disorder and the lack of focus and the failure to fulfill core mandates that we've sadly seen over the last number of years, for most of the time between 2003 and 2018, in particular. Again, it preserves that local voice.

I think of the balance that our proposals in this 44th Parliament, the proposals for legislative change that this Progressive Conservative government brings under the leadership of Premier Ford. It is about balance. Like the Conservation Authorities Act amendments that were approved under Bill 97: We have, for the first time, a central guiding agency, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency. We did not have that before. We have nine consolidated regional watershed-based conservation authorities throughout the province—no community being left behind; no community previously served by a conservation authority not continuing to be served. And the local voice—because we listened in our consultations of the need for that local voice, the local watershed councils.

Again, you have the essence of what was begun by a Progressive Conservative government 80 years ago: conservation authorities focused on flood prevention and watershed management, better and more equally resourced, guiding central agency authority to ensure consistency across the board, to ensure the core mandate is met, and then the local voice of local watershed councils.

That type of balance, that type of approach, which is the best of every possible world, is what Bill 101 is about: that central guidance from the Ministry of Education, that division of responsibilities between a chief executive officer responsible for financial operations and infrastructure and a chief education officer laser-focused on learning and our students' achievement.

Then the local voice, the trustees, will still be elected, will still be that essential local voice, but they will be focused on the core mandate of what trustees were supposed to be all about, and were all about most of the time since Confederation.

Let's not forget as well the constitutional respect contained in this bill, respecting French-language education rights and our charter, the Constitution Act, 1982, and the Constitution Act, 1867, and denominational school rights, a foundational principle in the founding of this nation. It would not have been possible to achieve Confederation—with Ontario being one of the founding provinces of Confederation—it would not have been possible without that grand bargain. That is respected and preserved with Bill 101. We will continue to have elected trustees, Catholic, French language and public.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the opposition be persuaded to support other government bills—four when I was Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. I urge them to take another look at the bill, consider my comments and those of my colleagues and vote in favour of Bill 101.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll be honest, I've always voted in favour of good bills. Unfortunately, this isn't a good bill.

This government hasn't put a dent in the \$17-billion repair backlog in our schools. They can't even manage to keep students in safe buildings. Why should they be able to take more control from trustees?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Well, I can't tell you how disappointed I am with the member. We have agreed on some things. He has voted for bills that I've tabled on behalf of this government, and I appreciate that. I thought he might actually keep me in suspense for a while, but he just lead off with a big no. So I am disappointed.

I do have to say that I believe we've struck the right balance here. I think we have it right and we're going to have the best of both worlds. We're going to have the constitutional protections here. We're going to have that local voice, with proper guidance, to ensure that core mandates for school boards are met.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a question for the minister who just spoke. He made an observation, something along the lines that 90% of life is showing up. I'm wondering if the minister can provide us his observations using that particular theory and applying it to the current state of the chamber with the Liberal benches and the government benches.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I appreciate the question from the excellent member for Essex. I wasn't here during the 42nd Parliament, nor was the member. We were both elected in 2022, for the first time, so we were here post-pandemic. But I know that the members who were here made every effort, even in those challenging times, to be here with protocols that were followed so that we were here in person. I'm proud of that.

I love the tradition that we have to be in our seats to vote. That means you've got to show up live. There's no virtual voting here and I'm quite proud of that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The member mentioned that he was very much opposed to the expense of a milkshake, which I thought was fascinating, because the member is one of the cabinet ministers who unanimously approved the Premier's purchase of a \$30-million jet.

So I am wondering, given the minister's feeling that expenses shouldn't be made with taxpayer dollars that might be considered a luxury, whether he thinks that the expense policies that will now apply to trustees under Bill 101 should also apply to the Premier and the cabinet.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I am very proud, Mr. Speaker, of the Premier's leadership on all fronts, especially when it comes to the fact that we are a government that has never raised a tax or fee. If anything, we have cut taxes and fees.

The Premier has said, and we all support him in this, that the worst thing to do is to hand your money over to government. Put the money back into the pockets of people. That is where it belongs. Keep taxes low, cut taxes and be responsible, as the Premier and this government are with every taxpayer dollar. We will, therefore, have oversight over trustees who are not responsible with the taxpayer dollars. That's what this bill is about.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Before I go to the next question, I will ask the House to quiet the chatter so that we can hear the members with their questions and answers.

The next question goes to the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank the minister and the member for Durham for his comments. I do find it interesting, again—the member from the official opposition mentioned the milkshake. We have a government that has yet to table a balanced budget, something that they think school boards should do. Yet, again, they cannot lead by example. It's quite ironic when you have a government that cannot balance their own books, that spends \$30 million of taxpayer money on a jet that they say they're all proud of. In fact, the member says he's proud of it, yet he can't say the word.

I challenge the minister: Can you actually say that you voted for the jet?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Speaking of voting, I did a lot better running under the leadership of Premier Ford when I ran in 2022, and then again in 2025. I did tell this House, I only won by three votes and two in the recount for trustee in 1994, but I won by over 10,000 votes in 2022, and I got up over 50.5% of the vote in 2025. Believe me, that wasn't so much about me as it was about our great Premier and our fantastic Progressive Conservative Party because the people of Durham loved this man.

But what I can say is, I'm one of the rare ones in this House that has served locally, here in this provincial Parliament and in the judicial branch of government, as a deputy judge, so I see governments from all branches.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Look, I don't want to compare electoral numbers, but if we are saying them, it was 45%—actually, 44.99% to be honest—in 2022, but it was 57.52% in 2025.

But I was wondering—you know, it's sad to see the opposition be so partisan on this issue. We should all be coming together, whether we're Progressive Conservatives, New Democrats, Liberals, independents, Greens—I think I might see a Green over there, maybe not. We should all be coming together to support students.

Could the member explain, maybe—one last pitch. We've heard from the New Democrats, we've heard from the Liberals. They don't want accountability in the school boards. Could the member make one last appeal to maybe help our friends across the aisle change their minds and see the light in their ways?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I only heard one no for sure over there. I thought he was going to keep me guessing, that member, but I'm still hoping that debate matters and I'm going to make the appeal again. As I said, the member raised a good point.

When I had the privilege of being Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, the opposition unanimously supported the new Consumer Protection Act—Bill 142—in the 43rd Parliament. They unanimously supported—we thank them for this—the Building Infrastructure Safety Act; that was Bill 153 in 2024, and then, abolishing NOSIs, those fraudulent consumer registrations, and then the modern AI and cyber security protection, Bill

194. If they could do it for those bills, let's come together in a non-partisan way, support our teachers, support our students, support our parents and support our local trustees and give them the right guidelines—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The government's education bill only mentions "protecting student outcomes" three times, but it mentions "liability" 43 times. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says that the bill contains some of the most aggressive liability-shielding provisions seen in Ontario legislation in recent memory and that this arrangement is fundamentally incompatible with the rule of law's requirement that government be answerable for its actions. Bill 101's liability provisions come dangerously close to insulating provincial decision-making from all meaningful legal accountability.

As a lawyer, how can the member opposite possibly vote for a bill that is fundamentally incompatible with the rule of law?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to say and build upon what I already said: I'm one of the few that has been a member of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, so it gives me a unique perspective.

What I can say is this bill is reflective of our great traditions of constitutional monarchy, responsible government, parliamentary democracy. The minister named in the bill and the oversight by that minister and the Ministry of Education is based on the principle of responsible government. Less than 200 years old, the province of Ontario, but that minister, like all ministers of the Crown, must be elected by his or her community, must be responsive to this House as an elected member to this elected House, and this bill has to pass democratically. A majority has to vote for it. That's what I call constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy and responsible government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): A very quick question from the member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'd like to give the minister another chance—talking about expenses, talking about accountability, responsibility. He voted for the jet. Could he just say he voted for the jet and take responsibility for that?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is if the member opposite and other members don't support this attempt to rid ourselves of inappropriate expenses by trustees then they're going to be answering—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Before I begin my formal remarks, I'd like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member from Waterloo.

It's always an honour for me to rise and speak on behalf of the great people of London North Centre. If this government were actually listening to educators on the front line—if they were actually speaking to parents of young people in education—they would hear stories that are happening in our classrooms that are absolutely appalling. You see, on movies, on television, on video games, there are warnings when there is objectionable content, when parents want to

perhaps make sure their child does not engage with that content. And yet, every single day in classrooms across Ontario, there are acts of violence—student on student, student on educator. There are also young people who are struggling with mental health needs, struggling with behavioural exceptionalities, who are hurling disturbing language towards their peers and educators.

Part of that reason is because of this government's chronic destruction and underfunding of our education system right now. Yet this government has the audacity, in a late-night sitting, to say that they stand for young people. What we're seeing in real time is part of the program that was begun by the Harris Conservatives in the mid-1990s. You see, they stripped a billion dollars out of education. They separated and divided educators and administrators against one another so that they were on competing factions, rather than working on the same side.

Once the Liberals took over for 15 years, they never returned that billion dollars that the Harris Conservatives cut out of education—in fact, they made it far worse.

So, today, I rise to oppose Bill 101. It's a bill that raises huge concerns in my riding of London North Centre, and it's raising concerns in communities across Ontario among parents, educators and advocacy groups who have dedicated themselves to the well-being of our children.

Parents have reached out to myself and my Ontario NDP colleagues to urge us to remain firm in our opposition toward this bill because they understand that it will harm their children, especially those with special needs. Speaker, they're right to be concerned. Across Ontario, families are asking, where is their voice in this process?

That's why we're standing here late at night in this chamber, because this government wants to pass this legislation, like their budget, under the cover of night. It's a very weak will that we see from this government, Speaker. It's a lack of a backbone, that they're trying to do this when they hope people aren't paying attention.

Despite everything—the testimony from critics, educators, concerned citizens and advocacy groups—this government is still charging ahead with Bill 101. It's a bill that is not only unfair and harmful, but one that also completely ignores the local realities of our communities. What's even more troubling is the way this government is pushing this bill forward with careless disregard for the public input they promised to take seriously. We have to ask the question, what happened to our democracy?

We're being asked to allow this Premier and his government to unilaterally dictate changes that will directly impact students, families and communities across Ontario. How is this acceptable? These decisions are not simply abstract policy, they affect the lives of our children and the future of our communities. These are also deeply personal choices, and they need to be made in full consultation with those who will be affected the most.

During this process, Speaker, the government allowed just one day of public hearings on the bill, with five hours of input allowed from the public. Of that time, the minister took an hour. The vast majority who applied to speak at committee were denied that opportunity. With a bill as serious as this is, on a topic as serious as this is, this government has actively shut out local voices and the voices of concerned people.

The minister himself actually shut down the livestream of the special education advisory committee. You see, parents of young people who have exceptionalities might have difficulty getting to that meeting in real time. So the livestream was a real benefit for them so that they could tune in, and they didn't have to have somebody look after their child. And for no reason whatsoever, the minister shut that down. The minister shut out parents of young people with special needs.

In my riding of London North Centre, parents are demanding to know why their voices are being ignored. They're asking why they're being shut out of a process that will have such a profound impact. This is a call for accountability. Why is it that those in power are pushing through these changes without listening to the people they're supposed to serve? Again, this is not democracy, this is the picture of weakness.

Parents in my riding do not want to give more power to elected bureaucrats. They want to have a say in how their children are educated, especially in the system where there's so much at stake. This is not about having control for the sake of control, this is about accountability. Parents deserve the right to advocate for their children, to ensure that their children's needs are being heard and addressed. And these are not just administrative issues, Speaker, these are the issues that will affect children's futures, their mental health, their education and their well-being.

But I want to touch on the liability provisions that are very curiously present in this bill. As has been mentioned before, this comes up numerous times, to the overshadowing of the more important pedagogical issues which should be the main focus of this bill. When the minister was asked about these provisions, he quickly dismissed these concerns, saying they were simply standard protections for ministers. But I think that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said it best when they described these provisions as "some of the most aggressive liability-shielding provisions" we've seen in Ontario legislation.

If you are not doing something wrong, you shouldn't be worried about having to protect yourself. So the fact this government is actively trying to create this shield does make one wonder what they're actually up to behind closed doors.

Now, these provisions go so far as to insulate decision-makers from any meaningful accountability for the consequences of their actions. It's not about ensuring government officials are protected when doing their jobs in good faith. This is about giving those in power blanket immunity. It undermines accountability that is supposed to be at the heart of our democracy.

I need someone in the government to justify and explain why this is in this bill. How can we sit back and trust this government if they are going to make decisions that harm students, families and communities and not be subject to any legal consequences whatsoever? No one should be above the law.

And yet this government, like that child who—you know, I think about some children, Speaker, and I think about the young person who might lose at a game a number of times. Once they lose at that game a number of times, suddenly they want to change the rules. And this government is clear evidence of that. They're so upset by being held back by the law in this province that they changed the goalposts. They always want to change the rules. They want to change everything to make sure that they can win at all costs, at the expense of education, at the expense of students, at the expense of educators and of families.

As we've heard, this bill is not only harmful in its contents, but also in the way the government has rejected common-sense amendments that could have improved it. The NDP, my colleagues, have proposed amendments that would have protected the most vulnerable in society, enhanced accessibility and ensured that the education system worked for all students. These touched on such aspects as protecting the constitutional rights of Franco-Ontarians to manage their own education system. Another would have ensured accessibility for disabled students, making sure that every student, no matter their ability, had an equal opportunity to succeed.

We also proposed that the Dreams Delayed report recommendations on anti-Black racism in Ontario's education system be adopted. But these, like all other common-sense resolutions that we brought forward, were rejected by this government.

In my riding of London North Centre, we are also home to a vibrant francophone community that deeply cherishes its language and relies on us to protect French language rights. When I attend events with the francophone community, I'm always struck by their pride, their cultural strength and their commitment to preserving their language for future generations. This is exactly why these protections matter—not in theory, but in real communities like mine.

Speaker, in difficult times like this, it does beg the question why this government wants to undermine our democracy, why they are straining the democratic process, why they do not listen to people and do not value students.

Speaker, I urge this government to move past their empty, vacuous, meaningless words about standing up for educators, standing up for students. It's abundantly clear what this bill is all about: This bill is about protecting themselves. It's about seizing school board assets. It's about wresting control to make sure that they can fill school boards with their unelected bureaucratic friends to make sure that they can all join in at this gravy train and feed at the trough. That's what this government is about. It's about control, it's about money and it's about undermining democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to acknowledge that the member from London North Centre, a former educator—when he talks about the classroom and those students, he does with care and a sense of professionalism that really is indicative of the lack of respect that this government has for teachers. I just want to publicly thank him for being an excellent educator. I mean, right now, he's actively trying to educate you—to no avail, apparently. Classroom management here is really off the rails, I might say, Speaker. Feel free to interject at any point.

It makes me really think about how the Minister of Education and this government has really disrespected the education sector and, quite openly, with a lot of animosity, with very little empathy for how difficult it is to be a good teacher.

Because I want to tell you, my sister is watching right now—Julie Wood from the Peel District School Board. She's an amazing teacher. She just got an award. But there is emotional labour in the profession, and it's disheartening to see the government often talk and disparage educators in this province.

It makes me think of this grade 10 student from the Waterloo Region District School Board. Her name is Uzma. She wrote to me, Mr. Speaker. I want to put it on the record because it's so

indicative of how smart our students are despite the challenges of poverty, despite the challenges of an underfunded system, despite the challenges that youth have today with addictive algorithms on their phones and the pressure that they experience in today's society, which is actually quite different than what we had. So I think that's why it's so important to listen to them.

But Uzma wrote me a letter. It's entitled "How to buy a jet." She says, "Ms. Fife, do you know how difficult it is to buy a jet? Whether to buy a private jet—you can start to explore the possibility by carrying out a cost-to-benefit analysis." I'm sure the government did that in the cabinet room. The rule of thumb is that if you or your executives, meaning the Premier, spend 350 to 400 hours in the air each year, then the expense of fully owning a private jet is likely not worth it.

She goes on to say, "Part of the analysis that I came up with, Ms. Fife, is that in the initial outline involved in buying a jet aircraft, you'll also have to understand what it will cost to run your private jet." And then she goes into a really detailed and thoughtful analysis, Speaker, about how complex it is to buy a private jet if you're the Premier of the province of Ontario.

She goes on to say what it will cost to run the private plane: These running costs include fuel, repairs, maintenance, insurance, airport taxes and landing fees, catering, flight personnel, along with the cost of layovers and stayovers. She says, "The Premier will need to create a financial buffer into your costings."

I'm sure that this is all going to become very clear when the Trillium or Global News gets their FOI—oh, wait. They can't do that anymore, right? Because this government has shut down the government's—you're no longer the most transparent government in the history of the province of Ontario.

But she goes on to say, "If you don't have a flight department to oversee the management of your jet"—these are cost projections—"you'll want to hire an aircraft management company." I'm pretty sure the government likely has an aircraft management company. "They will take care of pretty much everything to do with the running of your jet, from maintenance to repairs to the hiring of pilots and on-board catering." We know catering is very important to this government. "This can cost as much as \$250,000 a year"—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Order, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm reading a letter from a student who's indicative of how smart our students are in the province of Ontario.

Now, you may not want to hear how great a job our teachers are doing despite the huge challenges that you've created in the system, but I must say, she goes into how much most jets cost on average: up to \$500 million. The cheapest one on the market right now, she says, is \$1.2 million. But no, this Premier decided to buy a \$30-million jet. But you know what? That will only hold eight passengers in comfort, although this would hold six lobbyists, the chief of staff and the Premier.

She actually develops an aircraft cost calculator—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, I know you don't want to hear from Uzma, but I do, and I'm going to share it today.

The running cost details on actual—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on a point of order.

Hon. Greg Rickford: A clever workaround, but she can't use a letter to go completely off-topic from a bill about education. Sorry. It's just not on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will remind the member to stick to the topic of the bill.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I know you don't like clever women, but—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I ask all members to come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Actually, that's as complimentary as it gets around here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I've been tolerant this evening of a lot of chatter, a lot of side comment. I will not be tolerant of the back-and-forth. Please keep order in this House.

I turn back to the member.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm just going to finish Uzma's letter, because this is a voice of a student in the education system—I'll send it over to you—and she has costed out what the government has not chosen to provide. I really do appreciate her in-depth knowledge and, quite honestly, her interest in what's going on in the Legislature in Ontario. She says hiring a private pilot for a small, rented plane can cost up to \$2,000 to \$14,000 per hour, and then she goes on to say that the total—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on a point of order.

Hon. Greg Rickford: We've been through this in previous debate—I believe it was in education—when a document came out of an envelope in a completely unrelated matter and introduced discussion about something that's not related to what we're currently speaking about. I would kindly ask that the member return to the debate at hand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Stop the clock, please.

I will ask the member to stick to the bill and the topic at hand.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Bill 101, which is a completely undemocratic piece of legislation that this government has brought to the floor of the House, which undermines our democratic institutions in school boards—our longest-serving democratic institution in the history of the province is under attack by this government.

Uzma, a student from the Waterloo Region District School Board, has reached out to me and said, "Where are the priorities of this government?" Clearly the priorities of this government are not with students, and they certainly are not supportive of educators, Speaker. She just finishes

by saying, “You know, the Premier should be very careful and have a business plan, because the cost of fuel is really going up a high level”—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on a point of order.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Once again, returning to the letter to talk about subject matter completely unrelated to the debate at hand is not acceptable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will once again ask the member to move on to the topic of the bill and not the other topics.

Now I return to the member.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker. It is not surprising that this government does not want to listen to the voices of students and educators in Ontario, especially this member. And I know that they’re a little sensitive about the jet, because the jet is off-brand and the jet scandal is not going away, right?

But I will go back to the fact that this bill increases the control over educational materials in curriculum resources. It increases the control over public communications, including those of elected board members. It has sweeping approval authority over all land acquisitions and building projects and repairs—which, I will say, pretty much is the heart of this bill, because this is a real estate bill where this government is looking for real estate to solve the problems that you created on the housing file—and, finally, Speaker, the approval authority over board budget estimates, which is so interesting coming from a government that is running up the debt and the operational deficit in the province of Ontario.

There’s no wonder why Conservatives across this province are referring to you as the new Liberal Party, because you certainly know how to spend money, you certainly don’t know how to be fiscally responsible and you certainly do not know the value—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Through the Speaker, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —of public education in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Before I go to questions, I once again wish to remind this House that the side chatter is disruptive to the overall function of the House. Please keep it to a dull roar, as my parents used to say.

I recognize the member from Don Valley West for a question.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: What a lively debate we’re having tonight. Isn’t that fun?

I want to ask a question to the member from London North Centre, who I know is a former educator, and I know he cares deeply about education.

We’ve talked about the faults of this government with education—cuts of about \$1,500 per student.

We’ve talked about the problems of the Harris government, when they cut ESL, they cut music, they cut phys ed, they closed libraries. We know the damage that they did.

We've talked about a mistake that the Liberals made. And again, I think it takes a big person to admit that.

I wonder if you want to talk about whether or not the NDP government of the 1990s, under the Social Contract Act, where teachers and educators had to take 12 unpaid days of work—was that a mistake?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I've got to say that it is very surprising and refreshing to hear a Liberal actually use the words "Bill 115"—the horrible way in which educators were treated. So kudos to that member.

I think it's important that the member also recognize the good things that the Rae government did for educators—allowing them control of their own pension fund, which has grown to one of the best-managed and most lucrative pension funds in the province and in the country.

It's really quite interesting, when you consider the history of what the Liberal government did to education. They would pat themselves on the back for all-day kindergarten, and yet they would not want to admit the 600 schools they closed—the way in which they decimated rural Ontario by really taking away the heart of a community by closing those rural schools.

The Liberals' record on education is terrible, and the Conservatives are digging even deeper and making it worse.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to ask a question to the member from Waterloo, and I specifically want to talk about the role of the trustees.

One of the things I really think is important in this bill is to make sure that—this indoctrination of conversation that the trustees have brought to date in some of the boards, like in Toronto and like in Ottawa, is not in the best interests of our education, and it's not in the best interests of students. It's bringing in conversation that doesn't belong there. What the Minister of Education has done is made sure that the priority is always with the students.

So I'd like to ask the member opposite, does she feel that the indoctrination, the misspending that the trustees had is helpful at all to our students?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting, Bill 101 increases the power over schools and school boards, including books, grades, exams, school budgets, board communications, land acquisitions, building projects and trustee pay and expenses. It's basically the Voldemort education bill.

The level of overreach that your government is having into public education is actively undermining creative processes in education.

I will tell you, as the past president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, that trustees come to those board tables each and every single day with an interest in public well-being, which is actually legislated. And you should know that.

This bill, quite honestly, is completely unsupportable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to my London colleague, the member for London North Centre. I just want to ask his opinion about the supervision of the Thames Valley District School Board, because that experience of supervision is kind of a mini preview of the damage that this bill is going to do to public education.

So my question is, is centralizing power, is delegating the management of the school board to a government appointee who has no knowledge of the education system—has that worked in Thames Valley to improve public education for our students?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to my colleague from London West for an absolutely excellent question.

Really, what we saw in the Thames Valley District School Board was this government blaming trustees for behaviour of the administration. We saw that the administration took a trip to a Blue Jays game, and it's really unfortunate that this government was using the trustees in such a manipulative and deceitful way.

The supervisor, since they've come to Thames Valley, does not attend the special education advisory committee meetings, does not answer questions to parents, does not speak to the media. We see just another opportunity for one of these Conservative, unelected, appointed insiders to feed at the trough the Conservatives have created.

They have taken every public system and are trying to find ways to insert their friends and take money from the public purse.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: My question is to the member from Waterloo.

Being a past president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, I'm very curious for your thoughts around this government's approach that I think will potentially mean the end of OPSBA and the Catholic school board association as well, and what that impact might have on school boards across the province.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Ajax for that question.

It's a very good point. This government has whittled away at our democratic processes here in this House, shutting down public consultation on legislation, preventing FOI access to data that we need to do our job. And quite honestly, Bill 101 will increase ministerial control over the public communications of elected trustees. This is particularly concerning and may infringe freedom of expression under section 2(b) of the charter.

So if you had any questions about whether you're doing the right thing, the answer is, you are not. If you are truly interested in strengthening public education, you would listen to the people who are in the system and invest appropriately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: This to the representative from London North Centre.

Ontario students deserve access to well-trained, high-quality teachers that you heard about earlier. Our government is taking action to meet that need by modernizing teacher education, reducing unnecessary barriers while strengthening hands-on classroom experience. This bill

ensures, Speaker, we can get more qualified teachers in the classroom sooner without compromising standards.

If this bill expands access, strengthens training and responds directly to workforce needs, will the member opposite support it, or will he continue to stand in the way of getting more teachers into Ontario classrooms?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the representative from Whitby for a very strangely 1984 question. I mean, he talks about well-trained, high-quality educators. This is the same government that was attacking educational assistants with the "notwithstanding" clause. It is the same government that has ignored classrooms which have seen such struggles since the pandemic. We see a government that is actually firing teachers through their actions.

Educational assistants who do tremendous work within our school boards are grossly underpaid because of this government, as are early childhood educators. These positions, as mandated by the government, are not respected by the government. If they were respected properly, they would be paid properly. This government has an abysmal record on respecting educators.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): A quick question.

MPP Catherine McKenney: My question is to the member from Waterloo.

We do know what students need. They need smaller class sizes. They need more teachers, educators in schools, schools that don't leak, mental health support and special ed.

Do you think that the operating costs that your student outlined in the letter, that would have gone towards operating a jet, could go towards some of these resources?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Actually, Uzma just finishes her point, saying:

"Ms. Fife, the overall cost of owning a private jet is extremely expensive, typically requiring a net worth of \$50 million to \$100 million for comfortable ownership, with total costs often exceeding \$1 million to \$5 million annually. Beyond the \$2-million to \$75-million purchase price, owners pay for crew salaries, hangar fees, insurance and heavy maintenance."

Do you know what I want to tell you? This is money that would be well spent in the education system, especially for those 21,000 special education students that are exempted from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think we've got a little bit of a bigger audience than usual here during a late sitting.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The members will not make reference to the absence of members.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It's actually a lot of folks.

Speaker, it took me a while to find the words for this bill because when I look at how this government is managing education, honestly, I think it leaves me speechless. The actions of this government are driving chaos and crisis in our education system at a record pace. It doesn't put student achievement first. It doesn't make our schools any safer.

When we look at the real issues in public education right now, we talk about things like class sizes and the retention crisis within our schools, where we see educators that are burned out, that are leaving—EAs, ECEs that are leaving—and not even able to recruit, sometimes, enough custodial staff within schools. Those are some of the challenges that we're facing within our public schools. We see this bill doesn't support kids with special needs. It doesn't ensure that they have the tools that they need to succeed.

When I look at the bill and I look at the intentions behind it, it feels as though we're playing a bit of a shell game. It feels as though it's a little bit of a mirage when we've seen 5,000 classroom educators lost since 2018, \$1,500 less in per-student funding when adjusted for inflation, a crisis in special education and violence in schools that are really linked to unmet supports for students. And then there's a lot of rhetoric around student achievement. Really, Speaker, it's a mirage; it's a distraction from the real issues that are going on in public education.

It really does feel as though this minister and government are interested in creating chaos in our system. Looking at what's rolled out since this bill's been at committee, and now back here, it's very clearly a government and a minister that are in crisis, trying to put a very positive spin on a bill that hasn't been well received, that hasn't been well thought out. It almost feels as though the minister in this case is making it up as he goes along, because all of this talk about getting rid of trustees—we saw them, for months and months and months: "We're going to get rid of trustees—those trustees, those trustees." The government's keeping trustees.

So why else, then, would the minister be at committee, as we saw very recently, trying to argue with witnesses? I don't think I've seen that before in my time watching this, and in speaking to others, it's very rare—almost never—to see something like that happen in the past. But then taking those exchanges and posting information on social media that doesn't reflect what happened during the committee meeting?

The minister at that committee meeting asked one of the heads of the school boards if they would agree about some of the dollars that are spent on outside organizations and would that have a positive impact on education. Well, the clip then that was posted by the minister cut off the part where that head of an education union said that there have been \$6.3 billion in cuts in education. The whole quote was that that would be "insignificant compared"—and it was cut—"to the \$6.3 billion in cuts" we've had in education.

I hear a lot of the debate around this bill, and the government—in some ways, rightfully so—is calling out some of the expenses, some of the challenges and some of the waste that you have seen within education. But then they say that they want to put that money back into public education, but in the same breath, we see a government that's talking about spending \$28.9 million on a private jet that we saw reversed so quickly, and almost \$2 billion at Ontario Place and moving the Ontario Science Centre—which is a place for learning, a place for children—moving that away and spending \$1 billion on doing the science centre at Ontario Place, when to redo the science centre on its current location would be about \$250 million.

So spending \$750 million more? Well, we can funnel that money into schools. We can funnel that money into supporting student achievement. We look at the \$1.4 billion spent to put booze in convenience stores and grocery stores, including paying, though, \$225 million to do that a year early.

So we want to talk about \$100,000, \$200,000, \$300,000, which I think are sometimes fair arguments to make when you're not spending all of this other money and wasting it all over the place. We look at \$8 million to staff the Premier's office, the most expensive Premier's office in our history. And God knows what a 401 tunnel is going to cost, \$150 billion? So we talk about all these big numbers and never have we seen a government spend so much to deliver so little, but then we're going to look at these very small amounts and say, "That's going to fix education." I don't buy it; I don't think the public buys it.

At the end of the day, this is a government that is increasingly out of touch from the reality of what's going on on the ground, whether it's in our schools or whether it's in our communities in every part of our province.

So now we saw the government was going to cut short the consultations in Bill 101, the regulations behind that bill. The public comment deadline online was shortened by nine days, from May 13 to May 4, and then now we've seen that reversed again. This is clearly a government that is spinning its wheels on public education, that is quite literally making it up as they go along to fix a crisis that was created by this government in the first place.

The minister is scrambling on this. They didn't do their homework. There's no plan for stability in here. It almost looks like they're doing it on purpose, Speaker. That's what it looks like. It looks like this government is mismanaging our public education system on purpose. It feels like Mike Harris 30 years ago creating a crisis. That's what it feels like when I look at this bill and the rhetoric that we've seen from this minister.

Recently, the minister spoke and said he didn't care if it would take one, two or 10 years to bring school boards out of supervision. We need a plan for normalcy back for those boards. We're not seeing that happen.

So what does the minister then have to say to those voters and families in those boards where elections are being held for positions where maybe we'll have duly elected trustees in a board that's still under supervision, the direct control over this—

Interjection.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It's pretty good. It looks pretty good.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Order.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So why is the minister against local Ontarians being able to have a say within their schools? They created a situation, where, "Well, elected trustees can't do any work, and then we're going to bounce parents into a call centre," and shutting down any shred of transparency.

The minister said we won't let those supervisors talk to the public, not to the media, not to trustees. So who do those supervisors talk to, Speaker? Are they \$400,000-a-year puppets of the minister? I don't know.

Parental options are now essentially a call centre or a minister who won't respond or will just deflect and distract and not address the real issues. That's really democracy at work here, right, folks?

Now, on labour relations: It's not doing any better when we look at this bill. The minister claimed in this House that they'd be moving bargaining away from inexperienced trustees, trustees who don't know how to do collective bargaining. But if we actually look at the process in which that takes place, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association has professional staff who are human resource professionals, who are experienced in labour relations, who are doing that central bargaining. It's not left up to any Tom, Dick or Harry; that's a school board trustee doing it.

Frankly, when we look at how bargaining's going to work, there are no details released on how that transition from OPSBA is going to look like or going to work. Back in early March, we saw a joint call from the education unions calling for bargaining to start now, because the contract is going to be coming up sooner than we think. Collective bargaining takes time. It requires discussion. It requires problem-solving, finding solutions.

The education unions have said, "We want to bargain. We want to do that now. We want to address the issues and make our public education system work better in the interests of students, their families, for parents." But we've seen this government and the minister refuse to engage on that.

The collective agreements are going to expire soon. So why isn't the government interested in bargaining early? It doesn't make any sense unless the intention is to create chaos and to further weaken our public education system.

And we see this government attempting to weaken the role school board associations play—associations that provide shared services, governance training, labour expertise, policy and communications guidance. Those services help prevent disputes and reduce legal and consultant costs for school boards. We've heard tonight the government is very interested in talking about consultant costs; well, let's actually reduce those, absolutely, and promote consistent informed decision-making across the publicly funded education system.

In Peel, actually, the savings that they've had from being a member of OPSBA is about \$700,000 a year. It's a pretty good return on investment, actually saving money by being a member of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

Collaboration is very important within education. That's being diminished. We don't see the government now going after all of the different municipal conferences that take place, or these other things, because it's important to build capacity. It's important for people to share stories. That's where you learn how to deliver services better in our public education system or whatever other sector it might be. The role of associations has been to collaborate and work with the ministry to make our system better, to support students, staff and parents.

On safe schools, it looks like this government isn't interested in data to inform decision-making. It's really the equivalent of putting your head in the sand. Climate surveys potentially being removed: There's going to be less data on bullying, less data on student safety, less insight into the mental health of our students.

We're seeing rising violence in our schools and classrooms. Again, it's not a kid with a knife showing up to the school in this case; it's a kid that's struggling, that isn't getting the support that they need, that's acting out. There are not enough adults in our schools, and some of the very serious and complex mental health challenges aren't being addressed.

We see through some of the actions and rhetoric a damaging of trust with Black communities. The situation of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is one example, and shows the risk of when you have provincial Queen's Park control, putting your hands and fingers into every single school board. It will backfire. It will create more issues. It will diminish trust. And it will make our communities less safe. We see this, and what the result is is doubling down on harm, silencing lived experience, reinforcing bias, increasing mistrust in our public school system. So what's the outcome? Unequal discipline risk, systemic racism ignored and schools less safe for everybody.

Now, let's look at school boards all across Ontario. We don't have to look very far to see what cuts to staffing are taking place and what the impact will be. Very recently at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board—and this is through the hand-picked supervisor, by the way, at that school board, cutting custodial and skilled trade staff members—the union head there said, “There's nowhere left to cut. I hear from workers every day that they're exhausted. There are injuries every day because of the physical nature of the job.”

It snows quite a bit here in Ontario. So what happens when it snows? Well, the custodian is at the school first thing in the morning. The custodian is at the school ensuring that the walkway is plowed, so that kids and parents can get to school safely, can walk on a path that's salted, doing tireless work. And through the actions of this government, I think they're saying, “Well, we don't care about what's going to happen there. We don't care about dealing with the maintenance issues that we see in many of our schools.” That's not a recipe for success, Speaker.

In Peel, we're seeing 331 teaching positions cut; in Toronto, hundreds, including 40 vice-principals; in Waterloo region, 148 teaching positions cut; and the list goes on and on and on. So we see that this bill is weakening our public education system. It's diminishing trust, and the entire way our systems operate, our government operates, is built on trust. It needs to be built on trust. That trust isn't there.

I hear from parents. They don't trust what this government is doing with their public education system. They don't trust that their kid is going to get the support that they need in the classroom. They don't trust that this government is going to be able to boost student achievement, because they're too interested in distractions as opposed to addressing the very real and serious challenges within our schools. It's not going to be accountable to parents, the way our education system is being reorganized, shuffled around the table. It's going to centralize control over schools, really, in the backrooms at Queen's Park and ultimately silence parents and our local communities, the very people—the very people, Speaker—who know our schools best and make them strong.

So there's no evidence that this bill is going to improve student achievement by prioritizing centralization and ministerial decree. Above all, it's going to undermine local democratic accountability by diminishing the role of trustees, weakening local voices and oversight, but really diminishing the voices of communities, reducing the ability of our schools to be able to respond to diverse and local community issues and concerns and making our schools a lot more vulnerable to short-term politicization.

And I don't know what side of the bed the minister is going to wake up on. Is he going to attack folks at committee or is he going to really be interested in student achievement? I don't see where the government's evidence is that any of this is going to improve student achievement.

Now, we look at other aspects of this bill, Speaker. I think we are going back to, in some ways, the Harris days—okay, reducing honorariums to \$10,000 annually. That seems like a little bit of a backtrack there; I think the trends are there. We're seeing supervision powers expanded more and more and more. Well, it's not going to work out. We see the changes to teachers' college, and again, I think I've said publicly on that, it's not a bad change. It's not enough for me to vote for this bill, I'll tell you that. It's not necessarily a bad change.

It clarifies the definition of education materials, such as textbooks or other learning materials. It could further the use of digital assets in the classroom. My colleague from Orléans has raised some important concerns around using digital materials entirely within classrooms, as opposed to using textbooks and written materials, because we need to learn differently. The way in which we are training our brains, and young people are training their brains, we don't know what that impact is going to be yet. In fact, there are now studies and conversations that giving a kid an iPad and leaving them there—it's a solution for low-income families; meanwhile, families that have a lot of means, you'll find for those kids, it's not happening. So I'm very seriously concerned about where we might go in terms of child development and brain development. I'm very concerned around that.

I don't know if we're going to get into the banning books situation or not. Maybe we might. We might see that at the provincial level through this bill. We might do that; I don't know. Let's see. Let's see what happens there. Let's see.

I think there are some things that do make a little sense, but it's going to require a larger conversation around how we build and finance our schools, because if you look at a lot of school boards, well, they don't have the reserves or the capital necessary anymore in order to purchase land. So I think the model in which we're going to have to build schools is going to have to change, further than what this government is suggesting because boards just don't have the resources or the money really to do that right now. You're seeing some school boards actually spend a lot of money on lines of credit, paying interest on those lines of credit in order to fund their educational development charge backlog. That's something else that we're seeing within our education system. This bill doesn't fix that, Speaker.

I'd like to see in our province a model of schools where we're building schools earlier; that we're building schools where neighbourhoods are coming in; that we're building schools that you don't then have 15 portables on the side of that; and that we think about community use, that we think about how we maximize the use of public land and our public resources to benefit the whole community, so as school populations grow it's able to take over space in that school. And as school populations decrease, we're able to use space in that school for other community needs. I think that would be a very innovative way. But we're not seeing stuff like that; we're just seeing moving pieces all over the table.

So the bill is about control. We don't see a funding solution, we don't see a safety solution, we don't see an achievement plan; we just see centralization out of an ivory tower at Queen's Park.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I know that the member who just spoke was formerly an executive with the Durham public board. I understand the Durham public board has a budget of approximately \$1.3 billion. This bill proposes to introduce a CEO for boards. I'm just wondering, as a former executive responsible for a large budget, would the member like to—I'm just asking an open-

ended question. Would he like to comment on CEOs and their applicability to a board of \$1.3 billion, reflecting on his previous experience as an executive with the same board?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I thank the member from Essex for the question.

Essentially, what the bill does is it moves the finance official, really, to being the CEO. So there's not an extra staff person per se, but the person making that final decision essentially is the business, is the finance official that would have the final say over spending.

I actually have a concern with that, and I predict—hopefully not, but I think it could be likely a few years down the road—that we might see news stories then around misspending. What I found is that when you have a director of education that's an educator there making that final decision about where resources are allocated or where resources are spent, they're thinking about what happens in the classroom.

I think the risk—when we've looked at prior scandals around misspending, potential embezzlement and other things, we've seen that it's actually happened with that business official. So I am a little bit concerned about this approach.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Ajax talked extensively about this power imbalance that's going to be happening right now. The ministerial control over the public communications of elected trustees is particularly alarming. Elected officials have a fundamental right and a responsibility to communicate with their constituents. Restrictions on that communication interfere with the free flow of information between public representatives and those that they represent, and this may be a concern under the charter, 2(b).

Why do you think the government is having such a strong overreach into school boards? What are they really up to in this instance?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think what the government's approach is in this situation is really to limit alternative voices, to limit dissent to essentially be able to just put forward their narrative when it comes to the public education system. I think that's what the impact of that is.

I would note, though, if we do look at the Education Act right now, the spokesperson for the board is the chair of the board and very much designated as such. I think that in some ways, it does make a little bit of sense to put a box around communications, but I don't necessarily think I trust this government and this minister, frankly, in doing so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Adil Shamji: We're all gathered here on a late Tuesday night, presumably because we all care deeply about education. I certainly do, and I wouldn't be here were it not for the incredible teachers who made it possible for me to get here. Now, I was fortunate to grow up in a school that was well funded, had reasonable class sizes and had teachers that really cared.

I know that you have a fair amount of educational experience with the Durham school board. I wanted to ask if you might reflect a little bit on your experience, and if you had the opportunity to draft this legislation perhaps from the ground up, quite literally, what would you do? What would be your approach in doing that and delivering an education bill that Ontario's students actually deserve?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I got into politics because of public education, not because I worked for a school board, but because growing up, we didn't have a lot of money; I grew up in a one-bedroom apartment with my mom. I went to really great public schools. I had opportunity through our public education system that, quite frankly, not every kid gets to have.

I would start with—how do you ensure that every single kid in our province has the opportunity to succeed, no matter where you are, what postal code or region of the province you're from, income background—doesn't matter? How do you ensure that every kid in our province has the opportunity to succeed?

I think that we've got to reimagine our public education system. I think that starts with everybody around the table. But ultimately, every kid should have the opportunity to succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Going back to the issue of school boards and large budgets, we observed that Durham had a budget of approximately \$1.3 billion. Toronto District School Board has a budget of over \$3 billion. Ottawa school board has a budget over a billion dollars. And it seems to me that, perhaps over financial issues, we need more financial people at the table. Because I don't think anybody is going to suggest that at a school board, we don't have enough people with an education background at the table. I think everybody would agree we have lots of people with an education background at the table. Perhaps we need more people with a financial background at the table.

Again, it's an open-ended question and I just invite the member to provide whatever observations about that he would like to provide.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I do think we have folks with financial experience at the table. The CFO of a board is a staff member. Essentially, what the bill is proposing is moving that to be the CEO.

I think we do have folks with financial experience around the table. They actually have to be qualified to do that and get approval by the ministry in order to do that. So we already have that at our school boards.

I think what we do need to do for people who are senior administrators, principals—there's a human management element. You're managing an HR environment. Once you've come up from a principal, you're not necessarily coming up as an educator. You're not necessarily trained in managing people. I do think that, above and beyond principal and SO qualifications, we should be looking at how you do provide more HR training.

But I do think we have the financial people around the table. They present those budgets to the school board. It already happens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Ajax for his presentation on Bill 101.

With Bill 101 and the powers that the government is giving itself, interestingly, the government is currently looking to seize control of all different school board properties and assets.

Now, in the municipality of Kingsville, the municipality would like to purchase from the government a no longer used high school to use for a community centre. And yet, the government is blocking that. The government is saying no to the municipality of Kingsville.

My question to the member from Ajax: Who do you suppose this government is making these changes for, if not for our treasured municipal partners? Who do you think is feeding at their trough?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think we saw a lot of these changes made in the previous education bill that this government had. I am very much concerned, especially seeing the past actions and dealings of this government, with what may happen with certain properties.

Ultimately, a school that was built in a neighbourhood is public land. It's all of ours, and that should first and foremost serve public purposes to benefit the community which it's in.

Our neighbourhoods change. Our communities change. That's okay. It's how we manage that change and ensure that we are still ensuring that the public benefits from those assets, like a community centre, like the member mentioned, in Kingsville.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): A quick question from the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'd like to thank my colleague from Ajax for his excellent debate on this bill, highlighting the many weaknesses and problems in it and how it will hurt our kids.

I want to just ask about the funding for after-school programs. In my riding of Don Valley West, we have some vulnerable youth in Thorncliffe Park who are always looking for opportunities to do sports and other things in their schools. And yet, we know that this government's cuts have made it harder for the TDSB to do that. Would the member care to comment?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think what you are seeing, with the burnout of staff in our schools—we look at extracurriculars after school. The staff that are the coaches on the hockey team, the football team or whatever sport or activity, they're volunteering. They're volunteering their time because they care about the kids in that school, and when those educators are burned out, that doesn't happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: I really appreciate the debate this evening, and I want to thank the members for their comments. I'm so glad that both the ministers that were involved in the introduction of Bill 101 are here today, and I think on behalf of the Legislature, I want to thank the Honourable Paul Calandra, our Minister of Education, for his vision—

Interjections.

Hon. Steve Clark: I had to go back and watch the committee hearings, and I have to say, Minister, that was one of the most masterful committee presentations and questions that I've seen in this Legislature.

And through you, Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Nolan Quinn for the work that he's done on this bill to help get more teachers into the classroom.

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Let's face it, folks: Bill 101 is all about putting students first, about supporting our teachers and about ensuring that all the dollars that are needed in the system get to the system.

I want to thank the minister for being so forceful with some of those bad-actor school boards and trustees, making sure that those students have someone like the Honourable Paul Calandra that stands up for quality education, stands up for results in the classroom. I, on behalf of everyone, just want to thank Minister Calandra and Minister Quinn for Bill 101, for their vision.

With that, Speaker, I would like to move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Mr. Clark has moved that the question now be put. There have been over six hours of debate and 18 members have spoken to this motion. I am satisfied there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.