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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Manitoba | 40e | 2e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du Ministère de l’Éducation | 10 juillet 2013 | Nancy Allan | Minister of Education | New Democratic Party of Manitoba |

Well, I am pleased, Mr. Chair, to have the opportunity to sit with my colleagues and the opposition in the Legislature to have a conversation about public education. Our government is committed to providing high-quality education to students across the province and supporting teachers and parents as they help our students reach their full potential.

      In 2013-14 our Manitoba government is once again fulfilling its commitment to fund public education at the rate of economic growth with a 2.3 per cent increase to public school funding for 2013‑2014. This is the 14th consecutive year the Province has met or exceeded its commitment to fund public schools at the rate of economic growth and the funding has increased by $440.5 million or 57.1 per cent. Over those 14 years funding to public schools has grown to $1.211 billion.

      This year's budget increase sees every school division receiving funding­, the level of funding, we believe, which provides stability in the face of reassessment and also funding in regards to enrolment declines. The increase of funding to public schools is being made despite difficult economic times, and it reflects the co-operative work with school divisions ensuring restraint in order to ensure that expenditures are managed carefully and property taxes in support of education remain affordable. Of course, this is in stark contrast to what happened in the 1990s when the Conservative government cut funding to education for five consecutive years and resulted in the loss of 700 teachers in Manitoba.

      A decade ago, Manitoba had among the highest residential property taxes in Canada, and this is no longer the course–case. According to Stats Canada, the average property taxes in Manitoba have increased by only 9.2 per cent since 2000, the smallest increase of all provinces and significantly lower than the national average. The education property tax has increased by $450, from $250 to $700 since 1999. We have also increased the maximum seniors Education Property Tax Credit to $1,100 in 2013 from $1,025 in 2012. With Manitoba's existing property tax credits, 1 in 4 of Manitoba senior homeowners already pay no school tax. Our government eliminated the education support levy on residential property, a savings of more than $145 million to homeowners every year. As a result of these measures, Manitobans save more than $330 million annually in education property tax credits.

      Highlights of this year's funding include new resources for antibullying programming and continuing support for stay-in-school initiatives, additional resources for numeracy to help students in early and middle years build strong foundations in math, additional resources for early childhood literacy to help students get a strong start in reading, and increased support for northern students and students from remote communities.

      Following on our commitment to provide parents with more accessible, understandable information on their child's academic progress and achievement, the provincial report card pilot and voluntary process was completed. During the 2012‑13 school year, the provincial report card was voluntarily implemented in 485 schools in 35 school divisions. The response from teachers, parents, education leaders and our partners during the pilot and the voluntary implementation phase has been very positive, noting improved communication of student achievement and a closer examination of current assessment practices.

      The provincial report card also ensures that parents, no matter where they live in Manitoba, receive clear and consistent information on both academic achievement and learning behaviors and include meaningful comments that assist parents in their role as education partners.

      Manitoba's a diverse and growing province, and we were very pleased that we recently introduced new brochures in 16 languages to help parents get acquainted with new report cards.

      Our government recognizes the important connection between quality early years' learning experiences and long-term school success. In 2011, October, we announced that we would provide new supports to enable school divisions in Manitoba to cap kindergarten classes at 20 students.

      We committed $3 million in class-size funding in 2012-13, we provided that to all school divisions in Manitoba on a per-eligible-student basis. And this additional funding has supported the hiring of 83 teachers and has enhanced professional learning experiences for early years' teachers.

      A $4-million increase in operating funding for 2013-2014 will bring the total funding for this initiatives to $7 million, to ensure that school divisions are provided with the targeted support that they will need to meet class-size guidelines, including the anticipated hiring of an additional 69 teachers across the province. As all of us know in this room, smaller class sizes will provide our students with more one-on-one time with their teachers, helping them get a strong start in school and in life.

      We were also investing $15.2 million in phase I of our infrastructure investment to ensure that additional classroom spaces are available to support smaller classes. Under phase I, we will create 28 new classrooms across the province in 2013-2014. The capital projects chosen under phase I are based on careful consideration of the needs identified by school divisions and site visits by Manitoba Education staff.

      The Province of Manitoba continues to build new schools, as well as to support our major new additions and renovations to existing schools.

      Construction is under way on a new early‑learning-to-grade-8 school at Amber Trails, two new high schools in Steinbach, two new schools in Winkler, a new automotive shop in Morris and a heavy-duty mechanic shop in Swan River. Design is  progressing on eight classroom additions and a 74‑seat centre at Bonnycastle School; a seven‑classroom addition, multi-purpose room, grooming room, resource room and child-care centre at École Taché and a new DSFM school in Thompson.

      Recently, two new schools were announced, one in South Pointe in Waverly West and one in Sage Creek that will accommodate over 1,000 students in Winnipeg.

      Our commitment to health promotion and excellence in science education is reflected in our capital commitment under the Active Schools Fund, a five-year, $50-million investment to ensure that quality gymnasium facilities are available to support healthy and active living–as well as a science classroom renewal fund, a five-year, $25-million commitment to improve teaching and learning facilities in the sciences.

      To date, 14 new gymnasium projects and the renewal of 45 science labs are under way. The planning and design phases are set to begin on a further 15 to 20 science labs.

      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. Of particular note is the inclusion of daycare facilities as part of the design and planning of the additions at École Bonnycastle and École Taché.

      Our commitment to early childhood education and learning is also reflected in the development of the early childhood education unit, established in   2011 to increase the connection between early   childhood education and the formal K‑to‑12 education system.

      The unit continues to assist school divisions in using EDI data, to inform program planning, as well as to develop support documents that ensure that the latest research on effective practices guides kindergarten programming.

      Our government is committed to providing safe and caring learning environments. Since 2004, when we introduced the Safe Schools Charter and code of conduct, our government has been a leader in taking action to protect students from bullying and cyberbullying.

      All students have the right to learn in safe and caring school environments, free from bullying and respectful of human diversity. In response to the tragic suicide of Amanda Todd in British Columbia last fall, our government introduced an antibullying action plan, including legislation and new supports for students, parents and teachers to prevent bullying.

      As part of this plan, I introduced Bill 18, the safe and inclusive schools act. Bill 18 strengthens the definitions around bullying and cyberbullying and ensures that schools and school divisions are able to take proactive and effective action to prevent and address bullying in policy and in practice. It requires incidences of cyberbullying to be reported to the principal and to parents when they are brought to the attention of teachers, school, staff or volunteers who are in charge of students.

      We look forward to having this legislation go to committee so that we can hear the presenters. I understand we have almost 300 presenters, and we look forward to that bill going to committee so we can hear the voices of the many people that would like to speak to Bill 18. Thank you very much.