

EVIDENCE**Whitehorse, Yukon****Friday, February 6, 2009 — 10:00 a.m.**

Mr. Mitchell: I will now call to order the hearing of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. The purpose of this public hearing is to address issues of the implementation of policies, whether programs are being effectively and efficiently delivered and not to question the government's policies of the day.

Today the committee will investigate the Auditor General of Canada's report, entitled *Public Schools and Advanced Education, Yukon Department of Education*.

I would like to thank the witnesses from the Department of Education for appearing and I believe that Ms. Hine, the deputy minister, will introduce the other witnesses during her opening remarks. I would just like to note that Dr. Terry Weninger, president of Yukon College, will appear as a witness in the afternoon portion of this hearing.

Also present today are officials from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. They are sitting at the front table: Andrew Lennox, Assistant Auditor General responsible for territorial governments; sitting next to Mr. Lennox is Charlene Taylor, director in the Vancouver regional office; and sitting on my right is Eric Hellsten, principal in the Vancouver regional office. All of these people played an important role in the development of this report.

I will now introduce the members of the Public Accounts Committee. The committee members include me, Arthur Mitchell, chair of the committee; Steve Nordick, who is the vice-chair; the Hon. Brad Cathers, who is serving in lieu of Mr. Rouble, as he has recused himself from these hearings; John Edzerza; Hon. Glenn Hart; Don Inverarity; and the Hon. Marian Horne participated in all of the preparations up to and including yesterday for these hearings but is unable to attend today as she is not feeling well.

Acting as clerk to the Public Accounts Committee is Linda Kolody, who is the Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

The Public Accounts Committee is established by order of the Legislative Assembly. We are a non-partisan committee with a mandate to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in public spending — in other words, accountability for the use of public funds. Our task is not to challenge government policy but to examine its implementation. The results of our deliberations will be reported back to the Legislative Assembly.

To begin the proceedings, Mr. Lennox will give an opening statement, summarizing the findings in the Auditor General's report. Ms. Hine will then be invited to make an opening statement. Committee members will then ask questions. As is the committee's practice, we devise and compile the questions collectively. We then divide them up among the members. The questions that each member will ask are not just their personal questions on a particular subject, but rather are those of the entire committee.

At the end of the hearing, the committee will prepare a report of its proceedings and any recommendations that it makes. This report will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly, along with a transcript of this hearing.

Before we start the hearing, I would ask that questions and answers be kept brief and to the point so that we may deal with as many issues as possible in the time allotted for this hearing. I would also ask that members, witnesses and advisors wait until they are recognized by the chair before speaking. This will keep the discussion more orderly and allow those listening on the radio or over the Internet to know who is speaking, and it will also assist Hansard staff in preparing the transcript of this hearing.

We will now proceed with Mr. Lennox's opening statement.

Mr. Lennox: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss our January 2009 report on Public Schools and Advanced Education for the Yukon Department of Education.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chair, with me today is Eric Hellsten, principal, and Charlene Taylor, director.

We undertook this audit as the third in a series of audits under a long-range plan to carry out performance audits of the Government of Yukon's departments and agencies. The audit examined whether the department could demonstrate that it, first of all, effectively delivers public school programs to Yukon children and has a comprehensive action plan in place to address any performance gaps; second, successfully prepares young adults to pursue further education; third, incorporates adequate strategic planning in the delivery of education; and fourth, has a reasonable process to allocate teaching resources based on needs.

In 2007-08 the department spent about \$137 million through three branches.

The public schools branch spent \$94 million to provide primary, intermediate and secondary education to approximately 5,000 students in 28 schools in the Yukon.

The advanced education branch spent \$28 million to administer, promote and support adult training, education and labour-force development. They also provide funding to Yukon College. The support services branch spent \$15 million and provides financial and human resources and general administrative support services.

The audit mainly covered the 2001-02 to 2007-08 fiscal years. Our audit work was substantially completed on October 10, 2008, just prior to the issuance by the department of the 2007-08 departmental annual report. The observations and recommendations section of the report describes what we found in our audit and our recommendations for improvement.

Our findings are presented under the three headings that cover the department's branches: Public Schools, Advanced Education, and Support Services.

For Public Schools, we found that the department does identify and gather relevant data that can be used in assessing the program's performance. However, the department could not demonstrate to us that it effectively delivers public school pro-

grams to Yukon children. It is important to note, however, that we are not saying that the department has been ineffective. We as auditors do not directly assess the effectiveness of programs ourselves.

What we do is determine whether the department assesses the effectiveness of their own programs. We found that the department had not adequately done so.

Although the department identified and reported performance gaps and standardized tests, it did not determine how large the gap would have to be to warrant corrective action. We also found that the department does not benchmark graduation rates to those of similar jurisdictions or set a target graduation rate for Yukon students as a whole or for significant subgroups such as First Nations. For example, according to Statistics Canada, for the period ended 2005-06, the Yukon had the third lowest five-year graduation rate in Canada. The department's data shows a six-year average graduation rate of 40 percent for First Nation students, compared with 65 percent for other Yukon students. Finally, the department does not develop comprehensive action plans, including targets to address the underlying causes of any significant performance gaps.

In terms of advanced education, we found that the department needs to determine the effectiveness of student transition from public schools to post-secondary education, including training in trades. For example, the department does not track the progress of students after they leave high school. We also found that, in 2006-07, one-third of full-time students at Yukon College were registered in courses they needed for high school equivalency credits.

The department needs to coordinate their efforts with Yukon College to identify and address, to the extent possible, the root causes that lead to a lack of student readiness for the shift between high school and post-secondary education or training in trades. In addition, Yukon College needs to establish performance measures with specific targets and expectations and report actual results against those measures. In terms of support services, the department needs to improve its planning processes and practices.

While its departmental plan has elements of a strategic plan, the department does not have a comprehensive long-term strategic plan or integrated risk-management plan in place. Further, the department does not have a comprehensive human resources plan in place. Such a plan would help address the fact that student enrolment has declined eight percent over the past five years but the number of teachers and other teaching staff has increased. In addition, the department has no long-term facilities management plan to help ensure it is managing school facilities effectively, given that these facilities are aging and at the same time, vacancy rates are high. In Whitehorse alone there are approximately 3,900 students and 3,200 vacant seats.

We made 13 recommendations. We are pleased to note that the Department of Education and Yukon College have agreed with our recommendations and have committed to take appropriate actions to address our recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, your committee may want to invite representatives from the department and Yukon College to elaborate

on the specific action plans that they have to develop in order to implement the recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening statement. My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer any questions the members may have.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Lennox. Ms. Hine, I believe you have an opening statement prepared?

Ms. Hine: Yes. With me today is Christie Whitley, the Assistant Deputy Minister for Public Schools; Brent Slobodin, Assistant Deputy Minister for Advanced Education and Gord deBruyn, Facilities Manager. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to make opening comments today and I look forward to your questions.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank our partners in education, who have assisted the Auditor General's office and provided information for this audit. At the Department of Education, we are working to create a more responsive education system that enables all learners to succeed. This quest for a better way to educate is occurring locally, nationally and internationally. Economic, social and environmental events, advances in technology and development and research related to learning are all factors that are promoting major changes in the way we deliver education. We have different values that lead us to embrace multiculturalism and inclusion of students with special needs.

In allocation of resources, we now look at addressing needs of individual students and the needs of each classroom in the context of the overall configuration of the schools. The changes in education are taking place more rapidly than ever before.

Our responsibilities in decision-making are different now, too. The Department of Education has made a commitment to further develop and maintain meaningful relationships with all of our partners in education. Most Yukon First Nations are now self-governing and they have the right to draw down education. To that end, they are partners in a very material sense and it is our duty to engage First Nations as partners in a respectful government-to-government relationship. The Auditor General's report and the information contained within will help guide us as we continue to improve the education system.

We recognize the gap in performance between First Nation and non-First Nation students as well as the gap between rural and urban students. This is a national phenomenon and eliminating that achievement gap is a national priority as identified by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada.

In an effort to eliminate the achievement gap, we have established a First Nations programs and partnership unit within the Department of Education and the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee. Last year, the First Nation Education Advisory Committee released a document. The First Nations programs and partnerships unit staff is now working with that document to prepare an action plan and develop measurable objectives.

These will be brought back to the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee for further discussion. We are committed to improving achievement for all students in Yukon.

The Department of Education has high expectations for the success of all students. We are replacing the authoritative model with a supportive model. With these thoughts in mind, we are working very strategically to transform education in Yukon. For it to be a true transformation, we have worked with our partners to clarify our visions, our values and our goals. Our vision is for all Yukoners to have the knowledge, skills, opportunities and ability to participate effectively in their work and their communities and to promote a love of lifelong learning. We and our partners want to improve student achievement on task, but at the same time we are aiming to provide our students with more than just test-taking skills. We have met with partners and we have asked the hard questions. How do you define the successful completion of public school? Are passing grades enough? Shouldn't there be some expectation for what abilities and skills graduates should have? Are there ways to objectively measure those other competencies that are not captured in achievement tests? Are literacy and numeracy enough or should social values be included? What roles should families have in education systems? How can we measure success in those efforts?

Let me briefly describe our process that we will be using to develop our long-term strategies. We have engaged partners in education, in the education reform project. The final report was released February 2008. It contained broad, high-level recommendations to guide the department in developing strategies to improve student success.

As a follow-up to the report, the department continued its partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations to launch *New Horizons: Honouring our Commitment to the Future*. The goal of *New Horizons* is to develop a long-term implementation strategy for education reform in partnership with all stakeholders. Because more information, new reports and new opportunities continue to come forward, we are flexible enough to work with these as well. Through the *New Horizons* process, partners are working together to define student success and to identify goals, objectives, plans and indicators of success so that effectiveness can be evaluated.

Another important initiative pursuant to developing a long-term strategy is the secondary school program review, which was completed in October 2008. That was a study intended to help guide a strategy that would align student needs with the secondary school programming options available to meet those needs. It will also be used to address facility needs for the long term. The idea behind the review is that student needs should be reflected in programs and that any new facilities should be designed and built to accommodate the programs and student needs.

We now have working groups tasked with developing strategies and plans for the programming aspect, as well as the facilities aspect. Both the education reform report and the secondary school programming review report generate numerous recommendations to better meet the needs of Yukon students and will form the basis of a comprehensive strategy to improve student success and reduce performance gaps. In both projects, school councils, First Nations, the Yukon Catholic Education

Association, the francophone community, non-governmental groups and other organizations have expressed the desire to participate in strategic planning to improve student outcomes with the department.

Part of the long-term strategy will involve student engagement because student engagement is necessary to improve attendance and performance. The partnerships we have developed — *New Horizons* and the secondary school program review, as well as our partnerships with the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee — will be critical for improving student engagement. With the information-gathering stage already completed and with the continuing stakeholder engagement and action planning and implementation, we are now working with our partners to develop the very strategies that the Auditor General was calling for.

Just as we are working on transforming education, we have significant efforts already underway to develop strategies for utilizing our supports for education, such as human resources and facilities.

I have already mentioned how we are using our secondary school program review to guide our strategies for aligning the programming and the facilities. Our long-term human resources strategy will be developed with the guidance of the strategies coming out of the *New Horizons*, the secondary school program review and the *helping students succeed* report.

In the meantime, we have launched a leadership development programming in cooperation with the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee. This is one example of a human resources initiative that is aligned with the department plan and the strategies that are in development. In this leadership program, we were training over 60 educators to take leadership roles in Yukon schools with a view to supporting the transformation of education in Yukon.

In Advanced Education, we have already launched the labour market framework in partnership with other government departments and the business sector. The labour market framework will produce five strategies, including the comprehensive skills and trades and training strategy.

Last October, we hosted the labour market symposium to hear from our partners, and this very month working groups are meeting to develop the strategies. We are well on our way to meeting the Auditor General's recommendation for updating our training strategy. In the education reform project, the secondary school program review, the *helping students succeed* and the labour market framework projects, we are hearing consistent messages from our stakeholders and partners. Our work now is to align all of these initiatives and to develop a long-term comprehensive strategic department plan.

Again, we are in agreement with the recommendations and we are well on course for implementing the recommendations in the Auditor General's report. We are committed to continuing our course of action in addressing the recommendations.

As we are working to improve our assessments and data collection and reporting, we are committed to bearing in mind our most fundamental strategic goal: the best interest of our clients — the children and adult learners.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of our teachers, administrators and department staff. There are many good things happening in our education system, and their work makes a difference.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning, and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Ms. Hine. Before we begin the round of questioning, I would just like to note that Ms. Sue MacDonald from the Legislative Assembly Office is also providing support to the committee and is with us today.

I just want to reiterate for all people who may be listening, either over the radio or who are in the visitors gallery, that these questions have been developed by the committee with the consensus of the committee, and that we have grouped them under some headings and then literally assigned them based on the seating arrangement today, so one should not read any more significance into who is asking the question than where they happen to be sitting in this Assembly.

With that, we will start the round of questioning. Each member of the Public Accounts Committee will have approximately 15 minutes in this first round. We have a lot of questions, so I would ask the witnesses to try and be concise, when possible, with their answers.

We will start at my extreme right with Mr. Edzerza, who is the MLA for McIntyre-Takhini.

Mr. Edzerza: I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing today. I know it must have been a little bit nerve-racking, but it's okay because in our traditional knowledge teachings, we are taught to seek understanding and not judgment of others. I believe that is what we are doing here today. We're seeking understanding of the education program delivered to all citizens of the Yukon Territory. I also understand that some of the witnesses are relatively new to their positions. Having said that, I welcome you.

My first question was going to be somewhat of a general nature, but I believe that the opening comments by the deputy minister probably covered it, so I'm going to go right on into the education reform project.

I have three questions. What I will do is read out two and give you a chance to respond and then read the other two. On paragraph 13, what recommendations have been implemented from the final report of the education reform project and what recommendations of the education reform project that address the First Nations gap have been adopted?

Ms. Hine: There were 207 recommendations contained in the education reform report. Our commitment under our New Horizons is to work with our partners to determine which recommendations move forward, has made it an interesting project. There are a number of recommendations that we have moved forward on. Some of them will actually come into the Auditor General's report, as well.

As I mentioned in my opening comments, we have introduced a leadership program within the Department of Education in conjunction with our partners. This is in recognition that we need to provide the ability for our staff to be leaders in education, to work with communities and to work forward.

As I mentioned, we have over 60 participants that are actually enrolled in that program. It's a two-year program, and we're hoping to continue that program after this intake is completed.

The next one that we have worked on is the school growth planning process. It is a requirement under the *Education Act* and one that we knew wasn't achieving everything that we were hoping for. If we want to make our commitment of transformation of education and being inclusive of our partners and our community, we need to engage our community in the school growth planning process.

This is a process where we have an advisory group with a number of our partners who are continuing to inform us as we move forward. As you'll see in a response to the recommendation pertaining to the Auditor General report, we have agreed that there will be a policy that we hope to have introduced in the spring of this year to move forward on that initiative.

The formation of the First Nations programs and partnerships unit and the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee are definitely helping us to work with the achievement gap that has been identified with our First Nation students.

There has been a lot of emphasis over the last couple of years on introducing curriculum and resources within the school system. Just recently, this week, there was an announcement with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations on a bicultural education program which is being introduced as a pilot project, with the department working with the First Nation, the school council and the community. Although the pilot project is specific to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the idea is that the framework that will be developed in this will be able to be implemented and introduced in other communities that wish to take this angle.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. My next question — you probably answered a portion of it, but maybe you can elaborate a little bit more: is New Horizons the new process of implementing education reform or is it a whole new direction?

Ms. Hine: It's the implementation process. The department knew that a lot of work went on in the education reform project. It was very time-consuming. A lot of our partners were involved with the education reform project, and our commitment was that we didn't want to see a report that sat on the shelf.

By the introduction of New Horizons, it was our commitment as a department to continue to work with our partners in the implementation stage of the education reform recommendations. We want to be inclusive, we want to continue to do business differently, and we want to have meaningful engagement with our partners to help us move in a forward direction with the education system in the Yukon. So it's a continuation: it's the implementation plan of the education reform report.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. I'm going to go into the student information system. It appears that the department has a lot of information, but the Auditor General's

report notes that a lot of analysis had not been carried out. Why is this?

Ms. Hine: We do have a lot of information within the Education department and this information is gathered at a number of different levels within the schools, within the department, with the achievement tests that are written. The problem is we have a lot of information that is gathered in different sections. The information system that we have now within the department is an older information system and it's making it a little bit more difficult to actually take the information and be able to do the analysis that is required. In a lot of cases, in order to actually take the data, we have to go looking for it. It has to be looked at manually instead of being able to take an electronic report and have it generate reports for us.

We are looking at investigating a new student information system that will help data be collected electronically all in one area, so that we'll actually have a system that could help us do the analysis so it's not done manually all the time. So we are looking at ways of improving that.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. In order to address the additional work that will arise from this report, do you feel that you have enough resources in the student information and assessment unit to carry out the work you plan to do?

Ms. Hine: That is a difficult question to answer. I think we would all say we never have enough, but I think that we also have to take a look at how we are utilizing public funds. Our role is to take a look at our existing resources, our existing information, our existing staff, to see how we can utilize the existing resources better, more efficiently. Will it require additional money? There is a possibility of that but we need to make sure the implementation plan is there and that we can see what we can do with what we have now and maybe realign some staff members' jobs and take a look at different divisions a little bit better and more efficiently. Then we will be able to actually come back with the response as to whether or not we do need additional money and, of course, that will be done through the budget allocation process.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. I am quite sure that the government will be happy to hear that response, because it is a positive one.

Now, I have a few questions with regard to standardized testing. In paragraph 21, the department has created a yardstick. Eighty-five percent of students should demonstrate successful performance by scoring 50 percent or higher on standardized tests. What is the department suggesting doing to meet its targets?

Ms. Hine: The benchmark that was referred to in paragraph 21 of the Auditor General's report was actually established back in 1994 from the deputy minister at that time. It is a standard that is still in place today. The one thing that the Department of Education would like to do is a review of other jurisdictions to see what benchmarking other jurisdictions are using to see whether or not these standards are still considered the norm and the expectation.

Currently, when we receive the test results for standardized testing, this information is actually shared, obviously, with the

administrators. The superintendents work with the administrators. They review the actual results of the standardized testing. They try to determine whether it was something with the test, whether it was something with the curriculum and then the administrator and the superintendent can come forward and look at other initiatives or other programming that may need to be in place to assist students.

When you look over the changes in programs that have happened since 1994, we have reading recovery, we have Wilson Reading, we have a number of new programs that have been introduced into the schools, helping to provide better achievement and better results.

The assessment framework that we are looking at developing will also help us determine how we move forward and how we best utilize the data that we are receiving.

Mr. Edzerza: In paragraph 22 in the 2006-07 fiscal year, the department compared the results of the YATs — Yukon achievement tests — and BCPEs — British Columbia provincial exams — to its performance targets in a total of 20 subject areas. These targets were met in only six of the 20 subject areas. What were these six subject areas?

Ms. Hine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry for the delay. I was trying to find the information so I could accurately report on this.

On the B.C. provincial exams, it was Communication 12, English 10, English 12, Geography 12, History 12 and Socials 11.

Mr. Edzerza: The report at paragraph 23 notes that the department identifies and reports performance gaps in standardized tests. However, the department did not define how large a gap there would have to be to warrant corrective action.

Why didn't the department follow up in this regard?

Ms. Hine: Mr. Chair, could I ask the Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Schools to respond to that question?

Ms. Whitley: I'm wondering if I could have the question repeated, please.

Mr. Edzerza: The report at paragraph 23 notes that the department identifies and reports performance gaps in standardized tests. However, the department did not define how large a gap there would have to be to warrant corrective action. Why didn't the department follow up in this regard?

Ms. Whitley: One of the ways we are following up is looking at assessment generally in terms of developing a framework in which that will be identified. In other jurisdictions, the gap that is identified is stated to be that no gap is acceptable. What we're looking at in terms of the assessment framework are two different kinds of assessment. What we're talking about when we're talking about the YAT scores is summative assessment. That's a picture of the overall performance of students on a particular day and that's a conversation we would have within the context of the development of a framework. Formative assessment is what we are really focusing on in our schools. Formative assessments are focused specifically on individual students and addressed by the teacher and with parents. This would be what is reasonable in terms of looking at student performance on an individual basis. That

question will be addressed through the framework discussions we are having in the department and with our partner groups.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. The last part of my questioning is more like a two-part question: why doesn't the department report the gaps in the First Nation students' BCPE results? Where are the larger gaps in BCPE results for First Nation students?

Ms. Hine: The department is working with the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee to look at the different gaps, the results and the assessments on First Nations and how we can improve our reporting relationship. I think the one thing we must also recognize is that First Nation students — it's self-identification. Again, we need to make sure that students are actually self-identifying for us to be able to have accurate information to report on. We have spent a lot of time over the last few years working with our First Nation partners and talking about the importance of self-identification so that we can take a better action on eliminating the achievement gap. And we are getting better at that.

We do have some room to move. One of our priorities is to actually work with the Bureau of Statistics, First Nation partners, to help identify how we better report and reflect our actual performance in the assessments with First Nation students. In fact, as I mentioned in my opening comments, the gap of First Nation students is not unique to the Yukon. It is recognized across Canada, the gap between First Nation and non-First Nation achievement. In fact, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada have made it one of their priorities and, at the end of this month, there is actually a national meeting with aboriginal leaders to talk about how we work together to eliminate the gap. So the work that comes from that meeting will also help us from the national perspective, but also the commitment for us to work here with our Yukon First Nations in identifying and eliminating the gap.

Mr. Nordick: First off, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the witnesses who are appearing here today, and also I would like to acknowledge the hard work that the department does in educating our youth.

I would also like to thank the teachers, principals and all their staff for their daily commitment to educating Yukoners.

The questions that I am going to focus on are with regard to graduation rates.

What does the department think a good targeted graduation rate would be?

Ms. Hine: If I may, I would like to respond to this one from two perspectives: one on behalf of the department and one on behalf of being a parent with a student who is in the education system. I would like to say that I think that the Yukon education system should be looking at a graduation rate that is equivalent to the national average graduation rate. We have a long way to go, but we should be feeling confident that our students can graduate at the same level as the other jurisdictions in Canada. Having said that, we also need to take a look at the different jurisdictions in Canada. Some of the larger provinces obviously have more resources, more ability — the number of students we have in the Yukon would probably fit

within a school board in another jurisdiction. So we also have to take into consideration some of the economies of scale that we have to take a look at, and those are things that we are working on in improving our graduation rate.

Mr. Nordick: Could you clarify whether or not graduation statistics include all Yukon citizens?

Ms. Hine: Yes, we do. The graduation rates would include all students who are in school.

Mr. Nordick: A kind of follow-up question would be: are there jurisdictions in Canada in which some First Nation citizens are not included in that jurisdiction's graduation rates or statistics?

Ms. Hine: To the best of my knowledge, there will be jurisdictions that will not have all the First Nation students. Those would be jurisdictions where First Nations actually attend on-reserve schools. Those on-reserve schools are the responsibility of and administered by the federal government. So the provincial results would only reflect the students enrolled in provincial schools.

Mr. Nordick: How valid are favourable comparisons to other territories and jurisdictions when it comes to education outcomes, given that the Yukon communities are less remote than those in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories and that the Yukon only has one fly-in community?

Ms. Hine: I think that it is relevant to take and compare Yukon with the other two territories, because you have to take a look at the fact that it is a small jurisdiction. You are looking at almost the same number of students in enrolment and you are also taking a look at the same type of structure, where the department is created with the ministry and the school board kind of together. When you are looking at equal comparables, I would say that the three territories are more equal or relatively equal, compared to the way that we deliver education versus comparing us to maybe some of the larger jurisdictions that have the ministry separate and the school board, and then going down from there. I think it is a better comparison to look at the territories versus Canada as a whole.

Mr. Nordick: Has the department set a targeted graduation rate?

Ms. Hine: The secondary program review actually looked at that question. The feedback we received was that every student should graduate. Now we have to take a look at that to see if that is actually a realistic recommendation. We are working through our partners and through the programs that we have in place, like the secondary program review, to answer those questions. What is a respectful or a set graduation rate for the Yukon?

Mr. Nordick: Does student in-and-out migration affect graduation rates in the Yukon?

Ms. Hine: It definitely would have an impact if students are moving in and out of the system and whether they're moving out of the territory or whether they're leaving school for a period of time and then coming back into school. Again, as we get a better student information data collection system in place, we'll be able to track that impact a lot better.

Mr. Nordick: Your answer sort of answered this next question, but does the department track how many children enter school at age five and what percentage of them graduate by age 18, whether in Yukon or elsewhere?

Ms. Hine: At this point we wouldn't be able to track the student as you describe — students coming in at age five and whether they move in and out. Especially if they move to another jurisdiction, it's very difficult for us to track that information. As I've mentioned in my opening comments and in a couple of the other responses, we are looking at a new student data information tracking system. What we hope to do is find one where a student can have an identification number that will follow them through the whole scope of lifelong learning, so that we will be able to take a look at those aspects. So, if a student leaves the system and then comes back, their number will stay with them.

At this point, a student could actually move from one community to another, or there may be a name change, so to follow the student there are other factors that might make it difficult. So we're hoping that, as we investigate a new student information gathering system, we will be able to track the information you're talking about more effectively.

Mr. Nordick: In paragraph 29 of the report — I'm going to refer to that paragraph for this question: to improve transparency in the department's operation, why doesn't the department publish the SIMS graduation rates?

Ms. Hine: The way the department has been previously reporting graduation rates — since 1995, I think, when we actually started to report the graduation rates, it has been published in our annual report every year. Every year that it has been published, there is a definition as to how the actual graduation rates were calculated.

I have to admit that, when I came in as deputy minister, I had a bit of concern about the way that the actual graduation rates were being calculated and reported, and it was my commitment to make a change. As you can see in the annual report that was released and tabled in the Legislative Assembly in November, the actual calculation of graduation rates has changed. There is a commitment in the annual report that we are going to continue to take a look at the information and the calculation of the graduation rates so that we can better reflect the information.

Again, the SIM system is an older system and we have to be reassured that the information within the SIM system is accurate and that it is reflecting the best possible information.

Our commitment is to continue to take a look at the way the department calculates and reports on graduation rates, and we will continue to revise and improve that.

Mr. Nordick: A follow-up question on that: in the report, in Exhibit 3 — it is just a little bit of reference — why does the 2007-08 annual report include a graduation rate of 70.7 percent, so much higher than the SIMS rate for 2007-08 of 58 percent?

Ms. Hine: As I mentioned, we were trying to take a look at different ways of how we can best calculate the graduation rates. While we were doing that, we were also in consulta-

tion with the Bureau of Statistics. We were looking at how Stats Canada reported graduation rates across Canada, how the Bureau of Stats reported graduation rates. We were looking at our information system to see whether the information was accurate. The information that we provided in the annual report was what we thought was the best, the most accurate, information that we had that we could actually sit there and say this is how we have calculated the information. But, as I mentioned in the annual report, we clearly identified that we are going to continue to take a look at this, and we are hoping that the new information system will be able to allow us to improve the tracking system to reflect the best possible graduation rate and the most accurate graduation rate.

Mr. Nordick: Why does the department publish potential graduation numbers?

Ms. Hine: As I mentioned, that method of calculating graduation rates was incorporated back in 1995, I believe it was. My understanding was that was how other jurisdictions were calculating graduation rates at that time, and it was how the department continued to report. It was our commitment to change that, as reflected in the annual report for the school year 2007-08, which was tabled in the Legislative Assembly, with the ongoing commitment that we want to continue to refine that graduation rate to reflect true graduation and not the potential to graduate.

Mr. Nordick: I'll finish off my lines of questions with a pretty general question with regard to barriers that affect education. What are the barriers that you see that affect education?

Ms. Hine: It's a general question and it's a tough one to answer. I think there are a lot of barriers that affect education. One of the biggest ones is again to have the support of our partners of education, of the parents of the students and of the community. There are a number of factors outside of the education system that impact education. There are social and there are economic factors — there are a number of factors. More and more, it's being brought on to the education system as the responsibility of education, and it's one that we need to work with our partners and clarify. When you look at the fact that most of our schools have a breakfast program — so we're feeding students — most of our programs contain supports and special needs — most of all helping students through the parental aspect and the homework aspect. Absenteeism among our students is increasing.

Again, we can do what we can within the school system — within the building and our commitment to engage our partners — in helping to address those and to work with other government departments as well as to be able to have that inclusive, holistic approach to education. But I also have to say that it is putting more and more pressure and time on our students and school staff to be dealing with these other factors. It is not all just bringing students in and educating them in the way that maybe we would have seen — and I don't want to date myself — when we went to school, when it was reading, writing, arithmetic and maybe a physical education class. It's a lot more than that.

I think also that this is something that makes our education systems special. We are looking at the success of all learners. We have an inclusive education system. We expect that we can provide the resources and the material and the programming for every student to come into our school system and receive an education to the best of their ability. I think that that is something that the Yukon can be proud of.

Hon. Mr. Hart: First of all, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. In addition, I would like to thank the department, the teachers, the education assistants and all the support staff for all the hard work that they put into providing a good learning environment for all our students.

I will begin with a few questions with regard to IEPs. The first question I would like to ask is: is FASD identified in individual education programs? If so, how many students have been identified or assessed under this program?

Ms. Hine: I will ask the Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Schools to respond to that question.

Ms. Whitley: The identification of students with FASD would only be done at the request of a parent. As a system, it's a fairly intrusive kind of suggestion — if we are meeting with a parent and looking at the needs of a child — to suggest that kind of testing. On the other hand, we do have an inter-agency team that does testing and will provide support. That will be done at the request of a parent. That then would come into an individual education plan and, through the individual education planning process, the supports and the recommendations of that team would be incorporated into the individual education plan of that student.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Are students on IEPs included in all department stats?

Ms. Whitley: I believe so. I am trying to think if there would be any that they would not be involved in. There would be, from time to time, students who would be on IEPs who, for the benefit of those students, may be excluded from writing a particular exam, so they would not be calculated in the final results. That would only be a decision made by a school-based team in conjunction with the parents, and you look at what is in the best interest of the child.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Given that the Auditor General found that there was no established process for regulating the IEPs, the question we would ask is: are they working? And, if so, how do we know?

Ms. Whitley: We are actually doing a review right now in the department of the individual education planning process. There is a process that is followed by school-based teams and in conjunction with parents as part of those teams. They are, according to our manual and policy, to be reviewed with parents. We are reviewing that process to determine whether or not it is working both to the benefit of the children and to the satisfaction of our parents.

We're doing a lot of work. On Friday last week we actually met with all of our administrators. We brought in teams from out of town via video conferencing, and we did an overview of the legal requirements and obligations of our department to monitor the individual education planning process. So

we are doing updated training with our administrators. We are also bringing in our school-based teams next week to review that process and look at the data that we need to collect through the individual education planning process to feed into our school growth planning process.

Hon. Mr. Hart: We are aware that IEPs are usually followed fairly closely from K to 7, but there seems to be somewhat of a disconnect when they go up to the high school grades, and we were wondering what happens to the IEPs when they come from the elementary schools.

Ms. Whitley: All of the elementary schools that I'm aware of would do what's called a transition meeting in the spring with the secondary school-based teams. In those transition meetings, the school-based team would sit down and review the individual education plans of the students who will be progressing to the high school, and then the high school picks up those IEPs and would meet with parents as well and do the transition that way. We do the same thing in the early years. Child Development Centre transitions the kids into schools.

Hon. Mr. Hart: What is the methodology that the department uses, or proposes to use, to track the progress of children who have been identified at risk?

Ms. Whitley: That would be through the IEP process that we track them. That is a legal document. Once a child is identified as having special needs, then they would have an individual education plan and their progress would be tracked through that plan.

Hon. Mr. Hart: In addition, will the department be tracking the dropout rate of these students?

Ms. Whitley: Yes. It is difficult to track dropout rates. What we are really looking at is transition rates where we would be able to identify those students not going on to the next grade. There are two districts in B.C. that are tracking — that I am aware of — and they do it manually. I think, looking at our assessment data, it would be very beneficial to do that and do interviews with those children and families to determine what the problems were.

Hon. Mr. Hart: That's all of the questions I have.

Mr. Inverarity: Welcome again. I think you are going to get lots of welcomes today.

The area that I'm going to be covering deals with absenteeism. There really are only one or two paragraphs within the report itself, but it is a serious concern to a lot of the members here.

I'm going to ask a general question to start off with: what is the currently mandated length of the school year in the Yukon? Can you tell us how we compare to other jurisdictions with regard to the length of the school year?

Ms. Hine: I haven't got the *Education Act* in front of me. I believe that the mandated length of the school year is around 181 or 185 days. In comparison to the rest of Canada, we are at the lower aspect of the actual number of instructional days. We are reviewing that stat. Where education falls within the jurisdiction of each province and territory, there is no set indicator. So how a jurisdiction actually reports on what their hours of instruction or their number of days are may be differ-

ent from each jurisdiction. So we are looking at that information and we're continuing to do research. But based on just the numbers that have been reported in each jurisdiction, we have one of the lower number of hours of instructional days.

Mr. Inverarity: So, if I understand right — let's take 181 or 185 days — within that day, the number of hours of the instruction, is it lengthened out at all compared to other jurisdictions? In other words, do we have a longer teaching day than other jurisdictions?

Ms. Hine: That is part of the research that we have to do to actually make that comparison. Some jurisdictions will actually count recess as part of that day, as part of those hours; some include exams, some exclude exams. That is the research that we are doing. You cannot just look at the number as a bottom line. You have to actually take a look at what is included in that. We are completing that research now.

Mr. Inverarity: The report identifies absenteeism as a serious issue in the Yukon. It appears that, cumulatively, the average student ends up missing approximately one and a half years of school over the course of the grades K through 12. Do you think that the length of the currently mandated school year, which appears to be shorter than other jurisdictions, is effective to deliver the programs that you are trying to do?

Ms. Hine: I think the question is not just the absentee rate. When you are looking at the hours of instruction, you need to take a look at what kind of programs are being offered and what we want to achieve in the education system in the Yukon. Definitely the actual attendance of students becomes more related to the end result — graduation rate, ability to complete achievement tests and where they fall — because if you miss a number of hours of instruction, obviously you are not getting all the curriculum that is being taught within the school system.

The hours in a day or the hours of instruction — it's about the amount of time and how that time is being utilized. Are we able to provide enough time in the day to provide the actual programming, the teaching opportunity and the planning that staff require? We are taking a look at that, as I said, as we are looking at other jurisdictions to see what kind of averages there are, what they include and if this is something we need to look at changing. Again, as we do this, we would have to do it in partnership with our partners, with the school councils and, of course, with the Yukon Teachers Association.

Mr. Inverarity: I am not sure if that question was answered. What is the combined effect of Yukon's comparatively short school year with the high rate of absenteeism? I am not sure whether or not I asked that question properly. When you look at the short school year and you look at the high absenteeism rate, do these two factors come together with a lot of students missing time and is that like a double whammy in terms of trying to get students through the whole curriculum and through to graduation?

Ms. Hine: It's a good question; it's a difficult question because there's not an easy answer. You almost have to take a look at the impact on each individual student. A student could miss a period of time but also be taking homework and using

their own kind of ability to catch up. So whether they're taking homework or they're putting extra hours in, they're getting help, so the time they miss they're actually making up on their own time. Definitely, if you were looking at just the two — you have X number of days to teach the curriculum and students are missing a good portion of that — would it have an impact? Yes.

The hours of instruction or the school year has been designed so that the curriculum can be delivered. If you have big gaps of students missing that time, then you would say that it just makes sense there would be a collation as to the outcomes. Like I say, you have to take a look at why students are missing the time and how long are they missing. Is it a few days here and there and they're able to catch up so they don't lose the time or are they gone for extended periods of time all at once? So it is a difficult question and a lot of factors have to be taken into consideration.

Mr. Inverarity: So, have you conducted an in-depth analysis of absenteeism and tried to find out what the root causes of it are?

Ms. Hine: We do have a student attendance policy that has been developed with the Department of Education. The onus is on the schools to develop their own attendance policy so that they can be community-specific. We are working on that. We are telling schools and the school councils that they need to take a look at what is the absentee policy for them, and specifically for their schools. Our policy gives them an outline on what the roles and responsibilities are and the expectations. The actual aspect about trying to determine why students are actually being absent and the length of absences are stuff that we are looking at under the New Horizons in the secondary program review. It definitely has a lot to do with the role of parents and guardians to make sure and encourage students to actually attend school and to be there as well.

It is work that we are taking into consideration and trying to figure what the rates are. As I mentioned in my opening comments, student engagement is going to be key in this. We can take a look at all of the policies and all the research but if we don't ask the students why they are not coming to school or what is causing their absenteeism, then we are not going to get the actual answer to that.

Again, I can't emphasize enough that the expectation of the support of parents and guardians is to make sure that their students are coming to school and that they are taking the initiative to learn and to stay in the school as well.

Mr. Inverarity: What kind of demographic information is available on absenteeism? Do you collect any kind of demographic information now — male/female breakdowns, for example, or First Nations or those at risk?

Ms. Hine: Again, as I say, it's really at the school level that we actually collect the data on absenteeism. But one of the things we are looking at to try to get more information is with the new school growth planning process that we're introducing. In that, absentee data is one of the elements that we want to have incorporated into the school growth plan, so that we can actually take a look at — here's the school, here's what

your average absentee rate is — and then having goals within the school growth plan developed by the community — the school council, First Nations and the community — as to what can we do to lower the absentee rate and have actual better attendance.

So, we've got some information. It's not as detailed as what you're asking for, but I think with the combination of our school growth plan and with a student identification and a better tracking system, we will be able to get the information that you're looking for, where we can actually bring it down and clearly look at where the largest amount of absenteeism is and be able to do some good analysis of that information.

Mr. Inverarity: If I understand correctly, you are collecting information, or some of it, at the school level, but it's not getting through to the departmental level. For example, you're not tracking whether at-risk students have higher or lower absenteeism from a departmental point of view, it's just from a school level?

Ms. Hine: In the annual report, we do report on student absenteeism. We look at rural, non-rural, and we also take a look at First Nation and non-First Nation — again, on the fact of referring to First Nations as being self-identified. So, it's the information that we have. It may not capture the true picture if a First Nation student has not self-identified.

So we are getting some information. But to get down to the detail you're looking at, that's the information we need to work on with our schools through the school growth planning, to actually figure out what the information is — what the cause is, what the impact is on students on IEPs versus those who aren't, male/female. It's good information, and we are looking at incorporating this as one of the goals under the school growth plan to help us to achieve that.

Mr. Inverarity: Are the children who need intervention the most actually receiving it, or is it a case that at-risk students may lose their placement in programs designed to address their needs because of their low attendance if they're being absent? I understand that might be an issue.

Ms. Whitley: Could I get the question repeated? It's a complex one?

Mr. Inverarity: The question: are the children who need the intervention the most actually receiving it, or is it a case that at-risk students may lose their placement in programs designed to address their needs if their attendance is low?

Ms. Whitley: It is a multi-layered answer I have to give you. Student programs are designed based on student needs that are identified through assessment. One of the risk factors for any student would be low attendance. Depending on how serious the attendance issue is, that may actually be part of the plan for the child: how do you get them to school?

In regard to the interventions, if a child is chronically absent, then that needs to be part of their plan. You want to get them into school, so part of the plan would be strategies to make sure they are coming to school.

Then when they are at school, how do you re-enter them and enter them into their intervention plan? So that would be part of the planning. Are some of these strategies that we use as

intervention harmed by lack of attendance? I can talk specifically about reading recovery. A number of the students that are in reading recovery would be getting reading recovery as a strategy to address academic challenges. That program is a very sequenced program and when a child is not at school, of course they're not getting that. If they have a gap of a number of days to get them caught back up again, it requires maybe a step back in that program so their intervention would be expanded over a longer period than would originally be identified in the plan. So that needs to be considered if a child is absent — how will we follow through? So that's one example.

Mr. Inverarity: What other factors affect the attendance rates within the schools that we haven't covered?

Ms. Whitley: The weather. We've got some of our communities where if it's really, really cold, it's very hard to get to school and parents make the decision that it would be safer to keep students at home.

The other thing is in the First Nation culture — on a number of occasions, the First Nation Education Advisory Committee — it has been mentioned that the beginning of the school year is when it is really critical for First Nation elders and families to have their children out on the land. That is a really critical time in school, so that is a conversation that we are having with our First Nations. Some of the on-the-land activities are actually in many of our schools now being incorporated and not looked at as lack of attendance. We are looking at some of those issues that are related to specific First Nation learning and re-jigging our system to be respectful of that.

Mr. Inverarity: Has the department studied the relationship between bullying, for example, and the absentee rate? Are students staying away because they are afraid to go to school?

Ms. Whitley: We haven't studied that specifically, but we have a number of anti-bullying programs in place that monitor that dimension of social dynamics pretty carefully.

We do know that if kids are afraid to come to school that may be a factor but I think our communication with parents and our students now through much of the programming is really addressing some of those issues.

Mr. Inverarity: But you have not specifically looked at that issue — the relationship between bullying and absenteeism — as a specific item?

Ms. Whitley: Not specifically. One of the ways that other jurisdictions look at that more in-depth is through what they call satisfaction surveys. A number of our schools now are doing their own satisfaction surveys and those may be some of the issues they would be addressing.

We are, at the department, looking at satisfaction surveys as part of the assessment framework. That would be something that I think you would normally look at in a satisfaction survey of that kind.

Mr. Mitchell: Perhaps one more question, Mr. Inverarity, and then we can we can return to this later.

Mr. Inverarity: All right. How many children under the age of 12 are being told by schools not to return to class for a period of time, say a week maybe — might call it a suspen-

sion — or for any length of time due to them being disruptive in the class for behavioural reasons?

Ms. Whitley: That is a very good question. It is one that we are looking at — the whole issue of suspension. Ms. Hine was speaking earlier of real changes in thinking.

Certainly the research on student engagement in schools speaks to looking at other options than suspension. When students have made a mistake or misbehaved, you want to put in a plan that's going to help them learn from that. We know that a number of our students who have behavior difficulties need to be engaged, so many of our schools are looking at restorative processes rather than exclusionary processes. That is data that is part of our review in terms of our special programs review.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I'd like to begin by thanking witnesses for attending here today. As I believe someone already mentioned, I recognize that a number of you are relatively new in your positions and as you've mentioned, have had a limited amount of time to work on some things. You've mentioned a few things that you're doing.

I would like to ask you specifically beginning with paragraph 39 in recommendations on performance information. The Auditor General recommends that you present, in the annual report, the critical trends, significant performance gaps, and the results of actions taken to improve performance.

Are you planning to do this? If so, how do you intend to assess it and present it in the report?

Ms. Hine: Yes, as indicated in the Auditor General's report, we have agreed to this recommendation. We are already doing research, which we have started this year, to take a look at what other jurisdictions are doing as far as reporting on indicators, trying to determine which of those indicators make sense to the Yukon. What do our partners want to see reported in our annual report?

As I mentioned earlier, we have changed the format of our annual report. I believe on page 1 we actually talk about the fact that we are changing the annual report. We invite anyone to provide their comments as to what they would like to see reported in our annual report. As we move forward on the key initiatives — whether it's the New Horizons, the secondary program review, our work with the First Nation Education Advisory Committee — it is also to take a look at what is important to those key partners or key stakeholders to move forward. We want that information as well from the public, parents and our administrators.

We will continue to revise and revamp our annual report. That is a commitment I make as the deputy minister and one that is reflected in the messaging from both the minister and the deputy minister within the annual report that was just tabled in the Legislative Assembly. We hope that by the time we get the new student information system fully implemented, we will be able to have a better reporting system — probably by 2013, but that is full implementation. You don't have to wait until then to see changes and additional information in the report.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Thank you for the answer. I would also like to ask: you reference in the response to the Auditor General's recommendations and several times this morning you

have mentioned the data collection student information system and the review of a new data collection and student information system. With regard to that, how large a system is this? To put it more plainly: how many indicators and areas would this information system review? What would be included in this and when is it expected to be on-line? Is it a little premature for you to be able to give that answer?

Ms. Hine: What the department is doing now is actually reviewing what kind of systems are out there. We are investigating the systems that already exist in other jurisdictions.

The information and the recommendations in the Auditor General's report will certainly help us as we go in and we look at what kind of systems will better meet our needs. Definitely the system that we pick is going to be one that we want to continue to add to so that we can take a look at achieving better results and better indicators as we move forward. It is a bit premature to be able to give you the detail you are asking for but it is definitely information that we are going to be taking under advisement as we look at the available information system and what will make sense for the Yukon — as I said before, especially one that can continue to grow as the Yukon grows, as far as education and reporting back on the performance of the education system.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The current system — I believe you refer to it as the SIM system — what is the vintage of that system?

Ms. Hine: I am not sure of the vintage of it, when it actually was first — and I can get back to the committee with that if you want that information. The one thing that we have been advised by the system managers of that system is that they will no longer be supporting the software, and that is why we have been doing the work. So it gives you an indication on the age without having it; the software will no longer be supported.

That's why the timing is right. That's why we have already started our investigation into other systems and why the information that is contained in the Auditor General's report is very timely for us as we are going through the last stages of trying to figure out a system that meets the needs of the Yukon and the education system.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: In your response to the Auditor General's recommendation, you referenced that the department is in the process of developing a kindergarten-to-grade-12 assessment framework to assist in the analysis of critical trends and performance gaps. Can you describe that framework or what is likely contained in it?

Ms. Whitley: What we want to do is to calculate data again when students enter kindergarten. We have kindergarten review and reporting right now. There is an international system that is now being used so you could have broader comparative data. It is referred to as the EDI. I can't remember exactly what EDI — education; I won't even calculate or try to identify what those letters stand for, but it's a system that is being used and talked about nationally for identifying factors of resilience, at-risk factors for students entering the system.

So we're investigating the use of that in the Yukon. There is also then later a new dimension of that called the MDI and

that's for middle school. If you did the early years one and then the middle one, you could actually go back to one of the questions earlier and track how the student is doing on the factors identified in the EDI.

The other things our teachers are starting to use are what are called "performance standards" out of British Columbia. There are performance standards in reading, writing, in social responsibility and in numeracy. These performance standards are rubrics that are designed to identify where students are on their learning path. So you can track a student from grade 1 right through to grade 9 on these rubrics. It's a very quick and efficient way to do that.

We're also looking right now at other assessment tools teachers are currently using and finding valuable. So when the framework is finally developed, we hope that we will have a framework that goes kindergarten all the way through grade 12, identifying what measures will be looked at each year. Right now the YATs we do at grade 3, grade 6 and grade 9, then we pick up the BCPEs. But we're looking at formative assessment tools that can also inform some of the summative assessment tools like the YATs.

We're also reviewing the use of the YATs. The YATs are Alberta tests and we follow B.C. curriculum so that's an interesting juxtaposition we are reviewing.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: That leads me to a follow-up question of the issue of students moving from one grade to the next and the issue of whether a child is required to repeat a grade or whether they are moved on. To what extent is that assessed in the effectiveness of the decision-making around that and whether children are perhaps — as obviously will occur in some cases — being moved on to another grade when that should not be happening? To what extent is that reflected in the current statistics, or is it intended to be tracked in the upcoming assessment framework?

Ms. Whitley: Research would certainly suggest that having a child repeat a grade is not beneficial to their learning or to their social development. The performance standards that I have spoken of earlier really track the individual development of a child, so regardless of what grade level they are in, they should be able to be tracked along that developmental path. Any grade you walk into, any classroom you walk into, you are going to have children on a whole spectrum of development in their learning, whether it be mathematics or reading.

So what the teacher needs to do is know where that child is within the road map of curriculum and take that child where they are and move them forward. It would be very rare to repeat a child in a grade, and you would only do that if there were really good indicators as to how that would benefit the child. It's done very rarely anywhere now in education.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Since that, of course, is a significant shift from what was once the practice, and I recognize the argument against it, to what extent has that been analyzed either here or elsewhere? Obviously you believe it's working effectively but, I guess, to what extent that creates — obviously there are challenges, but what measurements are in place, or planned to be in place, for assessing the challenges for a

teacher in teaching to a wide range of a developmental path? Sorry, that was a very badly phrased question but how is that actually assessed? I guess the question really is, regarding the belief that it is working better to keep children in the same grade with the same peer group, what information is in place within the Yukon context to demonstrate that that is indeed the case?

Ms. Whitley: I'm not sure I'm going to be able to answer your question, so if I'm not on the right track, please stop me. This isn't actually something that is new. In my entire career, it has been very rare — and I've worked in three jurisdictions — to look at repeating children as a strategy to help them learn.

In terms of the Yukon, I've been a principal here too, and in all the years I was a principal, it was very rare. I think we had maybe — with the support of the parent — one child, and it was because of maturation. Sometimes it would be beneficial for kids to spend another year with their peer group.

In terms of teachers teaching to multiple levels of development, that has been going on for years. I mean, one-room schoolhouses supported children from kindergarten right through grade 12. What we hope to do is, through assessment practices, to really be very focused on the student needs. And then what you do, as a classroom teacher, is try and group those needs as much as you can. That's where our support staffing comes into place as well. So it really goes to programming and methodology in a classroom, and our teachers are pretty good at that, actually.

There are other things that work. We know, too, from research that combined classes also help with social, emotional and academic learning. So there are different ways you can address the varying dimensions of growth on a learning continuum for individual children.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Returning again to the K to 12 assessment framework, what is the department's suggested timeline for beginning to implement that initiative? I believe that the question may have been asked already, but when is the planned implementation of the data collection system?

Ms. Whitley: In terms of the framework, our consultants are working on that right now. We are hoping to have the basic framework articulated by the end of this school year. Whenever you are implementing something new, although our teachers have been looking at formative assessment, we will have to parallel the implementation of the assessment framework with professional development. That will hopefully start in the fall. We have a number of assessment tools already operating in classrooms. Assessment has always been done in classrooms. What we are doing is an inventory of what people are using. We will try as much as possible to build on that.

In terms of the implementation of the information system, we need to first of all make the decision as to which information system we are going to purchase. Then we have to do the training and we will have an implementation plan again. Introducing a new technology system into schools is not an easy thing to do. We will have to have a good plan and good support

in place to do that, but we are hoping to have some pilot schools by September.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Moving on to paragraph 46 now, with the issue of transition to post-secondary education or employment, what initiatives has the department taken in recent years that might provide information about tracking the progress of students in employment and post-secondary education, recognizing that it has already been noted that there are issues around that tracking? What initiatives have been tried to date? Have any been tried in the past to attempt to gain that information?

Ms. Hine: The department conducted a user survey probably four years ago. It was entitled "Coming Home". It requested students to provide feedback on their status as to whether they were in post-secondary or working. Unfortunately, the response rate was very low. It was less than 30 percent, so we weren't able to gain very much information as to using that method and where the transition was and be able to track the students and the transition aspect. We are, though, already in conversation with the Yukon Bureau of Stats to take a look at what other types of surveys or what other types of methodologies are in place that we could track and better improve that. So we have made those, already started those conversations and hope to be able to introduce other ways of doing this. But, like I say, it was about four years ago that we did a survey; the results were less than 30 percent, so it didn't give us a lot of really good information.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Earlier on in questioning you mentioned work on a student number — I can't recall exactly the term you used, whether it was a student number or a graduation number. Could you clarify for me whether that was intended to be a number that a student would get upon entering kindergarten that would then follow throughout the school system, or whether it was at graduation to track in post secondary?

Ms. Hine: What we are hoping to do is to be able to have a system in place that could identify a student identification number that would come to the student as soon as the student enters the school, and continue on even as the student moves forward, so that a student in the Yukon system would have the same identification number from K to 12. If they move on and they receive financial assistance — whether they're actually enrolled as an apprentice within the Yukon government or the Yukon Education department — that number would continue to follow them. So it would be a lifelong learning number and not just a K-to-12 number. That's our hope.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: You've actually partly answered this question already, but will the department track Yukon students from high schools like F.H. Collins through college and track how many of the students actually complete the program successfully with this number? I guess the second part of that question would be that presumably implementing — if the plan is indeed to do so — that system with Yukon College would be relatively simple, but what steps would be taken or are reasonable to even try to take with regard to tracking university education if somebody is not receiving the Yukon grant?

Ms. Hine: It is our hope that we will be able to utilize the system and again, a system has limitations. We need to be aware of that. I mean, we were looking at the best system that can answer all our needs, but to find that magic bullet sometimes is not always the easiest.

But, as we are looking at our options, we are looking at how do we use an existing system — or a new system — to meet those needs. We have talked already with Yukon College, and this is in our discussions under the secondary program review of how we can better make those transitions and track students who are leaving our schools system, going into Yukon College and, if it is possible, we would like to be able to use this identification number.

The problem would become more on the students who are leaving to go into post secondary who are not attached to the student financial assistance. If you have a student who graduated from the system but, for whatever reason, they are not utilizing the financial assistance and they decide to go outside the territory for post-secondary education, that becomes a bit of a problem because, once they leave and are not attached to the department, how do you keep that number going? That would be one of the shortfalls but, again, our conversation with the Bureau of Statistics is at looking at maybe surveys or other techniques of trying to figure out how we can track that. So we are looking at other areas as well, and not just the system.

Mr. Mitchell: Perhaps one final question. Your time is expired, but if you would like to pick a good one.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I have a number on the same theme here, so I think it would be better at this point to turn the floor over to the next member of the committee and hopefully resume later on the next theme.

Mr. Mitchell: That member would be me. First of all, I, too, would like to thank all the witnesses for appearing here today. We know that this may be a somewhat stressful situation, but it's not intended to be. Our goal, of course, is to work together with the officials to improve our education system and ensure that we're getting the most out of it that we possibly can on behalf of the students.

I also want to thank all of the educators, from principals to teachers to educational assistants, and I certainly want to thank reading recovery teachers — just my little in-joke.

I'm going to cover a few areas, as the time will allow, starting with community training funds. That would be paragraphs 57 through 62 in the Auditor General's report. How will the department develop a comprehensive strategy for managing the community training funds, as the report seems to indicate that there isn't currently such a comprehensive strategy? What are the guidelines going to be?

Ms. Hine: Before I answer your question, let me say that all of the questions are good questions and that even though a hearing is stressful, the philosophy of the Public Accounts hearing to work together to improve our system is the philosophy of the department.

As mentioned in my opening comments, we already have a process in place that will help us to achieve the recommendation on the community training trust funds. Starting last Octo-

ber, we had a labour market symposium held here in Whitehorse that actually will be designed to take a look at a 10-year horizon on how we address the fluctuation and meet Yukon labour market needs.

The actual response from that symposium was overwhelming in a positive manner. There was a willingness among the participants not to let it just end at the symposium, and we have engaged the participants in providing actual working groups that are going to be working with the department — so, it is not just the Department of Education; it is not just the Yukon government; it is also private sector — to develop strategies that will deal with the labour market needs. One of those strategies is a comprehensive skills, trades and training strategy. We have groups that are actually meeting this week that are starting on that work and that will end up bringing in and helping us move forward on the recommendation.

I must say that there was an actual strategy, although it was a number of years ago that the strategy was in place. It is that strategy that we are utilizing as we move forward with the allocations under the current community training trust funds. We do see the need to improve, and that's our commitment with the working group on the labour market framework. We hope to be able to implement it and have a new strategy in the very near future.

Mr. Mitchell: Your answer here and also following paragraph 62 in the report does refer to the 10-year training strategy, so I guess my next question would be: does the department now plan on reporting on a yearly basis on the strategy in the Education department's annual report? Will we get yearly updates on how this is progressing?

Ms. Hine: Our commitment, obviously, within the Department of Education is to utilize the annual report to report on the whole department. Even though the requirement to table an annual report is actually under the *Education Act*, so it could be limited to the K-to-12 system, that has not been the way we interpreted it. We have been very pleased and proud to table an annual report every year on the Department of Education and the whole capacity of the Department of Education. Our commitment is to report in our annual report not just on the labour market strategy but also to include a page or section in the annual report on the Auditor General's report. That way, we can report on the progress of our commitments to all the recommendations within the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Mitchell: In paragraph 60 of the Auditor General's report, again on this topic of comprehensive strategy for the allocation of funds, there are references to determining whether or not the funds were spent effectively, economically and efficiently. In other words, simply listing the money spent and the groups that have received the training funds money would not sufficiently address this. Could you elaborate on how you will present or provide information to demonstrate that the money spent on these training funds is in fact effective and efficient?

Ms. Hine: As I mentioned previously, we have been using the actual training strategy, although it was prepared in 1998. That has been our guideline as we allocate the funding.

We do also try to take into consideration any type of special criteria. So if there is a trend that's happening in the communities that fits within the framework or the allocation and the objective of the training trust fund, we take that into consideration.

In the summer of 2007, we did create a new monitoring system within the Department of Education to ensure that the implementation and the effectiveness of the community training trust funds are being met. We do need to continue to take a look at that, as any new monitoring system. Just putting it in place is not always sufficient. We do have to go back and take a review of it to make sure it is working. Our commitment is to continue to review that to ensure that we are allocating the funds within the intent.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, and I think you've actually answered the next question that I have here, so I'm going to skip that one. So, we're getting two for one. That's very efficient and effective.

I'm going to move to another area: individual school plans, and that would be paragraphs 77 through 81 in the report.

Right now, it would appear from the information in this report and the findings of the Auditor General that the process for preparing school plans isn't a fully-inclusive process. I guess my question will relate to who is responsible and how that responsibility will be shared. Will the preparation of school plans be opened up to include more of the partners in education, such as teachers, school boards, school councils and parents as opposed to being a more centralized process that seems to be more heavily dependent on the principals and the department?

Ms. Hine: This is certainly one question I am very pleased to respond to. If I can say anything regarding the Department of Education, it is that we are doing business differently. It's not an inclusive education system just on the idea of all students have the right to an education, but it's how we engage our partners in education to work with the department and to change the education system. It's the transformation and evolution.

The department — and it's one of the areas that is under the *Education Act* — all schools are required to have a school growth plan. That is being done. But we saw this as an opportunity to continue to revise and enhance that existing process and that is through the education reform, the New Horizons commitment.

In order to achieve that, to make sure this process is inclusive and allows our partners to have a say with what they want to see in schools, schools should be the heart of the community. Each school should reflect what is important to the community. By doing this, we have established a school growth planning advisory committee. It is made up of representatives from the Yukon Teachers Association, the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees, Catholic Educators Association, the francophone school system, the First Nation Education Advisory Committee and, of course, the Department of Education.

It is with this committee that we have taken a look at their process and wanting to move it forward. We want it to be inclusive. We do have a draft policy in place — that is draft. We hope to have the committee and our stakeholders review and approve it in the very near future. We are already working in this new concept of school growth planning within our schools, so although the policy is being developed, it is not stopping us from encouraging our schools to be inclusive and not to limit the planning to the point of an administrator or the school staff, but to be involved with the community.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you. You have actually started to answer my next question once again.

Looking at the timeline for fully implementing the new policy, in the interim, in the short term, I was going to ask how school plans will be developed in the short term before you have concluded that. I guess, based on your response, the approach will be to try to make as much use of this in transition to having a finalized policy?

Ms. Hine: Yes, we already have schools that are working on this new school growth planning process. As Education, we don't operate in silos. Everything we do is layered upon one another and we continue to create the foundation of a responsive education system.

Even, as I mentioned earlier, the idea of having a leadership program introduced within the education system, when we have over 60 educators who have actually come in willingly, over and above their day-to-day operation, to take this two-year training program to be leaders in their communities. Not all of them will be administrators. But the more leaders we have in the education system, the more leaders who are receiving the direction and the support to be inclusive and engaging within their community, the better the system is. I have to say that we were thinking we may have 30 maximum, as far as people wanting to take the program and we have over 60. So the willingness for change, the willingness to be inclusive and involve our partners is out there.

We're really pleased to see that and the willingness for schools to look at a process, incorporate the process and not wait for the bureaucratic process of policies to be in place, but to engage. It's an opportunity to move forward.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you for that response. I'm going to move on to another section of the report. That is strategic planning and largely paragraphs 66 through 70. I'm going to preface this by again saying that the committee does recognize that in your leadership positions — including the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister for public schools branch — some of you haven't been in these positions for that long. We look, therefore, at the questions and the comments in the report itself as not being necessarily reflective on those people who are currently in the department at those levels, but rather over a broader period of time.

Nevertheless, the Auditor General's report did find that the department does not have a long-term strategic plan. In the absence of such a long-term strategic plan, we're wondering: how did the department then develop a five-year capital plan if there is no overall long-term strategic plan?

Ms. Hine: I believe it was actually referred to in the Auditor General's report or certainly in the comments since: the department has a lot of information. It's not necessarily more information; it's being able to take this information that is located in different sections and bring it together so that we can then actually have a long-term strategic plan. I think that's one of the areas that the department definitely needs to work on more. Again, we agreed on the recommendation.

The ability to do a five-year capital plan and take a look at how we introduce new programs into the school system is being done through a planning process. It's not like we're just drawing straws or we have a dartboard in the department; we are planning. The recommendation is one that we welcome.

As I said before, we have utilized the tools that we do have at our disposal. The annual report is definitely one where we have taken that — we're one of the few departments that actually will report in the Legislative Assembly about how we are doing and reporting back. We made the commitment to continue to evolve that report to be meaningful. I'm glad to see that people are reading the report and making reference to it. That's what we're looking for.

Again, it's not the fact that we didn't have the information; it's just that it's probably in a number of different locations and it would be in the best interest of the department to compile it into a strategic long-term plan. That is what we hope to do.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Ms. Hine.

Just to clarify, in looking at the response, I see that in the response following the recommendation in paragraph 70, some of the items you have just mentioned, such as revising the annual report — which was, by the way, a very informative report — to better align the department's strategic goals, objectives and mandate and continue to expand the current department plan to include relevant performance indicators. But I don't actually see a specific commitment to develop a long-term strategic plan.

Is that commitment now in place in terms of specifically answering that? It's sort of a part-answer that I'm seeing here, but I'm not convinced we've seen the full answer.

Ms. Hine: Yes, you do have the department's commitment to develop a long-term strategic plan. The timelines in developing the long-term strategic plan will really be linked to the processes that are currently in place with our partners.

That would be the secondary school plan, the New Horizons plan, the school growth plan — so that we have a number of initiatives in process that are going to help us take it to the next level. It really is kind of a two-prong approach. One is the Department of Education needs to collect all of the information we currently have and be able to have it in one location and one plan so we know where we are. A second one is to continue to work with our partners in education to determine where they want to see education go and have that go into a long-term strategic plan.

Again, as I like to always say, a plan is that: it is a plan. The one thing that I like to say is that we will always continually be evolving education and that is what makes education so exciting. So, as the plan continues to move on, we always want

to take it to that next level, and we look forward to doing that with our partners.

Mr. Mitchell: One additional question on this topic. Again, where you mention in the annual report that you are working to better align the department's strategic goals, objectives and mandate, can you give us some examples of what specifically the department is doing to better align the department's strategic goals, objectives and mandate? Do you have any performance indicators that you can share with us for example?

Ms. Hine: One of the things that we've been trying to do over the last couple of years is to take all the documentation that we have and make sure that it is reflective. That's part of this better alignment of our goals and values. We have the annual report and we have the main estimates. There is a number of documentation — and the *Education Act* — which are actually public documents. The problem became that we were almost becoming schizophrenic in a way, I guess, in the fact that we were reporting some on school years, we were reporting some on financial years, we were making reference to certain objectives in one document and something else in another document. I think that one thing that we can say that has been achieved over the last couple of years is aligning those reports so we're speaking the same language. As I mentioned earlier, the recent annual report is starting to show that and I think now if you can take the annual report and you look at the main estimates, you can actually start seeing the connection, that it is making the reference.

We still have some work to do on the performance indicators and on our stats. Again, it has to do with the different requirements that we have to come forward in as to whether or not a financial process requires a fiscal year, why a school process requires a school year. But we are looking at that and we are hoping to continue to improve. I want to mention the fact that we're working with our partners in education in identifying those performance measures that they want to see us report on, and we look for that feedback.

Mr. Mitchell: In the few minutes that I have remaining, I'm going to begin asking some questions regarding paragraphs 71 through 76, risk identification and management. I don't think we're going to get very far into it now, but we can return to it later this afternoon.

In paragraph 76, the Auditor General has indicated that the identification, management and mitigation of risks should not only be done on an ad hoc basis, which is how the Auditor General saw it was being managed now. The report recommends that, "As part of the strategic planning process, the Department of Education should develop an integrated risk-management plan that identifies and assesses the key risks the Department faces and the measures it will use to mitigate these risks." The report certainly gives a number of potential risks. Risks are not necessarily negatives; they're just indicators of things that could change — demographic changes, enrolment changes, deficiencies in information needed for decision-making, personnel changes, aging facilities, and so forth.

What are the guidelines that you're going to pursue in assessing risks? Can you give us some preliminary projections about these guidelines and the timelines in which they would be implemented in developing such a plan?

Ms. Hine: As you mentioned, the Auditor General has helped us a lot with that. There are a number of potential risks that have been outlined in the report. Our commitment would be to include in the annual report a section that will be called "environmental scan", which will give a summary of some of the risks and will give a bit of an outline as to what could be some impacts on the delivery of education, now and into the future.

We would like to see that changed for the report of the 2009-10 school year so that it could be tabled in the fall of 2010. That will give us some time to take a look at what the risks are and better identify those risks.

In that same timeline, we'll incorporate a risk-management plan. Whether we have a separate risk-management plan or whether that becomes part of the long-term strategic plan, we have to take a look at that a little bit. We also want to continue to work with the corporate risk-management project that is actually being undertaken by the Yukon government. They are currently looking at a framework that will be introduced for departments. We expect to have their initial results by the fall 2009.

So we are hoping that we have, again, something that is meaningful for the department but also follows the Yukon government risk management. I am hoping that we can have some information rather quickly that we can report on and make that commitment within the tabling of the annual report.

Mr. Mitchell: I think I only have time for perhaps one short follow-up question before we adjourn — or recess, rather — for lunch.

The Auditor General's office has provided a list of possible risk, a bit of a menu that they see. Can you give us a preliminary view as to which of these you see as key risks to the department? Which ones are you tending to focus on?

Ms. Hine: When you look at the preliminary lists that are included in the Auditor General's report, I think they are all very important when we look at risk management and taking it into consideration — again, some of the information is already within the department, but it's not contained within a report. Obviously, the impact of land claims settlement is a key risk and one that we are very much aware of. We have been working with our First Nations and, again, I mentioned the First Nation program and partnership unit within the department, and our Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee, the commitment of the department to work with the Council of Yukon First Nations on the implementation of the education reform, so although we may not have it all in a plan, we are working with our partners in helping to mitigate the risk.

The aging facilities: again, we have information on that — it's how to compile it. I think at this time it is hard to say which one we would concentrate on more. I think it is a matter of gathering the information that we have and then obviously the ones that have the least amount of information would be the

ones that we would focus more on so that we could have that information at hand.

Mr. Mitchell: Seeing the time, we will recess and reconvene at 1:30 this afternoon.

Recess

Mr. Mitchell: Good afternoon. At this time, I would like to reconvene the Public Accounts Committee hearing into the Auditor General's report on Public Schools and Advanced Education.

I would just like to start by introducing an additional witness who is with us for the remainder of the afternoon: Dr. Terry Weninger, the president of Yukon College.

At this point we are going to resume our line of questioning. In the rotation, we will start again where we started this morning with Mr. Edzerza, the Member for McIntyre-Takhini.

Mr. Edzerza: Paragraph 89 of the report indicates that Statistics Canada figures from 2005-06 show that Yukon has the lowest student education ratio in Canada with one educator for every 11 students. It goes on to note that the Auditor General found that Yukon has the lowest five-year average ratio in Canada of 11.7 to 1 compared with Canada's average of 15.5 to 1.

What is the department's target ratio for student education and are the student/educator ratios low in the areas where needed?

Ms. Hine: The information contained in the Auditor General's report is obviously correct, as far as the student/teacher ratio for the Yukon. We don't have a target ratio because the student/teacher ratio is based on student need. We take a look at the actual enrolment, the needs of the students and the programming that is actually being offered within the school and then we allocate resources accordingly. We are not actually looking at a set teacher ratio.

I missed the second part of your question.

Mr. Edzerza: Are the student/educator ratios low in areas where needed?

Ms. Hine: Thank you for repeating the second part of your question. As I said before, we allocate based on needs. The needs will be met with the current teacher ratio. We monitor that. We start the process — actually, we are starting now to take a look at the next coming school year. We are already working with our school administrators and school staff to determine their projections, their needs and the programming to determine the allocation for the next school year. It's an ongoing process.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. The report notes that there has been a 14-percent increase in the number of educational assistants and remedial tutors between 2003 and 2007, despite there being eight-percent fewer students in the Yukon. What is the justification for this 14-percent increase and what impact is the increased number of educational assistants and remedial tutors having in the classroom?

Ms. Hine: As mentioned, where we base the allocation on student need, even though the overall student enroll-

ment is decreasing, the needs of each student are taken into consideration. So the increase in the actual allocation to educational assistants and remedial tutors is based on the actual needs of the students. Again, our goal is to look at the success of each student and their individual needs and learning requirements.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. What effect on the Yukon's overall ratio does the one-to-one ratio — which is mandated for certain special needs students — have and what would an average class size be, excluding these one-to-one ratios?

Ms. Whitley: First of all, I'll speak to the allocation of staffing in the collective agreement with YTA. There are identified numbers for each grade level. We can staff with 1:20 ratio in kindergarten; 1:23 up to grade 3 and 1:26 above grade 3. The one-to-one support that some of our students get is taken into consideration when principals are looking at the profiles of their schools. We staff based on the formula articulated and then we have operational staffing that would address any special needs beyond the regular ratio that I cited.

Mr. Edzerza: I'm going to go on to ask the department: what number of educational assistants are being driven by FASD, FAE and identified special needs students? Do you have a number for this number of students?

Ms. Whitley: As I indicated earlier, parents would ask for a designation of FASD and ask for an assessment. We would not have those numbers necessarily articulated. It is something, again, that we would be looking at in our review of special programs. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Edzerza: Maybe it would be appropriate to ask this one question with regard to the FASD, as we are on that topic.

If parents refuse to consent to their child being tested for FASD or FAE, as educators, does the department feel that they can develop an appropriate IEP program that would meet the needs of a student who suffers from FASD or FAE?

Ms. Whitley: In response to your question, the answer would be yes. What we do when we develop an IEP is we look at the needs of the child, which would be articulated either through assessments of an academic nature or behavioural descriptors. Goals would be set depending on the needs of the child in the area of academics, social or emotional behaviour. It wouldn't necessarily mean that there had to be a diagnosis of FASD.

Mr. Edzerza: I am going to ask you a few questions now with regard to the department. Paragraph 91 notes that the department has not established a staffing needs profile. In light of that, with the teachers we have and the teachers we need, are there enough of them to meet student needs? For example, do we have enough early maths specialists? Do you think that this trend is going to continue? What is the department's strategy for planning to have the appropriate personnel to meet the demands that exist?

Ms. Whitley: If you go back to the pupil/teacher ratio, we are really very well resourced. One of the things that we are doing right now in terms of connecting school growth plan-

ning to evidence measures is looking at school profiles and, as we collect the data on those school profiles, we are getting indicators that there are areas within right now the social/emotional area where we would need to put more emphasis.

We've got fabulous teachers in the system. What we're looking at is not needing more, but needing maybe to do some retraining in specific areas like the area of social/emotional development of students. You mentioned early childhood. One of the things that we're looking at as well as developing a framework for assessment is developing a literacy framework and possibly looking at more literacy support for classroom teachers. So it's not needing more; it's sometimes needing to retool and looking at it differently.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. You probably answered a little bit of some of the next bit here, but you may want to elaborate a little more on it. Are there issues with regard to providing the appropriate training for specific positions? Are there adequate training opportunities for teachers?

Ms. Whitley: If I can just repeat the question as I understood it — you're asking if there are adequate resources and opportunities for learning for our teachers? Does that capture it? In speaking to professional development, the department has continually been involved in professional development. Each year, our consultants develop a professional development plan in the areas of reading and writing, numeracy, and technology. The consultants who work in those areas deliver that professional development in a variety of ways. We're using more and more technology in the adult learning area and, as I said, when we are looking at our data and looking at the needs profiles, we are able to articulate the kinds of training that our teachers are needing.

We've been working with YTA to develop a professional development program strategy each year and will continue to do that. More and more of our teachers are getting masters degrees and doing upgrading in a variety of ways — podcasts and that kind of thing. We're doing more Web-casting.

So we have teachers who look at individual needs. They have individual teacher plans and identify what their learning needs are. We have school plans that indicate what professional development staff needs, and then we do develop professional development plans for the department. As well, YTA has significant funding to support professional development for their individual members and groups.

Mr. Edzerza: On paragraph 87 in the report it says that the department does not have a comprehensive human resource plan to manage current and future human resource needs. Having said that, absent a plan, are you able to explain how staff are recruited?

Ms. Whitley: There has been a heavy emphasis on putting classroom teachers in classrooms and keeping our numbers in our classrooms fairly low. We also know that in the area of special education there is a growing need for staff who have specialized training in areas such as speech and language pathology and in the area of behaviour. That is something that

is not unique in the Yukon. We send our superintendents out every year to recruit and, before they go, we identify areas of special need. Right now, certainly leadership is an area that we have identified as being a significant need in the Yukon. Between 40 and 50 percent of our school administrators will be retiring in the next few years, and so leadership has been a real priority when we are recruiting and, as we have said earlier, we have developed our own program to develop our own people skills in that area.

Mr. Edzerza: I'm going to run the last two questions I have here into one: how does the department allocate teachers by school? What is the percentage of teaching resources whose status of indeterminate and does this have an impact on educational outcomes?

Ms. Whitley: Teachers are allocated on the numbers that are in the collective agreement, as I spoke of just a few minutes ago. That is our level-one staffing. We start with asking our principals for their enrolment projections for the upcoming year. Then there is a funding formula that articulates the beginning numbers for staff in a school. Then the superintendent meets with the principal and, again, looks at their school profile. Operational needs are identified at that time and the staffing that's required is put in, but it has to be within the context of the entire Yukon need.

We try to balance that out very carefully. If principals feel that they do not have enough staffing, they will come back and then that decision is made at a senior management level, where we consider the requests of individual schools within the context of all schools in the Yukon. This is so that the priority needs are always addressed.

Mr. Nordick: Welcome back this afternoon. My questions will focus on long-term facility planning.

Can you tell us more about the methodology that the department uses to determine a school's total capacity?

Ms. Hine: I would like to redirect the question to our facility manager, Mr. deBruyn.

Mr. deBruyn: The capacity of schools is calculated basically by two different methods, one for elementary and one for secondary. Elementary is relatively simple: it's basically just the number of homeroom classrooms that are available in the school multiplied by the number of students allowed under the YTA collective agreement per room. It's just a simple straight calculation.

Secondary school calculation is a little bit more complicated because of the nature of the programs offered there and the fact that students move from classroom to classroom every hour. But the methodology is still similar: it's basically the number of classrooms multiplied by the allowable number of students per classroom, as allowed by the collective agreement. Although we will typically apply more of a factor to the secondary schools, recognizing that it is more difficult to basically fill the school to 100-percent capacity and still operate a workable education system.

Mr. Nordick: Thank you. With regard to long-term facility planning, what is the state of school facilities?

Mr. deBruyn: We have a number of schools that are approaching their maximum lifespan and we're in the process of developing a long-term school replacement scenario that will address those. In the short term, we expect that there will be perhaps one or two schools replaced within the next little while, but most of our schools are in quite good condition right now.

Our expectation is that a large number of the schools will be retired, if you will, within the next, say, 15 to 20 years. Part of this process will involve a school-by-school analysis of where the schools are at right now — which ones will have to be replaced soon and how many can then be done over a short period of time, given the government's budget capabilities.

Mr. Nordick: I have a follow-up question on that. Has the department examined schools and determined capital expenditures needed to expand their lifespan versus closing or building anew? Is there a capital plan?

Mr. deBruyn: That is an area that the Auditor General identified as a shortcoming in our process. The correlation between the condition of schools and the long-term decision on retiring those schools is one that we need to do better work on. Part of that will be addressed in some of your later questions about school audits. That will be a bit later in the program.

Our plan is to improve in that area, working with the property management division of Highways and Public Works to do a better analysis of the condition of the schools. Right now, as I said earlier, we don't have any serious crises in the system right now. We can see, just from the ages of the schools, that we will be having a little bit more of a challenge in that area in the coming years, but right now it is not a serious problem.

As far as what sort of investment will be made in the school to extend the usable life of the school, that is part of our ongoing facilities maintenance effort and we are always trying to extend the life of the schools to the maximum degree possible. Naturally we don't want to replace schools if we don't have to and a number of factors go into the decision to replace schools. It is a very difficult one — factoring in O&M costs, the cost of replacing the school, demographic factors and so forth.

Mr. Nordick: When do you think a long-term facility plan will be prepared?

Mr. deBruyn: We've committed to proceeding with that this spring and completing it by the spring of 2011.

Mr. Nordick: In paragraph 97 of the Auditor General's report, we see that 11 schools are operating below their capacity. How long has the department been aware of this and what is the department doing to address this situation?

Ms. Hine: Part of the secondary program review takes a look at the current facilities, as well — looking at the program needs and trying to develop an aspect of what we want to do and how we can best utilize the facilities that we do have. Again, we need to take a look at the ongoing demographics. We go back to the risk management and look at some of the demographics we need to continue to monitor. Where are the vacancies? How can we better utilize the vacancies and keep the assets that we have?

The department is looking at this to see what kind of an action plan we can move forward to make sure that we are maximizing the schools to their full potential.

Mr. Nordick: With regard to paragraph 104 in the Auditor General's report, what assessments are done and by whom, for schools nearing the end of their estimated lifespan?

Ms. Hine: Obviously, we have staff in the schools at all the times. The school administrator takes one of the key roles and that's the good thing about the way our programs are developed. If school staff, school administrators, see any issues or concerns within their schools that require maintenance, they contact the property management division of Highways and Public Works to let them know. They are always in contact with our facility staff as well. We have ongoing maintenance, as Mr. deBruyn has talked about, the preventive maintenance. We look at the building code, the inspections of the facility, to see how we can actually extend their useful life.

As we all know, buildings — although 40 years is a good time frame to look for an amortization period to look at the economic life, every time you do a repair or major renovation on a building, it actually extends that life. We continue to monitor that.

As Mr. deBruyn said, our school facilities are in good condition, and obviously the safety of our staff and students are one of our top priorities, and making sure that the school facilities are able to deliver the programming that we want to offer within those facilities.

Mr. Nordick: On a follow-up question — in the response to the Auditor General's report, in section 99, it says that the Yukon Department of Education and the property management division work together to coordinate these annual capital maintenance plans. This process encompasses only a two- to three-year planning horizon. That seems a little short. Can you explain why?

Ms. Hine: That is the process that is currently in place. Again, with the recommendations in the Auditor General's report and the emphasis on long-term planning and the need to take a look at that, as I said before, we've agreed on that and we are taking immediate actions to work with Property Management and do long-term planning. We're hoping to change the two- to three-year cycle that we're currently seeing.

Again, there are different phases of it. When you're looking at planning for capital, you're looking for the shorter term because you're looking at what kind of work that needs to be done immediately. Then again, the long-term planning is the next level to see what kind of action we can take in order to extend the life of the building or make sure we're better utilizing it. Our commitment to working with Property Management and our commitment to develop long-term plans will take this into consideration and extend our planning period beyond the three years as is currently the practice.

Mr. Nordick: My final question with regard to long-term facility planning: is the department using a measurable to determine the amount of money it will cost to keep up facilities over the next 10 to 15 years?

Ms. Hine: Again, I think we need to take a look at it. It's difficult to put a measurement tool on that, because there are so many factors we have to take a look at. We have to take a look at the programming, the actual requirement and the facility. Sometimes with a project or a building that is reaching the end of its useful life, we end up putting a little bit of maintenance into it. As I said before, you could do a retrofit and actually extend that useful life. So the actual effort to put a dollar figure or a measurement tool to this is something that is difficult to do, saying it is this or that. We also have to take a look as we move forward in the capital planning process to take into consideration the other capital assets and the priority of the government, as well, and moving it forward through the actual development capital planning process. That helps to determine whether or not we actually do a retrofit versus a replacement and that type of thing. It is hard to do the measurement, but we need to look at our tools and make sure that the buildings meet code for safety and also what needs to be done to extend their useful life.

Mr. Mitchell: Does that conclude your questions, Mr. Nordick?

Mr. Nordick: Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell: Before we move on, I just want to note that, before Mr. Hart starts asking the questions that he has been fortunate to draw, several of us have vacant spare bedrooms that can be put into short-term use if necessary.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I will save that until the end.

First of all, again, welcome back. I will again get into the actual school facilities questions first.

The department's response as described here will be utilizing a phased-in, system-by-system approach and the question we would like to ask is: when does Property Management and the department feel they will be finished with their business process redesign, and when do you feel the department will be able to implement it?

Ms. Hine: The department has committed to develop an audit schedule for periodic assessments of the schools and this will be completed by the fall of 2009. The department has already begun some of its facilities audits, and it will be done on a system-by-system basis. The actual system audits on roofs have already been completed. They were completed by December 2008. We are looking at the structural aspect: structural audits are to be completed 2009-10; energy management audit to be completed by 2010-11; ventilation, heating and electrical to be completed also by 2010-11.

Hon. Mr. Hart: That basically answered my next question that I had on those two particular items. I would assume that includes a seismic risk assessment on those buildings?

Ms. Hine: Yes, that is correct, and that would actually be completed during the structural audit, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2009-10.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The question I would ask is this: is the department following its policy with regard to performance evaluation for the staff, for its compliance with the act, for its

compliance with the labour relations act and the teachers' evaluation policy?

Ms. Hine: As noted in the Auditor General's report, we are not in compliance with the performance evaluation, as determined by the act and the education labour relations act. We have committed to taking immediate steps to make sure that the evaluations are in place.

What we are committing to do is to ensure that administrators will be advised at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year of the teachers who are not current in their evaluation cycles. We will ensure that standard evaluations are completed for teachers or that teachers are participating in professional growth plans and that this will be given priority to probationary evaluation and non-probationary teachers returning to a three-year cycle. So we are going to be looking at the priority aspect. We are asking that this would be completed by June of 2011.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Paragraph 101 of the report notes that the department has developed a draft version of the handbook for the evaluation of school-based teachers, which covers learning and teaching protocol, strengths and weaknesses, efficiencies and effectiveness through teamwork. Is this draft finalized? Is it about to be finalized? Is it finished? How long has it been in the process?

Ms. Hine: I don't have the answer to that question regarding if it has actually been finalized or is still in the draft. I can get back to the committee with a response.

Hon. Mr. Hart: In paragraph 103, it refers to it in the Auditor General's report, but the question we would like to ask is why would teachers be evaluated or participate in the growth plan?

Ms. Whitley: We always want to improve our practice. Just as we are asking for student assessment to be done on an ongoing basis, we also want to give our staff an opportunity to grow and learn. As Ms. Hine mentioned earlier this morning in her opening remarks, education continues to change and so our practices need to continue to change. The focus in education currently is on learning. It's not just on student learning, but also on adult learning, as well. Our staff are viewed as adult learners, as are our administrators and those in the department. So the focus is on learning and evaluation. Certainly, the growth planning process is to support and encourage that learning and ongoing improvement of practice.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Thank you very much for that response and, Mr. Chair, that is the end of my questions.

Mr. Inverarity: I am going to direct some questions to Yukon College at this point in time.

Thank you for coming. Could you tell us what Yukon College's mandate is?

Dr. Weninger: It is outlined in the legislation and it is to provide adult and continuing education opportunities to adults within the territory.

Mr. Inverarity: Do you believe that you are achieving these goals?

Dr. Weninger: Not to the extent that I think we should.

Mr. Inverarity: What currently is the primary focus of Yukon College? We noticed in paragraph 42 that there are three divisions: Professional Studies, Arts and Science and Developmental Studies. I am wondering if you have one focus over another at this point in time.

Dr. Weninger: The Yukon College is, if you want, along the lines of a comprehensive community college that you would find elsewhere, so its mandate in this regard is to provide education right from development education, if you want introductory access programming to trades, technologies and university transfer. So it's what we classify as a comprehensive community college. To have a specific identity in this, we do not. We think that might be one of our marketing weaknesses, that we should be specializing in some area, but we haven't been able to identify that because of the very diverse needs that are facing us.

Mr. Inverarity: I guess one aspect of that — we talked about developmental studies. We notice that about 32 percent of the resources that you have go to the developmental studies and these are essentially — if I understand it — people are going to the college to upgrade their skills, because perhaps they didn't get a GED or graduation or perhaps they're looking to improve their math — things along those lines. You would know better than I do.

Do you feel that figure is higher or lower compared to, say, other colleges similar to yourself?

Dr. Weninger: My previous experience was in central B.C. I'll give an answer and then if I could just describe it a bit, all right? In the previous college — and I sort of anticipated this question, so I did go back into an annual report, and it was 17 percent at the College of New Caledonia.

However — and this is where the qualifier comes in — Yukon College and other colleges have gone away from that strict developmental education approach where it's for academic and upgrading purposes, as you outlined — which is absolutely correct — and it's more access programming and we are getting into essential skills development. This means to the student they would be coming in to the college and they would not just be taking academic upgrading, as it were. They would have it hinged or linked to a career, so that they have better motivation and they would then be able to explore some careers that they are interested in.

For example, you might have someone wanting to explore trades and he or she needs their maths to upgrade. They would not only upgrade their maths but they would also then be linked into an entry-level trades program. We feel that this is a better way of motivating and a better way of linking them together. That's a common practice now across Canada. I think the program is called the essential skills program. It's very difficult now to start comparing just the developmental education components from various institutions. We would almost have to broaden the definition and talk about access programs.

Mr. Inverarity: Just to follow up on that from a thought-process point of view: what percentage do you think are students who are going into the college to get their grade 12 or their graduation — GED, I think you might call it? Do you

have any numbers on those kinds of statistics of that 32 percent?

Dr. Weninger: Sorry, I'm a little anxious. I like to be talking about the college.

No, we don't, and I think that's one of the things mentioned in this report, and I'm sure we'll be exploring that in a few minutes — but the tracking of these kinds of students. I'm going to broaden the concept of tracking developmental education students. We will be creating systems for students who will be in access kinds of programs, rather than just the developmental education programs. So I guess the short answer is that I can't give you a precise answer there.

Mr. Inverarity: This brings up a question that was raised earlier regarding the unique student ID number from K to 12. Are you working with the department to try and integrate your goals to theirs, so that that tracking process can continue?

Dr. Weninger: We have had some conversations on that and I think that is an excellent idea and we were wholeheartedly in support of it. When our registrar comes back from holiday, he will be engaged in that conversation. I have experience with that in the Province of British Columbia because we did implement a personal identification number and while I haven't been able to use it, conceptually and intuitively it is a good idea so that we are able to track the success or lack of success, if you want, of students. It would be very helpful.

Mr. Inverarity: Paragraph 50 of the report identifies a number of needs, but specifically it says that the Department of Education needs to coordinate their efforts with Yukon College. Do you see this as a working committee and has it actually been struck at this point?

Dr. Weninger: We've talked about it; there is membership, but I would have to ask the particular people engaged in that process how far it has progressed. I do know we have had some serious discussions in this regard.

From the college's perspective, it goes back a number of years. If I may, I can remember in the 1970s we were talking about basic training skills development and why we have so many students in that area. This isn't a current problem, as it were. We are moving forward in addressing those shortcomings.

Mr. Inverarity: Paragraphs 53 to 56 talk about performance measurements and trying to establish specific targets. I noticed in the highlights of the annual report that was given here, the Yukon College is a successful institution. In light of the fact that the Auditor General said that you really have no performance indicators, how can you make that statement?

Dr. Weninger: Well, I have about 10 years' experience with accountability. I was chair of the accountability framework for the Province of British Columbia and we were tackling these kinds of problems for the colleges and institutes.

I think where the problem was there and we discussed it — and it's the same problem here — was deciding on what is a performance measure and whether it should be quantifiable or whether it can be anecdotal. I believe that there is a combination of the two that has to be put into an accountability framework. I think that when we look at our graduation rate, when

we look at — I did just bring some papers here and if you want them, I can leave them — but on an annual basis, we do a follow-up survey with all our students. We have about a 50-percent return rate and we call it our Yukon College exit survey. It's done every year. If students say they have met their objective by coming to Yukon College, we feel that's a measure of success and we have a tremendously high rating on that in all the studies that we've done. So on that basis, I feel very secure in saying, yes, we are a successful institution.

Mr. Inverarity: I guess it would be nice to see some of those. We deal with paper and we deal with annual reports and we have to formulate our questions around those issues. Obviously we're not getting that kind of information that we would like to see. Perhaps when you address the issues of the Auditor General, you will perhaps be giving us that kind of information that we need.

Paragraph 56 talks about a strategic plan that came out — well, they didn't really call it a strategic plan, but it was referred to in the response section that on December 12 and 13 you had a meeting and that an action plan was provided. Can you tell us if that is going to be a public document and if you can make it available to us and perhaps give us some insight as to what is in that action plan?

Dr. Weninger: Yes, we can and we would be more than pleased to do so. The whole strategic planning process that we engaged in was initiated about a year and a half ago. It was to replace a strategic plan that took us to 2008. We were a little late off the mark because of various organizational things that we were addressing, but we went through what I consider a very extensive community consultation — internal-external consultation. We developed six strategic directions as outlined in the auditor's report, and we have a document.

It outlines the strategic directions and then goals under each, and then the administration has, over the summer, developed the workplan to address each one of those specific goals. The administrators of the college will be, if you want, evaluated. My evaluation will be based on the progress that we made toward the fulfillment of that workplan in addressing those goals.

It is a public document. I believe it is on our Web site, but not everybody is going to go hunting through our Web site. I know that, but I would be more than pleased to make it available. If the first step in that would be to make it available to this committee, I would be more than pleased to do so, or however broad you think it should be.

Mr. Inverarity: Perhaps you could just give us a few key elements of the strategic plan so we have some idea, and then follow up with giving us the written version at a later date.

Dr. Weninger: Out of the process came six strategic directions, and I can just give you an example: building a community of learners; leading with our strengths and research programs and services; number 3 is working together with all Yukon communities; number 4 is working together with all First Nations; number 5 is building a vibrant and sustainable organization; and number 6 is improving the identity of the college.

That number 6 is a different way of saying that we want to get out in the market and get more students from Yukon into our place, but we feel that we should be improving the identity of the college. Working together with all First Nations is something that we pay particular attention to. We have three goals there.

The goals have been developed and this strategic direction has been developed with consultation with the President's Advisory Committee on First Nations Initiatives, which is representative. It has the educational training officer or equivalent from each one of the First Nations throughout the territory. They meet regularly. We engage them in some very serious discussions about what we should be doing and how we could be doing it. They meet on a regular basis and are monitoring the directions in which we are proceeding.

One of them, of course, is the executive development program that we are working on with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. That is a specific workplan that has to be completed by a certain time, so there are time frames and someone responsible — that kind of thing. Does that give you a bit of a flavour?

Mr. Inverarity: Thank you very much. It gives me an overall view of the key elements that you are talking about. I guess the second part of that is going back to the Auditor General's comments.

Are you setting specific goals? You talk about goals, but are they measurable goals that, when we call you back, you will be able to say this was the key element we are looking at and yes, we met the goals or no, we didn't, and by how much?

Dr. Weninger: The short answer to that is yes. A little bit more elaboration is that I don't think we will be able to get a number associated with each one of those things so that each goal will have a number, a key performance indicator, that would say a 6 or a 7 on scale of 10 and, if it goes up or down, it's good or bad. I've been through that, but we would be able to provide evidence that we are meeting or not meeting what we set out to do.

Mr. Mitchell: The time for this series of questions has sort of elapsed, but I believe we will have an opportunity at the end for people to go back and revisit areas.

Before we move on to Mr. Cathers, who is going to be returning to transitioning from public schools to post-secondary education and questions relating to that, some of these questions from the chair's perspective could be answered either by the department or by Dr. Weninger. I would just ask that if the witnesses would indicate who is going to answer the question, then I can recognize the witness in the interest of clarity for Hansard staff. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: As the chair alluded to, there are a number of areas. My questions will spend a significant amount of time on the issue of the transition between public schools and post-secondary education and on the area of developmental studies.

I believe we're talking about beginning with paragraph 46 here — although some of the questions do refer to different

parts in this general area related to the college and the transition.

First question: are students from outside the Yukon coming to Yukon College for the programs in the college's developmental studies division? If so, do you have a number of what percentage of the total in that area would be from outside?

Dr. Weninger: We don't. I couldn't give you an exact figure, but it would be very minimal because we have very few students from outside the territory. So it follows that we wouldn't have many students who would be in developmental studies. My answer to that would be that, while I can't give you a definitive answer, I think it would be very low.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: What percentage of students are taking developmental studies to upgrade education in order to take other courses — for example, students who are enrolled in developmental studies to take chemistry or algebra, to enter a nursing program or some other area that — I guess to clarify what I'm after is that it would generally be indicative of moving into a specific field that they didn't have the appropriate credits for versus not having the basic high school level skills and upgrading to attain that level.

Dr. Weninger: Again, I wouldn't have specific information on that; however, the vast majority of them are there to upgrade rather than to take specific courses to get into the career programs. The vast majority would be more in the lower level general upgrading kinds of instruction.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: As you indicated, you don't have the number at that point. Is this an area where steps are being taken to try in the future to have statistics on?

Dr. Weninger: Different things rise to the surface as a priority due to different external influences, and this report is one of those external influences that you want to respond to, and we have already contracted with a consultant to write the report to get the information out of our banner system. It's not just a simple matter of pushing a few buttons. We need to know which buttons need to be pushed. The registrar tells me we have the information, or most of the information, within our system, and it's a matter of writing the report so that we can then extract those elements from our database and, from there, we would be able to give the kinds of responses that you would expect from your questions.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: With your past two responses, you have addressed several of my questions. I am assuming that would be the same response for the percentage of students in developmental studies who have not completed high school and in drawing the differentiation between those who have completed but don't have the skills up to the level necessary to meet college entrance requirements or whatever they are upgrading to reach, versus the ones who have not actually completed high school and dropped out somewhere along the road. Is that correct?

Dr. Weninger: That is correct. We are looking for that comprehensive information.

By the way, the consultants, if I might, are contracted to be here in mid-March. While we are assured from the registrar that we have the information, because we haven't extracted

these reports we might have to then, should we say, increase the rigour of the information we are asking from students in order to address some of these rightful areas that we should know.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: When it comes to the number and comparing the 32 percent and number enrolled in developmental studies and the 17-percent number you recited from Caledonia, which of course I recognize is indicative of one college alone and my understanding from the report is that, at this point, there hasn't been comparative analysis — there are no stats really in place to enable you to track that percentage and how it stacks up against a broader pool of colleges.

First of all, if that statement is correct, the difference between this and the specific example you drew, is there anything at this point in time that is available for information or that you expect to become available through the consultant's report to give us some indication, if that 32 percent of students enrolled in developmental studies is indeed high, why that number is so high?

Dr. Weninger: I don't think it would be within the consultant's terms of reference to get to those questions. That is something we would be working with the department to calculate. Quite frankly, it goes back to Mr. Inverarity's question about the role of the college. The role of the college is really to take adults where they are, and take them to where we can provide them with that experience. With that general statement, where they come from is not as important as us being able to provide the programming. However, in looking at it from a total educational, if you will, experience in the Yukon, the work with the public schools branch and the college can maybe address some of those questions. Maybe by getting the numbers, we can then develop the strategies.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Thank you. I think you have mostly addressed the question. Just to elaborate, I guess, my hope would be — and I think this is what you are saying, as well — that the improved information data collection will give the ability over time to compare to some of the other colleges and also assess where the students are coming from.

In looking at this, I would assume that it's fair to draw the conclusion that comparing the 32 percent of Yukon College students in developmental studies with Caledonia's 17-percent number would be — dangerous is perhaps the wrong word — a bit of a rash assumption to conclude that because of that variation in numbers, without considering how many other students a college has, where their students are coming from, what variety of courses are being offered at that college, versus what students from that general area are having to travel to access, I assume it would be an accurate statement to note that it would be — while the number is of interest, at this point it's probably little more than an interesting difference until we have more information.

Dr. Weninger: If I might add, that's absolutely correct. In fact, most statistics of that nature — if they're not considered within the context — can almost be misleading and, quite frankly, can be dangerous if you're drawing the wrong conclusions from them. So you need to have a good contextual

statement there about where these stats come from. That was one of the major, if you want, areas that we focused on when I was working in B.C. as chair of the accountability framework for the province. Every college has a different, if you want, context, and we had to make sure that was included. Otherwise, we were being unfair to the students, and that would hold the same here.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: One further question: with regard to the developmental studies action plan referenced and the response in the Auditor General's report, how far along are you in developing that plan?

Dr. Weninger: There are a number of things that have transpired and are moving forward. We engage in the college in what we call thematic reviews or program reviews. We've gone through the second one now, and the first one identified many, if you want, problems with the developmental studies and how we were delivering developmental studies. We've made some of those corrections, and that's where we're emphasizing the access and central skills programs.

It's almost a moving target kind of thing to be making the comparisons, because the old definition of developmental studies is not going to be there. It will be a broader concept, but that doesn't mean we don't want to capture the data and do the reporting for students who are in that whole area of instruction.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: That concludes my line of questioning. Thank you, Dr. Weninger, and thank you again to all the witnesses.

Mr. Mitchell: It's now the chair's turn, in this second round, but in fact we have not assigned the chair any specific questions.

I would just like to follow up on a couple of things before we go to what I might call the lightning round where members will go back and revisit areas that they think we have not sufficiently drilled into. Since the last two members were questioning Dr. Weninger regarding the college, a couple of things came to mind that I would not mind following up on, recognizing the statements you have made about context and metrics. We have discussed the 32 percent of the students who are categorized as taking developmental studies. Can you give us, either by percentage of resources, dollars or number of teachers out of total faculty, some figures as to what percentage of the college's resources are being used or applied toward the development studies programming, out of the whole?

Dr. Weninger: An assumption can be made that it would be roughly one-third of the college budget that would go there. The instruction in those areas sometimes can be a little less because of the type of instruction. It is a classroom-based instruction; however, I don't have a specific breakdown. I think intuitively and from past experience I would say it would roughly equate.

Mr. Mitchell: I have one brief follow up regarding total resources. We don't get into questions of what the college's budget should be — that is policy — but is the amount of resources that you are putting into developmental studies programming in any way competing with other programs that you are trying to put on or would like to put on?

Dr. Weninger: There is a whole host of demands on the institution, but it is our approach that if they are new demands we try and negotiate those arrangements. The department has been very good in this regard — to find, if you want, new money without displacing students who are in needed programming. The answer would be no, but on the other side of the equation, if I can make this little plea, that still doesn't mean that there aren't a lot of other programs that we could be offering.

Mr. Mitchell: At this point, I would like to ask one question of the department and then I would like to go back to that additional time for the other members. Then I will reserve a couple of questions for myself at the end of that.

There are some very specific questions that I get asked very frequently as an MLA. As much as I would like to ask the specific question, I am not going to. I will try to ask a broader question that applies. Even with the stated overcapacities in the Whitehorse area elementary schools, which indicate that we have unused capacity at least in terms of physical classroom space in various locations and high demand elsewhere, are there any overall guidelines that the department is using regarding distance that they consider to be acceptable to bus students to more distant neighbourhoods, versus looking at increasing capacity in neighbourhoods that currently don't have any more capacity? I mean the higher level and not specific to any neighbourhood.

Ms. Hine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The answer to your question is yes. We always take a look at the whole picture in terms of what we are going to be able to do. When you have schools that are exceeding their capacity, we try to come up with a solution that is cost-effective and least disruptive on the programming and services, on the staff and, of course, on the students.

As a matter of fact, it was just — I believe it was in the spring that we actually made some changes to our attendance areas in recognition of the expansion of some of the new areas that are currently being developed. That is one area that we continue to take a look at and are committed to continue to take a look at. Again, as mentioned in the Auditor General's report, we have to take a look at our facilities and how we can best utilize those facilities. Having said that, we also know that it becomes very much a need also for public support so that when we do make the decision for busing outside of the attendance area or trying to utilize our facilities to the maximum, that we have the support of the public, of the parents, in order to help us facilitate that.

Mr. Mitchell: I think, although there are other questions I would ask, they are more wide-ranging and I would return in the same order that we've been and suggest that if each of the members of the Public Accounts Committee, starting again with Mr. Edzerza, wants to take a look at asking two or three follow-up questions in areas — it doesn't necessarily have to be the area that they were randomly assigned, but things that we have covered today — then we have some 10 minutes per to get through this.

Mr. Edzerza: I do have a few questions I'd like to ask. Continuing on with the college, who determines what trades are available or offered at the college? Does the college have consultation with the public at large to determine what trades are going to be offered?

Dr. Weninger: Those decisions are made in consultation with and working through the advanced education branch.

Mr. Edzerza: Thank you for that response. The other question I'd like to follow up on is about paragraph 36, page 11 of the audit report, where it states that the department produces an annual kindergarten screening profile report for younger students. The purpose of the screening profile is to identify students who may have problems with literacy or numeracy in grade 1. The 2006-07 kindergarten screening profile report stated that 34 percent of students in Yukon fell into an at-risk category.

I wanted to ask a question around that because that appears to be very high. Does the department know what portion of that percentage could be potential FASD/FAE clients, and what does the department do with these at-risk children?

Ms. Whitley: Once again, if the parents have requested a diagnosis from the Child Development Centre, we would be able to access that information. As I said earlier, the Child Development Centre would do transition with us to identify those seriously at-risk students that they have been working with throughout the territory. When students come into kindergarten, depending on the nature of the programming needs, an individual education program might then be planned for the child.

We also have early-intervention strategies such as reading recovery. We have a very well-trained group of professionals at the department in the areas of speech and language — our psychologists and our occupational therapists, hearing, et cetera — and, should those children need specific supports, those people would be called in to provide specific programming in those areas of need.

Mr. Edzerza: My final question is one that probably has a very simple answer. If one or more First Nations drew down education, what impact would it have on the education system in the Yukon Territory?

Ms. Hine: It definitely would have an impact because the number of students in the public school system would be reduced. However, the self-government agreements also say that there wouldn't be a net loss as well, so the Yukon government would still have to provide a public education system that is equivalent or equal to what is being delivered today. So we could see the possibility of a decreased number in enrolments of students, but again, there is an obligation under the self-government agreements that says we would still keep the public education system equivalent to the one that we are delivering today.

Mr. Nordick: I would like to say thanks to the witnesses. I have no further questions at this time.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I'll try to resolve myself here. Reading recovery and Wilson Reading programs have been in the schools for some time now. Has the department been monitor-

ing the results of those programs? Are they providing those results back to the teachers who are providing that program?

Ms. Whitley: Reading recovery has been in the system since the 1990s. There is an annual report on the results coming out of reading recovery that is given back to the department and to the schools. Those results are tracked and compared with our YAT scores. Wilson Reading is a program that hasn't been in the system for such an extensive period of time. It is one strategy for intervention. We are monitoring it and looking at it in comparison to other strategies that are in place or could be in place.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Thank you. Those are all my questions.

Mr. Inverarity: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of things. I have two or three questions on the absenteeism that I didn't get to finish earlier on, so I would like to initially return there. We were discussing children under 12 who have been sort of told to go home for the week on suspension or whatever the term might be. The answer you gave was adequate in terms of how you're looking at dealing with it.

My question initially here is: do such enforced absences form part of the absentee rate? In other words, if you suspend somebody, are they considered absent from a statistical point of view, or from however you calculate absentees?

Ms. Whitley: I don't believe so.

Mr. Inverarity: You don't believe so?

Ms. Whitley: No, I would have to check into that, but I know from being a principal, we didn't calculate those children as being absent, because they are still given a program.

Mr. Inverarity: So I understand the difference, right? One is perhaps a disciplinary issue and one is that they're just not there. But it does then mean that there are more individuals who are missing class for some reason other than that. I'm wondering what kind of impact that has on the delivery of the programs to those individuals and, just to wrap it up, in the evaluation of the teachers themselves. You know, if you're going to suspend somebody for something, there are usually two sides to the equation, and I'm just wondering if that is taken into consideration at the same time?

Ms. Whitley: In terms of suspension, it would be a principal that would make the suspension call.

In regard to evaluation of teachers, when a principal would be evaluating a teacher and being in their classroom, what they would be reviewing would be their classroom management strategies. If a teacher has good classroom management strategies, that would be reflected in the evaluation. Student behaviour can be related to classroom management strategies. Whether or not the child is handled appropriately in the classroom would possibly be monitored by the principal through evaluation. So that's where the two would link up.

Mr. Inverarity: The first part of that was the delivery program to those individuals who perhaps are on an individual learning plan. If they're being suspended, is there some consideration — how do you deal with that loss of time for those types of individuals?

Ms. Whitley: The ideal is that when the student is out of school, the intention is to provide an academic program that would be monitored and marked. Then when they come back to school, there would be a re-entry process to reintegrate those students into the program. I'm hoping so.

Mr. Inverarity: I guess I just have a couple of other areas.

You made reference to having no set student/teacher ratio, because you feel that you need to meet the needs of the individual students and you are not going to peg it into an overall student/teacher ratio. But you seem to have difficulty in demonstrating, through the reporting functions, that you are meeting those goals of the individual students. I am wondering how you rationalize the fact that you don't really know what you need for teachers, from a student/teacher ratio, compared to the fact that you are saying that you now are going to throw the teachers at the problem — basically that's how I am hearing it. Yet, you still don't know — from a statistical point of view or from an overall point of view — what your overall goal is in that area.

Ms. Hine: I think, to be clear on the process, as Ms. Whitley has explained, we actually talk to the administrator. The administrator actually looks at the projection of what they think their student enrolment is going to be for the next coming year. They take a look at the program needs within their school and they take a look at the students that they have who are on IEPs.

So there is information in the school that is helping to formulate what the staffing allocations require for those schools. So we are not just throwing the problem to the teacher and we are not just throwing teachers into a school. There is a process in place.

We are doing a review of the special needs program, as well, as mentioned earlier, which will help to take a look at IEPs and the whole aspect of how they are being delivered and whether the actual program is meeting the need, and whether it needs to be revised. As we say, education evolves; the way and methods of learning, how abilities evolve, and we need to continue to monitor our programs and our systems to make sure we are up to current practice. It does not mean our system is broken. It just means that education evolves and we need to be responsive. In terms of some of the programs that we are doing and some of the reviews and evaluations, it's just timely to do that.

As I said, we don't actually sit there and say well, the ideal pupil/teacher ratio is 11 or 12, because, again, there is so much that we have to take into consideration. We do need to make sure that we are providing for the needs of the students and that we are doing it in a fiscally responsible manner.

Mr. Inverarity: My final questions will revolve around something a little bit more subjective.

You are a mother, from what you have indicated here earlier, and my question is: do you believe in your heart that Yukon students are leaving your care with the education foundation that will carry them through the rest of their life?

Ms. Hine: I think the education system has been developed to the point that we can provide as much support as necessary for the success of the student. As we mentioned before, there are a number of different outside factors that also come into play. We can only do so much within the education system. We have those students for only so many hours a day, and I know that we have the professional staff members who are doing 120 percent of making a difference for those students. It's not just achieving the actual test results or being able to write a test. It's much more than that.

I think you just need to walk around the street and see Yukoners and see the youth and realize that we have an education system that is not only meeting that, but exceeding it. And I think it's one we should be proud of. I certainly am, as a parent of a student in the education system.

Mr. Inverarity: I appreciate that answer, and I know it came from your heart.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Cathers, do you have some follow-up questions?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I have one question that may require some follow-up to it, depending on the response. My question deals with an area that actually isn't really addressed in the report. There was a significant mention or certainly reference to the challenges posed by learning disabilities, special needs and behaviour problems.

An area that I do not believe there was any mention of in the report, and which certainly has an impact — and I would preface by noting your statement about reminding everyone that the education system has children for a very limited portion of the day — the questions that I'm asking I personally believe to be primarily a parental responsibility, but there is interaction with the education system, particularly when there are problems with that occurring. The question is about poor nutrition and lack of exercise.

As we all know, there is a lot of information from outside the territory on the detrimental effect that poor nutrition and lack of exercise have on the ability to learn. My question is: what information do we have in the Yukon context about the linkage between that and those who are not hitting their performance targets, whether it be through standardized tests or some other means or, alternatively, linkage between those who have poor nutrition and lack of exercise issues and may be on individual education plans? Is this something for which data has been compiled? If not, are there plans to do some work in analyzing that correlation in a Yukon context?

Ms. Whitley: I am not certain if there is data — not in the Department of Education. In the Department of Education, we work fairly closely with the Department of Health and Social Services. I know there have been discussions related to the issues of nutrition and health. We have a health curriculum that our teachers teach in conjunction with physical education.

It's an area that, of course, Canada is looking at nationwide. There are all kinds of issues related to it, such as diabetes and so on. There are lots of conversations going on with regard to health. In terms of specific students with health issues, certainly a classroom teacher, a principal or school-based team

would be addressing that directly with a parent, should it be interfering with learning. As Ms. Hine commented earlier, many of our schools have nutrition programs, again, in partnerships with other organizations in the territory. We have parent councils that do nutritious lunches and so on. It is certainly something that is being addressed in our schools. I am not sure whether or not we have statistics. We can find that out for you.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I thank you for that response. I would leave it then more as a comment and encouragement that this be analyzed. I know that it is an area from the health side, as you noted, and that there is a significant amount of information on the effect on other areas within life and long-term health, whether it's diabetes and so on. Certainly I believe everyone here is aware that there is information from other jurisdictions where studies have been done demonstrating the significant impact that even taking a short exercise break can have, versus students in a control group who did not have any exercise. In nutrition, of course, much of the premise of the food for learning programs and other approaches is the effect not only on health, but also on learning when children may be going to school hungry.

I would leave that more as a comment and a suggestion that I think that, as work is being done — so it should — in addressing learning disabilities and addressing issues such as special needs, whether it be physical or mental and behaviour problems, the fact that we have the report coming out — and I'm not intending to be critical of the Auditor General's staff in mentioning it — but as a result of this report, that it is not even mentioned, it is an issue that I think should be given some consideration in determining: (a) what effect it's having; and (b) what the best solutions are, in addition to what's being done; and (c) analyzing the data of actually correlating those links between simple lack of nutrition and lack of exercise.

With that, that concludes my comments. Thank you all for your comments and your answers this afternoon and this morning.

Mr. Mitchell: I believe Dr. Weninger would like to comment on that.

Dr. Weninger: This is just an added bit of gratuitous information, but there is the Arctic Health Research Network, with Dr. Jody Butler-Walker and Norma Kassi, and they have some very interesting sort of studies going on. As the research entity at the college expands, we will be able to get that kind of question on their agenda and be able to disseminate the information a lot faster than we have in the past.

So there is some work being done and it's hopeful that with what we are trying at the college, we'll be able to get that information out faster and also get questions on to those agendas that will be researched.

Mr. Mitchell: Did you want to comment?

I guess it's my turn. I really have just one question. It's partially a comment and partially a question regarding paragraph 31 and then a couple regarding the conclusions.

Paragraph 31 goes back to this issue of graduation rates, and we have had some discussion about it. I have to say that, for some years, I have been among those who have felt that the

methodology used in reporting graduation rates in Yukon has been misleading, as the Auditor General described it, in that if you are starting with those students who have made it to grade 12 and have the potential to graduate and have taken the course work to that point, you have already got a pretty select sample.

I want to commend the officials who are here today for having previously recognized that. I noted when we received the annual report in the Legislative Assembly that you were revisiting that. However, I just want to note — and I think you actually touched on it, Ms. Whitley, with one of your responses — that even with the two different methods, the Statistics Canada method versus the method that had been used in Yukon, we're still measuring something starting from a particular point.

I would hope that the department — I've known a lot of educators in my time and have been friends with a lot of them at all levels for quite a few years. I know the dedication that those people have, whether classroom educators, department officials, or anybody having to do with education. They have a passion for it. In my mind, we need to work toward a goal where, when a child enters school approximately at the age of five, we maximize the potential, so that the child will eventually — to the best of his or her capacity — be able to complete school and have the tools to move forward, be successful in life and reach their full potential.

Now, I would hope that whatever methodology is adopted focuses on all children, not simply those who enter in grade 9, versus grade 12 — that overall view. When I got this report, like many people, I was fairly shocked to see that the Auditor General was using numbers that they derived from the department's own information. It provided these rates that only 58 percent of Yukon students as a whole and only 40 percent of First Nation students in the Yukon are in fact graduating.

Regardless of how this compares with the territories or the provinces, I don't think any of us, yourselves included, would consider this to be acceptable. So if you have a comment to make on how you plan on moving forward to improve successful outcomes, I would be interested in hearing that.

Ms. Hine: I guess for the record I say, "ditto". I couldn't say it better. Our ongoing commitment, as I said earlier, is the initiatives that we are working on with our partners in education, whether it is New Horizons, the implementation of the education reform project or, most recently, the secondary program review, which is actually talking about what we want to see in education. We look at the secondary program review. But again we have to look at what, if we are going to develop this, is coming in at the start — the actual review of a student information system, so that we can actually start putting in the numbers so we can track lifelong learning and so that we are getting the complete picture of our students and our graduation. Again, if we can achieve the fact that each student matches and meets — we keep saying we want to look at student success, but when you look at it, each student has their own personal success. That is what we want to do and that is what we want to focus on.

So it's difficult for us to answer some questions like what is the ideal pupil/teacher ratio or what is the ideal expenditure per student. When you look at the success of each student — and we look at each student as an individual learner — putting benchmarks and putting in that magic number is not that simple. Again, we are working with our partners. We are asking for feedback and we are asking for direction. One of the easiest things for us to do would be to sit in isolation in the Department of Education and write this out. That is not the road that we have taken. The more feedback and the more dialogue we receive on education and what it means for Yukon, the better it's going to be.

I thank you for the comments about what we should be looking at — whether it's nutrition, exercise, or the aspect of course choices — what's happening in the school system, what's happening in the early years and what's happening in the adult education system are what we need to be looking at and need ongoing support.

Mr. Mitchell: Did you have a comment, Ms. Whitley?

Ms. Whitley: May I add to it?

Mr. Mitchell: Absolutely.

Ms. Whitley: I mentioned earlier that one of the things that's coming out of the indicators we are using is that there is more of an emphasis on a need for more support in the area of social and emotional development. We have been working with Justice and Health and a number of NGOs earlier in the spring of 2007 or 2008.

We had a meeting with our First Nation Education Advisory Committee and our school administrators, looking at transitions. It's in transitions where we lose kids. That's where kids are most vulnerable. Those transitions can be the transition from home to school, from grade 3 to grade 4, from elementary to high school. We certainly know from our data that grade 9 to grade 10 is a big transition — also from rural to urban. One of the conversations that we've been starting is in the area of resiliency and looking at resiliency factors in those transitions.

It's a national dialogue and I think that when we look at graduation rates and when we look at testing, one of the things we must not forget is just the dimension of care. We've got an incredible staff, as you've pointed out, who care deeply. We do have increasing numbers of students who need increasing amounts of care in a variety of areas and that conversation on resiliency I think is going to be a really important one as we move into the future.

Mr. Mitchell: Finally, I would like to just for a moment, before I give my closing statement, touch upon a couple of the conclusions in this report, the first one being paragraph 109 where it said, "The Yukon Department of Education could not demonstrate to us that it effectively delivers public school programs to Yukon children."

Like many Yukoners, when I read that I was taken aback, but in further discussions within our committee, with the Auditor General and with the rest of the audit team, I want to clarify something that has become apparent. The issue from an audit perspective is that the Yukon Department of Education could not demonstrate that it effectively delivered public school pro-

grams to Yukon children. It doesn't mean that it isn't effectively delivering public school programs in many, many cases, if not all, to Yukon children, but rather that there wasn't information that allowed measurable, quantitative analyses to take place.

I want to say that I know that department officials, educators at all levels, may have been taken aback by this report, but I don't think it was meant as criticism of the job that people are doing, but rather of the difficulty from an audit perspective of making a determination based on the information available.

On behalf of the committee, I would encourage the department to follow up with all of the promises and commitments that we have heard here today and received in writing, so that when we revisit this — I certainly expect we will and that we will come back with requests to perhaps appear again as a follow-up, which I will touch on in my closing statement — we have the information we need.

Ms. Hine, I want to say that you are sitting in the seat where I normally sit in this Assembly. I think that it's very important to note that today, all the members of the Public Accounts Committee — the Standing Committee on Public Accounts — are sitting on the same side in the Assembly. I think that there is some important symbolism there. I think that every one of us as public servants and, in most cases, as parents, care a great deal about this issue and have a great deal of respect for those who commit their lives to educate our children.

I am going to take the liberty of saying that, although on most days we sit on opposite sides of this Assembly, I think everyone here wants to act to make sure that you have the resources you need to educate our children. I encourage you to work with the government of the day, obviously, to be certain that you get the resources you need. All of us will be supportive of that. Our role here today was to try and make some determination if the resources that have been made available are being most effectively used.

Before I adjourn this meeting, I would like to make a few remarks on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. First of all, I would like to thank all the witnesses who appeared before the Public Accounts Committee today. I would also like to thank the committee's advisors from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and the committee clerk for their help.

The purpose of the Public Accounts Committee is to help ensure accountability for the use of public funds. I believe that the committee made progress toward accomplishing that task today. The committee's report on these hearings will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly, and we invite those who appeared before the committee and other Yukoners to read the report and communicate to the committee their reaction to it.

I would also like to again add that today's hearing does not necessarily signal the end of the committee's consideration of the issues raised in the Auditor General's report. The committee may follow up with the department on the implementation of the commitments made in response to the recommendations of the Auditor General and of the committee itself. This could include a follow-up public hearing at some point in the future.

In addition, I would like to note that there are two additional reports in this current performance-reporting cycle that were noted earlier in the day by the Deputy Auditor General. We are in the third one, but we have a report next year that is being worked on for the Yukon Housing Corporation and, the year after, for the Department of Health. It is my understanding that, following that, the Auditor General will be looking at going back over all the reports that have been done and producing follow-up reports to see what the results of these audits have been and what the success of the implementation of the recommendations has been. I can assure you that this committee will also be interested in doing that.

With that, I would again thank all those who participated in and helped to organize this hearing. I now declare this hearing adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 3:12 p.m.