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| Manitoba | 39e | 5e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du Ministère de l’Éducation | 26 avril 2011 | Nancy Allan | Minister of Education | New Democratic Party of Manitoba |

Mr. Acting Chair, thank you. I'm pleased to be here today to talk to you about Manitoba's education system as it continues to be a cornerstone in improving the social and economic well-being of our citizens.

      Our government demonstrates its commitment to education by helping to meet the needs of parents, students, and taxpayers across the province. In 2011‑12, education continues to be a priority area as the Manitoba government is once again exceeding its commitment to fund public education at the rate of economic growth, with a 2.7 per cent increase to public school funding for 2011-12. This is consistent with funding increases to school divisions at the rate of economic growth since 2000-2001, including in 2008-2009, the largest funding increase in 25 years of $53.5 million, or 5.6 per cent. Mr. Acting Chair, 2011-2012 is the 12th consecutive year the Province has met or exceeded its commitment to fund public schools at or above the rate of economic growth, and over the last 12 years, funding has increased by $363.7 million. Over those 12 years, funding to public schools has grown from $800 million to $1.135 billion.

      During this same period of time, government has provided significant direct and indirect school tax  relief. The tax incentive grant, introduced in 2008-2009, encourages school divisions to avoid education property tax increases. This year the TIG is helping 27 school divisions hold the line on taxes. Public school funding has an increase of 47.2 per cent, including the 2.7 per cent increase for this year.

      This increase in funding to public schools is being made despite difficult economic times. It reflects the co-operative work with school divisions, encouraging restraint in order to ensure that expenditures are managed carefully and property taxes in support of education remain affordable.

      The following are some examples. According to Statistics Canada, Manitoba is the only province whose average property taxes have remained virtually unchanged since 2000, compared to an increase of 33.7 per cent for Canada as a whole. Elimination of the education support levy on residential property is complete. The education property tax credit has increased by $350 to $750 since 1999. The Province's tax incentive grant is being continued for a fourth consecutive year to allow divisions to increase expenditures and hold the line on property taxes.

      This year's budget sees every school division receiving at least a 2.2 per cent grant increase which provides stability in the face of reassessment effects on funding and enrolment declines.

      Some of the highlights of this year's funding include $690,000 in new funding for stay-in-school initiatives to 'probote' student engagement, further support and enhance the inner city science Lab, and develop new ways to help more students be successful; $600,000 toward the Student Success Initiative pilot project in the Winnipeg, Lakeshore and Kelsey school divisions, aimed at keeping children in school and increasing graduation rates; $1.3 million more for special needs students and a 3  per cent increase for level 2 and 3 funding; nearly a million dollars more for English as an Additional Language; and $303,000 for Early Childhood Development Initiative to ensure children are ready for school; $75,000 to hire a new Technical Vocational Initiative co-ordinator to enhance TVI education in the Interlake and central regions;  $118,000 for the Winnipeg Interdivisional Student Services program to support Ji-zhaabwiing centre, which serves high-needs youth in the centre in the  care of Manitoba Child and Family Services; $10.8  million more for equalization funding to help   ensure school divisions with low tax bases are   still  able to offer high-quality programs and services  to students; $165,000 to assist school   divisions and First Nations in Portage la Prairie,  Border Land and Lakeshore to improve relationships  and understanding between students and communities to help increase student success.

      Our government strongly supports public education. We have invested more than $737 million in public school capital projects. To date, we have built 18 new schools and 13 replacement schools and completed extensive renovations and additions to existing schools. This year's record investment of $94.2 million represents the third year of a record $366.2-million, four-year funding commitment to our public schools. This year Manitoba Education will commit $41 million to support both the ongoing infrastructure renewal of mechanical, roofing, structural and accessibility systems in public schools and facilities. As well, work and investment continues on the construction of three middle schools in La Broquerie, Steinbach and Schanzenfeld and two new high schools in Steinbach and Winkler. As well, design and planning are under way for the construction of the new replacement school in Woodlands and a new early-learning-to-grade-8 elementary school in northwest Winnipeg.

      Of particular note, this year marks the first year of the Active Schools Fund, a five-year, $50-million capital funding commitment to ensure quality gymnasium facilities are available for healthy living and high school graduation in our public schools.

      We are also taking important steps to link early learning and child-care facilities to our public school building facilities by making room for child-care spaces in both existing and new schools with the support and co-operation of school divisions and local communities.

      We continue to monitor the need for schools from both record levels of immigration across the province and from robust residential development in Winnipeg and Brandon.

      We can see that stable, increased funding for   education pays dividends over time. Steadily increasing rates of high school completion demonstrate the social and economic benefits that can result from consistent investment in education. Increased resources to support the hard work of teachers and administrators, trustees and parents, in partnership with the provincial government, have helped improve graduation rates and helped to evolve more alternative approaches to increase student success.

      The government also recognizes the importance of the connection between children's early learning experience and their successful entry into the formal K-to-12 system. In support of this, we've created the Early Childhood Education Unit and increased funding to Early Childhood Development Initiative grant by $300,000. Staff from the unit will work with school divisions, other government departments and early-childhood community to support high-quality, co-ordinated learning opportunities for Manitoba children.

      School and community partnerships provide a wide range of innovative programs to engage, encourage and mentor students, ensuring that schools are safe and accessible places to learn. Schools collaborate with many partners to support those who  are unrepresented in our system, working closely with immigrant, war-affected and Aboriginal students at risk of dropping out of school. These combined efforts have seen Manitoba's graduation rate increase by 14 per cent in the last decade, from 72.4 per cent in 2001 to 82.7 per cent in June 2010.

      There is considerable research that tells us that when students are engaged with learning and their school, they are more likely to successfully complete high school. In order to support even more students to reach graduation, we have begun to focus on ways to help students stay in school and be successful. Bill  13, The Preparing Students for Success Act, when passed, will require young people to pursue their education until they are 18 years of age or complete the requirements for a high school diploma. In the modern economy, nothing is more important than keeping young people engaged in school and in their education.

      We also updated our assessment policy to ensure that there is a consistent framework for the promotion or retention of students' academic honesty and consequences for late and missing work. The updated policy reinforces the existing practice that decisions about passing students or holding them back when necessary are made by the school principal in consultation with teachers, parents and other specialists as appropriate.

      It is important to note that our government continues its commitment to inclusion and education. Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows  every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the challenging needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. Our government embraces inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community.

      By working together we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us. We are proud to be a partner working with teachers, specialists, administrators and trustees to advance the key strengths of public education, that everyone is welcome in our schools and our schools are committed to nurturing all students' growth and development.

      I'd like to thank my partners. We have many partnership agreements. We work with First Nations, the Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to provide funding and support Aboriginal languages and culturally relevant programming, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my education partners that I've had the opportunity to work with for the last year and a half. We have all worked together in a collegial manner and there's been a lot of really good work that has been done by our education partners in regards to strengthening our public education system, and we're all in this together and I appreciate all of the hard work that we have done together, thank you.