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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Alberta | 18e  | 2e  | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du ministère de l’Éducation  | 14 avril 1976 | M. Julian G. Koziak | Ministre de l’Éducation  |  PC |

**Mr. Koziak:** Mr. Chairman, first of all, before getting into the estimates, I would like to make two announcements. I'd like to make them this afternoon before the hon. members leave for the Easter break, because I'm sure the information I'll be supplying in these announcements will be of use in the discussions they will be having with their constituents.

The first announcement I'd like to make, Mr. Chairman, is in connection with the early childhood services program. I might add at the beginning that the early childhood services program, which was first developed under my extremely capable predecessor, has been a highly successful program and well accepted throughout this province.

I have the figures here as to the total enrolment in the early childhood services programs as of February 20, 1976, in the province. That is 26,690, which is fairly close to 90 per cent of all the children of the age who would be entitled to enroll in these programs.

The announcement I wish to make this afternoon is one which many members of this committee are awaiting because of discussions we had during the question period in the House some time ago approximately a week or two ago. I recall that the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Edmonton Calder both posed questions to me in this regard. That was in connection with the funding of those students in the province of Alberta in early childhood programs who are of the age of 5.5 years.

I'd like to outline some basic principles with respect to that overall matter. These principles involve an adjustment of the previous statement that 5.5-yearold children would not be funded in the forthcoming educational year commencing in September. These adjustments and basic principles are as follows. First, the age of children for which government support will be provided to regular early childhood services programs will be one year lower than the school entry age set by the school board in that particular jurisdiction.

If I might enlarge on that for a moment, Mr. Chairman, that would mean that entry into the program in those jurisdictions where the admission age in Grade 1 is five years, six months on September 1, would then be four years, six months in such jurisdiction. In those jurisdictions - and there are some in the province in which the entry age for Grade 1 is five years, eight months - there would be a corresponding adjustment with respect to early childhood services in that jurisdiction, so the entry age would be four years, eight months.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, government support will be provided for one year in early childhood services for all children enrolled. This would mean that those children who are 5.5 years of age on September 1, who for one reason or another have not had an early childhood services program, and whose parents feel that that would be a desirable step before the child enters Grade 1, would also be supported in the normal grant structure.

Third, government support will be provided for up to three years for early childhood services for handicapped children. Some handicapped children are eligible for entry into an early childhood services program at age 3.5. Even at age 5.5, after two years in such a program, parents may find that the children would be better suited for a further year in the early childhood program, rather than entering Grade 1 at age 5.5. As well, under those circumstances, a 5.5-year-old child who is handicapped will be entitled to be counted for support in an early childhood program.

Government support will be provided - and this is the fourth principle - for a second year for emotionally and intellectually immature children at the option of parents, in consultation with ECS staff. So those parents who feel their child is not ready, either emotionally or intellectually, to enter Grade 1 at the age of 5.5, will have the option of continuing that child, in consultation first with ECS staff, for a second year of early childhood services program, rather than entering the Grade 1 stream.

In the initial year, there will be children in those jurisdictions that have an entry age into Grade 1 of five years, eight months. In the initial year, that would mean some children would be entitled to an early childhood program, so as not to interrupt the educational process of that child between early childhood services and Grade 1. This will be in the first year of this program. Following that, this problem should no longer arise, because the entry age in those jurisdictions where the school age is 5 years 8 months would be correspondingly one year below that. That would eliminate the problem.

I might add that these basic principles and procedures should effectively resolve the concerns I've had expressed to me by members of the Legislature, by parents, by members of the teaching profession, and by departmental officials. I know this is of great interest to probably all the members in this Assembly. Mr. Chairman, I've brought with me copies of the news release outlining these adjustments so members might have them in their possession prior to departing for the Easter break.

Before distributing those press releases, I would like to make one other announcement which will also be documented in the form of a press release and distributed to all members of the committee. That is in connection with support prices on school construction. The support prices will see a basic increase from $29 for construction under 4,000 square feet and for the core schools to $30.50 per square foot. For additions on permanent schools in the area of 4,001 to 8,000 square feet, the increase would be from $28 to $29.50 per square foot. For permanent construction in excess of 8,000 square feet, the increase would be from $25 to $26.50 per square foot.

In addition to this, Mr. Chairman, we've made certain adjustments to the ring system we have. This provides additional support for those jurisdictions which build schools that are set distances away from major construction areas in the province. Hon. members will recall the previous ring system which was in effect until December 31, 1975. I might add that these adjustments in support prices are effective January 1, 1976 for all tenders approved from that date.

The information I'm going to share with members now in connection with the ring system of additional support is also in effect from January 1, 1976. Previously, Mr. Chairman, the ring system provided an additional support of $1 per square foot for those schools built between 50 and 100 miles from a major construction area. This was increased by $1 for each additional 50 miles. The maximum additional support was $4 per square foot for those jurisdictions building schools 201-plus miles away from major construction centers.

Mr. Chairman, we have changed the mileage in the rings, first of all, so those jurisdictions entitled to additional support will be those that fall within the first ring of 25 to 75 miles from a major construction area. We've moved the first ring and each subsequent ring 25 miles closer. We've added a fifth ring for those jurisdictions 226-plus miles from a major construction area. Those jurisdictions building schools at that distance from a major construction area would receive an additional $5 per square foot in support.

Previous to this, Mr. Chairman, no additional support on the ring system was provided to portable schools. The announcement which I'm sharing now with members indicates there will now be a ring system in effect for additional support for portable schools. Basically, it will rely on the same mileage provided in the ring system on permanent construction. The additional support, however, will be one-half the additional support provided in permanent construction. A school built in the area of 26 to 75 miles would receive an additional 50 cents support on portable construction, as opposed to $1 on permanent construction. A school built in excess of 225 miles from a major construction area would receive $2.50 additional support for a portable, as opposed to $5 for permanent construction. This takes into account some of the submissions I've received. There are additional costs in the area of portable construction, particularly in moving and transporting these portables from the vicinity of construction to the vicinity of use. There has been no change in support for free-standing portables, but $1 has been added to the support price for the portables which are plugged into core schools. So that's gone up from $18 to $19.

I'm passing this information out now, Mr. Chairman. I might just refer hon. members to one error I’ve found in the second page of the release dealing with the construction support prices. That is the matter I last dealt with, the ring system of additional support for portables. The first ring is 26 to 75 miles, and not 175 miles as shown in the document. I think that will be clear once hon. members receive copies of this. If a page could assist, I could provide copies for distribution to hon. members.

Mr. Chairman, the $513,582,510 budget of the Department of Education provides an overall 11.1 increase over forecast for total departmental expenditures of 1975-76. At the same time, Mr. Chairman, it provides an increase in the grants paid to school boards in the province, an increase again of 11.1 per cent over the amounts paid out in grants as forecast for the 75-76 fiscal year. In fact, the school foundation program fund which appears on page 97 of the Estimates of Expenditure shows that the provincial government contribution to this fund has increased by 11.7 per cent over the forecast of the previous fiscal year. At the same time, there's been an increase of 8.3 per cent in the amount contributed to the school foundation program fund by property tax on commercial and industrial property. Mr. Chairman, I should point out that the 8.3 per cent reflected there is not an increase in taxation on individual properties in the form of an increased mill rate. The mill rate will remain exactly the same. This will flow from the result of new assessment being added during the past year.

The result in total for the school foundation program fund, Mr. Chairman, is an 11.3 per cent increase over the previous year. This is important because the grants paid out from this fund represent just about three-quarters of all the grants school boards in the province receive from this government. That is in the form of the school foundation program for pupil grants and the other items mentioned in the vote.

I would like to point out to the members of the committee, Mr. Chairman, that the budget reflects a number of new thrusts. First, the change of funding of private schools that provide educational services for children who are handicapped: there are substantial budget increases in grants to these schools, grants that will more closely approximate the level of funding that the department provides to school boards in the province for educational services for the same type of handicapped child. So the private schools are providing these services. In fact we're providing these services when no one else dared to tread in this area.

The private schools that have shown the lead in this area, with the efforts of volunteers and those of good heart in our society, will in fact be provided with a level of support which will enable them to continue to provide a service for these handicapped children who require such educational services. It will enable private organizations, such as the Winifred Stewart [School] and others that I'm sure come to the minds of members of this committee, to in fact improve and increase the quality of service that is and can be provided for these children.

Another thrust that this budget will provide, Mr. Chairman, is an increase in the level of funding that private schools can expect from this government. The budget provides for an increase in grants to private schools from a level of one-third of the school foundation program fund grants that regular school boards receive, to a level of 40 per cent of those very same grants.

The budget also provides for the funding of two new transportation plans, the rural and the urban transportation plans that have been announced in this House and prior to the opening of this spring session.

The budget also provides for an increase in the level of funding for students in elementary and junior high school programs, an increase which reflects the minister's advisory committee on school finance recommendations, recommending a shift towards the elementary in the level of grants that are provided under the SFP program, a shift which will see a narrowing between the grants provided for elementary school children and those provided at the high school level.

It also provides, Mr. Chairman, for funding of the really very substantial growth of special education teaching positions that we've seen in the last two years, providing for additional educational services for children who have handicaps and learning disabilities. We have seen an increase of approximately 60 per cent in the number of these teaching positions approved during the course of the last two years, and we will be able, within this budget, to continue to fund those teaching positions that have been approved thus far. In addition, we'll be able to fund further teaching positions that may be necessary for those children who have severe handicaps.

It provides, Mr. Chairman, for an anticipated increase in enrolment of approximately 1 per cent in September 1976, also for the shifts in funding that will develop as the bubble of population in our school system moves from the present Grade 6 to Grades 10 and 11 through the system.

At the same time as I mention the provision in the budget for an anticipated 1 per cent increase in enrolment in September 1976, I should caution members of the committee that we do not expect that increase to continue. In fact, projections would indicate that thereafter, probably commencing in the fall of 1977 but more surely in the fall of 1978, enrolments in this province will again be decreasing as the bubble of enlarged enrolments that presently exists in Grades 6 to 11 shifts through the system and is replaced by lower enrolments in the elementary grades than we see at the present time.

I would imagine, Mr. Chairman, that there would be a number of questions flowing from the budget, and I would be pleased to deal with them. However, perhaps I can dispose of some that might immediately come to mind.

The first one, of course, would be on page 91 under Vote 1, where we summarize by element the moneys appropriated to that vote, the provision for a 27.1 per cent increase in the minister's office. That, Mr. Chairman, would provide for additional clerical assistance to handle an increasing volume of correspondence and other material that is flowing into the office. To be honest, Mr. Chairman, I can give no assurance that it will be used, but the provision is there to ensure that, should the need arise, the people of the province of Alberta can in fact be accommodated as quickly as possible.

Another area where a question may arise is in relation to Votes 1 and 4 in total. These indicate a 19 per cent increase over forecast in Vote 1 and a 13.6 per cent increase over forecast in Vote 4, which would seem to be above the 11 per cent guidelines. I would refer members particularly to the fact that those percentages are calculated on forecast and not on estimates, so that in each case, the estimates for both votes were higher in 75-76 than forecast. In other words, the Assembly voted a greater sum than was in fact spent in those two votes for the previous fiscal year. Part of the reason is that positions which were not filled at the beginning of the year have subsequently been filled and will require the appropriate amount of funding in future.

Another question that may concern members is in Vote 2, Ref. No. 2.4, where the education opportunity fund shows an increase of only 1.2 per cent. That is in spite of the fact that we have increased the level of funding from $23 to $25 per elementary pupil under the education opportunity fund in accordance with the regulations there under. The reason for the small increase which is shown is again the fact that part of the expenditures that were attributable to the '74-75 fiscal year, and which should have been paid in the '74-75 fiscal year, were paid in the '75-76 fiscal year. So in actual fact, the moneys which will be going out to boards will be substantially greater than the 1.2 per cent which is shown.

I mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman, that I expected a great deal of interest in the estimates of the Department of Education. I think I should leave some time for the hon. members to express their interest, and perhaps pose additional questions that I haven't had the opportunity to touch upon.