The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise today of course to

discuss the supplementary estimates for the Department of Education,

over which I have responsibility. As all members can see, the

supplementary estimate that is requested is in the amount of $64.8

million in order that we can continue to support a number of very

important initiatives that are of tremendous benefit to our students

and toward the enhancement of their learning and, particularly so, to

help add more teachers to our classrooms. In fact, of the $64.8

million $52 million for fiscal '04-05 will go specifically toward

reducing average class sizes in our school jurisdictions, which, I

might add, was an important if not critical recommendation of the

Alberta Commission on Learning.

Mr. Chair, I'm sure that the members are well aware of the need

for these funds because there's been a lot of talk about reducing

class sizes in Alberta. This particular class size reduction initiative,

which started last year, has been phenomenally successful. Having

concluded my meetings with all 62 school boards, I can tell you that

they are absolutely delighted with these new monies. They just want

to make sure that we continue them, and we intend to do that.

In any event, the $52 million was first identified and allocated for

school jurisdictions I think back in July and August of 2004, and

then it was incorporated as a special warrant on January 26 of '05,

and what we're asking for now is ratification by the Legislative

Assembly within this process called supplementary estimates.

I should also just add for clarity purposes that there is an additional

$37 million, which if you add to the $52 million comes to $89

million, and that, in fact, was part of the announcement. But

because of the way the government year and the school calendar

year sort of overlap by a five-twelfths/seven-twelfths basis, the $37

million will actually come forward in the '05-06 budget, that has yet

to be presented in this House. So I just wanted to clear up that point.

This particular supplementary estimate is for the $64.8 million,

and of that amount $52 million is specifically for the class size

reduction initiative. The second item, which will be the balance,

represents $12.8 million, and that's specifically for the purchase of

textbooks and other classroom resources that are in support of the

new and updated curricula in Alberta's classrooms.

The new funding that we're asking for here will support the

implementation of a new social studies curriculum, in particular,

which will start in September of '05. The work has all been done.

The professional development side has been looked after. The inservicing

side, for the most part, has also been looked after, and it's

a timely recognition for our centennial year. Obviously, Mr. Chair,

everybody in the Assembly would know that textbooks are a critical

learning tool for our students, which help them with their literacy,

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research, study skills, the KSAs as they're called: knowledge, skills,

and abilities of our students.

A final couple of comments. The $12.8 million requested here as

part of the $64.8 million will help our teachers with classroom

learning objectives, and it will give school administrators the

flexibility they need in preparation for the introduction and

implementation

of the new school curriculum. I would like to advise

everyone that the revised social studies program will include a

greater emphasis, a greater focus on Canadian and Alberta history

and will focus on the core concepts of citizenship and identity, for

example. This is a good thing, and it's one reason why we updated

the curriculum. That, of course, ties in with our centennial initiative

that I referred to earlier.

I'll conclude by just saying that the $12.8 million for this aspect

will be distributed on a per student basis, and all school jurisdictions,

that being 62 school boards plus Alberta students enrolled in the

Lloydminster public and separate boards plus 13 charter schools and

112 accredited and funded private schools, will receive their portion

of funds with the March '05 grant payments. Providing funds in this

fashion, Mr. Chair, is very much in keeping with our flexibility

formula, our flexibility principle of our new funding framework, and

it will allow school jurisdictions to do the best planning possible for

the allocation of these additional resources, whether it's for textbooks

or for other important student resources as referenced in the

estimates book.

4:30

I'll finally just say this concluding statement. These supplementary

estimates are very necessary to us, Mr. Chair, because they are

ministry-specific and they will give my Ministry of Education the

legislative authority to increase spending above amounts previously

approved by this Legislature in 2004. In that respect, I certainly

look forward to support for these two important initiatives that will

be addressed through this supplementary estimate amount.

Thank you.