

## **SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ACT, 2013**

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 30, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act respecting collective bargaining in Ontario's school system

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Further debate.

**Mr. Rob Leone:** I'm pleased to join the debate and offer the PC lead on Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. Mr. Speaker, when I became the critic for education, just more than a month ago, I expected that I would be engaged in the government's education agenda quite readily and speedily as the critic. But what I thought we would be talking about in education are some of the things that are perhaps lacking in our school systems. We have, certainly, some questions related to how our teachers are being hired with regulation 274. We have questions with respect to our test scores and what seems to be happening in our schools today with test scores not performing as well as they might.

We could talk about a number of different things that are problematic in our education system, yet since I've been appointed as the PC critic for education, we've been faced with two particular pieces of legislation. This piece of legislation, which is called the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, deals with the collective bargaining process for teachers and their schools, and school boards and the government. We're also dealing with an Ontario College of Teachers bill which talks about strengthening the process and the regulations by which we entrust the Ontario College of Teachers. These are two pieces of legislation that the government has brought forward in the education field, and I would suggest that contrary to my previously stated objective, which is to help improve our education system here in the province of Ontario, what we're dealing with are really what amount to process bills: a process for collective bargaining and a process for disputing whether we should license certain teachers or not in the Ontario College of Teachers bill that we've started debate on already in this Legislature. Nothing has been said, nothing has been done to talk about some of the ailments in our system.

I'm going to talk a bit about those in a few minutes, but I think that if we are to have an honest conversation about education—and we like to have conversations in this Legislature—we should talk about those matters which are perhaps not all well and good in our education system, and try to address those problems and those concerns.

Ultimately, when we hear about education from our constituents, it's often coming from parents who have certain concerns about what's happening in our schools: whether our schools are safe and nurturing places to foster and nurture a child's natural curiosity to learn, whether parents are happy with what their students are learning. These are the kinds of concerns that are brought to members of this Legislature all the time in their constituency work, yet we're confronted with two pieces of legislation that essentially do not address some of those prevailing concerns. That, by way of introductory remarks, is a criticism I'm going to level at this government.

Let's start getting on with fixing our education system. Let's try to have some legislation in place that will actually improve test scores. Let's do that, and we need to do that sooner rather than later. So I hope that the next time the government introduces an education bill, they're doing so with the lens of trying to fix the problems that are inherent—the problems that exist—in our education system.

I also have to say, by the way of introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, that our PC caucus has done what I think has been a pretty historic move with a programming motion that we had passed in this Legislature to clear the decks, to try to see whether the government does in fact have an economic plan, to see whether those ideas about kick-starting the private sector and the job growth that needs to happen in our private sector are brought forward. This is another example of a piece of legislation that does not address the prevailing jobs crisis, economic crisis and fiscal crisis in the province of Ontario. This is what we hoped the government would do, once we passed that programming motion. We hoped they would say, "Yes, we need to act on the economy."

I guess, Mr. Speaker, we're pinning our hopes that in tomorrow's economic update we're going to have some semblance of an idea that the government is prepared to fix the economy. But we've already heard from the finance minister that he's not tabling any legislation that's going to actually do that. If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, I think we owe it to the people of Ontario to roll up our sleeves and talk about the kinds of laws and policies that will enable job growth in the private sector to happen—that would be a good start—and to actually have a plan in place to balance this province's books when the time indeed does come.

In debating the context of Bill 122, we can't ignore what's transpiring in this Legislature as we speak today: no jobs plan and no education policy that's actually going to address the prevailing problems we face in our education system.

Mr. Speaker, the government likes to talk about its partners in education, and obviously this piece of legislation is designed to make peace with those partners in education. I just want to spend a little bit of time talking about exactly the scope of what is happening in our education system today.

As of 2012-13, the year that just passed, the number of students in Ontario was 2,031,205. That's a lot of students. That's a lot of families who have their children in the education system. I think what I would suggest is that if we are talking about partners in education, we obviously have to be addressing the kinds of concerns our students in the system are facing—2,031,205 as of last year. We also had, at the end of last year, 3,978 elementary schools and 913 secondary schools in the province of Ontario. The government's total investment in education is \$21 billion, and a total capital investment of \$1.4 billion.

Mr. Speaker, the scope of this ministry is very big. It affects moms and dads. It obviously affects the ability of a government to manage the fiscal issues it has incurred. Those fiscal issues have been voiced by many members, particularly in the opposition, who believe we need to do something to fix and avert our fiscal crisis before we have to make some difficult decisions. That's what the members of the PC caucus are very concerned about. We want a well-funded

and well-resourced education system. That's going to be challenged by the lack of fiscal discipline on that side of the House. We're not going to be able to do what we want in education if we continue to spend money we don't have and kick the can further down the road of economic ruin.

We have in our system approximately 115,000 full-time teachers, full-time equivalents. We have 7,326 administrators: principals and vice-principals. We have 4,390 ECEs, or early childhood educators, in our school system. That's a large number of people who are affected by the kinds of policies we are creating in this Legislature. Not only do we have more than 2 million students, our kids, in the system, but we have more than 100,000 people who are directly employed in this sector. So it's a very big issue that we have to face here, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the growing demands of our elementary and secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for overseeing all aspects of Ontario's public education system. Ontario's Education Act sets out the duties and responsibilities of the minister, the school boards, supervisory officers, principals, teachers, parents and students. It's important, as this piece of legislation talks about solidifying the role of the crown or the role of the ministry in the collective bargaining process, to understand exactly what they do.

The ministry is responsible for setting policies and guidelines for school boards; for allocating funding to school boards using a funding formula; for establishing the provincial curriculum; for setting the requirements for graduation, for diplomas and certificates; and for creating lists of approved textbooks and other resources to be used by teachers and by students in the classroom.

In addition to the ministry obviously having a role in our system, they are also the funder of how we pay for the system. More than \$20 billion, as I previously noted, is being spent in our education system today. That number is more than \$8.5 billion more than occurred in 2003, so spending is significantly up in this sector. The question we're going to talk about and explore a little bit more is whether we have in fact received our bang for the buck, whether that increased investment has led to what I think all parents want, which is improving the quality of education for our students and our kids. I think the jury's out on that. I know the government likes to talk about gains in the system, but I'm going to spend some time talking about some of the, maybe, myths about the gains they have currently. It is what it is.

Another aspect of this bill talks about the partners of education being the school boards. The school boards are the people who are entrusted, the employers of our teachers and our administrators and our early childhood educators in all regions of the province of Ontario. They obviously perform a particular task and particular role.

There are 72 school boards in the province of Ontario: 31 English public, 29 English Catholic, four French public and eight French Catholic. There are also several school authorities that oversee schools in hospitals, treatment centres and remote regions of the province. There's a vast array of folks who are involved in education today, not just the students and the teachers, but also from the employer's side on our school boards, that we obviously have to recognize and reconcile when we're having a debate on this particular issue.

In terms of who does what, we talked a bit about what the Ministry of Education does; perhaps it's instructive to talk a little bit about what school boards are responsible for. They're responsible for deciding how to spend the funds they receive from the province for things like hiring teachers and other staff, building and maintaining schools, and purchasing school supplies. School boards are responsible for deciding where new schools should be built, and when and if schools should close. School boards provide programs in schools such as special education, programs for newcomers and French immersion programs that I think a lot of people take advantage of. They're responsible for developing local educational policy. Local educational policy is particularly related to safe schools, to homework guidelines and the like. They're responsible for setting an annual balanced budget for the school board. I know some school boards have complained about their lack of ability, given the resources provided by the government, to actually do that, and particularly when we see governments coming into the collective bargaining process and ignoring what school boards are dealing with, as happened through Bill 115.

Our school boards are also responsible for ensuring schools follow the rules that are set out by the Education Act. Obviously, that is an act of this Legislature. Certainly, the Ministry of Education is very concerned about making sure that the Education Act is followed, and school boards are in many ways the police that make sure that it happens.

Finally—at least finally on this page—school boards are responsible for establishing a school council at each school and a parent involvement committee of the board. I think that this is obviously a very important component of this, particularly when we're talking about partners in education.

The government has instituted a process through Bill 122, the bill that we're debating today, where the government's going to be a party to the negotiations, the school boards are going to be party to the negotiations and the respective teachers' federations are going to be party to the negotiations that we face. Three parties to the negotiation process will be institutionalized should Bill 122 pass this Legislature.

One growing concern that I have is the fact that those very parents, many of whom volunteer their time after completing a day's work, who try to make sure their students and their schools have the kinds of things that parents expect from their schools, have been seemingly shut out of this process and this discussion of being included as partners in this whole discussion about partners in education. I'm concerned about the fact that the very people who are going to be most affected by the kinds of things that are going to be talked about have very little role in the setting of education policy in the province of Ontario. We should be doing more to consult parents, not less. We shouldn't be shutting them out of the process; we should be including them. I think that if we're looking at how we can address the contents of this bill, we might well think about the role of our parents and our students in our education system and including them among the list of who we would consider as partners in the education system.

My water arrived a little late, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping I would have a cup before I started.

We also have trustees. I know that the bill talks about the role of trustee associations in the collective bargaining process, obviously something we need to consider as well. School trustees are officials, elected every four years during municipal elections, who serve on school boards. Their cycle is every four years, and their elections are about to occur next year, which I think is an important marker. Trustees are responsible for setting the school board's overall policy direction and the board's budget, and they represent the interests of the community, parents and students in their area.

I don't know how many members of the Legislature have actually visited their local school board in the course of being the MPP for their area, but I would certainly encourage that to happen, because there are interesting things that are brought up at those meetings that, in the absence of actually attending, you probably wouldn't know about. I learned a lot. I think it has been about half a year since I've been to one of our school boards in a school board meeting where—

Interjections.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** I'm having trouble hearing your own member. If you would like a little trio talk, go outside and do it, please.

Continue.

**Mr. Rob Leone:** Would it help, Mr. Speaker, if I spoke a little louder?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** You might want to talk to your friends.

**Mr. Rob Leone:** Okay.

As I mentioned, trustees are responsible for setting the school board's overall policy direction. They represent the interests of the community, parents and students in their communities. Like I was saying, Mr. Speaker, before I was interrupted by you and my colleagues—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** It's my job to interrupt you when you're doing something wrong. Thank you for that notification.

Continue.

**Mr. Rob Leone:** Mr. Speaker, as soon as I said that, I realized I had made a little bit of a mistake, so I will slap myself on the wrist.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** —ever, ever, ever, ever do that again.

**Mr. Rob Leone:** The member for Nepean–Carleton suggests that I should apologize to the Speaker, and I will take that offer, Mr. Speaker. I'm very sorry for perhaps questioning your authority, which I wasn't intending to do in the first place, and I won't ever, ever, ever, ever do it again—I think that was the other part.

Back to Bill 122, I think, would be a better place to start. You know, Mr. Speaker, I think that what the government is trying to do with Bill 122 is certainly to grab hold of this monstrosity of a ministry that deals with lots of students, lots of teachers, lots of trustees and, most importantly, I think, lots of families who are deeply wedded to what's happening in our schools.

I would say that if we are to set some priorities, we should do so in the following manner: We should do so by judging each and every piece of legislation by how it improves test scores and the quality of education of our students, and the respect we afford and allot to our educators, who are certainly performing miracles every day in our classrooms, and how we can properly resource our teachers to not only do the job they're currently doing, but do it even better. How we can discuss mechanisms by which that occurs, I think, is very important in how we can judge and assess education policy going forward.

Mr. Speaker, I think we also have to judge the policies that come before us based on what parents might be saying. I think we have to have a mechanism by which we understand precisely what parents are saying about what's happening in our schools. You know, I'm deeply concerned about some of the things I'm hearing as an MPP. I hope that some of the things I'm hearing aren't actually happening in my son's school, and I think that is the case, to a large degree. But when we hear some of these disturbing stories that are happening in our schools, we have to have the ability to talk about policies and the direction of policies that can actually eliminate those problems. Through the process we've seen, which has unfolded, we're dealing with legislation, again, that I think strays from those priorities.

We cannot ignore the context by which Bill 122 has been introduced in this Legislature. I know that the government has done its best effort and has conducted its best efforts, in the last round of negotiation, to try and rein in the seemingly endless increases in expenses in our education system, which is what led to Bill 115. One cannot ignore, in debating this piece of legislation, Bill 122, the context in which Bill 115 had occurred.

I will state very clearly that our party did support Bill 115. We supported Bill 115 because it was the first acknowledgement by this government that we actually have a fiscal crisis in the province of Ontario, and that there needed to be corrective action taken to ensure that we would actually protect education by making sure we're making prudent financial decisions today so that my kids, when they're going through their school, have an education system that we all can be proud of.

So we supported that piece of legislation, even though it wasn't our preferred piece of legislation. We don't want to be pitting teachers against nurses against police officers against MPPs and other public servants. We believe that it was the appropriate move to freeze public sector wages across the board for two years. I think that approach was an approach that would have been a lot easier to swallow if everyone was in the battle together, if we all joined hands, if we're arm in arm battling the fiscal crisis that is still before us.

In the course of doing that, Mr. Speaker, in the process of doing what they did with Bill 115, of course, the government irritated its partners in education. We're not just simply talking about the teachers' federations. I know my friends in the NDP will probably have a lot more to say about

this particular part. The teachers' federations were upset about the process that they were forced to submit to. But the school boards themselves were also upset. They were sidestepped; they had to implement an agreement without actually having any input into the process.

I realize what the government is trying to do here. They obviously want to make sure that we are correcting some of the issues that have emerged since Bill 115 and in the process that unfolded therefrom. I will say that one of the things I like about this legislation is that it actually does that. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of the government, of the teachers' federations and of the school boards. Now, whether the government has it right in terms of every little bit that's in this bill—I think the jury is still out on that; I don't know.

Like I said earlier, I was in this position to talk about education policy and improving our schools and improving our students' test scores, not about debating the minutiae of collective bargaining. I would say that I'm more of an expert in education policy and less in understanding of how collective bargaining works. I've never been at the central table. I'm not a labour lawyer. I think the labour lawyers and the negotiators are probably going to have more to say about this piece of legislation than I could, and I think that is an important aspect that we have to understand.

We are trying to institutionalize, in this bill, the process that unfolded prior to Bill 115, which is that there were voluntary framework agreements that happened between the government and the teachers' federations that ended up being the basis by which local collective agreements would occur. Now we are institutionalizing that process and formalizing the government's role in doing that. I think the government actually needs to be there; I've said that a couple of times already. The government funds education in the province of Ontario. They need to have a say in how it transpires. From that perspective, it's something that I like about the bill.

But what I will suggest, Mr. Speaker, is that if we are looking at how this bill might transpire and what we can say about the various aspects of this legislation, we aren't going to really know how this bill will play out until we've actually done a complete negotiation, a cycle of negotiation. I would say that. I'm not a labour expert, but I would say that given the people whom I've talked to on this piece of legislation, whether it's the teachers' federations, whether it's school board officials, whether it's parents, the one thing that I would say is that we're actually not going to know the details of how this legislation is going to unfold and whether the rules actually make sense to the parties that are involved until we actually complete one round of negotiation.

So I would suggest, by way of improving this piece of legislation, that we should include some provision to review this legislation after one cycle of bargaining is complete. I think including a sunset provision or a review clause in this piece of legislation will strengthen it. It would give an opportunity for the "partners in education" to come before the legislative committee or to consult with the ministry officials about the kinds of things that worked with this piece of legislation and the kinds of things that perhaps need to be modified. I think if the government is really interested in improving this piece of legislation, they would actually focus on perhaps this idea. Let's call everybody in after the process is done. Let's see what worked.

Perhaps we could do it in a legislative committee; perhaps we could do it by way of ministerial consultation and conversation. I'd like to use that word—have kind of sullied the word in my

vocabulary, but I'll still use the word "conversation" with these partners to see whether or not it's transpired and it's worked out in quite the way they intended.

As a member of the Legislature who has not participated directly at the negotiation table, the kinds of rules that are established in this piece of legislation—and it's a lengthy piece of legislation; I think I picked it up on the way in. I'm going to be searching quite a while for the pieces of paper here, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a copy, but it's quite a lengthy piece of legislation. You can't actually read this piece of legislation without understanding labour law and the Labour Relations Act, which I think, certainly, the Minister of Labour is probably the noted expert here on that.

It's a very technical bill, and I think that is certainly—I wouldn't say a problem I have with it, because obviously you need to have some of these rules established, but it's hard to, in some ways, criticize a bill without having the expertise and knowledge and wherewithal to see how these kinds of rules play out. So I would suggest that there's some room for improvement on this piece of legislation coming forward—here it is; it's a few pages long.

As I mentioned, Bill 122 talks about the role of central versus local bargaining. I listened intently when the minister was making her remarks and when the parliamentary assistant was making her remarks on this. It talks about the various roles, the central versus local bargaining. There is obviously a need and a role for the government to be a party to this. I think we would say, on this side of the House, that there's some reasonable expectation as the people paying the bills that we're actually going to do this. Like I said, there's a part of the bill that I think we can certainly have some agreement on.

It establishes the bargaining representatives, so there's a section of the bill that talks about the bargaining representatives from the labour perspective, the AEFO, ETFO, OECTA and the OSSTF, which are four broadly defined teacher federations that will be party to the central negotiating table with the corresponding trustee associations that are going to be party to it as well, as well as the crown.

There is a local bargaining component that's still maintained between the school board and their teacher federation locals that I understand the teacher federations want to preserve and to maintain. I think that the bill reflects at least that acknowledgement that local bargaining still needs to take place, and I think that's well established.

I think that there are issues around the support staff in central bargaining that obviously were previously left out. I know sometimes we talk to these organizations and support staff directly. It always seems that it's about the teacher federations and not the support staff and to what extent support staff need to have an ability to negotiate as well.

These are the sorts of things that the bill includes, that are obviously—as I suggest, I think we need to see it play out before we can actually understand whether things are going in a particular direction.

I want to talk about some of the things that I think the bill is lacking. First of all, as I suggested earlier, this is about process. It's about setting out the rules and establishing the authority.

I know that some of the criticism I've heard, particularly on this bill, is that there's too much left to the discretion of the Minister of Education with respect to some of the rules that are at play. I don't know, again, not being a party to the negotiating process, how that criticism actually plays out in real life. That's why I would like to see the process unfold before we come back and review whether the latitude we've been giving to the Minister of Education has been and is appropriate to the process itself.

Mr. Speaker, what I've tried to assert several times during the last half hour is that I think what parents want to talk about is improving the schools. Since we're talking about process, we're not talking about how we can do that: how we can improve student test scores, how we can improve our schools, how we can help our teachers do the tasks that we entrust them with by teaching our students. We haven't seen that in this bill.

This isn't about improving any gains that the government purports to have made in education. We have no understanding of how this bill will actually encourage that. It's not about understanding how we grapple with the fiscal pressures that we find in the province of Ontario today. We're spending \$8.5 billion more in education in the last 10 years. Meanwhile, we have 250,000 fewer students in our schools. Do the purported gains that the government likes to talk about correspond with that increase in money spent? Do we see our test scores improving?

I want to spend a little bit of time talking about that particular issue. What this bill does not do, when we're talking about the fiscal pressures this government faces, is understand how we can actually deal with those problems. This bill does not talk about that at all. In fact, what I think I'm hearing from the government is quite the opposite: that when it comes to regulation 274 and amending it, that's going to be subject to the negotiating table. Well, if that's going to be subject to the negotiating table, and if we're going to talk about everything else with education policy being subjected to the negotiating table, then what are we doing in this Legislature?

We're supposed to be debating what we can do to improve our schools, to improve our student test scores, to help build confidence with parents in our education system. If those tools are going to be taken away because we're relegating all of this to the collective bargaining process, then I would suggest that we have some significant issues with respect to that, because there is legislation that we can implement in this Legislature that actually does improve schools, that will improve student test scores and will do a whole lot more than simply taking a hands-off approach on this. And if this bill is intended to ensure that all aspects of education policy will not be subjected to legislation from this Legislature and actually be totally removed from this Legislature and only at the hands of the collective bargaining table, then, again, Mr. Speaker, there are certain issues that we would have with that process.

Let's talk about those gains. I note with interest that I have been looking at some of the test scores, and the international comparisons of those test scores. We can talk about the PISA test scores, which we're going to get to in a little bit. But at least five countries and provinces performed better than the province of Ontario, which is, I think, pretty good. We're at least

among the top, which is important. That's for reading. For mathematics—which is a growing concern; I know that our test scores or results in mathematics are on the decline—our PISA results show that Ontario is the 12th highest jurisdiction. So we're obviously faring a lot worse in mathematics. International statistics are suggesting that we are lacking in our math skills. I think there's certainly a concern that is expressed with that.

I know in the remarks that the member from Trinity–Spadina made on Bill 122, he addressed the problem about declining math scores, and he suggested an idea that I think is worthy of consideration: whether we should have specialized math teachers in our schools teaching mathematics. I think that's an idea that I would like to actually have a debate about in this Legislature. But at the end of the day, we're talking about process. We're not talking about how we can improve results in math. I think the member raises a very interesting point.

If we look at the change of our PISA test scores over the last number of years, our reading scores since 2000—and you have to remember who was in power in the year 2000—have actually declined. They've gone down by two points—on a raw score of two points on a year-over-year comparison. Our mathematics score has gone up just slightly by, again, two points. Our science scores have improved as well.

There are certainly concerns that over time—which I'm going to get to in the next international comparison I'm going to make, in terms of where we fare on the TIMSS test. I'm not talking about the leader of the official opposition here. We're not talking about him, because he would certainly outperform a lot of the scores and a lot of measures that we've seen here. But the TIMSS test results on grade 4 mathematics show that 20 jurisdictions in the world are outperforming the province of Ontario. Actually, we're doing worse; we're in the middle of the pack now with our grade 4 math scores. Those are 2011 results. In grade 8 mathematics, there's a slight improvement: 16 jurisdictions around the world are actually doing better than what's happening right here in the province of Ontario—16 jurisdictions. I remember during the last election campaign we were told that we were the best jurisdiction in the English-speaking world, but certainly the international indicators have suggested otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I noticed in one of the trends in the TIMSS test results is, if we look at the trends in Canadian provinces for grade 8 mathematics achievement, the best scores that we received—continually, from 1995 to 2003, our scores were going up. In 1995, the year we took power, the score was at 501. By 1999, it improved to 517. By 2003, our test scores in grade 8 mathematics got up to 521. Today, it's down to 512. So during our time in power, we saw grade 8 math scores actually improve. Yet, despite spending \$8.5 billion more in education today, we're seeing our grade 8 math scores decline under this government. Grade 4 science scores: 18 jurisdictions in the world scored better on grade 4 science than the province of Ontario. Florida, the Russian Federation, Finland and Singapore all scored better than the province of Ontario.

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** Florida?

**Mr. Rob Leone:** Yes, Florida. Florida used to be at the very bottom of the US test scores and has now surpassed even Ontario.

Grade 8 science tests, the TIMSS scores for 2011: 19 jurisdictions fared better than the province of Ontario. If we look at trends in Canadian provinces for science, the same trend appears to have taken place. In Ontario from 1995 to 2003, we saw test scores increase, but from 2003 to 2011, we've seen them decrease, this despite the fact that we spend today \$8.5 billion more in education. Where are the results going, Mr. Speaker?

Grade 8 science achievement: Again, the trends show a particular phenomenon. The raw score in 1995 for grade 8 science achievement was 496, in 1999 it was 518 and in 2003 it was 533. In 2007 it went down to 526 and in 2011 it went down to 521, this despite spending \$8.5 billion more in education today than they did 10 years ago. Where has the money gone?

All the while, we see that we have these EQAO test results, and every year, for reading and writing, those scores have gone up. The EQAO, which is a provincial standardized test instituted by our government, has shown a significant increase, which is contrary to what these international results, the PISA and the TIMSS results, are showing right here in the province of Ontario. One has to wonder, when looking at this data, how can that possibly be? How could it possibly be that the international comparisons are showing that Ontario is on the decline, but our provincial standards show us going up? One has to have a serious and honest debate about why this might be the case. The potential answer to that may well be that we're relaxing the standards on our standardized tests. If the international scores are showing a decline while our own tests are showing an increase, there's something that is seriously wrong with the "gains" that this government purports to be making in education, and this despite—we have to say it once again—that we spend \$8.5 billion more in education today than we did 10 years ago. Meanwhile, we have 250,000 fewer students. Where has the money gone? Have we seen any appreciation on test scores going forward?

I read with interest, I think members of this Legislature should know, that this government created the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. The title: Making the Grade? Troubling Trends in Postsecondary Student Literacy.

I know all members of the Legislature will know that prior to entering this Legislature, I was a university professor. I have talked to the university professors that had been there before I got there and who had taught for a span of 15 or 20 years. They told me that the quality of the student now coming into university has deteriorated, has declined. Their reading and writing skills are certainly not what they were even a generation before. Well, Mr. Speaker, we now have a HEQCO report that actually talks about that. Let me take a little bit of time to outline what some of these reports have said.

The executive summary suggests that "there is growing concern that Canadians' literacy skills, including those of students attending post-secondary institutions in Ontario, are not meeting expectations."

They go on to talk about the timing of this. The "troubling trends in literacy achievement and a lack of consistency in expectations for high school students who go on to post-secondary education" are very real.

“According to IALS, not even a quarter of respondents aged 18 to 65 scored above level 3—the minimum level of proficiency.” I think level 3 is related to the PISA scores—oh, sorry, the IALS. I made a mistake there.

“The most recent literacy results from PIAAC also registered no improvement but rather a slight deterioration in Canadians’ scores at both ends of the literacy spectrum, with a greater number of Canadians scoring at level 1 and below and fewer Canadians scoring at levels 4 and 5.” This is certainly a trend that we’re seeing right across the country, Mr. Speaker.

But what interested me about this report was a section that we find on page 16: “Are High School Graduates Prepared for PSE?”—for post-secondary education.

I’ll quote from the report: “The literature abounds with examples of college and university faculty bemoaning the perceived underpreparation of their first-year students.... In one survey of professors at Western University”—this is at Western University, right here in London, Ontario—“91% agreed that high schools do not sufficiently prepare students to write essays at a university level.” And we’re talking about gains in our system.

It goes on to suggest that “prose remains inelegant and unsophisticated, document structure is rudimentary and is often limited to the ‘five-paragraph essay’ taught in Ontario’s high schools, and critical thought often seems to be nonexistent.” These are what our professors are saying, once our students exit our elementary and secondary schools and go on to college and university.

“When a focus group of students at an Ontario university was asked how prepared they felt for university upon entry, most students stated that they were not at all prepared.” Again, we spend \$8.5 billion on education today, and there is a discrepancy between what these gains mean for the preparation of our students to succeed in our colleges and universities.

“A recent HEQCO-funded project at George Brown College recognizes outright”—this is a quote from this HEQCO-funded project—“that the ‘Ontario secondary school diploma or equivalent does not guarantee that all students are prepared for the rigors of post-secondary academic work.’” Again, we spend \$8.5 billion in the province of Ontario and we’re seeing a decline.

It concludes, on page 24: “The gap in expectations between high school graduation and post-secondary admission needs to be reconciled.”

Mr. Speaker, this seems to point to a troubling trend and an issue I have with our education system that I’ve expressed, and these international test scores actually show a lack of improvement. In fact, we’re doing worse today than we were 10 years ago. But we’re setting these standards lower for students, actually. Our EQAO scores might have gone up on a couple of indicators, but our international test scores don’t reflect that. And when these students leave our elementary and secondary schools, they’re not prepared to succeed in college or university. And at the end of the day, they’re calling these gains. Despite spending \$8.5 billion more on education today, they are met with modest success. You can read the report yourselves, if you would like.

I also read with interest—I love how in education you get lots of reports. I know the government is very happy with this report, which is the Final Report: Evaluation of the Implementation of the Ontario Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program. Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to state very succinctly that, as a member of this Legislature, I actually believe in early literacy. I think we should be making investments in improving early literacy and making sure our students are well prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

But if we actually go into this report and the details of the report, we're finding some troubling things, that despite the fact the government likes to say that everything is hunky-dory in education, it may not actually be the case.

There's a number of aspects that have been studied here, but the fact that our special-needs students—the kinds of students that we're hoping to improve with the introduction of full-day kindergarten—actually perform better in non-FDK schools is, for me, a very troubling trend. These are the very people we're trying to help, and the report actually looks at the fact that for example, on social competence, students performed better overall in non-FDK schools, but that trend was even more pronounced for students with special educational needs. That's a troubling trend.

In emotional maturity, again, the overall trend is that students actually performed a little better in emotional maturity in non-FDK schools, but that trend was even more pronounced for students with special educational needs.

The report talks about a number of results indicating that kindergarten students from FDK—sorry, that's not the one I want.

On page 85 of the report, it states: “A final observation of the findings worth noting is that on several measures, the non-FDELK programs were associated with more positive outcomes. This was especially true for non-FDELK programs in low needs schools, on the EDI measures of emotional maturity and communications skills and general knowledge. To be clear, some children appear to have done worse with the FDELK than with non-FDELK.”

What we've suggested all along is that we actually have to understand the results and to modify the program to address these kinds of concerns. We're spending \$1.5 billion on full-day kindergarten in the province of Ontario, and we're just starting to see the results. There have been some positive results—I will acknowledge that—but there are some troubling trends as well.

“The children with special educational needs showed superior outcomes on the measures of social competence and emotional maturity in non-FDELK programs.” The basis of this difference is unclear, of course, but nonetheless, this is what the study found, and if we are going to be honest about the program, we should be addressing these concerns.

So at the end of the day, we have a lot to talk about with respect to gains, but one thing that I want to focus on in my remaining time is what I think is the priority of the Ontario PC caucus, and it involves regulation 274. We have stated—and we had a private member's bill in the name

of my friend from Nepean–Carleton, who wanted to modify regulation 274. We think it's a priority of our party and should be the priority of the government.

We are increasingly troubled by what we're hearing from the Minister of Education with respect to modifying regulation 274. We don't think this should be something subject to collective bargaining. We think that legislators in this assembly have a role and a responsibility to ensure that we are putting the best teachers in front of our students. That best teacher might be the most experienced teacher, and quite often it is the most experienced teacher, but we shouldn't limit the opportunity for our younger teachers to have a crack, particularly if they are showing superior skills in leading in the classroom. We should enable our principals to make those decisions on who is best able to fulfill a vacancy in that school based on their ability to teach effectively in the core subject matter, based on whatever holes that school needs to fill, if it's with extracurricular activities or the like. We shouldn't be limiting our teachers and our principals in finding the best teacher in front of the classroom

I know the minister has also talked about the fact that we're trying to root out nepotism and that there are actually some things in regulation 274 that are actually good, and I agree. Posting positions: great. Eliminating nepotism, which our bill actually suggests, can be fulfilled by modifying hiring practices.

What we suggest—and I know the minister wants to talk about fast and speedy passage of this legislation. I would suggest in this Legislature, right here, right now, that if the minister is sincere about that, if they are sincere about putting this legislation forward and getting this into committee so that the federations can come in and the school boards can come in, so that everybody who has a perspective, a point of view, can come in, and they want to do that as expeditiously as possible and before the next round of collective bargaining begins, which will happen early next year—then what I am asking the Minister of Education to do right here and commit to is to modify regulation 274 so that we can have merit-based hiring back in our schools, so we can ensure that the best teachers are in front of the classroom, so that we can ensure that principals in our school system are the ones who are going to determine the best person to fill that job—not based on seniority, not based on anything but the quality and the qualifications of that teacher. If the government is willing to meet us on that request, then we will meet them in their request to move this bill to committee as fast as possible. But if they are unwilling to talk about modifying regulation 274, then we're going to have a serious discussion about the merits of this piece of legislation.

So I would suggest, in my final comments on this piece of legislation, let's talk about putting regulation 274 back on the table. Let's make sure that legislators in this assembly have a say on what happens and ensure that our students have the best teacher in front of the classroom. Then we can make peace with this legislation.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** Questions and comments?

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** While I applaud the intentions of the member from Cambridge—I think it's clear that he's concerned about the education system and the services that we provide for our students, and so I applaud the member for his intentions. I have some concern with the logic that

he employs, and I simply suggest this as constructive criticism so that he can perhaps bolster his argument. The comparisons that he brought up, while I found them very interesting and certainly illuminative on the issue of how we fare internationally—the comparisons that the member from Cambridge drew were with science and math. Certainly there are a number of jurisdictions that performed better, but comparing the EQAO test on reading and writing and suggesting that those are indicative of a decline or incline when comparing with science and math isn't the best argument. But I certainly take his point that we need to do better if we are falling behind other jurisdictions internationally. I think it's a great point, and I support that concern.

What I want to talk about in my remaining minute is the three areas of grave concern I find in our education system. One is that while we have a significantly increasing population of new Canadians coming from various parts of the world, we are failing those new Canadians when it comes to ESL. Many school boards have talked about the fact that there is funding set aside for ESL but there's a clear reduction in terms of ESL classes and ESL education and ESL students. That's an area that we need to address. Why is there a reduction when we know that, in terms of population and demographics, there is certainly no reduction? We see, instead, an increase.

Another two areas—I think we need to have a fulsome education system which supports music. Music and arts are a fundamental aspect of developing yourself as a well-rounded human being.

And finally, physical education: We can only look at our youth to see that physical education is something that we need to make a priority, to prevent some of the ailments and illnesses that happen, moving forward. We need to focus on physical education as well.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** Questions and comments?

**Hon. Liz Sandals:** Let me speak very briefly about the quality of education in Ontario. I think two things stand out very strongly. If you want to look at the pan-Canadian results, which are tests of all students in all jurisdictions in Canada, Ontario is the only province in which the students perform better than the Canadian average in math and science and literacy. So that's a Canadian, not an Ontario test, an across-Canada test.

If you look at the graduation rate on a very strict measure of following individual kids for five years, in 2003 the Ontario high school graduation rate was 68%. It is now 83%, and that's following individual children to see what individual kids have graduated. So we have made great strides in Ontario education.

Now, what the bill is actually about, of course, is school board collective bargaining. I know this is a highly technical bill, which may be why the member chose not to talk about it very much. But I do want to assure him that the Ministry of Labour experts have supported us greatly in terms of it, because it is a technical bill, and we've worked very closely with the labour relations experts from the Ministry of Labour to work out the details with both the school boards and the unions.

But what I really did find strange were the closing comments, in which I think what I heard was that for a bill on labour relations to figure out how to do collective bargaining, the support of that

party is conditional on having the Legislature override something that was a result of collective bargaining. I find that very peculiar logic.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** Questions and comments?

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** First off, I want to congratulate my colleague the fine member from Cambridge, Mr. Leone, on his new appointment as the critic for education. I know, as an educator myself, and Mr. Leone being a doctor, he obviously is more than qualified to address the issues or concerns around our education system.

I just want to make a few observations, if I may, on what the Minister of Education acknowledged. I think, though, that some of her facts are mis-skewed, if you will. What we see first-hand is—I was in the classroom when our graduation rates were such, and what this government has done is lowered the bar so low that my dog could graduate from high school as an honour student.

Interjections.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** I think the comparative analysis was a little rough. I would suggest you withdraw that last one.

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** His name is Shakespeare—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** I said withdraw.

**Mr. Rob E. Milligan:** Withdraw. His name is Shakespeare, Mr. Speaker, by the way.

I saw and witnessed first-hand the standardized test, the EQAO testing, under Mr. Harris, the quality of testing that was brought forward and what was instructed. I also witnessed first-hand, as my wife has, who is an elementary teacher, the standardized testing under this government, and I can honestly tell you, Mr. Speaker, the differences are leaps and bounds.

I think Mr. Leone made it very clear that there is obviously a problem in the education system. That's why Mr. Leone has left his profession as a professor and that's why I have left my profession as a teacher: to improve those scores.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** Questions and comments?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I want to thank the member for Cambridge for his comments. There was a lot of content in that speech, and several things I'd like to focus on.

The first is that I'm glad that the member for Cambridge recognized the loss to school boards of their right to participate in collective bargaining, which affected school boards as much as teachers. I hope that that indicates that they recognize the error of their ways in supporting Bill 115, which really triggered that loss of collective bargaining.

The second thing I wanted to say: As a researcher myself, someone who has written reports for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, I know how statistics can be taken out of context and used in ways to support whatever side of an argument you want to stand on. There has been research that has critiqued an overreliance on PISA and TIMSS scores, and EQAO testing scores, as these tests measure the extent to which the education system is delivering prescribed content.

There are other international measures. There is something called the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, or GEM, which is also conducted in over 50 countries internationally, and that global measure looks at the extent of the level of entrepreneurial activity, the level of start-ups, innovation within a country, and has found there is absolutely no correlation between PISA scores and the level of entrepreneurial activity. I think that's something that all sides of this House can agree on, that we need to support a knowledge economy, we need to support students to become innovators and to participate in future economic development.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller):** The member from Cambridge has two minutes.

**Mr. Rob Leone:** I appreciate the comments and questions—I don't know if I have any questions, but at least the comments—from the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton, the Minister of Education, my good friend the member from Northumberland–Quinte West and the new member from London West. I really appreciate the comments that were made.

I do want to address a couple of things. I know the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton suggested that I used comparisons of decline in math and science and TIMSS scores, but I also did mention that on the PISA scores, from 2000 to 2009 there actually has been a slight decline in the year-over-year comparisons. That was the reference I was making to that. I wanted to make sure he understood the context by which I was making those comments.

To the Minister of Education: I notice she mentioned that Ontario is performing well. I have to admit I was—I don't have the latest statistics on this to know whether this is true or not. Still, it's interesting. The PISA results from 2009 at least suggest that Alberta outperformed Ontario in reading, that Alberta and Quebec outperformed Ontario in math, and that—let's see here—British Columbia and Alberta, in the 2009 PISA test results, outperformed Ontario as well.

We can obviously quibble about the statistics, but what I was trying to present today is the fact that we're spending an increasing amount of money, and are the results going up in correspondence with those increased investments? I think the jury is still out on that, Mr. Speaker, which is why I wanted to present that to the members of this Legislature, to the people of Ontario, who I'm sure are watching this debate today. My concern is about improving test scores, improving the quality of our schools, improving the effect that teachers can have on our students. That's what our priorities are on this side of the Legislature.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.