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—
Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (0900)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good morning to everyone. Welcome to the 24th meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

We have three representatives today from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. We welcome back Christine Cram, the assistant deputy minister under the rubric of education and social development programs and partnerships. We also welcome Kathleen Keenan, director general of the education branch, and also Céline Laverdière, director for policy and intergovernmental relations.

Members, this is a continuation of our consideration, you will recall, from Tuesday's meeting, at which we heard from the First Nations Education Council. We'll continue with that consideration this morning and begin with ten-minute presentations, and then go to questions from members.

Madam Cram.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Cram (Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships Sector, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and committee members. I am pleased to be here today and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss the important issue of first nations education.

Education is the key to personal success and Canada's continued prosperity in today's knowledge-based economy. For this reason, there is growing recognition of the need to overcome the achievement gaps that persist between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in Canada.

[English]

Minister Strahl sees improving aboriginal education outcomes as a top priority and is putting particular emphasis on improving education for first nations, in partnership with the provinces and first nations communities.

The good news is that we are seeing a great deal of interest across Canada in improving the educational outcomes of first nations students and a growing debate about how best to achieve this goal. Increasingly, research notes the importance of family and community factors on student outcomes. One recent study concludes that between 40% and 50% of a school's impact on student achievement

can be attributed to factors beyond the school's control. The persistence of poverty, poor housing, unemployment, single parenthood, and poor health are commonly reported challenges in some first nations communities, and we mustn't overlook these factors in efforts to improve first nations education.

Nevertheless, some stakeholders have singled out inadequate federal funding as the primary reason for an achievement gap between first nations students on reserve and non-aboriginal students. This argument stems from the view that greater investments in education lead to improved school quality.

While funding is a key issue, identifying appropriate levels is a highly debated issue. In fact, research does not consistently conclude that higher levels of investment lead to improved student outcomes.

I would like to provide some context on how INAC supports first nations education on reserve. Commencing in the 1970s, the responsibility for the delivery of elementary and secondary education services to first nations learners on reserve was devolved to individual first nations, reducing the federal role to that of a funder. The exception to this is the seven federal schools that the Government of Canada continues to run at the request of the respective first nations communities.

In 2008-09, INAC invested approximately \$1.3 billion to support the elementary and secondary education for approximately 120,000 first nations students living on reserve. Approximately 40% of these students attend provincial schools off reserve, for which first nations pay tuition, generally to the school board that the students are attending.

INAC provides each community with funding for instructional services. Traditionally these amounts were based on a funding formula comprised of a range of factors. This formula was called the band-operated funding formula. However, with first nations assuming control over the delivery of education on reserve, INAC allows greater first nations flexibility to establish and meet local education priorities and needs. All first nations receive a base per student funding amount, which is then supplemented to reflect the local realities such as school size, remoteness, and socio-economic conditions. This methodology varies from region to region.

In addition to hiring teachers, first nations have the ability to use the funding provided under the instructional services stream to purchase new classroom equipment, including computers, textbooks, school supplies, computer software, or library books. They can hire library and other resource persons, invest in new physical education equipment, and develop in-class course work around language and culture. The flexibility is there for first nations to manage the design and delivery of education programs and services within their communities.

In addition to instructional services, funding is provided for student services and transportation, as well as targeted initiatives such as special education services, cultural education centres, teacher recruitment and retention, parental and community engagement, youth employment, and connectivity services.

When you move beyond the debate about whether and how strong the relationship is between investments and outcomes, what becomes evident is the need for any investment in education to be supported by a sound performance measurement system.

● (0905)

[Translation]

Many first nations schools lack the tools to undertake the activities which are well advanced in most provincial systems. Implementation of province-wide standardized tests, school success plans and performance measurement systems can be used to improve student achievement over time.

[English]

When used effectively, these activities equip educators with the information needed to make strategic adjustments to the curriculum, teacher training, and allocation of other resources to respond to student need. In a Canadian report that describes 10 successful aboriginal school case studies, the largest gains in aboriginal education were found in provinces that use assessment programs for schools and student improvement planning.

To this end, since 2006 the Government of Canada has engaged with first nations through the Assembly of First Nations and regional first nations organizations to undertake a series of key reforms in first nations education. Two new education programs were launched in December 2008 to set the foundation for long-term improvement in first nations education. These programs are supported by an investment, set out in Budget 2008, of \$268 million over five years and ongoing funding of \$75 million in each subsequent year.

The first nations student success program will help schools develop success plans, conduct student assessments, and put in place performance management systems to assess and report on school and student progress. The three key priority areas are literacy, numeracy, and student retention. The education partnerships program has been put in place to develop and enhance tripartite education partnerships with first nations and provinces. Partnerships will support better collaboration among first nations schools, organizations, and provincial education systems. The premise behind the new program is that while the relationship among federal, provincial, territorial, and first nations roles and responsibilities for first nations education is complex, all agree that the partners need to work together to improve student educational outcomes.

● (0910)

[Translation]

A great deal of work needs to be done in first nations education, and INAC is actively engaged with first nations on an agenda of reform. Every year the department undertakes and funds a significant amount of consultation and policy work with the Assembly of First Nations. Last year the Assembly of First Nations provided two reports on school-based performance indicators and on data management.

[English]

The First Nations Education Council is another key partner that we regularly work with.

I note that the committee earlier this week reviewed the report that INAC contributed to in 2005. INAC has funded the First Nations Education Council, or FNEC, to undertake, amongst other work, analysis of funding questions. INAC and FNEC jointly funded the research that contributed to the 2005 tuition fees committee final report entitled *Analysis of Educational Costs and Tuition Fees: Pre-School, Elementary School and High School Levels*.

Recently the INAC Quebec region provided FNEC with \$50,000, which FNEC used to undertake a second phase of the education cost drivers study intended to design a funding formula for education that included all 21 cost drivers identified in the 2005 report. I believe you have seen both of these reports.

We are looking forward to working with the First Nations Education Council on implementing the two new programs that we launched this past year. The council's proposals to the first nations student success program and the education partnerships program were approved subject to revisions. Provided they meet the conditions outlined in their letter of decision, the first round of proposals will invest approximately \$2.8 million in First Nations Education Council activities.

[Translation]

I would like to acknowledge the extensive work that FNEC undertook in analyzing a very complex issue in their 2005 and 2009 report. Their efforts are certainly welcome given the limited scope of research on this issue in Canada.

[English]

It bears noting that the current context has changed since the 2005 report was released, when the council based its analysis on 2001-02 data. The department has since made significant investments in first nations education.

Taking up-to-date data, the Government of Canada invests \$1.3 billion every year in various elementary and secondary programs for 120,000 first nations students across Canada. This equates to about \$10,800 per student. Using the latest year for which data is available on provincial and territorial expenditures, 2005-06, provincial and territorial expenditures for elementary and secondary school systems averaged \$9,700 nationally, ranging from a high of \$18,500 per student in Yukon to a low of \$7,600 in Prince Edward Island. The Province of Quebec expenditure for that year was \$9,100 per student.

However, making direct comparisons between INAC's funding and provincial funding levels is difficult, as each level of government accounts for educational funding in different ways. There are also significant variances in per-student spending among provinces, as you can see by those average numbers, and even greater variation between urban, rural, and remote communities within individual provinces.

We have embarked on a phased approach to improving first nations educational outcomes. Initial steps to improve outcomes are in place with the launch of the two new programs in December 2008.

In addition, we are reviewing current programs around first nations education with the view that subsequent phases of reform would focus on programs that target supports where they are most needed.

• (0915)

[Translation]

We look forward to continuing our important relationship with the First Nations Education Council and other first nations organizations and communities to work together to improve education outcomes for all.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue with your committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Russell, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. It's good to see you again, Ms. Cram, Ms. Keenan, and Ms. Laverdière.

I want to come back to a point you raised in your presentation about higher levels of investment. You said that "in fact research does not consistently conclude that higher levels of investment lead to improved student outcomes". But can there be any doubt that if you have a population that's exponentially growing and the funding is capped, there's going to be a gap in the amount of funding that's required? I'm not saying funding by itself. I think most reports would conclude that funding by itself may not be the only indicator or the one that certainly leads to higher educational attainment. But isn't

there some admittance within the department itself that there is a lack of funding for first nations schools?

It also ties into your comment on page 6, "The flexibility is there for first nations to manage the design and delivery of education programs and services within their communities".

If there's a lack of funding, I think it inhibits the flexibility first nations would have just at the first level of services, in terms of infrastructure and delivery of programs, and then at the second and third levels of services that many people have talked about.

But is there no admittance within the department that the 2% cap has to go and that there must be an increase in funding, along with other types of reforms?

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you, Mr. Russell. You're right. In my comments I was really referring to the fact that funding alone won't make the improvements. What we're interested in doing is achieving improved results. Everybody's interested in that.

This committee has considered the 2% cap before. I think even most recently, when the minister was here on the main estimates, there was discussion of the 2% cap. The 2% cap is a challenge the department faces.

I mentioned about phase two. We're hoping that the work we can do, working with first nations in terms of building a business case for what is required for education, will succeed in obtaining more resources. That's part of why we got resources in Budget 2008. We will continue those efforts in our phase two work to obtain resources.

It's challenging, as I mentioned. There's the issue of provincial comparability, but then there's also the question of what it would take to get comparable results. I think I also mentioned the fact that there isn't consensus about what would result in those improvements.

Mr. Todd Russell: It seems to me there's some sense within the department that the 2% cap is challenging and problematic. You're making the case for more resources based on maybe some consultative work and things of that nature. Now in terms of the two new programs you announced, they're competitive programs, are they not? They're proposal driven. They don't apply in a broad way to each first nation. They have to compete on a proposal-driven basis.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan (Director General, Education Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): It's true that they are proposal driven, but that's not so much to foster competition as it is to engage with those who are ready to move to a different way of doing education. They're meant to drive towards results. There are a number of conditions first nations communities take on when they enter into the proposal-based process. It is seen very much as foundational.

• (0920)

Mr. Todd Russell: How many proposals have you received? And how much money has actually gone out the door?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: There were two programs, and a total of 60 proposals were submitted. All proponents have been advised of the results of the decisions that were made by a national selection committee. Virtually all of them have required revisions. Work is under way now with the proponents to revise them, particularly around definitions and detail in the budget components. They're linked between the budget and what they're undertaking to do, because there's a fair bit of variability in what different communities could undertake. Those discussions are going on now. We've asked all those proponents who can to revise their proposals by June 23. We would undertake to have the funding agreements in place. If some feel that they don't have enough time to make the kinds of revisions the selection committee asked for, they are eligible to come back in round two. The call letters for that will go out in September, with a deadline....

Mr. Todd Russell: Has any money actually gone out from these particular programs?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: The money hasn't gone out yet because the revisions have to be made. Then funding agreements will be put in place.

Mr. Todd Russell: It's a three-year program, though, isn't it?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: No, it's ongoing.

Mr. Todd Russell: It's ongoing?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: It's ongoing.

Mr. Todd Russell: Okay.

There's been a big discussion around this table, and particularly with the last witnesses we had, about the fact that they don't have enough resources to put in place libraries, library supports, and things of that nature. How do you reconcile the fact that the department says and the government says that they can do that, and groups such as FNEC and first nations come before us and say they just don't have the money to do it? How do you reconcile those two particular positions, if I might put it that way?

Ms. Christine Cram: I'll speak to how it actually works, and then Céline is going to talk about how it specifically works in Quebec.

You're right, Mr. Russell, in the sense that as part of the funding first nations receive, libraries are an eligible expense. The operations of libraries are an eligible expense. It's then up to first nations to decide what the priorities are. They make the decisions as to whether they will devote resources to that versus other activities.

Maybe I can just turn to Madame Laverdière to speak about Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière (Director, Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): If I may, I will respond in French.

As far as the Quebec region is concerned, first nations, as Ms. Cram said, decide what their priorities are. Our program guidelines allow first nations to use the money to buy supplies for libraries or to hire librarians. We are aware that first nations often use money from elsewhere to put together a library within their school or community. But this is a priority which is established by first nations themselves.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, that's about it, Mr. Russell. You're just about right on time. You're slightly over. This is a good time to remind members, and in fact our witnesses as well, that our time limits are for both questions and answers. So in light of keeping our members' questions in queue and giving them the time they need, good, short, concise answers are terrific.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemay, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you for being here.

I will follow up on the issues raised by Mr. Russell. Can the money you send to the communities, be it Kitigan Zibi, Maniwaki, Pikogan, which is near Amos, or the Timiskaming First Nation, be spent at the discretion of the community? These communities receive an overall amount which they spend on administering the school, teachers' salaries, the library, diving courses and so on.

Is that correct?

• (0925)

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: I would like to briefly explain that there are two types of contracts, or funding agreements, with our first nations: the one-year comprehensive funding arrangement and the five-year funding arrangement.

Mr. Marc Lemay: For education?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: They apply to all the programs of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Other departments are even sometimes included in the five-year funding arrangements.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Let's just talk about education.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Well then, education...

Mr. Marc Lemay: It's so complicated.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Yes, that's true. You are right in saying that it is complicated.

In fact, last year, approximately \$117 million, which represents the regional education budget, was allocated to first nations.

Mr. Marc Lemay: When you refer to the regional budget, are you talking about the Quebec region?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Yes, I am talking about the Quebec region.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Fine.

So that's \$117 million for the approximately 60 communities in Quebec.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: No, that does not include the Cree and Inuit. It's only for first nations. It excludes « convention nations ».

Mr. Marc Lemay: We are talking about the Attikamek, the Algonquins, and others. So the amount is \$118 million?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Yes, nearly \$118 million. In fact, it is \$117.4 million.

Mr. Marc Lemay: They manage that amount.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Marc Lemay: How can you make sure that the money is indeed spent on education?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Various compliance audits are carried out, such as our assessment of the schools. The financial statements are audited each year and account for the money that is spent under the various programs that receive funding.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In your opinion, since you have experience, is the money well and truly spent on education?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: I dare hope so. In fact, I am basically convinced that it is. Beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Mr. Marc Lemay: If my community grows by 3.2% each year, as is the case of many communities, at a certain point I won't have enough funding.

Let's look at the department's figures. The amount of 2%, cumulative since 1996 — the year in which the threshold was established — represents a funding shortfall of \$1.5 billion since 1996. So for Quebec alone, that represents \$233 million.

How can the communities cope?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Some communities have their own sources of revenue, such as royalties from Hydro Quebec, which they receive when major work affecting the community is carried out.

I would be lying if I said that all of Quebec first nations receive such royalties.

Mr. Marc Lemay: You're right about that!

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: A few years ago, the Quebec regional office launched a small initiative, which was possible because of our regional flexibility, to help some small schools. So we invested some additional money in eight small schools in Quebec to help them as much as we could.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I think you will agree with me that the funding formula of 1996 is not valid anymore. At the very least, it should be changed.

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes.

We recognize that if we want to obtain better results, two things have to happen: likely, more investments, but also different kinds of programs. What does that mean? How are they going to be funded? Is the best way to do this through a formula? I don't know. We have to study these things.

● (0930)

Mr. Marc Lemay: Ms. Cram, there is something I don't understand, and I have a problem with it. We were told something yesterday or the day before yesterday. This always happens at the last minute. Communities do not know what programs will be at their disposal this year, that is, 2009-2010.

Is that actually possible?

Ms. Christine Cram: The only thing they don't know about are those two new programs.

As Ms. Keenan explained, we have just sent out the letters. As for the rest, discussions are underway.

Communities that have signed a five-year funding arrangement know exactly what amounts are involved. As for the communities that signed a comprehensive one-year funding arrangement, discussions began well before the beginning of the current fiscal year with regard to the amounts they will receive.

However, all education programs have been extended; they will simply be administered differently. There is a basic funding for basic programs, what we call core funding and programs, and the contributions are made to achieve specific objectives.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I will be brief. There is one thing I would like to understand. You live in Quebec, but we cannot speak for the others. In Quebec, a great deal of work must be done in the area of vocational training. Aboriginal communities want to carry out the whole infrastructure program in their community, and so on. You know what I mean.

Will this program be funded? Will they be receiving additional funds, or will they come from their current budget?

Ms. Christine Cram: I think there are two points here. Quebec has a type of vocational training at the high school level. That is one thing, and it represents a challenge for us. I will ask Céline to explain that.

For training other than that offered at high school, there are other federal government programs,

[*English*]

HRSDC programs that are directed to training and skills development.

[*Translation*]

I'm going to ask Ms. Laverdière to add...

The Chair: The answer must be very brief.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: I will be brief.

With respect to access to vocational training for young aboriginals, there is no funding problem for those between age 4 and 21. These young people may take a vocational training program outside the community, if there is not one offered within the community. The challenge is to develop vocational training possibilities within the communities. But access to these programs is available for people in the 4 to 21 age group.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I just want to understand the last thing that was said. What is meant by the 4 to 21 group?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, for clarification.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: We're talking about the age group—between 4 and 21.

The Chair: Do you understand?

Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

[*English*]

Now we'll go to Madam Crowder for seven minutes.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks for coming before the committee.

I have a comment before I get to my question. In your presentation, you were saying that investment alone will not lead to increased quality of education. However, the department and the minister have admitted that a 2% cap has been in place since 1996, and the Auditor General, in her 2004 report, identified that there was at least an 11% population growth. If we presume that in 1996 there was a level playing field between federally controlled and provincially controlled investment, and we know there wasn't, it goes beyond all imagination that we wouldn't call for additional investment, given that increasing gap between 2% and the population growth.

That's simply a comment.

My question, and probably no surprise, has to do with libraries. My understanding of what you have presented to the committee is that the money that comes before first nations...they have flexibility in terms of funding other services, but my understanding of the 2003 national program guidelines is that libraries were not specifically included. They include things like salaries for staff, support for culture and language, professional development and so on, but these expenditures do not include school library services, library books, equipment or materials.

I'm having trouble understanding. There's a difference between what I'm hearing you say and what I understand from the guidelines. Are libraries specifically included in those guidelines, and if they are, what amount is allocated per student?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: For any of the elements there is not any specific allocation per student. It's a global fund that's available for instructional services, and the first nation community attributes the funds to whatever priorities they have.

Under education, there's funding made available for the books and CDs and so on that might be used in a library, but the construction of the library would be under a different program.

• (0935)

Ms. Jean Crowder: We understand that. That's a capital fund, and I won't even get into the underfunding in the capital fund for now. My understanding of what you're saying, then, is that there's no specific allocation for libraries.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: There's no specific allocation for any element.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But I want to focus on libraries. There's no specific allocation for libraries, and the amount of funding that a first nation gets is supposed to cover technology, libraries, counselling support, sports and recreation, all of those things.

I know everybody says there's not comparable funding, but in British Columbia, and I'm sure it's the same in Quebec, when you look at the funding bands get for education, if you do the gross division of students into that amount of funding, it is not close to what provinces are getting, or what the bands themselves have to pay to the provinces.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: From the data we've seen so far, that varies widely across the country, and it varies within each region.

Ms. Jean Crowder: In my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, the amount the band has to pay to the provincial school is not the amount they get under their memorandum of understanding.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: We'll look at that community, but what we have seen is that it varies widely across the country, and in some regions there are many first nations that are receiving more than they're paying for their provincial tuition.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Could you provide us with a list of those first nations that get more than they're paying for provincial tuition? I think the committee would be interested in seeing how many first nations out of the 633 are getting more than they're paying for their provincial tuition.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: We have that work under way now. That's part of where we need to get to when we look at what's already on the table.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I've been in band schools versus provincial schools, and the difference is shocking—it's shocking! I was in one school where the condition of the building was so bad that they had a girder holding up the wall. I would argue that any engineer who went in to look at that school would say that it was unsafe. The gym floor had mould.

I want to come back to page 12 where you talked about \$1.3 billion and 120,000 first nations students, which you say equates to \$10,833 per student. On page 15 of the paper on first nations education funding, they do the same math, except they take out the amount that goes to INAC headquarters for administration costs, the amount that goes to provincial and private schools for tuition costs, and then some of the other administration costs. If you subtract all of those amounts out of the \$1.3 billion, what's the cost per student that the band actually gets?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: It would depend—

Ms. Jean Crowder: On average. You've done an averaging formula on page 12. Since you've done this math, I want to know, on average, once you subtract all of those other costs, what the actual amount per student is.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: We'll come back to you on that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I know we've been talking about Quebec, but this is happening all over Canada. The department admitted that there was underfunding happening in British Columbia, and they instituted an interim band-operating funding formula that directed an additional \$9 million to British Columbia, because of the problems. However, the Province of B.C. subsequently increased the funding of public schools by approximately 26.8%, which resulted in renewed large gaps in funding—this was in 2005—and the first nations schools continued to receive approximately 17% less than public schools on average, taken across the different regions. The numbers that we're hearing are from every province. Surely all first nations can't be incorrect in saying that they're getting less than the provincial funding formula.

Ms. Christine Cram: That's what we talked about after phase two, and we are already working with AFN and other organizations such as FNEC on the comparability issue. We're not denying there isn't a real challenge in comparability, but a lot of work needs to be done to figure out, first, what would be comparable, and, second, how you would maintain it in the future. Nathan Matthew has been working very conscientiously and hard on this matter for some time.

● (0940)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thirty years, I think. That was when he did the first paper on control of Indian education.

The Chair: We're out of time now. Did you want to finish up on that?

Ms. Christine Cram: No, I think that's okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Crowder.

Now we'll go to the last question of this first round. That will be from Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): It's last, but not least.

The Chair: Well, I didn't say that exactly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: In any case, please proceed. You have seven minutes.

Mr. John Duncan: Thank you.

I'm going to try to move away from money for a minute and talk about achievements. You made a reference, Christine, on page 8 of your English document that "the largest gains in Aboriginal education were found in provinces that use assessment programs for school and student improvement planning". And that sentence references a study.

I guess my question is whether that study included all of the provinces and territories. If so, which provinces came out looking much better than others?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: What the study did was look at success stories across the country. So they weren't comparing one province with another; they were looking for best practices and what actually would make a difference. What they were trying to do was to identify what actually helped in educational outcomes. And they were looking at provincial schools, in particular, and how the aboriginal students within the provincial schools did better.

Mr. John Duncan: Was there a relationship between having accreditation and not having it? In other words, were better results associated with accreditation, for example?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: The study looked at particular success stories in provincial schools, not first nations schools.

Mr. John Duncan: So you were looking at aboriginal education contained within the public school system.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: That's right.

Mr. John Duncan: Okay.

We seem to be focused considerably on Quebec education, because of the presentation on Tuesday. I want to know if my numbers are correct, and maybe Céline can offer some clarification.

The FNEC numbers were based on the year 2001-02, I believe. And I believe at that time the non-James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement first nations school population was just over 9,000. In 2007-08, that population was just over 9,100. So there was a net change of 100 students. Would that be a correct assumption?

[Translation]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: That is in the figures.

[English]

Mr. John Duncan: What is the reason we see so little growth in that school-age population in the province of Quebec?

[Translation]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: It is difficult for me to answer this question about the birth rate. I'm sorry.

[English]

Mr. John Duncan: It does tend to defy the demographics in the rest of the statistics.

Ms. Christine Cram: Maybe, Mr. Duncan, I could just add to that.

The way the student population was probably calculated was by using the nominal roll system, in which case the number of students actually attending school are counted on a particular date, and then there are some subsequent follow-ups to see if that's changed. Usually, it takes place in October of each year, I believe.

So one of the issues could be non-attendance.

● (0945)

Mr. John Duncan: I have seen comparisons of per capita or per student funding for first nations students within band-operated schools in Quebec versus the first nation student body under the James Bay Agreement. Those comparisons are quite stark, in that per capita spending on the James Bay agreement students was approximately double that for normal first nations students.

Is that a normal phenomenon? Is it related to the fact that they're under the James Bay Agreement, or is it really related to the fact that these are smaller, isolated communities? Or maybe it's a combination.

[Translation]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: These agreements were negotiated in James Bay. It is therefore rather difficult to compare first nations schools. Since the budget rules are comparable to those in place for the Government of Quebec, it is difficult to explain the difference, but it has to do mainly with the negotiation of these agreements.

[English]

Mr. John Duncan: Am I reading the statistics correctly to say that INAC's elementary and secondary school funding in 2001-02, the overall number, was \$1.029 billion, and currently it is \$1.3 billion?

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. John Duncan: So this is significantly more than what would be indicated by a 2% cap in terms of incremental change.

Ms. Christine Cram: The 2% is on the basic services. Since that time, we have also introduced new programming. That is over and above the 2%. About five different programs, I think, have been introduced since then: high-cost special education and teacher retention, just to name two. Those all added incremental dollars. Then, in addition to that, there was what I already mentioned about Budget 2008. That's over and above the 2% by which the total INAC basic services pot has expanded.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the second round of five-minute questions, starting with Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There is no doubt that it must be difficult to work with limited resources.

All I'm trying to get at in terms of my line of questioning is that if there are going to be additional resources, there has to be an admission within the department itself, when briefings are being prepared for the minister or you're looking at memoranda to cabinet, somewhere along this line, that more resources are required.

My understanding is that you have limited resources, so you're trying to do more with it or you're trying to change it a little bit or adapt it. You add on a little bit here and there, such as these two new programs, and hopefully this will yield some type of result. I understand some of the challenges you're faced with, but when it comes to resources and we talk about libraries or sports facilities or additional resources for technology and things like that, I'm under the assumption that if you as an individual or I only had enough money to build four walls and put up a few partitions, we ain't gonna build on a gazebo. I think that's the sort of challenge people are faced with in these communities with the limited resources they have.

I want to go to a couple of other issues. First, the finance minister has identified that INAC is one of those departments under review, an asset review, for the selling off of government assets. He names INAC as one of the four departments. Has your directorate done any review? What could those assets possibly be?

• (0950)

Ms. Christine Cram: Mr. Chairman, I'm not aware of any assets that are being contemplated in such a review. As this committee is probably aware, INAC doesn't actually own assets, meaning infrastructure. In first nations communities, those assets are owned by those first nations.

Mr. Todd Russell: No. I'm just saying that this is what the finance minister has identified. INAC is one of the four departments that he has identified.

Secondly, where are we with regard to post-secondary education? As I understand it, there's a consultation process being undertaken. There is some talk about restructuring the program, redesigning the program. This has caused a lot of angst in a lot of first nations communities that currently deliver post-secondary education. They don't believe there are enough resources, but in many cases they find it fairly successful in terms of those that do get the funding.

Could you give us an update on that?

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you for that question. I think you asked that question when we were here for main estimates as well.

There are two things that we have under way. One is that we received an audit on post-secondary education, and we've developed a management action plan to address that. The second is the review that was announced in Budget 2008.

We have spent a lot of time looking at internal information, as well as at other expert information, and now we are reaching out to the Assembly of First Nations and other regional first nations organizations to discuss how we should launch an engagement process with them to discuss both implementation of the audit action plan and what improvements—

Mr. Todd Russell: Is engagement the same as consultation?

Ms. Christine Cram: I use the word "engagement" because, as you may be aware, many first nations challenge the use of consultation and say they don't wish a certain discussion or whatever to be considered a consultation because of confusion with the actual duty to consult. I use "engagement" as meaning I don't know whether we'll start with information sharing, and then we'll get into some discussions, but I don't want to put the first nations into the position of being in agreement that that is defined as a consultation.

Mr. Todd Russell: Okay.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Mr. Todd Russell: I'm good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

Now we'll go to Mr. Rickford for five minutes.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I want to make just one brief comment. I appreciate that you used the words "foundational piece" in focusing on performance. I think that's going to help all of us identify where resources ought to go when we talk about working with the authorities and the first nations in establishing priorities moving forward.

I know that in the Kenora riding, one of the things that we continue to try to do is to look at how students leaving high school on reserves, particularly on the isolated ones, can come out with degrees of equivalency that allow them to avoid having to do a lot of the pre-courses that are often required to get into substantive degrees. I think that's a really important benefit moving forward.

The good news, of course, on the education front is that, while I appreciate Madam Crowder's comments earlier that there are schools in need of serious repair, I've seen a number in my own extensive travels that would suggest that there are some really great new schools in communities across Canada.

Furthermore, since 2006 we have seriously renovated or replaced more than 90 schools, and in the last eight months we have announced the construction of 10 brand-new schools. One of them may very well have been the one that my colleague was referring to. This is addressing an issue that goes back, of course, a couple of decades.

My question, then—and considerations for resources may be a part of this—Christine, is whether you can tell us a little bit more about what other factors affect the delivery of education services to first nations. In particular, could you comment on the isolated communities—I have 25 communities in my riding not accessible by road—and identify some of the differences between first nations education and provincial education models?

I think I'll just start with that.

●(0955)

Ms. Christine Cram: Okay. I'm going to ask my colleague, Mrs. Keenan, to respond.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: One of the most important factors in school success has to do with the nature of the community in which that school is located. It's not just the status of the family; it's the socio-economic status of the census metropolitan area in which the school is located.

Those challenges are common to first nations schools as they are to provincial communities. The challenges that first nations schools face, particularly in remote communities and fly-in communities, are ones that are very similar to what the non-aboriginal population would face there, too.

The remoteness factor, the question of recruiting teachers to come to communities that aren't necessarily ones they all aspire to work in, the ability to actually offer the kinds of courses that allow them to go on to post-secondary with the numbers of students in the higher grades—the same differences exist between the city of Ottawa and 50 miles outside of Ottawa.

Mr. Greg Rickford: But I think we are talking about degrees here, it's pretty safe to say.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: Yes.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I spent eight years of my life living in isolated communities, some of the most remote in Canada. While it's safe to say there are comparisons, there are clearly degrees of this comparison, I think, relative to today's conversation.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: Very much so. It's a question that's particularly difficult for first nations schools, but it's also a question for provincial governments and provincial ministries of education to struggle with. How do you make a curriculum that's relevant? How do you take account of the particular skill sets that are more appropriate to remote and isolated communities than to a large urban area?

Mr. Greg Rickford: I'm a big proponent, obviously, of the kinds of education programs or health and social programs that can occur before school and can arm students with the kind of education that can get them into some great programs. We're seeing some great results. More first nations students are becoming doctors. The Northern Ontario School of Medicine just graduated six first nations physicians. We're very pleased with that.

If the Government of Canada funding were taking into account... across other departments, other sources—and I'm thinking of the aboriginal head start program, our commitments to maternal-child health, early childhood development—how would these funding gaps that are being advanced in some of our discussion change that?

Can you comment at all? Does it look different if we look more comprehensively at what the departments are doing?

Ms. Christine Cram: That would change the numbers, but we absolutely agree with you that we think investments in early childhood education would be extremely beneficial. The research shows that every dollar you invest in early childhood is going to have the biggest payoff in terms of remaining school success.

I guess one of the challenges in the federal government is that there are a number of different programs that have been established for a number of different purposes. What we would like to see—and that's us and what we've been looking at doing—is having it more closely linked with the schools. Now people come at early childhood from different perspectives. For some it's from a health perspective. Some of it's from, really, an employment perspective of the parents. We think there are some advantages to looking at how you could look at all those different programs and perhaps have them more closely linked to supporting improved education.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I think that's a great idea. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Lévesque, you have five minutes.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For once, we can say: “Good morning, ladies”; usually, we say: “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen”.

On pages 12 and 13, you give averages for ordinary schools in the provinces and territories. That seems to be your basis for determining the approximate cost per student for the first nations. In your calculations, do you take into account the fact that in the case of first nations, at least two languages are taught from the start, which is not true of the other provinces? In Ontario, the language is English; in Quebec, it is French. In these provinces, only one language is taught. There is also the isolation of these communities compared to cities. Because of municipal taxes, the cities develop recreational activities and sports within the school system.

I believe it is the role of first nations schools to offer recreational and sports activities that are a part of the school system. Do you think the method used in determining an average for the first nations compared to the average for a province or a territory is appropriate?

●(1000)

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you for your question, Mr. Lévesque.

No. We are providing this information just as an illustration. Averages cannot be used to calculate exactly what is required. The provinces have different formulas, and they include different things. In British Columbia, for example, the province includes an amount for languages. However, this varies from province to province. So we should not take into account just the average, but rather look at the data for a school board that is very close by, because this will take into account the geographic location, the isolation of the community and its socio-economic situation. These figures are provided only as an illustration, as a broad outline. However, to calculate exactly what is required, I think we have to look at each school board.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: In my region, I am surrounded by several communities, which I go and visit. I realize the tremendous difference between first nations schools and schools in cities. The first nations do not even have enough money to pay the teachers, who generally come from provincial and territorial school boards, and are asked to go and teach in first nations schools. The same conditions cannot apply. In addition, the first nations have to hire another teacher to complement the program given in their language and culture. There is a flagrant shortage in this area.

Have you gotten to that point in your consultations with the first nations designed to correct the system? To what extent does the 2% prevent you from taking action?

Ms. Christine Cram: We are having discussions with the first nations at the moment, both nationally and regionally. In British Columbia, for example, they have some ideas as to a fair formula or their financial requirements. It is not necessarily the same type of formula as the one put forward by Quebec.

The first nations want something that works in their province. So we really have to look at the situation province by province, because comparisons must be made with the province, but also within the province and with school boards as well.

The 2% provides more money every year for the department. However, as we discussed, we also have other programs. At the moment, we are working on what we call phase 2 to see what we can do in the area of education. One of the questions we are working on is a comparison with the other provinces.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque. Unfortunately, your time is up.

Mr. Payne, for five minutes.

• (1005)

[English]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses for appearing this morning and for the information that you've provided in your report.

I want to refer back to Mr. Duncan, where he talked about the studies on page 8. You also referred on page 8 to some research work that was done. Is that the same study or the same research work that is referred to on page 4? On page 4, the first paragraph in English says that "research does not consistently conclude that higher levels of investment lead to improved student outcomes".

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: No. These would be international assessments that have been done.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

That kind of leads into the next question I have. Could you expand upon that research? Who did the research, when was it done, and what were the results that were shown from that?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: There are a number of studies that have been done internationally that look at improving student outcomes. Generally, it's how the money is to be used that is critical. It's not simply more money. Internationally, what we've seen to be particularly significant is investment in the quality and calibre of teachers and in early and critical investment in students who are falling behind. So it's particularly around literacy and numeracy.

That's very much reflected in the new program design. Those are based on the kind of analysis that's been done to date internationally and what educators and researchers have seen to make the most difference in student outcomes. The whole emphasis on performance measurement is an international trend, but it's very much reflective of that kind of research.

Mr. LaVar Payne: You say this was an international study.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: Not one, many.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Involving numerous countries, I presume.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: Groups of countries, and also individual countries when they've looked at the kinds of things that have made a difference. We'll see that coming out of the United States, with the increased emphasis on the new president's focus on education. It's going to be very much about results, investing in teachers and investing in early remediation of students.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Were any kinds of financial numbers shown to be different from one case to another?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: The research I've looked at didn't attribute amounts per student, which, in an international context, wouldn't make a lot of sense. But in terms of reinvestment, those were seen as definitely the priority areas.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay. Thank you.

Also, in terms of education and renovations to schools or new schools for first nations, do you have the numbers since 2006?

Ms. Christine Cram: Are you looking nationally or for Quebec?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Nationally, but if you have Quebec too, that's fine.

Ms. Christine Cram: For Quebec...and your year was since 2006.

[Translation]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Between 2004 and 2009, the capital expenditures for education amounted to \$24,562,000 for the 22 communities in Quebec.

[English]

Ms. Christine Cram: I'm sorry, I can't locate the Canada ones, but I can certainly get the committee those numbers.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay. I would appreciate that.

The Chair: Do you have some more questions?

I'll pass it to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Duncan: It's not directly related to your comments, but in 2006 the FNEC and the AFN for Quebec and Labrador signed an MOU with INAC, with the minister of the day, to receive \$150,000 to implement the memorandum of understanding and \$365,000 for a study of the feasibility of creating a first nations post-secondary institute. Can you give us an update on developments?

• (1010)

[Translation]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: The memorandum of understanding was signed during the First Nations Socioeconomic Forum, which was held in Mashteuiatsh in October 2006. There were two objectives: to work together on a study to establish a second-level system, and subsequently, to look at the whole issue of jurisdiction.

Some work was done and submitted to the assistant deputy minister, Ms. Cram, by the First Nations Education Council.

Work was also done with respect to the department's commitment to the FNEC regarding a building. I know that the First Nations Education Council has had many discussions with institutions. We are waiting to hear where the First Nations Education Council would like this institution to be located. I know that two or three weeks ago, Ms. Bastien, the Executive Director of the First Nations Education Council, wrote to my director general of the Quebec regional office to schedule a meeting on this matter. The date of the meeting will be determined within the next few days.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Laverdière, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Payne.

Ms. Crowder, you have five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

It appears the minister is going to be making some announcements today about funding, and he's talking about a new approach in that the government is not prepared to waste time on unproductive and unsuccessful processes.

I apologize for having to read this off the BlackBerry, because it's emerging news, but the government is intent on rolling out pilot projects in education and so on. He's talking about partnerships with provincial governments and first nations. He says what he's not prepared to do is have a system where each schoolhouse has its own school board. It's not practical and the results are no good. He goes on to talk about various other initiatives.

You talked about the two new education programs that were being launched in December, and I wonder if in assessing those programs you looked at what could be potentially unproductive and unsuccessful, if you have any criteria to define unproductive and unsuccessful?

Ms. Christine Cram: That wasn't the approach we took in designing those two programs. As Ms. Keenan said, we looked at international as well as domestic research and designed two new

programs for what we thought would result in improved student outcomes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: If this is the approach the department is now taking, the current level of funding won't be affected, but any new initiatives will not go to so-called unproductive and unsuccessful initiatives. So if we have schools that are struggling, in part because of consistent underfunding, and they're deemed unproductive and unsuccessful, how will they ever achieve comparable standards when they're not eligible for additional funding?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: The new programs do not look at the school's success. Rather, they look at the plans for improvement. It's very much based on student success plans, setting targets. How these school authorities try to make a difference to the targets is up to them.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I would assume that if student outcomes are not what one would expect, they would be deemed as unproductive and unsuccessful.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: I don't interpret it that way. If a proponent just asks for money, without a plan, it might not be seen as productive.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I can't imagine anybody just asking for money. There's generally an understanding that there's a contractual obligation under which people must demonstrate outcomes and all of those kinds of things. But it seems from this announcement that any new stream of funds coming on has to be for something new and better and different. That's the essence of what the minister has said.

You haven't received that direction?

Ms. Kathleen Keenan: No.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay. I want to go on to another question.

With regard to this tuition fees committee report, I'm looking at the executive summary and analysis of education costs and tuition fees. It says that comparisons were made with different provincial school commissions having similar characteristics to the sample communities, and these indicated that the communities would receive an average of between 25% and 63% more total funding depending on the school commission in the community.

This was a joint report, was it not?

Ms. Christine Cram: Sorry, you're referring to the February—

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry, I don't have the date. It says it's a final report, an analysis of educational costs and tuition fees, by the FNEC-DIAND tuition fees committee.

• (1015)

Ms. Christine Cram: We've been working with FNEC on a work plan for moving forward—

Ms. Jean Crowder: But my question is, was this a joint report.

Ms. Christine Cram: It's funded, so we agree on the work plan and on what will be done, and INAC provides the funding.

Ms. Jean Crowder: One of the recommendations was to put into effect short-term alternative solutions. You said this was 2005—that's four years ago. Have any short-term alternative solutions been put in place?

[Translation]

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Not really. It has already been four years. After that plan, a five-year plan was submitted to Ms. Cram last fall, and it contained some very specific measures. Even though a number of activities have not received approval for funding and implementation, this has been done indirectly.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder: May we have a copy of that action plan?

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: Yes, we have a copy.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Can we have a copy as a committee?

The Chair: The answer's been given.

Thank you, Madam Crowder.

Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): My thanks to the witnesses for coming this morning.

We're talking about education in schools. Since 2006, can you give me the approximate number of new schools that have been constructed, together with the refurbishings or renovations that have been done? Do you have that number?

Ms. Christine Cram: Since 2006, 16 new schools have been constructed at a cost of \$165.3 million. In addition, there have been another 37 school building projects such as construction of temporary school facilities and minor or major renovation projects, for a total of \$258.9 million.

Mr. Rob Clarke: All right.

In the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, I believe it states that from the 1990s until 2006, on average—and I keep getting different numbers—between 30 and 50 new schools were built each year. If my math serves me correctly, wouldn't that have been a new school on every reserve in Canada, or pretty close to it, if that was the actual number?

Ms. Christine Cram: There are 462 first nations schools on reserve, I believe.

In terms of the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, we are still in the process of working our way through the numbers and the methodology. One of the challenges the Parliamentary Budget Officer had was that they were using what we call the integrated capital management system, which was a new system that was being implemented. All the data hadn't been migrated from old systems to that system, so some of the facts that the Parliamentary Budget Officer used were not completely up to date.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Okay. Thank you.

So this Parliamentary Budget Officer...it was a draft in which a lot of the numbers had not been confirmed as being correct. Is that correct?

Ms. Christine Cram: Well—

Mr. Rob Clarke: There are inaccuracies in the report.

Ms. Christine Cram: I think Michael Wernick, the deputy, mentioned when he was here at public accounts that we are currently undertaking analysis of the report, and Mr. Wernick would be

writing to the Parliamentary Budget Officer outlining some of the issues we find with that report.

The Chair: Okay. In today's announcement, I believe the minister was announcing economic successes for first nations. Could you elaborate more on what the announcement was about?

Ms. Christine Cram: I'm very sorry, I don't know specifically what that announcement was about today.

The Chair: I think we're actually getting into an area there, Mr. Clarke, that the witnesses really aren't in a position to speak about. But by all means, carry on on the education front and we'll see how we do.

• (1020)

Mr. Rob Clarke: Sure.

Post-secondary education has been raised a number of times. There is currently a review of post-secondary education. Could you tell us why the review is going on now, what the reason is behind this, and what conclusions have been reached?

Ms. Christine Cram: I believe we were before this committee talking about post-secondary education a month or so ago, so we spoke quite a bit about post-secondary education. But when we look at the data on post-secondary education, what we are seeing is a decline in the number of students being assisted, and we think that's an issue. So we wish to find ways of improving post-secondary student participation.

We also had an audit, which came out a couple of months ago, and we've developed an action plan. So we want to work on both things. The audit looked at how the department was managing the program and we want to look at that issue, as well as do a broader review on the program and try to find ways of improving access for students.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Just going back to the issue of schools and building and renovations, what is the life expectancy, on average, of a first nations school?

Ms. Christine Cram: I don't have the number right in my head. The Parliamentary Budget Officer did some research on the issue of what you should estimate to be the longevity of a school and they came up with a number that's a Canada standard: 40 years. I don't know what their average would be. We would have some schools that are definitely older than 40 years and we would have some schools that are younger. I would say, for the most part, that we feel the longevity of infrastructure in first nations communities is less than we would like it to be because it is generally less than what the average is in the rest of Canada. It's an issue we have to address.

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you, Mr. Clarke and Madam Cram.

We'll now go to Mr. Russell, and then I'm going to take one of the government spots for a question as well.

Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

The content is one thing, in terms of the announcement, but, Mr. Chair, I'm just shocked at the language, to a certain extent. It's so patronizing, with stuff like—

The Chair: Are we talking about the—

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes, it has to do with.... As the report from Mrs. Cram states, there are a whole bunch of factors that impact on education, not just funding, but socio-economic conditions, language issues, and poverty. All of these things affect education, and I would suggest attitudes affect education as well.

The government wants to move to a more market-oriented approach. The government is also keen to reform....

You can't impose, I would say, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I would just say—

Mr. Todd Russell: You cannot impose. The time for that is over.

Anyway, let me move on.

The Chair: Mr. Russell, just stand by for a second.

A point of order, Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I'm concerned, Mr. Chair, that we're talking about an announcement that we have not, in fairness, had the content of. Neither are the witnesses here, as you rightly pointed out, in a position to answer that or any of the questions concerning that announcement. So to the extent that the announcement raises issues for this committee to discuss at some other later point, I think doing so would be appropriate, and we could save commentary and speculation on those things until they become relevant at a specific committee meeting. Otherwise, this is just for the cameras, and I don't think that's what we all want to do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Todd Russell: I'm making a general point, and I will move towards a more directed question, I would say.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell: In terms of capital expenditures, how many new schools are on the list for construction, and how many do you have on the list for major or minor repairs? How much in resources, in terms of dollars and cents, is being put towards second- and third-level services, in terms of the education portfolio?

Is that direct enough, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's your time.

Mr. Todd Russell: Will that satisfy the member?

• (1025)

The Chair: It's on your time, so if you're happy....

Ms. Christine Cram: In terms of the first question about how many are on the list, I can certainly mention the ones that relate to Canada's economic action plan. The announcement was \$200 million for 10 new schools and three major renovations. There are, in addition to that, other schools that are on the list in the long-term capital plan, and I believe that long-term capital plan was shared with this committee. But I will get back to you about the ones that are in the plan for this year, in addition to those under Canada's economic action plan.

In terms of your second question, on how much we spend on second- and third-level services, I don't have those numbers. I don't know to what extent we could get the numbers, because we provide blocks that are divided not by level of service but rather by activity.

We could give you what we have, in terms of how we break down education funding.

Mr. Todd Russell: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

I just want to follow up on a couple of issues, in fact, that arose from your earlier comments, on the uptake of the programs for improved performance. You mentioned in your opening remarks that funding isn't in fact the only contributing factor to those better outcomes.

First of all, to what degree would you say there is the uptake, the interest on the part of first nations communities to in fact embrace more of that kind of thinking, in terms of their advancing education outcomes?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: The new programs, really, are catching pace with leaders in improving first nations education outcomes. There have already been a number of communities that have moved forward with the kind of results-based focus that the new programs support. Those programs provide the wherewithal for those schools to enhance what they're doing and also to allow others to follow in their leadership.

The Chair: When you say it's catching on, in terms of percentage, is there a—

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: In terms of the proposals, we had expected that in the first year there would probably be about a quarter of first nations schools that would be covered by proposals. In fact, the number of proposals that came in covered about three-quarters of first nations schools. So it suggests that the degree of interest that's there to actually get on with making results is very high.

The Chair: Okay. Would you say there is any reluctance at all to move to...better pedagogical excellence and investments? It seems to me that part of the answer here is in fact investing in the kinds of things that concentrate on that sort of enhanced performance, as well as funding, and the other things that contribute to those outcomes. In other words, would it be fair to say that we're getting enough investment in those things that are in fact moving performance ahead in good measure?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: The number of proposals that came in would suggest that there's a very high degree of interest in moving there. This is really about changing the ways in which the relationship between the department and first nations educators has functioned, so there is going to be some time required for the complete cultural change. The quality of the proposals varied somewhat. Those who are already first movers tended to be in a better position to make the case for what they wanted to do and how they were going to do that. What it suggests to us is that we need to put in place the kind of support so that others who want to move there are able to get there more quickly than people who started 10 years ago and had time to build towards it.

The Chair: I think you referenced at one point, since 1970, the evolution of greater leadership on the part of first nations communities to take charge of education responsibilities.

In terms of this emerging emphasis on outcomes and student performance, how would you describe how that has evolved? Is it recent? Has it been ongoing? Has this been a long and gradual process, or are we looking at something in the last decade?

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: My historical interpretation of it is that the interest in doing well by students has been there since the beginning. What's different now is what people see as required in order to do well by students.

Thirty years ago, many would have thought that jurisdiction was the answer. I think people now have a more sophisticated approach to it and see that this, in and of itself, may not be sufficient. This isn't just in first nations schools; this is true for all education.

• (1030)

The Chair: Yes, across all education, I would say. Very good.

Thank you very much. That's all I had.

[*Translation*]

Do you have any questions, Mr. Lemay?

Mr. Marc Lemay: Yes, thank you.

I listened intently because this is a matter of great interest to me. I believe, and others share this view, that education is the road to freedom. I would like to understand how specialized education works. Is there a dedicated budget for it? My question is somewhat ambivalent. For one, we know that a number of first nations dip into Quebec's budget to send students to Ontario, for instance. Is this normal? Should not the regional office of the Ontario Ministry of Education be covering these costs? These are Quebec students crossing the border. I would imagine you are aware of the situation. I would like you to explain this to me.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: I will try to do so to the best of my abilities and quickly.

There is indeed a specific budget for special education. As to the budget, a formula is used and funds granted to first nations to meet the specific needs of certain students who encounter genuine problems in their communities.

With respect to first nations students attending provincial schools or schools in other provinces, like for instance Micmacs and Algonquins, the schools that welcome these students, and the first nations they come from, must negotiate tuition fees. In most cases, the first nations are the ones negotiating costs and using the money in their envelope.

Mr. Marc Lemay: That would mean that if they send two or three students to study elsewhere, and their tuition fees amount to between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per year, this amount would be withdrawn from the envelope.

Mrs. Céline Laverdière: It's a bit more complex than that because some first nations have five-year agreements. Agreements are reached with the school boards. Moreover, there is the added dimension of parental choice. In some communities, when parents decide to send their children to study elsewhere, the first nations do not cover the costs. So, the parents must do so. It is really quite complex. There is no simple answer. Each first nation has its own way of doing things.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

Mr. Rickford, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you.

I just want to return to the last question I had asked and give the witnesses an opportunity to expound on it a little bit more, since I think it's so important to understand that there are other sources coming from the Government of Canada that we must take into account when we try to think about or consider how to put students in the best position starting school and obviously then to complete high school.

I'm really involved in maternal child health and early childhood development, because I see these as a great way for starting school off on the right foot and making sure that these are culturally appropriate and relevant programs. In some of the communities that I've worked in prior to being elected, and Pikangikum is a great example, Christine, we did what you were talking about. The core and curriculum training.... I know that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs does a very good job at this, of making sure that people have that kind of training in place so that the maternal-child health and early childhood development programs are strong in their communities and that in K4 and K5, where there are a lot of students, they have teachers' assistants who are adequately trained. Can you talk a little bit more about the importance of that as you consider it in your department?

Finally, I want to encourage you to think more about the need to make sure the departments are talking to each other for this broader platform around education. Obviously, it deals with social and health determinants as well, all important considerations on how to build paradigms for education.

• (1035)

Ms. Christine Cram: Maybe I can start by talking about what the federal government has done to try to coordinate some of those early childhood development programs, and then Kathleen can talk about the future and what our thinking is.

In the federal government there are a number of programs, and you may be aware of this, in different departments. There are some in HRSDC, there are some in INAC, there are some in Health Canada, and there are some in the Public Health Agency of Canada. The challenge is how to get them all to work together in the best way. As you pointed out in the example of Pikangikum, the government has tried to organize itself to make them work together, but actually the success that's occurred is on the ground; communities have found ways to make them all work together, and work together as well with other programming that may be available. In some cases there's provincial programming as well. I think that's where the locus is most effective to try to bring these together.

As I mentioned earlier, because we're coming at it from an education perspective, we want to see it better linked to the education system, whereas Health Canada comes at it from the view that they want it linked with healthy mothers-healthy child—it all goes to the same end—and HRSDC comes at it from more of an employment focus. I think communities, as you mentioned, have been very successful in bringing it together.

Maybe I can just ask Kathleen to speak about where we hope to go.

Mrs. Kathleen Keenan: Much of what we've seen in the research world, and as well what we see in having provincial ministries of education, is increasing emphasis on learning readiness. Much of that has to do with early childhood development. We would think for phase two we would want to look at what opportunities there are to move together, with different departments leading in their particular mandate areas, but doing so in such a way that the clear focus is on bringing whatever resources and programs there are together and looking at whether there are any enhancements required to ensure that when the child gets to the school they're at a level playing field and they don't have two years of language or literacy to catch up before they're actually ready to start grade one.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I think this is the important point that needs to be made.

Christine, I appreciate your insight and commentary on the fact that it is generally the community that puts their children and then students in the best position to understand how all of those things work. Obviously, we're talking about massive departments and the distinctions between employment, education, and health, but at the community level they can, importantly, all come together. A lot of the work that we do in some of the education authorities and health authorities is tying them in and hosting forums and round tables on how to ensure that we're getting the best value. I think the question of resources is highly dependent on our ability at the community level to make sure that those things are all—

The Chair: Would you wrap it up if you can, please?

Mr. Greg Rickford: —brought together and discussed thoroughly in such a way to maximize or optimize the outcome for the children and students.

I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: You are out of time. I don't know that it was really a question at all, but thank you for being here as a witness today. That was very good.

Now we will go to Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I just wanted to correct a couple of pieces of information. First of all, the announcement today that Mr. Rickford had a point of order on is in the public domain, in the *National Post*. It really isn't our problem if the Conservative members don't know that the minister is making an announcement. Also, it's not about economic development. It's talking about agreements with provinces on education, health issues, and the private sector on economic development. I just want to correct that piece of information for the record.

On the second piece of information, I'm not sure if I can correct this. It would be interesting to see what happens when the

Parliamentary Budget Officer and the department get together, because in the PBO's report, they actually say there are 803 school assets in various physical conditions; 726 schools have been reported as permanent structures, whereas 77 have been reported as temporary. Only about 49% of the schools are in good condition. I just wanted to put that on the record.

On the third piece of information, I understood Ms. Cram to say there are differences in formulas across the country, and that the one in B.C. meets B.C.'s needs. I think B.C. would dispute that it meets their needs. I'm referring again back to the First Nations Education Steering Committee. They are talking, again, about the gaps that I have already talked about. They are saying there is approximately 17% less funding, but they also say that in the ongoing negotiations between B.C. and the department, the federal government's latest offer does not reflect the need for comparable funding for first nations schools, nor does it reflect the additional costs that will be associated with the implementation of jurisdiction, such as increased governance and administrative costs.

We are hearing you talk about performance standards. I want to make sure that the committee understands that in the first nations education jurisdiction, in fulfilling the promise, they indicate that school certification and standards have been implemented through the First Nations Schools Association since 2003. Teacher standards and certification were piloted in the fall of 2008; curriculum and exam standards were completed in 2008.

I'm hearing you say that it's all about performance. I'm sure Quebec is in the same boat. I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that it would be good to hear from the First Nations Education Steering Committee, because this is a model that the minister often touts as being a good model. I think it will be important to hear from them, but we have the performance standards in place.

What's the delay in getting the funding to British Columbia?

● (1040)

Ms. Christine Cram: I just want to comment on the PBO report, then I'll make my comments on B.C., and then I'll get to the last one. In terms of the—

Ms. Jean Crowder: I don't want you to comment on the announcement. I was just correcting the record. If I have any time left, I have another question.

Ms. Christine Cram: Okay.

On the PBO report, the number I think I used was 462 schools. The PBO report took any education-related facilities. They took teacherages, machine shops—they took everything.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I did say school assets.

Ms. Christine Cram: School assets...but then they essentially dealt with them as if they were schools. They then went to calculate what the appropriate school square footage or square metres was and things like that. We're saying they needed to look at the actual schools.

Ms. Jean Crowder: That's why I said it would be interesting, once the department and the PBO.... I want to point out that they also used INAC's own figures.

Ms. Christine Cram: That's where I mentioned about using the integrated capital management system.

In terms of my comment on B.C., I wasn't trying to suggest they would be happy with the current formula. I was trying to say they wouldn't necessarily want the same factors to be considered as what FNEC is considering. They will want to line up with their province as opposed to the Province of Quebec.

Sorry, I've forgotten the last question.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I didn't have another question. I was just correcting the record. The announcement was not just about economic development.

On the issue around on-reserve students going to provincial schools and needing to take that out of their educational budget, there will be a discrepancy between what they're funded per student and what they actually have to pay the provincial government. That's accurate, is it not?

Ms. Christine Cram: What the cost is depends on where you are. But they do have to take the money.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I understand that there's a cost, but they have to pay it.

Ms. Christine Cram: They have to pay the money, except in certain circumstances, and I would ask Céline to speak on that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Before you go there, I want to talk about the reverse, too—a provincial student going to a first nations school. I know this was originally brought up in B.C., and I believe it has now been corrected, but for provincial students going to a first nations school, the band got no additional money. It's been corrected in B.C. Has that been corrected across the country?

Ms. Christine Cram: I don't know if it has been corrected across the country. You're absolutely right. There was a reciprocal agreement negotiated in British Columbia whereby the same amount will be paid if a first nations child goes to a provincial school or if a provincial child goes to a first nations school.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Could you clarify that for us? We heard different information. We heard that when the provincial student goes to a first nations school, they get what the first nations get per student and not what the provincial government pays. Could you clarify that for the committee? I know we're out of time.

The Chair: Do you have a brief comment to clarify that, or do you want to get back to us?

Ms. Christine Cram: I would say that in British Columbia they have recently negotiated a reciprocal agreement such that it's exactly the same amount of money.

•(1045)

The Chair: We return now to Mr. Duncan, and then we'll have Mr. Bélanger for the final question.

Go ahead, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Duncan: I'd like to talk about the John Ivison column in the *National Post* this morning. We do know how to read on this side of the table, Jean, so we're well aware that all your comments are based on a John Ivison column. They're not based on the actual announcement. I think it's kind of ridiculous to be basing so much of

your questioning on the *National Post*, but I'm glad you put so much credibility in it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: A point of order. He had quotes from the minister, and that's what I was using. I was using the quotes from the minister.

The Chair: Okay, the point of order is heard.

Carry on, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Duncan: That's enough said on that front.

I do have a confession to make. The confession is that my mother and father were both educators. I grew up in an educators' home. I was imbued with the fact that what obtains good results is a real commitment from the home, of course, but also from the teachers themselves and the school administration.

One of the British Columbia first nations involved in this group of communities that is negotiating with the federal government is in my riding. I went to their school on a "pro-d" day. In British Columbia we have "pro-d" days, or professional development days, when if you go into a public school, chances are you won't find very many teachers, because they're all somewhere else. I was most impressed, because every teacher was there. Every teacher was dedicated to his or her task, and it was obviously a very happy place. There were very productive, progressive things happening. They have embraced that as the lynchpin of making progressive, positive change in their community. It was very refreshing. That's all just a comment.

I am curious. We have very mobile families. In the province of Quebec, they're crossing the border to go to work. They're going into the U.S. We have similar circumstances across the country for work or due to family connections and this kind of thing. Is there an agreement between INAC and the equivalent in the U.S. on education for students who are mobile? Do we have an agreement, for example, with the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools? How does that work? It's a legitimate curiosity I have.

Ms. Christine Cram: To my knowledge, there isn't any agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States. There is one community where children attend schools in three different jurisdictions, and that's Akwesasne. They go to schools in Ontario, Quebec, and the United States. In those cases, it's the children who are physically in the United States who attend the schools there.

I will say that recently we met with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and it's fascinating to see how they administer schools. We want to further pursue with them how they do it. A lot of their schools are what we would call federal schools in that they run them. Teachers are employees of the bureau, and they hold them to certain standards. In fact, if they don't meet those standards, they are very strict in terms of what happens. It's an interesting difference in how they've approached education.

Mr. John Duncan: I guess related to that question is the fact that we have various levels of provincial accreditation within band-run schools across the country. Is there any movement, or direction, or initiatives that generally approach that issue?

•(1050)

Ms. Christine Cram: Part of the funding agreement with the first nation is that the teachers employed in teaching must be accredited by the particular province in which they teach. There is one first nation group organization that's in British Columbia—FNESC—which is going to be working toward developing a certification that would be recognized, but it would still be recognized by the province. That's one of the areas of jurisdiction that they will eventually exercise under their agreement.

Mr. John Duncan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

I now have Mr. Bélanger, but I understand you have a different question to do with committee business. You have a question for the panel as well. Let's proceed with that. We'll hopefully have enough time for your other issue at the end.

Mr. Bélanger.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): I have three comments to make, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Crowder, I listened carefully to your suggestion to call another group from B.-C. to appear. I have a suggestion in the same vein. Perhaps we should go to them, perhaps even to B.C. It would give us an opportunity to visit some schools. Some things were said this morning about what state these schools are in which would be a concern to me if I were a departmental official. I think it will be worthwhile to go and visit a few schools. That would be my first comment.

Second, I sat on another committee that was considering the future of television, as well as a private member's bill which aimed to curb the influence of TV violence on youth. We spoke to everyone except the youth, and it would seem we are doing the same thing here. We're speaking to everyone except the students at the primary, secondary and post-secondary level. In our deliberations we should consider meeting with student groups and student representatives to get the opinions of those directly concerned.

My third comment has to do with post-secondary education. Without wanting to diminish the importance of grade school and high school, post-secondary education is what I am interested in. If I heard the figures correctly, there are over 30,000 potential aboriginal students at the post-secondary level and there are 45 aboriginal institutions which can accommodate 10,000 students. That would mean that over two-thirds of aboriginal students at the post-secondary level will be attending non-aboriginal institutions.

Regardless of how long it takes, I would like the department to inform us of the nature of the agreements. I also would like it to provide us with a list of the agreements that exist between the department and post-secondary institutions, either from the provinces — the provinces for the relevant ministries — or directly from the universities and colleges. I would also like to know how they are funded.

The University of Ottawa is in my riding. Under a previous government I had asked my colleague Andy Scott to help me obtain funding from the Department of Health to set aside six spots for

aboriginal students at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Medicine. It did happen, but I recall that it was difficult to do.

What is the department's position on these types of initiatives? Ms. Cram knows what I am talking about, because I have been corresponding with her and with one of her supervisors. If possible, I would like to obtain a report from the department on the agreements we have signed with institutions or departments in the area of post-secondary education.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you very much for your question. Perhaps I can start by explaining that within the amounts set out for post-secondary education, approximately \$22 million go to a program for post-secondary institutions. It involves a combination of aboriginal and non-aboriginal post-secondary institutions. There are now approximately 65 institutions receiving funding. Funds are not granted for operations nor for the establishment of these organizations, but to help aboriginal students. It is for the creation of specific programs, specific curricula for aboriginal students, and programs to help them pursue post-secondary studies. We did this because there was not a lot of uptake. That is why we believed it was crucial to invest in these types of programs.

Now, there are far more students attending non-aboriginal institutions than aboriginal ones. Institutions now make great efforts to offer programs which suit the needs of aboriginal students, in order to retain them. Kathleen and I have held discussions with post-secondary institutions to see what more they could do to help these students. They have shown great willingness to do the types of things you suggested, for instance to set aside a number of positions for aboriginal students at the faculty of medicine or elsewhere.

•(1055)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. That will have to do it.

Mr. Bélanger, did you have something else?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I have a question.

Part of the distribution we received, dated May 28, from our clerk was two letters, one from the Samson Cree Nation and one from the Montana First Nation. The Montana First Nation letter is not dated, and it's essentially the same text as the one from the Samson Cree Nation, concerning Bill C-5, an act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act.

This letter from the Samson Cree Nation was dated March 23, 2009. So my question is this. When did the clerk receive that letter?

The Chair: That's a good question, and we'll turn it over to the clerk for a response.

Okay. I recall that now. Essentially what happened there is that both letters, in this case, were in fact received on the same day that the committee considered clause-by-clause examination of Bill C-5. In fact, they were not translated into both official languages, so they were sent off to translation and then received back. Once they were received back, they were sent out to members.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So this letter, if I understand correctly, was received by the clerk on the day we were doing the bill.

The Chair: Correct.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It was not distributed.

The Chair: It came in only in English, and our rules of course require that the distribution to committee members be in both languages.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'll end it for now, Mr. Chairman, but it's interesting that the Samson Cree Nation is from Alberta, and they expressed some grave concerns with the bill and support for the amendments that had been presented.

This letter was sent to us on May 28, which is more than a month after it was received. I just want to leave that for now on the record and maybe we'll revisit it someday.

The Chair: I think that's a fair comment, Mr. Bélanger. I would also point out, though, that they essentially echoed the same concerns as were brought before us by the Stoney Nakoda First Nation.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Well, then, could you please explain to me why it would take more than a month to have letters distributed to us that were sent to the clerk?

The Chair: We are finding in fact that in some cases the translation process is taking up to two weeks. Translation has indicated to us that they have considerable volume in front of them, and even in the normal course it has been difficult for us to get documents translated and out to you on a timely basis.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

The Chair: There being no other business, thank you, members.

Thank you, witnesses, for your presentations again today. They were very informative and we had great questions from members.

We'll see you on Tuesday. We'll be hearing from Neil McCrank on the McCrank report regarding northern economic development.

The meeting is adjourned.

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