

First Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Chairperson
Mr. Matt Wiebe
Constituency of Concordia

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, August 17, 2016

TIME – 1 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West)

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Messrs. Bindle, Helwer, Johnston, Ms. Klassen, Messrs. Maloway, Marcelino, Mrs. Mayer, Mr. Michaleski, Ms. Morley-Lecomte, Messrs. Wiebe, Yakimoski

APPEARING:

*Mr. James Allum, MLA for Fort Garry-Riverview
 Ms. Nahanni Fontaine, MLA for St. Johns
 Mr. Andrew Swan, MLA for Minto
 Mr. Norm Ricard, Auditor General
 Ms. Sandra Cohen, Assistant Auditor General, Value for Money Audit Services*

WITNESSES:

*Hon. Ian Wishart, Minister of Education and Training
 Mr. Bramwell Strain, Deputy Minister of Education and Training*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Auditor General's Report–Annual Report to the Legislature, dated January 2013

Chapter 7–Provincial Nominee Program for Business

Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated May 2015

Section 8–Special Needs Education

Section 14–Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program

Section 17–Provincial Nominee Program for Business

Auditor General's Report – Follow-Up of Recommendations, dated May 2016

Special Needs Education

Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program

Provincial Nominee Program for Business

Auditor General's Report – Improving Educational Outcomes for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Students, dated January 2016

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Mr. Chairperson: Good afternoon. Will the Standing Committee on Public Accounts please come to order.

This meeting has been called to consider the following reports: The Auditor General's Report–Annual Report to the Legislature, dated January 2013, chapter 7, Provincial Nominee Program for Business; Auditor General's Report–Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated May 2015: section 8, Special needs education, section 14, Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program, and section 17, Provincial Nominee Program for Business; the Auditor General's Report follow-up of previously issued recommendations, dated May 2016, Special needs education, Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program, and Provincial Nominee Program for Business; and the Auditor General's Report–Improving Educational Outcomes for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Students, dated January 2016.

Are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this afternoon?

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): For as long as it takes to have this approved.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it agreed that the committee will sit until the work of the committee is done, or 5 o'clock, whichever comes first? *[Agreed]*

Are there any suggestions as to the order in which we should consider the reports? And I can just comment that, after a brief a conversation with the

Auditor General and the vice-chairperson of the committee that, because we have quite a large number of reports in front of us and with regards to presenting that information in a way that's most easily answered by the department, the recommendation was that the Auditor General's report on improving educational outcomes for kindergarten to grade 12 Aboriginal students would be considered first, and that the follow-up reports with regards to education be considered second, and then the annual report to the Legislature from 2013, along with the follow-up reports and the Provincial Nominee Program for Business, be considered last. And, again, that's just to allow the auditor and others to organize themselves in terms of giving an opening statement and considering the information.

Would that be agreeable to the committee?
[Agreed]

This is my opportunity to invite the minister and deputy minister to the table, but I do see that you're already here. I would ask, though, that if you have any other staff that you'd like to bring to the table, now would be the opportunity, and I'll give you an opportunity to introduce those staff that are with you here today.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): With me today I have the deputy, Mr. Bramwell Strain.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Does the Auditor General wish to make an opening statement?

Mr. Norm Ricard (Auditor General): Yes, I do, Mr. Chair. I'd first like to introduce the staff members that are with me today.

Behind me are: Sandra Cohen, who is the assistant auditor general responsible for oversight of this audit; Melissa Emslie, beside her, who is the audit principal responsible for the audit; and Tiffany Locken, who was the audit manager for the audit.

Mr. Chair, high school graduation is an essential building block in holding—in helping people gain employment, earn a higher income and achieve overall wellbeing and prosperity. At the time of our audit, the government's most recent data showed that only 55 per cent of Aboriginal students were graduating from high school, compared to 96 per cent of non-Aboriginal students, a 'gap' that has been widening. In this audit, we assessed how well the Department of Education and Training was

managing its goal of narrowing this gap. Specifically, we examined whether the department effectively planned, monitored and reported on its initiatives, and whether it effectively supported the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in school divisions.

Mr. Chair, we found that the department's planning, monitoring and reporting processes were not adequately supporting its efforts to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. While a strategic plan had been developed and was being updated, the department was not providing sufficient leadership to effectively guide partnered departments and school divisions towards achieving its objectives and intended outcomes. And, while the Province had other broad, multi-department plans and initiatives such as the ALL Aboard poverty-reduction initiative with a focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal people, there was no strong mechanism to ensure that overlapping plans were co-ordinated to ensure a unified approach and to avoid duplication of effort.

We also noted that the department lacked a comprehensive knowledge of all key government department and school division initiatives already under way, and that there was no systematic approach to identify key barriers to success and whether these barriers were being adequately addressed in the plan.

* (13:10)

Also of concern was the department had not determined the total funding required to successfully implement the plan, nor had it developed any specific measurable targets to use as checkpoints in periodically assessing progress.

To know what was working well to affect change, the department needed more quantifiable output and outcome measures for its various initiatives and better data analysis to identify and explain trends and why the gap persists. This information is also needed to provide the public with more meaningful information on results achieved.

Mr. Chair, we also found that there were gaps in the department's support for the delivery of Aboriginal education initiatives in school divisions. Processes for allocating funding to school divisions did not ensure that funding would be directed to where it was most needed, and grant funding was disbursed even when school division plans failed to comply with the department's stated requirements.

Further, while the transition from on-reserve schools to provincial schools presents many challenges for First Nation students, the department had limited guidance and minimal targeted funding for school divisions to help First Nation students overcome this barrier.

And, finally, while the infusion of Aboriginal perspectives and curricula and teacher training was ongoing, less progress had been made in increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers.

Mr. Chair, the department can do more to ensure its initiatives and related funding levels help Aboriginal students succeed in school and graduate with their peers. Enhanced performance planning and monitoring will help ensure that over time progress toward desired outcomes is achieved. To this end, I am pleased that the department has accepted our 19 recommendations. We will be following up on the status of these recommendations as of September 30th, 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Ricard.

Does the deputy minister wish to make an opening statement?

Mr. Bramwell Strain (Deputy Minister of Education and Training): First and foremost, pleasure to be here today.

So if—just to understand procedure, you just want me to address the first on the Aboriginal piece? Take me a second as my speaking notes are slightly out of order.

Improving educational outcomes for kindergarten to grade 12 Aboriginal students: The department supports and accepts all of the recommendations contained in the OAG report. Aboriginal education, in particular Aboriginal academic achievement, is a significant provincial priority.

During the 2015-16 school year, approximately 35,000 self-identified Aboriginal students attended public schools in Manitoba. This represents nearly 20 per cent of the total school population.

The department has already embarked on some recommendations and is reviewing how best to proceed with others. For instance, the department has contributed to the development of the Manitoba Collaborative Indigenous Education Blueprint for universities, colleges, public school boards, making indigenous education a priority. The blueprint

includes 10 commitments to support indigenous education which all signatories will work towards individually and collectively.

The department continues to actively promote and support targeted focus on increasing academic achievement in literacy and numeracy. Through the Building Students Success with Aboriginal parents program and the Community Schools program, the department works with school divisions and schools to promote family engagement in the education of their children.

The department's new K-to-12 framework for continuous improvement clearly identifies or defines roles and responsibilities for the department and school divisions with a focus on planning and reporting for improved numeracy and literacy achievement for all students with a specific disintegration of data for indigenous students.

First Nation, Metis and Inuit education policy framework which is currently being finalized includes a three-year reporting cycle on the progress of its activities and intended outcomes. This will help the department extend its understanding of initiatives beyond those focused on numeracy and literacy achievement.

The department will continue to ensure all Manitoba students and teachers learn about First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples' history, cultures, traditional values and knowledge and contemporary lifestyles.

Activities in support of the OAG report recommendations will allow First Nations, Metis and Inuit students to acquire traditional and contemporary knowledge and languages to walk in both indigenous and western ways of life. This will help increase indigenous student engagement and educational attainment.

Thank you for the opportunity to present.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Before we proceed further, I'd like to inform those who are new to this committee of the process that is undertaken with regards to outstanding questions. So, at the end of every meeting, the research officer reviews the Hansard for any outstanding question that the witness commits to provide an answer, and we'll draft a questions-pending-response document to send to the deputy minister. Upon receipt of the answers to those questions, the research officer then forwards the responses to every PAC member and to every other member recorded as attending that meeting.

At the next PAC meeting, the Chair tables the responses for the record.

And before we get into questions, I'd like to remind members that questions of an administrative nature are to be placed to the deputy minister, and that policy questions will not be entertained and are better left for another forum. However, if there are questions that borders on policy and the minister would like to answer that question—or the deputy minister wants to defer to the minister to respond to—that is something that we would consider.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. And I certainly want to thank the Auditor General and his office for the report. I think it's an issue, obviously, that is central to the well-being of Manitoba into the 21st century and beyond, certainly critical to the reconciliation project that we're engaged in right now.

So I just want to ask you just a—sort of a few general kind of questions, if I could. First, could you characterize the dialogue between yourselves and the department during the undertaking of this particular report? Was it a constructive dialogue?

Mr. Ricard: We—definitely, we would characterize the dialogue that occurred between the audit team and the department as being very constructive and very helpful.

Mr. Allum: Thank you. I appreciate that. I know that to be true, as well, and I wanted to put that on the public record, especially in relation to the fact that the department at the time did accept the recommendations as proposed by the Auditor General.

I was impressed both by your letter—or I guess your opening at the very beginning, Auditor General's comments, especially the second paragraph, and then it's again noted at the beginning of the report. It talks about educational outcomes being affected by many factors outside of the school system's jurisdiction, if you will.

And, again, it's noted in the report and we appreciate that because, of course, schools can only do so much within the four walls of what they're doing each and every day, but if a child comes to school hungry, if a child comes from a disaffected family, if a child comes from any number of circumstances, their performance in school is central to that.

What I don't see is the broader historical context in which we need to understand outcomes for indigenous students in schools in relation to the intergenerational consequences of residential schools. So, can you tell me how you and/or your staff, why there's no broader historical context described within the report and what the nature of any conversations that were had with the directorate in that regard?

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Chair, this is a question that might—I think would be better answered by the assistant auditor general. If I could get her to sit in my seat to respond to that question, would that be okay? That way you'll be able to hear her response.

Ms. Sandra Cohen (Assistant Auditor General, Value for Money Audit Services): We were aware of it, so I can confirm that. You may not find it specifically alluded to in the—what's labelled the background section of our report because, obviously, we don't want it, like the background section can't include absolutely everything. However, you can find reference to it because there's background in context throughout the report when we talk about reasons why parents may not want to self-identify their children as Aboriginal. So there is reference to what you're talking about in that section of the report, rather than in the background.

* (13:20)

Mr. Allum: I thank you for that. I just—it seems to me, and there's a reason that I'm going to ask, but it seems to me that one can hardly understand educational outcomes for indigenous students in our public schools in Manitoba without a very succinct and central discussion of the historical context facing—that helps to explain the critical challenges facing the schools, facing the school divisions and facing government that are central to the outcomes, and no one is arguing that schools have a central role to play and that they certainly do—government has a central role to play, and that we certainly do. But it strikes me as a very clinical analysis of something that's much more nuanced and textured than you would get from reading it, and so I offer that as a constructive, I hope, criticism of the—even if you don't take it as one, because I see you're not exactly responding to me there—even if you don't take it as one.

But the other point of this, and what we know historically and what we know from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that this is a national issue. This is not simply related to Manitoba, so I

wonder if you could tell me what the outcomes for students are in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Ms. Cohen: I would refer you to—it's indirectly answering your question—figure 2 on page 12 of our report is where we show some comparative information, so you can see where Manitoba sits vis-à-vis the other provinces. So Manitoba has one of the lowest percentages of Aboriginal people ages 20 to 24 that have completed high school, but it's not alone, so Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba are all very similar; they're very close.

Mr. Allum: I saw that chart. That's for ages of 20 to 24, and we spoke earlier about the importance of that particular context which actually deals with adult learning as well, but I don't see specifically a national comparison here of K to 12.

Ms. Cohen: Not all provinces, although many do, disclose that information publicly, and so we only would be looking at publicly reported information, so we did not assemble that.

Mr. Allum: Well, it strikes me that if we're to understand the context of what we're talking about here—I'm sorry if this is bothering you, this line of questioning, but it would be helpful, I think, for readers of the report to understand the very important historical context that exists within Canada relating to outcomes for indigenous students. And, again, this is to reiterate, we certainly think that those need to be improved dramatically, but that it's not in the report strikes me as something that's missing, and so, too, our national comparators on the K-to-12 system, which the report is intended to address. So I think something further educational is missing from the report in that respect and, again, I offer that as a friendly and, I hope, constructive criticism.

I'm going to turn my attention to the deputy. Now, if I could, I welcome to the table, and maybe this is—maybe the minister might also want to answer this: Could you help me to understand why members of the Aboriginal Education Directorate aren't with you today, given that you are new to your position—congratulations. The minister's new to his position. The dialogue between the Auditor General's Office and the Aboriginal directorate folks happened prior to your arrival, so can you just help me to understand why they're not here that they could help us to understand some of the other issues and help to address questions from members of the committee that you might understandably not be able to answer?

Floor Comment: In the spirit of being—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Strain.

Mr. Strain: First time at this committee and I was not informed I was allowed to bring anyone with me, so at the next occasion you will certainly have more people.

Mr. Allum: Well, I appreciate that, and gosh knows I walked into many walls myself, so I—and—or things you didn't know, so I appreciate that as well.

So can I ask you, you've had a chance to evaluate the report, and if you'd just give us a sense of where the department's moving on the issues addressed in the report at this stage.

Mr. Strain: Yes, certainly. The report was very comprehensive, and as you well know, there are many things in there that were known to us previously. So we are undertaking each one of them very seriously, looking at each recommendation and their implementation. We're looking at them in an overarching piece of the whole of the education system. And when I talk about the whole of the education system, I'm not simply referring to K to 12 or looking at the post-secondary part, but also the early learning part, because as you previously mentioned, some of the issues around past history, some of the indicators of why we are where we are and some of the performance, especially early on, actually predates attendance in school of any kind, organized school.

So we're looking at the fulsome piece of that. There are several committees that have been formed, advisory groups with parents, with indigenous leaders, elders, with the educators themselves, with the post-secondary institutions to advise and guide on best way forward on a lot of these things.

So there are a number that are still in progress. The Aboriginal director, as you mentioned, does sit over top of them all, so it has a matrix reporting into the rest of the organization. They do sit around the senior management table, though, as an absolute full participating member, provide invaluable resources to us, and absolutely one hundred per cent of everything we do is looked at with an indigenous lens. It is a challenge for us, period. It's 20 per cent of the school population; it's almost 20 per cent of the general population. It is seen as a labour market driver in the future and, quite frankly, a key driver of the province's future, so it is absolutely critical to us to get it right.

But there are—you have to kind of continue along the continuum, so from early child to working with

those who are in school, those who perhaps fell off the grid at some point to get them back into the system. And as we know now, on many levels there are folk that there's not a straight line very often anymore. You don't go from grade 12 into your preferred occupation. People kind of wander back and forth through different things, so it's providing that continuum of support, but I think probably the most important thing coming up in the next year is that addition of the early child piece into it, so it's that 0-5 range before they actually enter into the system to make sure we have firm base while moving into K to 12.

Mr. Allum: Thank you for that. Does the director of the Aboriginal directorate still report directly to the deputy minister?

Mr. Strain: Absolutely.

Mr. Allum: Okay. That's good to know. I'm almost done.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Klassen.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): Oh, sorry.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms. Klassen: He was going, still.

Mr. Allum: Yes. I hadn't quite done yet, but I'll certainly—

Mr. Chairperson: My apologies. I will—as I said previously, I do like to keep the questions together; it was simply an oversight, so please continue your line of questioning.

Mr. Allum: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I certainly want my sister to be able to have ample opportunity, as well as my sister from St. Johns as well as for all of my other colleagues to have time, so I don't intend to go on for an extended period.

Will the department then, in light of the Auditor General's reports, be setting the kind of targets that the report calls for?

Mr. Strain: Yes, that is interesting question. Yes, we will be raising the bar in setting targets. We will be—have performance-based programming, absolutely. That said, it is a longer term solution. As mentioned, things are going to take some time as they work their way through the system. So the focus is on each individual child and getting them to attain the highest degree of performance that they can do. So, yes, but we will be following target setting.

Mr. Allum: I understand you—if I understand you correctly, yes, at some uncertain point in the future would be your answer once things play themselves out. Would that be—

Mr. Strain: Yes.

Mr. Allum: So no specific date.

Mr. Strain: Within the next year.

Mr. Allum: So within the next year. I think it's like ping-pong here. Not quite as fast as Olympic ping-pong, but still quite like ping-pong.

I thank you for your answers and I think that that's reasonable. One of the ways in which the former government had intended to respond both to the Auditor General's report and to the truth and reconciliation—recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's with a First Nation, Metis and Inuit education framework, is the government proceeding with that particular framework and that particular legislation?

* (13:30)

Mr. Strain: On the framework policy, yes, we are working—we're finalizing that as we speak. It'll be slightly different and with some alterations from the original. I would defer the legislative question.

Mr. Chairperson: Deputy—or sorry, honourable minister.

Mr. Wishart: At this point we're not anticipating any further legislation in regards to this, at this point.

Mr. Allum: I thank you for that answer.

The report talks about per capita per student funding in relation to other provinces; I think they were BC and maybe Alberta in relation to Manitoba. But as we've just recently learned from a previous meeting, it's not exactly an apples-to-apples comparison and, in fact, its inclusion in the report could potentially be understood to be misleading precisely because there's no context around that number, or I don't—didn't see a footnote to help to explain that. Is it your intention to drive up per capita funding for students? Is it the department's intention to drive up per capita funding for students in the future?

Mr. Strain: Just a clarification on the question: Do you mean specifically for indigenous students?

An Honourable Member: Yes, for indigenous.

Mr. Strain: So the per capita—there is a per capita base, which is for all students. So that is intended to remain the same. That does go up on the discretion of the government on a year-to-year basis. However, what we're looking more so is targeted funding and interventions in the communities of most need and in demographics of most need. So there would be specific programming that would be targeted for academic achievement for Aboriginal people. So it's a bit of an apples-and-different-types-of-apples conversation, but there would definitely be, if you were to break it out in a less scientific per capita, there would be additional monies that would be put towards specific targeted initiatives.

Mr. Allum: So the report suggests in here that one of the things that didn't happen was that there wasn't sufficient monitoring and grants through AAA or the Aboriginal parent grant were never discontinued; the money kept flowing. Would it be the department's intention that if performance targets aren't met that the money would stop flowing?

Mr. Strain: I think more—the intent is to make sure you have value for money. So—and when additional targets were not set for particular groups, it's hard to achieve things that weren't necessarily set, per se. So, definitely, there would be expected outcomes and that those outcomes would be achieved. We would obviously work with any group to ensure they were achieving those outcomes to the best of their ability and at which some time, if somebody was not meeting specific performance targets for a reason, we would have to review that for continuation, certainly.

Mr. Allum: I just want to switch back to the Auditor General before I move back to the department one more time, and then I'll concede my role here.

The report talks about the absence of a kind of a central mechanism to ensure departmental co-ordination among many departments who might be involved in the file in one way or another, yet I didn't see a reference in the report—I stand to be corrected—about the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. Was there no reason to see that as a—at least one element of a central co-ordinating mechanism of government around the education and around indigenous education, more specifically?

Mr. Ricard: If you're referring to a committee of Cabinet, those are—the proceedings within those committees aren't—we aren't privy to that, so we would have no direct knowledge of whether it was functioning in that role.

Mr. Allum: Fair enough, some public record not available to you, I can completely understand that. Would it not have been worth noting that the government had established, I believe, in legislation, the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet that did some of that co-ordination?

Mr. Ricard: I would have no knowledge that it did that kind of co-ordination. That's my point though, without direct evidence, we have to be very careful in our reports not to imply or infer information or facts that we can't substantiate.

Mr. Allum: Well, then, I'd ask, probably, the minister first and then the deputy: Is Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet currently constituted, and are you the chair?

Mr. Wishart: Yes, it is constituted. We've actually had one full meeting and deputies' meeting, and I am the chair.

Mr. Allum: And if I could ask the deputy: Would you see Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet maybe not being the central monitoring, but a very important monitoring element of education and indigenous education in particular?

Mr. Strain: Absolutely, and further to that, I would also say from a—from a whole-of-the-system or whole-of-government approach, it would be the go-to place to ensure that all of the departments are working together for common outcomes and goals.

Mr. Allum: I'll concede the floor now, at this point. I may have other questions, but I want to make sure that others have an opportunity to ask questions, and I want to thank the deputy and the minister and the Auditor General for their co-operation and their responses today.

Ms. Klassen: Thanks for being here. My question—well, I personally self-identify. My kids are in the western system, but I'm speaking on behalf the indigenous kids on reserve. Is that under your portfolio, or do I start asking the feds for support?

Mr. Strain: I wish there was a really straightforward answer to that question. There are several. It would really depend on the First Nation we were talking about. First Nations schools on First Nation, the vast majority are funded by INAC, so the federal government. There are some instances, however, where kids go to—off First Nation and into the public school system, in which case they're ours. And then there are some that border our territory where we

share responsibility. So INAC funds gives us money; we provide the education.

Ms. Klassen: Can I get a list of the ones that border? That'd be great.

Mr. Strain: Absolutely.

Ms. Klassen: So in respect of attendance at schools on First Nation, I just wanted to put it out there that our schools are mouldy, our kids get 40 minutes in a gym in my reserve for—per week, and that's every grade because there are six nursery classes, there are six kindergarten classes. There—the schools are busting at the seams already, and we just got a new school recently and our administration offices are in closets. They were designated for closets, but they made way for the kids to have that ability to be in nice classrooms, right? And our libraries are now gone because they've had to split the library to put more classrooms in there. Our roads are deplorable, you know, so our buses continuously break down. So that adds to the attendance issue. One of the things that—we're still a hunting society. So every spring, every fall, a lot of our community kids go out to their traplines, and so that contributes to the attendance as well.

And when you're talking about sending kids out to Winnipeg, if you look at Rinelle Harper, who was, you know, trying to achieve something, ends up getting nearly, you know, passed away from that. I myself left at age 14 for high school because our school did go up to grade 12, but I was already designated for the 00 program, so I don't—maybe some of you guys remember that where it was 00, 01, 02, 03. So I was on the academic route. They knew I was capable of university.

But even though I graduated my own school with highest academics, going into a system, Thompson school system, R.D. Parker, I was at a grade 6 level. And here I was going into grade 9. And so that's one of the big issues that a lot of our kids face and why they fail. And other kids—there was nine of us selected on that path. Only two of us went. A lot of kids don't want to come out. They don't want to leave their homes at 13. You know, I was playing with Barbie dolls and next thing I was parentless in Thompson in a residential school. And so I faced a lot of struggles.

I had a good support system. I made sure of that. You know, I already had a voice way back then, you know, fought for myself, right? But a lot of kids, they're these shy—you know, I'm not going to tell

anybody my issues. You know, so they struggle. And there's a lot of things that go along with that. And they willingly fail or they willingly hide on their First Nation. They don't want to do the school system because that means leaving home. And so that's one of the things that needs to be addressed. So I guess my question is: Who speaks on behalf of the kids?

* (13:40)

Mr. Strain: Certainly, I understand but I do not understand the challenges, but I understand those challenges exist. So I don't want to say I understand what you went through.

That said, there are several groups that advocate on behalf of the children. Some of the issues—the initial issues talked about, about the school situations on First Nation, again, I'm—not my area, so unfortunately I can't speak to those. What I can speak to is the need for programs that help First Nations kids transition into urban or off-First Nation situations, so much like the one you describe, and to ensure that they have equal opportunity to participate.

So, for instance, we fund a program that allows—pays for some extra transportation cost to and from location so that they can participate in extracurricular activities, be part of sports teams or social outings, et cetera, on behalf of the school. So that is something we'd look at very seriously is moving from any rural or remote setting like that into—especially at a very young age, there's a lot of supports that are needed. So we do look at those wrap-around supports. There are some great programs like Morningstar, that runs out of R.B. Russell, which is the exact kind of program that we—continuation of funding has happened this year, that we're looking at as a pilot, but also to expand to others to ensure that everybody gets the best opportunity they have to be the best that they can be.

Ms. Klassen: So I'm still wondering who the kids are, specifically.

Do you know, personally, any of these kids that are getting consulted? Because it's their lives that we're trying to progress. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Strain.

Mr. Strain: Oh, sorry. I've met some through different committees, so absolutely. And hearing those voices—there's nothing more powerful than the

voice of the individual experiencing the situation. Also, we spent a great deal of time at several schools already, before school let out, listening to individual circumstances and then talking with the teachers, the resource teachers, the oshkabes as well, to find out what some of the consistent challenges were, and there are a number of issues and challenges that plague attendance. The number of kids that are couch surfing, staying with relatives, the mental health issues—youth mental health issues, et cetera.

So those—that information is helping form policy moving forward, which then turns into programming to help those. But, again, it's doing what we can to support those now as well as prepare and prevent those situations from occurring in—

Ms. Klassen: In regards, specifically, to our kids in care: Is there anybody speaking on behalf of them, as well?

Mr. Strain: Yes, well, the Children's Advocate speaks for them. As well as, I would say, again—not to be repetitive, but the counsellors, the oshkabes, et cetera, within the schools are feeding some of that information in.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'm going to direct my question to the Auditor General.

So I just want to pick up, in respect of my colleague, Mr. Allum, in respect of really setting the tone and the context, in its totality, for the discussions that we're having right now. And that is lacking in the report, right?

So I understand from your colleague that, you know, there's not a lot of space to frame that historical context. I understand that, I get that piece. However, when it's completely omitted, it really divorces us from a full, comprehensive analysis of this issue, because there's this fundamental piece in which these numbers or these issues are predicated upon, right? So, if we were going to look at the 52 per cent of graduation rates, that's predicated upon a myriad of different historical and contemporary factors, and so it's omitted from your report.

So I think it's—I respectfully—and I say this entirely respectfully—it is problematic. It's problematic for people that are going to be reading the report, because what's happened is, when we have that omission—you know, so not only do we not have a full analysis, but there's intrinsically this kind of notion or this marker that indigenous people—and, in this case, indigenous students—are to blame for their current situation when we don't have that full

analysis. So, you know, I don't know if I have so much of a question, more just a comment that I would hope that going forward that, you know, in 2016 that we fully kind of understand the importance of providing that information and that historical and contemporary context upon which most indigenous issues are predicated upon.

So I share that and I'm not sure if—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Ricard.

Mr. Ricard: Thank you very much for those comments.

We—you know, I must say we were—we tried to be sensitive to all of the factors that might impact the success rates of Aboriginal students. But I think the thing to not forget here is our audit focused on what the department was doing to deal with the gap. It wasn't trying to get at why is there a gap. It was, there is a gap. The department has indicated it is—its goal was to narrow the gap. What was it doing? When we talked about barriers, the systematic identification of barriers, I fully expected that the department would be looking for barriers that may have emerged because of the historical context and the implications and the impact of that on the youth today.

So we, you know, as an office, I would apologize if we somehow—if we, through our absence, through the absence—if specific commentary offended the indigenous people of the province, that definitely wasn't our intent. Our intent here was to really be a voice for ensuring that the department was doing well at what it was—at its goal of attempting to close the gap.

I think we identified a number of areas where the department really needs to do a much better job of planning and developing initiatives and identifying courses of action. And, in particular, one of the things that I focus in in my comments, I believe, is on identifying barriers. And I think when I hear you speak of the historical context and—whether that be the residential schools and the history of colonialism that our indigenous people had to live through, I think that it wasn't our—you know, it wasn't the audit's role to identify the causes or to identify, you know, the reasons why the educational outcomes were the way they were. It was, here's where we're at; what is the department doing? Does it understand fully the implications of the context? That's what we meant by barriers. Does it—is it fully doing that? Does it have a strategic plan that fully, completely

reflects that concern and identifies initiatives to help overcome the impact of that?

And I think that's what we, as best as we could, tried to reflect in our report. And so it wasn't intended to try and explain the—I understand your concern, but it wasn't our intent to try and explain why graduation rates were the way they were. It was really aimed at what is the department doing now to close that gap.

Ms. Fontaine: And I fully appreciate that. I—and, again, I have the utmost respect and I fully appreciate it, but it's, you know, even understanding those gaps, divorced from this, you know, and it's not only a historical. I always say a historical and contemporary in context, because indigenous people, we are still living with those effects, right?

So I will leave it at that, and—but I understand your point as well, but it's—it—the analysis is not a full analysis.

Mr. Ricard: I just wanted to make one more point because I think it speaks to a concern or a question you might have for the department, because as part of our vetting process in the reports, part of our planning, as part of our convictive audit work we do talk to departmental people a great deal. We do try and tell them we're looking for context.

*(13:50)

We want you to teach us about the context that we should be aware of. We give them an opportunity to review the draft report and we ask specifically if there's context that you think the—that we've overlooked, that we should be included in the report. And that was not brought to our attention, okay.

We note that in their responses there is reference to racism, residential schools and colonialism, but it's not a very detailed elaboration either, so.

Ms. Fontaine: I'll direct my questioning to the deputy minister, and congratulations on your appointment.

So, I was going to ask, in respect of everything that I just mentioned, you know, why wasn't there more information provided in setting the tone in that historical contemporary context in respect of understanding more thoroughly and fully those gaps. And, you know, all of these just—statistics, when we look at them again, if we don't have that, we're missing a really key piece to that.

And I know personally some of your staff. You're—it—you have extraordinary indigenous staff, so I know that they would know first-hand, so.

Mr. Strain: I cannot respond directly to why it wasn't included. I wasn't there when the questions were asked, et cetera.

However, what I can tell you is it is definitely part of our context. We understand very clearly the residential school legacy and that it's multi-generational, and the impacts of that, what is that—has done to traditional ways of life, traditional ways of parenting and into the education system. So it is a very clear understanding the impact that has had.

We also understand that in order to improve the outcomes from—for Aboriginal children within the system, it's not just the system of education. It is health, it is families, it is the justice system, et cetera. It's the other parts, workforce part of our department, et cetera. So there is the whole—again, it's that whole of government response to it. So there is no one singular answer.

So we are acutely aware of those factors that have led us to where we are. So that is why there's a myriad of programming which will actually have an effect. The Aboriginal, some of the AAA, the parenting programs, et cetera, those will actually have a very positive effect on those children who will then enter the system. It's generational. It is going to take several generations to get back to where we should be.

If I could just add to a further response to minister—or, sorry—Mr. Allum's question around targets, there currently, if you look at the assessment rates, and they're saying that the pass average or the average attainment is 55 per cent around the norms, the student norm in mathematics, and the Aboriginal indigenous marked it at 35 per cent. The goal is not to bring indigenous to the average of 55 because, quite frankly, 55 is not acceptable either.

So that's where the target-setting issue comes in, it's not just to bring people up to the average, it's that the average, in and of itself, is not good enough anymore.

But there are a myriad of factors and you have to look at it from that whole of system. So very clearly I understand what both MLAs are saying, and that is definitely part of the process that moves forward. Any program with—program and it goes into the system runs through that Aboriginal directorate and

it is—goes across departments to be consulted upon and to look at all the different causes and effects across government, so.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

So I have some questions in respect of the Manitoba Coalition for Indigenous Education. Can you just explain a little bit more a couple of things? So, first off, exactly what it's going to be doing, but also who are the partners and what was the process in identifying those partners? And then, again, like, what's the time frame or the structure or the mandate?

Mr. Strain: Certainly. So the coalition originally started in December 2015 with the signing of the agreement, the blueprint was initiated by the indigenous education working group of the council of presidents of the universities. So post-secondaries were the originators of it. The signing of the blueprint was a milestone event for partnership. Right now it has 10 key commitments which take a strength-based approach to improving educational outcomes for indigenous students, from early education to post-secondary and participation in the labour market upon graduation.

The blueprint is designed to meet the diversity needs and celebrate unique contributions of indigenous students. There's a five-year implementation plan, so 2017 is the start to 2021, being developed a steering committee composed of representatives from all Manitoba universities and colleges, the Manitoba School Boards Association, the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools, the government of Manitoba as an ex officio member and Manitoba's indigenous educational authorities and partners. So those have yet to be specifically identified, so membership in terms of individuals has not yet specifically been identified.

Ms. Fontaine: Sorry, I'm having such a hard time hearing you, so I'm just going to—*[interjection]* No, no, it's fine.

So the specific individuals have not been identified as of yet, and it's going to be the indigenous educational authorities that will determine who will be sitting on this coalition?

Mr. Strain: Might be because I have my papers on top of the microphone.

So it will be—the membership will be of organizations. It will be up to that organization to then determine who their individual member would

be. So it will be the post-secondaries, but then the educational partners, the Aboriginal educational partners, which will be, obviously, could be school boards, will be parent associations, could be student representation. It's not fully fleshed out exactly who each individual organization will be asked to participate, but it will be as inclusive as possible.

Ms. Fontaine: So in respect of indigenous partners or organizations, I'm sure you're well aware that we have political organizations as well, right? We have MKO; we have SAO, AMC, MMF. So will those organizations be offered a seat as well?

Mr. Strain: There will be a combination of between those organizations which represent, as long as—as well as not-for-profit organizations, training organizations. Again, there are some parent councils, northern parent councils in particular, a very strong one in Thompson, so those individuals will be able to put—it is not a—it's not meant to be restrictive in membership. It's meant to be inclusive in membership to get that holistic view of what we need to do and get the right information, advice and guidance.

Ms. Fontaine: Yes, is there any documents prepared that perhaps could be shared just in respect of you saying your 10-point plan and then the five-year plan, and is there anything that could just be shared that would be able to disseminate a little bit more information for us?

Mr. Strain: We could provide that in writing, yes.

Ms. Fontaine: And then—I don't even know if I'm supposed to—is there any seats for opposition for the NDP on there? We can—I throw that out there.

Mr. Strain: I'm sorry. You'll have to get her to repeat the question because I did not hear it.

Ms. Fontaine: My question was is there any seat on the Manitoba Coalition for Indigenous Education for a member of the NDP opposition?

Mr. Strain: Well, as the member probably realizes, there's no seats on it for the governing party either. It is not political in nature; it's non-political in nature and designed to be as inclusive as possible, so I suspect that the member would support that approach.

Ms. Fontaine: Hence, why I was proposing that. Since we're trying to be inclusive, I thought I'd throw it out there, but—*[interjection]* To the deputy minister again, so are there any dollars set aside for the coalition?

Mr. Strain: Not specifically for the coalition. The coalition is to give advice and guidance. What would come out of that coalition could perhaps lead to funding opportunities, specific programs, targeted initiatives.

Ms. Fontaine: And when do you think you'll have some, like, concrete recommendations coming out of that, that then we would be looking at, potentially some dollars and what these programs might look like.

Mr. Strain: So it is to begin full implementation in 2017. So 2017 would be the first of the initiatives, but we would then expect throughout the course of that five years different programming to come forward.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for all of that. So I'm just wanting to understand a little bit more in respect of those transitional dollars. So if you can just kind of walk me through—you know, so a student is leaving a First Nation community and coming into, you know, an urban centre. Like, how are those—first off, what are the transition dollars? What's the total budget? What are the transition dollars per student, and how does that manifest itself in that student's life, I suppose their educational life?

* (14:00)

Mr. Strain: It's a little hard to give you an exact number per student, because there are targeted initiatives for Aboriginal students within, say, a school or a school division. How then they target specifically—I mean, you could take the total number of students divided by the number of dollars of a program and come out with a per student. However, because the programs are very targeted, it goes to by need. So perhaps one student may access a program more than another, so you would never get that exact granular number, I think, that you'd be looking for on a per-student basis.

That said, there are programs that exist in various school divisions. There are some that are mandated by the department and funded by the department. Then, of course, each school division—for instance, Frontier School Division would tend to do a lot more for students transitioning from First Nation into urban settings because of sheer numbers and volume; so they have become very good at it. There's a lot of indigenous programming, cultural programming, et cetera.

When it's from a Winnipeg context, you're into a slightly different matter, because of—it tends to be targeted by its school division, again—Louis Riel, Winnipeg tend to be some of the higher parts. So what goes—they're called wraparound supports, and the whole idea behind the wraparound support is that it gives the student what they need between guidance counselling, extra tuition—tutoring and supports within specific subjects. I mentioned one program that's specific to transportation, which is in some rural school divisions—for instance, Portage La Prairie and Russell, those areas—to allow students to participate in the extracurricular activities, to get the full of the experience and for the program to be fully inclusive of all students within that area.

So there's a myriad of programs. I could definitely respond in writing for that—to a written response of everything that goes on, but there is quite a number of individual grants. And then, of course, each school and school division then builds depending on their independent needs.

Ms. Fontaine: So just so that I'm clear. I understand, like, this amount here, this \$290 per Aboriginal student on educational supports, that's different from the transitional dollars, or is it one and the same? And, if not, how does this dollars work?

Mr. Strain: It would be one and the same, but that would be an average. So what I would suggest is that some students, high-performing students who have transitioned easily and well or perhaps have family supports, in a certain situation, may not access that money. So you could double that somewhere else, depending on access to the programs, depending what the need is for the program, what the student's need is for the program. So it's not quite the same as, say, a per capita funding basis. You do get a per capita, but then the need is based off the student need.

So I'm not sure if—I'm not explaining that very well, clearly. What you have there is an average, the amount of money we spend, on average, per student. That doesn't mean that every single student gets tagged with \$290 that comes with them to do whatever it is they may need to do. It's \$290 per student that goes to the school. The school, then, within the parameters of the program, would look at what individuals need and give them the appropriate supports.

Ms. Fontaine: So just so I'm clear. There's not a separate pot of dollars that are called, like, these transitional dollars?

Mr. Strain: Yes, they are separate grants. They're separate grants that are targeted to specific things that go towards Aboriginal kids.

Ms. Fontaine: Let's try and—I'm sorry, and I'm sorry if I'm a little confused in respect of. So I understand that there's \$290 for indigenous students. My son is, you know, I understand that there's \$290 earmarked. He's—self-identifies, blah, blah, blah. But what are those specific dollars for transitioning? Like, how does that work? Because if there's two pots of dollars, how do those transitional dollars support indigenous students that are coming from the reserve, specifically, to the—unless I'm missing something.

Mr. Strain: No, no, you're not missing anything at all. I think it's my explaining it. The transition—so there is certain programing and grants that are specific to students transitioning from First Nation into the urban areas. So there are smaller grants that are for that; those are very targeted to school divisions that have that need. The school divisions can then augment that number for programming, if they so chose to do that. Specifically, the \$290 per student goes to general cultural difference sensitivity types of things that would happen within the school system. So it is targeted to a numeric—to a number of students. However, how the school division uses that—again, they have to be within certain parameters, but does not specify it is exactly \$290 per student. That's how much they get. They don't have to spend it on each individual student, per se. That part's based on need. And, again, they augment that depending on their situation and different schools and demographics.

Ms. Fontaine: So those transitional funds, how does the department determine what those dollars are per year? Like, what's the formula for that?

Mr. Strain: That was on availability of funds, what we could access at the time from Treasury Board. And then the school divisions apply, they make application to the program and we assess those applications and give grants accordingly.

Ms. Fontaine: Do you have who you—give me the last budgeted amount for those transitional dollars?

Mr. Strain: Apologies. I can get that to you in writing.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm not sure if there's, like, a projection for the next couple of years in respect of those transitional dollars, and what those might be. If I could get those as—or if we could get those, as well, that would be great.

Mr. Strain: Yes, if I could, on that one, that will be a little tougher, because projections—we don't often know. We know those one year in advance, sometimes we can go a little further out. A big issue there is that self-identification piece. We're self-identifying at \$35,000; we do believe that number to be higher. So that is a big piece for us is to do educational awareness, I'll say. Especially for parents to allow kids to self-identify. So, again, that we can get funds and proper supports to those who need them. So it's tough, but—

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Fontaine.

Ms. Fontaine: So just two questions before I hand it over, here.

So I think that that self-identification is actually really key. And we know, and I think we've mentioned it here, that there's a variety of reasons why people don't self-identify. So does the department have a—oh, I had another question, sorry. Does the department have a strategy in respect of kind of any public awareness campaigns on how we're going to get parents to self-identify. And then, I guess—and I know I'm mixing all of them because I want to give time, but—and how does the federal government's funding play into all of this as well?

I know I just 'mished' everything together.

Mr. Strain: In terms of is there a targeted approach for self-identification? Each school division has been allowed to do that individually to this point. What I've heard over the last couple of months is that is not working to the extent that it should, so we are currently looking at what could we do on a broader campaign.

And I think it's—there has been some, for various reasons, stigma attached to it, so there is a reason why folks are not self-identifying. And it's important to understand what that is, to uncover that whether that be pure fear of exclusion or special treatment or for whatever reason that is, to uncover what that is, whatever that systematic reason is. And, then, to also explain the benefits of self-identification is to celebrate who we are and what we are and not to do those negative aspects to it.

So—but, again, it goes back to some of the original questioning about the situation, and for

generations certain things have been pushed through. So it's going to take a little bit to get over that. But, certainly, that is something that we want to do, because there are—again, like I said, there's probably a lot more. Well, we know there's more. We know there's more and we need to do more.

That said, the last question was a little big. Their—INAC does a lot of work so, again, going back to my initial response around Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, they fund on-reserve activities—so from K to 12, specifically.

So there are transfers. If an Aboriginal, indigenous child goes off-reserve there's a transfer of money that goes with it. There are some issues with that because INAC does not fund to the level the Province funds to. So that causes individual First Nations to make—have some financial struggles, at times, which is a bit of an issue. The school divisions work with them to make sure that kids get the equal opportunity. So that is a discussion we will be entering into very shortly with INAC. They have shown some indication in Saskatchewan, one particular instance where they changed their funding model. So that's a positive and they're calling it a pilot; but, as we all know, pilots tend to—especially when they're positive—have a good effect. So that would be huge in respect to on-First Nation kids.

*(14:10)

Also, we're waiting for the outcome of the recent quarter tribunal and trying to figure—well, not trying to figure out—seeing what that does in terms of—for non-status and Metis, so.

Ms. Fontaine: Okay, I promise this will be my last question. Sorry. So I know that we noted in the report that at the time of the report, the department was looking at a strategy of getting more supporting training, getting more indigenous teachers. So I'm interested to know where the department's at in respect to that strategy. Has it rolled out, and what does that strategy look like?

Mr. Strain: I'm sorry; apologize again. The strategy is not fully fleshed out at this point in time. There'll be some changes to it. But there is a heavy promotion, and we're doing a lot of work with the post-secondaries in particular, those who obviously—who have the education programs. There are a lot of bursaries and scholarships that go specifically targeted for those groups. That's right through from the school boards to the teachers' association, MTS, et cetera. So there is a concerted effort among a

number of partners to play into that. So more—there'll be more to come on that.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Further to that question, Mr. Strain, I guess, historically, Brandon University is a big part of educating Aboriginal, First Nations teachers. PENT is a successful program; BUNTEP was another program that was very successful. As a former board member, I attended many graduation ceremonies and saw the cohort going out into educating students. However, BUNTEP was moved to UCN, is my understanding. And does that program still exist at UCN, and does it graduate any teachers?

Mr. Strain: That program does exist and continues to be highly successful.

Mr. Allum: I just wanted to pick up on the transition funding question just briefly. We had, in response to the auditor's report, identified a fund we called the First Nations transition fund. I believe that was \$500,000. Was that money protected in the budget?

Mr. Strain: So the number was \$440,000, yes. It was not specifically funded within the budget, but we did find the money within the department to fund part of that.

Mr. Allum: So the fund doesn't exist?

Mr. Strain: The fund does exist.

Mr. Allum: The fund does exist. It's not new money. It's reoriented money and not 440, which you corrected me on the number, it's how much?

Mr. Strain: Apologies. You had said 500. It is 440.

Mr. Allum: No, I understand that. But I understood you to say that you had redirected money for a portion of that 440. So how much have you redirected?

Mr. Strain: We've notionally targeted \$200,000, and we were asking for applications from the school divisions.

Mr. Allum: Thank you on that as well.

And then one final question. The report makes reference to kids in care and how utterly important that element is to improving outcomes for indigenous students as well. A task force had been established from—that'd be co-chaired by Tammy Christensen at Ndinawe and Kevin—I'm looking at my sister—Kevin—*[interjection]* No. Sorry, I'm—the other names are forgetting me. Sorry. And Kevin Lamoureux, not the elected MP but the other very fine

Kevin Lamoureux, I might add. There'd be a number of recommendations coming from that report. Is it your intention to implement those recommendations?

Mr. Strain: Our—it would be our intent to take them under serious consideration and implement those that we can, absolutely.

Mr. Allum: So no progress has been made on that to date?

Mr. Strain: It's something that we're looking at it within the fall. So, again, we're in the first—sorry. We're in the first few months of doing business. So it's in the to-do list and on the radar and will be coming forward shortly.

Mr. Allum: We had projected to put in a fund for one of the key recommendations in that report related to transportation of kids in care so that whatever might happen in terms of their home situation, their school life could be as stable as possible and the teacher and the student would work together with the principal to identify if the child wanted to stay there at the school even if their foster home was moving somewhere else, and so we had, I think, identified several hundred thousand dollars for transportation in order to ensure that that recommendation was implemented and ready to go.

Has that money been protected?

Mr. Strain: That money was—that was non-existing money. That was money that would be asked for in the future, so what we're having to do is look at the recommendations. We're also talking to Family Services. We're talking to the school boards just to solidify what is actually needed in that particular instance.

There's a secondary part of that which is Manitoba Housing, which, at times, closes down entire buildings and relocates families, which creates another set of situations for socio-economic disadvantaged people. So we're working in that whole collective and then looking at—is the transportation part—will it be part of that further review?

Mr. Allum: So the two items—the transition fund that we talked about as well as this transportation fund for kids in care, I take those each to be redirected dollars there, not new dollars that the government has utilized to respond to the recommendations of the Auditor General.

Am I correct in that?

Mr. Strain: Only partially. The \$200,000 is redirected funds. The others have not been identified nor redirected at this point in time. There's been no source of funds identified at this point.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I just want to return to something that we started discussing a few minutes ago. The report talks about how it is an ongoing challenge to identify Aboriginal students, and when we look at trying to gather the information and come up with conclusions it is often difficult.

So I see, in this case, the Auditor General's Office had gone through and had taken a look at practices of different divisions dealing with self-reporting and found there was actually a wide range. Some divisions gave families an opportunity to self-identify each year; some only when their child started school in kindergarten, and some when they began a new school.

Recommendation No. 13 is actually quite clear. The Auditor General recommends the department take steps to ensure that all schools give parents an annual opportunity to declare their child's Aboriginal identity.

The response at that time is that the department would require all school divisions to provide parents with an opportunity to declare the child's identity on an annual basis and incorporate the Aboriginal identity self-declaration on their main student registration form.

Will this be going into effect this fall or next fall, or what is the plan for the division?

Mr. Strain: This fall.

Mr. Swan: I thank the deputy minister for that, and I think we've already discussed that some parents may not choose to identify for various reasons. I expect it's fair to say that school divisions do have an interest, if only a small one, in trying to make sure that every—everyone with an Aboriginal child reports.

Is there any effort planned to communicate with school divisions to try to encourage them to work with parents to ensure that there's the most accurate reporting as possible?

Mr. Strain: Absolutely, and further we will be sharing best practices from within the school division, so those who have a high success rate and high return rate, we would share those best practices with the school divisions who are struggling. The

parents are absolutely the key to that particular program.

Mr. Swan: That's great. Is there any plan to report on the success of those efforts which the deputy minister says will be beginning this fall?

Mr. Strain: That's actually a very easy one because if that 35,000 number goes up, we will be successful, so we will see more—if we are successful we will see more self-identification.

Mr. Swan: Thank you.

Ms. Klassen: I just wanted to go on recommendation 13 as well, because self-identifying, I said I do it myself, and I never understood why, but, at the same time, other parents that I know in the—in Steinbach, they don't want to self-identify because there are a lot of reasons, you know, mentioned here as well. There is still a fear of, you know, Big Brother is watching me, or the government's following us yet again, or, you know, people—there are still people who are ashamed that they're Aboriginal. And so that's a couple of things I wanted to bring.

* (14:20)

So the understanding doesn't come through as to why. And it's every year, and so I usually put, yes, we're still Indian, on my form when I submit it to the Hanover School Division there.

But—so, the target should be an understanding as to why this form is important. You know, that should be the focus when you're—when the school is presenting it to the parents, you know, not the focus of, oh, here's this mysterious form asking you whether or not—what kind of First Nation, Inuit or Metis, what kind of indigenous person you are, and if you are that, in fact. So the key is to get the understanding and then I'm sure a lot more parents would, you know—like it was described to me way later on that, you know, possibly more funding would be targeted for my kids and then, yes, you know, right away. So the key is education, educating people why that form is so important.

The other thing I had was: Are the CFS kids mandated—like, the foster parents, are they mandated to sign those forms? I'm not sure who I should ask.

Mr. Strain: I do not know the answer but I will undertake to find that out for you.

Mr. Wishart: It's my understanding that, when the CFS children are put into school in that system, that the social worker is to identify them if known, and

I'm sure they should be. And so there should be some record, and I would—I'm not absolutely positive, but I believe it should be passed down to the school division.

Mr. Marcelino: Considering that most of the outcomes of any program, especially those where money's involved, the measure is how successful it is, or how much money was spent.

Now, my question is this: How many people have qualified for the grants for the BSSAP or the AAA?

Mr. Strain: I wouldn't have that information right at my fingertips but there would—I could certainly get that for you, very specific number of individuals that have benefited from those.

Mr. Marcelino: As a corollary to that, considering that there are times when, you know, when the funding model of the Department of Education, before, was based on a lump sum being provided, how many students so divided by the number of students that's how much. The finding of the Auditor General is that there's only \$290 that was spent.

Do you intend to increase that in order to substantially, maybe, improve the chances of success?

Mr. Strain: So you're absolutely right, that the school funding model is—it's based on a number of factors.

There is a per capita grant that is given. So, for each student's based on projected enrolment for September; that is what schools will get. What there is also is a number of other grants that are available for special, targeted initiatives. So, in particular, in this instance we were talking about for indigenous achievement, could be the transition fund, could be special transportation funds, could be a number of different children in care, et cetera, could be a number of different things.

So that is where we will be looking for those targeted places, so that those dollars get to the kids most in need, to allow for full inclusion within the system.

Mr. Marcelino: Maybe the last question for me.

Do we have any hint as to how many indigenous students who enrolled then drop out?

Mr. Strain: Yes, so we would know what those specific numbers are.

We have graduation rates, you know, around 53, 54 per cent. So that would indicate, you know, as we know, there's—you can't use the 35 student—35,000 students as—and then just divide that and figure out by 53 because, obviously, those are from K to 12 so—but that is the graduation ratio.

Again, without proper self-identification, I could give you a number, but it would not be as accurate as we would like it to be.

Mr. Marcelino: The real question I have is: Have we at least attempted to identify why we have such a huge gap or dropout rate?

Mr. Strain: Absolutely, we're working to identify that as we speak. There is a number of reasons, and the larger question doesn't become those who are not successful, i.e., do not pass grade 12 so do not graduate. There's actually a much larger issue around grade 8, which is where a large number of dropouts occur.

There is another bubble or a bump when—especially when kids come off First Nation and go into the—are forced to leave their homes, for lack of a better term. There's another bump there, so it's kind of following that continuum. So there is no one simple reason why that occurs.

So that's why there's a number of programs and grants and solutions; that's why we work with the indigenous educators; that's why we work with the parents; that's why we work with First Nations leadership, is to find out what are some of those challenges and issues and how can we work, as a system, to bring people back in, because there is a secondary part of that, which is once kids leave K to 12, is re-engaging as adults. And then how can we get to GEDs, how can they be welcomed back into the system to upgrade skills for employment purposes. So it is a—it's a wide variety, and it's trying to be as holistic as possible.

Mr. Marcelino: Yes, would—I said one last question, sorry.

Would the inclusion of the recommendation for an indigenous curriculum in all public schools help out in maybe enhancing the graduation rate, and maybe raising a little bit the level of hope for some indigenous students and communities? Is that something that's within your ambit of authority or power?

Mr. Strain: Yes, so there is some research that would say that that is a 'benefactual'—a 'benefact' to

students and staying in and being inclusive. There is another overarching piece, which is understanding our history, who we are, where we came—where we come from. And that's not just for indigenous students, but that's for all Manitobans.

So there is a larger impact, I would say, on that side of things, and folks understanding about Indian residential schools, about '60s scoop, about some of these things that have happened that have led us to where we are, and the importance of that within our history. Ten years ago, 15 years ago, that was not part of our official history; this is now a part of our history. You know, we have to be forthright about that. People have to know. Generation—the future—present generation and future generations have to know why we are where we are. That will help in the inclusion.

Mr. Swan: Yes, the community schools program has been quite successful at helping schools, maybe with parents with lower socio-economic backgrounds, but also parents who may be less likely to engage in the school system because of their own school experience. They may be parents that were impacted by residential schools. It could also be newcomers to Canada. The schools are in a lot of areas where there are both large indigenous populations and newcomers.

In the West End, the area I represent, John M. King and Wellington School are both community schools. The department provides the division with a liaison worker. They're not a teacher; they're a liaison worker whose job is to try and encourage parents to become familiar with the school. It's very handy in a number of ways. Parents who may never have thought of setting foot inside a school then are quite prepared not just to attend but then to be—to advocate for their children with teachers, with which—with principals.

Even though it's not directed at First Nations students, I'll ask the deputy—if he thinks it's unfair, he can throw it to the minister—do you seek the community schools program as being a best practice for achieving successful transitions for First Nations students who may be coming from a northern community into the city of Winnipeg?

* (14:30)

Mr. Strain: Short answer would be yes. They are showing—proving to be highly successful. I would also say not only from a transitioning point of view but also for urban aboriginal kids, for anyone in a

socio-economic disadvantage, single parents from different backgrounds, say, for newcomers, et cetera. I can also tell you that probably that the strongest indicator of their success, is myself and Joy Cramer, deputy of Families, met with the parent advisory group in the community schools, and some of those folks said they would never have ever participated in school. Some have never finished school themselves, but here they are now sitting as representatives not only on their parent councils but on the community schools councils and advising us on it.

So, again, as I reiterated earlier, there is nothing stronger than that personal experience and those testimonials to help guide us forward. But also what comes from that is their understanding of the system is there now is more ways to help than to hinder, and previously the system was often seen as a—not a friend; it was a foe, and now it's being seen as a friend.

Mr. Swan: Well, thank you, Deputy Minister, for that response, and I heartily agree.

Another happy by-product of that system has been some parents who've now been enticed to come in the door, have a look at what's going on in the school. I have met parents who've decided not only are they prepared to advocate for their kids and be involved in their education, they actually want to be educators. And I know of parents who then got on to become educational assistants and now a couple of parents who, years before would never have set foot inside a school, thinking about being a teacher.

So I thank the deputy minister for that response, and I hope we continue to see the community school program playing a role indirectly and accomplishing the things that are set out in the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Derek Johnston (Interlake): I have two questions. On the report, on page 44—I'm going to hand it over to you—I asked this question when we were going over the report with the auditor, and I just thought that I would take the opportunity to ask you—the auditor wasn't able to comment after the report was published in 2016—in regard to initiatives to—or an advisory committee looking at strategies of increasing Aboriginal teachers in Manitoba. And you may have to take this question as notice; I can appreciate that. But I'm just wondering if there's any further you can relay in regard to that initiative.

Mr. Strain: Yes, the—what I can tell you is the work continues to identify and promote Aboriginal

educators, to show the benefits of that within communities. It has been particularly successful in the North, not quite as successful from an urban point of view. So it's work that we continually need to do.

Again, it's somewhat chosen profession, so it's hard to—we can definitely target. There are some specific bursaries and scholarships that go specifically towards that. So we're hoping that some of those new initiatives will take hold and that number would increase over the course of time.
[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With demand being so high, certainly that would be an avenue that may entice Aboriginal individuals to pursue that type of—I know in my former—with my former responsibilities as school trustee, our school division was always very aggressively trying to create further representation of Aboriginal teachers, so therefore the demand is there. So that's kind of where I'm going, Mr. Chair.

Second question is you had indicated when you were talking about overall results of students in Manitoba, and you had indicated that Aboriginal student results will also benefit from increased initiatives by the provincial government to be more results oriented. Could you speak to that a little bit?

Mr. Strain: Absolutely. So with a focus on literacy and numeracy, there will be specific dollars. We're investigating programs right now to increase performance of all students, so, obviously, there would be the spinoff effect. Aboriginal students are students, so there would be that benefit, net benefit overall, to them.

The secondary part of that is that while those go in en masse, for the whole, for any student falling behind, who is not achieving those goals, is also to look at specific programs to help them come up or to increase their capacity in their issues.

So it's not just one specific thing that we're doing; there would be a myriad of things, but the focus on increased performance is—

An Honourable Member: It raises the bar.

Mr. Strain: It raises the bar for everyone. But as I mentioned previously, it's not to get just to the minimum, it is to increase performance period, absolutely, yes, absolutely.

Ms. Klassen: I wanted to add to that. I see the extremes in Kewatinook in regards to Aboriginal teachers. Our schools are largely staffed by our own community members. UCN recently graduated—I can't remember the number—I think it's around 30 with the BUNTEP degrees. So—but then I see, in a place like Shamattawa, where there's only one Aboriginal teacher in that community, and, for the last three years, they haven't had a single graduate. In our own community, you know, you see the benefits, because we brag—I think we had over 100 graduates altogether. That's post-secondary and high school as well, right. And so we see the benefits of having the—our own teaching our kids, right.

The question I had, though, was in regards to our transgender kids in school and their dropout rates and all the, like, the LGBTTQ* community. And I don't see anything in the reports regarding how we're going to ensure that a larger number of those—that community is graduating. So is there anything addressing that?

Mr. Strain: Two things, if I could. I know the first one wasn't really a question, but I'd like to address it anyway. The number of Aboriginal teachers as well—the hope is when you get that graduation rate higher, that there would be also a higher number that would go on to post-secondary education, and, hopefully, a number of those would be teachers. So that's kind of a, you know, cause-and-effect piece.

On the issue of transgender and LGBTQ*, there are a number of—*[interjection]* Thank you—there are a number of programs that are under way within the schools or educate students, teachers, school boards, trustees, et cetera. In specific to dropout rates, there is a—you know, I don't have that number right on my fingertips of what that number would be, because we don't ask for that self-identification. So it would be very hard to say, but the hope is that those programs of awareness, education—would hope that they would work and retain students.

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): I'm just wondering if, in your numbers of graduation rates, if there's a direct correlation between isolation, like, communities that have no train or winter road, that are basically just fly-in, are they—are their graduation rates lower? Is it related to the isolation? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Strain.

Mr. Strain: Apologies. Some of those stats we'd have to get from INAC. We wouldn't keep those

stats. We would know that they left the public school system, but we wouldn't know that they left school, period, or if they're coming back, et cetera. So there—but there's two separate parts of that, too, and there are—is correlation between—seemingly correlation between coming off a First Nation and going back. The reasons for that dropout tend not to necessarily be exactly the same.

So that's what I was talking about before. When you're looking at a stay in school or to increase graduation rates, there is not just one simple solution, because everyone's not starting from the same platform and not having the same issues along the continuum. To have a grade 10 student in R.B. Russell school who is couch surfing undergoes substantially more issues than, you know, somebody from Tuxedo who's staying at their parents' home with, you know, a stable environment. So there's a lot of different factors in there. You could get into some of that subdivision, but, unfortunately, that 53 per cent is not substantially higher or lower in any one particular school division.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, I'd suggest to the committee that we—potentially, we can move on to other reports with the understanding that we will return to this report to—for consideration by the committee at the end of the—of this afternoon's session.

But, as previously agreed, then, if we could, we could move to the Auditor General's Report—Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, section 8 and section 14. That is from May of 2015. And the May 2016 report considering special needs education and Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program. So, again, just to be clear, Provincial Nominee Program we would like to consider as a separate section at the—after we've considered these particular reports.

If that's clear, I will ask the Auditor General if he has an opening statement with regards to these reports.

* (14:40)

Mr. Ricard: I do have an opening statement.

Mr. Chair, a follow-up review is scheduled approximately 18 months after a project audit report is released and annually thereafter for two more years for a total three—three follow-ups. We request that management provide us with status updates using our prescribed template.

Our review consists primarily of inquiry, analytical procedures and discussion related to information supplied. We do not re-perform audit procedures from the original audit.

So, with respect to the recommendations included in the special needs education report that was originally issued in January of 2012, the follow-up report that we issued in May 2016 is the third and final follow-up review we will be conducting. As at June 30th, 2015, 12 of our 19 recommendations had been implemented. The department does not intend to implement recommendations 2, 9, 10 and 11, but we continue to support the value of these recommendations. We noted that significant progress has been made in implementing one of the remaining three recommendations.

With respect to the recommendations included in the early learning—the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program audit report that was originally issued in January 2013, the follow-up report that we issued in May 2016 is the second follow-up review that we conducted. One more review is scheduled.

As at June 30th, 2015, 12 of the 25 recommendations had been implemented and we noted that significant progress had been made on eight on the 13 that remained in progress.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Ricard.

Does the deputy minister have an opening statement?

Mr. Strain: In Manitoba, we are committed to providing high-quality, inclusive education for all of our students. Manitoba school divisions have a long history of ensuring that students with special needs are not just included in their community school, but also that they have a sense of belonging and feel valued and safe in caring classrooms.

The skilled work—oh, sorry—build upon the foundation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Human Rights Code, the appropriate educational program or regulation and the amendment to the educational administration regulations were finalized in 2005 and provide regulations and consistent standards for programming for students with special needs, regardless of the geographical location within the province.

The department provides school divisions with categorical funding and programming supports to

school divisions to meet their obligations, specifically for students with special needs. For example, the formula-based student services grant supports a large number of students with mild to moderate learning, assistants' needs and department staff provides school divisions with training, direct teaching and support documents in numerous special needs areas.

In place for over 32 years, special needs funding, levels 2 and 3, are grants for a small number of students with severe to profound disabilities and programming needs. School divisions submit individual student funding applications to the department based on established criteria that relate to students with severe to profound intellectual, physical, sensory or social-emotional disabilities.

Departmental staff processes these level 2 and 3 funding applications and, if approved, funding is provided to the school division to support the appropriate educational programming of the student they applied for.

The department provides school divisions with approximately \$170 million annually to support students with special needs. Of that amount, around \$70 million is for level 2 and 3 grants for nearly 5,500 students. Given the large government investment in this area, the OAG performed an audit in the department in the area of special needs and programming and released its report in January 2012. The OAG contained—report contained 19 recommendations, largely centered on the work of the Program and Student Services Branch, enhancing the documentation of funding decisions, providing easier access to training and support materials to parents and Student Services' staff and monitoring student outcomes as a result of the supports being provided.

The funding review team conducts a review of reporting processes of one-third of the school divisions each year. This process is an accountability measure that includes departmental staff visiting schools and verifying students' eligibility and that the appropriate planning and supports are in place and documented according to provincial standards. Revisions to the funding application process and review reporting process address many of the auditor's recommendations.

The Task Force on Special Needs Funding was established in March 2015 to explore potential changes, improvements and/or alternative models for funding. A final report in November 2015 recommended that student-specific formula grant—or

student-specific funding application process be replaced by a formula grant and that the individualized education plan report be mandated for use for students with special needs as appropriate in conjunction with the reporting process for all students in Manitoba. Work is under way to implement these recommendations.

As of June 2016, 12 of these recommendations were addressed; four of the recommendations are not intended to be implemented and are considered to be cleared. The three remaining recommendations are indicated to be as work in progress, although significant progress has been noted in each.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you to the deputy minister.

I'll now open the floor to questions.

Mr. Allum: So four of the recommendations were—the department said that they weren't going to act on them.

Will you be revisiting those four recommendations?

Mr. Strain: The reason for not implementing those four is because it's the jurisdiction of the school division. So we'll work with the school divisions, but it is the school divisions themselves that have authority over those particular recommendations.

So they have been informed and we'll work with them.

Mr. Allum: Thank you for that.

The special needs task force, which you mentioned, recommended that we, as a system, revisit the application process that was going to be trialed in Louis Riel, made voluntary in year 2, and made mandatory in year 3, assuming there was good, healthy, constructive learning process going on throughout those three—that three-year period.

Is that still the plan, then, with respect to the application process itself?

Mr. Strain: Yes.

Mr. Allum: I'm very pleased to hear that.

Now, there are several other recommendations associated with the special needs task force. My understanding, from the minister during Estimates, that, in fact, there hadn't been a final report, but I knew that there was. Is that task force continuing to meet, however, which I think probably is what the minister was referring to.

Mr. Strain: Yes, so there was a final report. However, what there were were several recommendations that were to be followed-up with. Of course, the largest one being the funding model that was put forward. So they continue to meet, they continue to make recommendations, and they're finalizing a recommendation on a funding form then.

Mr. Allum: You may not have this at your fingertips, but just for the members of the committee: There was a very broad consensus on the special needs task force about the funding model in particular, as well as the other recommendations.

Can you articulate who was on that task force?

Mr. Strain: I would have to get back to you in writing. I—it's at my fingertip, I can see faces, but I wouldn't be able to quote names. I want to be accurate.

Mr. Allum: For the benefit of committee members, so that they would know—and it's not the individuals, of course, it's who they're representing and—because it was a broad and important consensus that takes time to be achieved in any context. And I think members would want to know who was involved—and has considerable amount of work that went into that. And I'm very pleased to hear that you're proceeding with the taskforce and continuing to work on that particular file.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further—oh, Ms. Klassen.

Ms. Klassen: Once again, the question of your funding model. Does that apply to reserves on school—schools on reserve, or is it specifically for urban areas?

Mr. Strain: It is specific to schools under our jurisdiction and First Nation schools, unfortunately, don't fall under it.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, I recommend, then, that the committee moves on to our final set of considerations for this afternoon, including the Auditor General's report, chapter 7, dated January 2013, as well as the two follow-ups with regards to the Provincial Nominee Program for Business.

And does the Auditor General have an opening statement with regard to those reports?

Mr. Ricard: Yes, I do, very brief one.

Mr. Chair, with respect to the recommendations included in the Provincial Nominee Program for

Business audit report that was originally issued in January 2013, the follow-up report that we issued, in May 2016, is the second follow-up report that we conducted. One more review is scheduled.

As of June 30th, 2015, 10 of our 13 recommendations had been implemented.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Ricard.

Does the deputy minister have an opening statement with regards to these reports?

*(14:50)

Mr. Strain: The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program business stream is an integral part of Manitoba's economic development strategy. The MPNP nominates business applicants who demonstrate that they have a net worth of business management experience necessary to 'successfully' invest in, and-or start and directly manage, a business in Manitoba after they have received a permanent visa from the federal government. Business nominees are required to provide \$100,000 deposit and sign a performance agreement with the Province committing them to establish a business meeting specific requirements within two years in order to have their deposits returned.

Since the program was established in 2000, over 8,400–840 initial business investments have been made from 18 different countries, reflecting a total investment in the province in excess of \$275 million. In the last three years, 400 jobs have been created or maintained by businesses started by applicants to the program, and business nominees have invested in over 100 farms in rural Manitoba, supporting Manitoba's agricultural sector.

The OAG's report identified risks and vulnerabilities associated with the business category of the Provincial Nominee Program arising from insufficient measures for risk management, post-arrival compliance monitoring of nominees, and overall quality assurance to ensure the program was meeting its objectives of nominating entrepreneurs who are willing to fulfill their obligations to start a successful business in Manitoba.

In line with the OAG's initial report in 2013, the Provincial Nominee Program has successfully implemented 10 of the 13 recommendations and made a number of significant improvements designed to strengthen program integrity and to attract well qualified immigrant entrepreneurs to

Manitoba. These changes include the introduction of the Expression of Interest System, application fees, adaptability and risk matrixes, the Farm Strategic Recruitment Initiative, and additional due diligence measures and capacities.

As indicated in the OAG's May 2016 report, there are three recommendations that remain in progress. The department continues to work diligently to achieve compliance with these recommendations related to the tracking and monitoring of provincial nominees. In July, an MOU was signed between my department and the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living to put in place a formal mechanism for the exchange of personal and personal health information to determine residencies and retention of provincial nominees for a minimum of three years.

The department also continues to work with civil legal services to explore arrangements with third-party credit reporting agencies that will help verify nominee residents in Canada. And this year, based on the results of the lean initiative, improvements have been implemented to—implement to achieve program efficiencies and to ensure the sustainable implementation of the OAG's recommendation. The skilled worker and business categories of the Provincial Nominee Program have been structurally integrated and physically co-located, and there's been a consolidation of dedicated Integrity & Quality Assurance unit.

Throughout the OAG's audit process, the business program has been enhanced and will operate more efficiently to continue attracting quality entrepreneurs to Manitoba's growing economy.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the deputy minister for the comments.

I now open the floor for questions.

Mr. Marcelino: I'm interested to know if there is any plan to expand this program.

Mr. Strain: Clarification question: specifically, the business nominee program?

Mr. Marcelino: Yes, just the business nominee program.

Mr. Chairperson: Mister—sorry, honourable minister.

Mr. Wishart: At this time, Ted, there's no—or, the honourable member from Maples, have I got it right?

[interjection] Tyndall Park, sorry—Tyndall Park. At this time, there's no plan to expand it.

Ms. Marcelino: Are there plans to increase the fees?

Mr. Strain: Currently, we're—are reviewing the process. So, of course, any time you have efficiencies and you're looking for different things, sources of revenue are also very important. So we're looking to be competitive within Canada and competitive within the world, attracting business-class entrepreneurs to Manitoba. So we will definitely be looking at that in a more general review of the full of the program.

Ms. Marcelino: And are there plans to up the amount of money that's needed in order to make a deposit, a qualified deposit? Are we increasing it, the level of the deposit?

Mr. Strain: Yes. It would be the same process, so that when we're doing the whole of the program, we would definitely look at that, and, again, in relation to different standards throughout the country and the world on what's acceptable.

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, and do we have any timelines as to when this review might be completed?

Mr. Strain: It is the department's intention to do that in the first year, within the first year.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): I'm just looking at the Provincial Nominee Program for Business, the cross-Canada comparison, and I notice that Manitoba, New Brunswick and Yukon do not have processing fees. But, specifically, for Manitoba, why is that not—why do we not have that fee, a processing fee?

Mr. Strain: So that was a decision that was made previously. I believe, at the time, it was to be competitive and attractive. Again, that's something we'll be looking at in a more fulsome review is why we don't have that fee, and, if a fee is appropriate, what would the structure be.

Ms. Klassen: Just when we're finishing, I have a question. I'm going to use one of these ones here. What is the timeline for the full implementation of the single application process?

Mr. Strain: It is our hope to be done within the year. That is our target.

Ms. Klassen: How will that improve the efficiency?

Mr. Strain: Single application—anytime you have more—anytime you reduce the number of paperwork

you have to look at, reduce the number of steps for the applicant, the accuracy of the information increases, which means processing time then increases, because the information is there to make the decision in a timely basis.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Deputy Minister, I'm curious as to how you're going to track long-term nominees so that you know they're staying in the province.

Mr. Strain: Again, that was one of the recommendations, was that it is very hard to do. Some of the issues around there are privacy issues, so I indicated that we are—we, currently, just struck an agreement with—MOU at the—Health. We're also looking at some different credit agencies to see how we can do that. It is—gets—butts up a little against privacy legislation, which, of course, you do not want to intervene. However, there is also some strength that we can do on the front end of that application process.

Ms. Morley-Lecomte: So, if there are family concerns for an individual who may enter Manitoba but want to go to BC and you know that, would that hinder or stop or somehow change the application?

Mr. Strain: The family connection is an interesting one. It is used as a factor so part of an overarching—the whole of the application. That said, because someone has a sibling or a cousin or, you know, some family member outside of our jurisdiction should also not be held against them per se in their decision to come to Manitoba. I, personally, have sisters across the West, and I'm not moving to get any closer to them so. I joke there, but you also—yes, you don't want to be a detriment, but it is one small indicator that perhaps there is a risk that that person would not settle here.

Part of the issue with the provincial—with the nominee program, in the business class in particular, is they do receive permanent residency, and the beauty of living in a free country is once you have that residency, you are free to go where you want. So it is that front-end screening that is very important to ensure that folks who have chosen this route invest and become entrepreneurs within the province.

Mr. Johnston: I had a question in regards to post-landing responsibilities. As in the auditor's report, the nominee has two years from the date of landing in Canada to meet the investment conditions. They may request an extension or a change of

business intent. If there is a change of business intent, a form gets filled out, et cetera.

When the candidate applies for acceptance, is it—the criteria not laid out? I guess what I'm getting at is that what would indicate exception of a change in business intent? Can you explain that?

* (15:00)

Mr. Strain: Yes, certainly. So, when an initial entrepreneur comes, they may have a certain business in mind that they would like to invest in, whether that be a machine shop, an abattoir, a franchise of, some type of farm. What can sometimes happen within that two-year period is they may search the market for such a business to buy, and it does not come to fruition, or perhaps they're in negotiations to purchase or take something over within that two-year—when that two-year timeline is running out. So what that allows to do is to not default their deposit. So it allows for an extension, assuming they have a legitimate opportunity that they're following up on, could be a health concern, could be any number of, you know, extenuating circumstances.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now move to consideration of all of the reports, but before we do that, I thought I might open up the floor to any questions that folks may still have on any of the reports in a global fashion before we move on to consideration of the reports.

Are there any other questions from members of the committee?

Okay, so then I will ask: Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of chapter 7, Provincial Nominee Program for Business, of the Auditor General's Report—Annual Report to the Legislature, dated January 2013? *[Agreed]*

And just as a point of clarification for folks who are following along here, we actually considered the reports in the reverse order. We're now considering them in the order that they are presented on your—on the order paper of the day.

So then I will ask: Because we have considered all chapters of the Auditor General's Annual Report to the Legislature, dated January 2013, shall this report pass? *[Agreed]*

Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of section 8, Special needs education, of the Auditor General's Report—

Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated May 2015? *[Agreed]*

Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of section 14, Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program, of the Auditor General's Report—Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated May 2015? *[Agreed]*

Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of section 17, Provincial Nominee Program for Business, of the Auditor General's Report—Follow-Up of Previously Issued Recommendations, dated May 2015? *[Agreed]*

Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of the item on special needs education included in the Auditor General's Report—follow-up of previously issued recommendations, dated May 2016? *[Agreed]*

Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of the item on Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Program included in the Auditor General's report—follow-up of previously recommended—previously issued recommendations, dated May 2016? *[Agreed]*

Does the committee agree that we have completed consideration of the item on Provincial Nominee Program for Business included in the Auditor General's Report—follow-up of previously issued recommendations, dated May 2016? *[Agreed]*

Auditor General's Report – Improving Educational Outcomes for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Students, dated January 2016—pass.

This concludes the business before us.

Before we rise, it'd be appreciated if members would leave behind any unused copies of reports so they may be collected and reused at the next meeting.

The hour being 3:04, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 3:04 p.m.

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