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*\*(Ce discours est bilingue)*

**Department of Education**

**Hon. Mr. Lamrock,** after all items under the Department of Education had been presented: I want to make a few brief remarks to introduce the estimates for this fiscal year for the Department of Education. One of the key commitments of this government in the *Charter for Change* was to focus on three E’s: economic development, energy and, most important of all, education. Members who have heard me speak in this Chamber before know that this is more than a theoretical debate for me, it is a passion that took up my life before politics and, as the parent of a daughter who will enter kindergarten this coming year, it is a very real challenge.

I know that we have committed to build the best education system in Canada. To do that, we are going to need creative ideas from both sides of the Chamber. We are going to need to involve and engage and inspire parents, teachers, principals, businesses, volunteer organizations and, most of all, the children to be passionate learners.

First, I want to inform the House that on Tuesday morning, June 5, we will be releasing our five-year plan to set out the guideposts for how we intend to meet the challenge given to us by the Premier: to build the best education system in Canada. Certainly, I expect to be back on that day and others to give the opposition a chance to ask very real and relevant questions about the policies, dreams, and visions set out in that plan.

Today, it is also my pleasure to talk about what we will do this year to begin paving the way to that day when we can truly give our kids the gift of the best education system in Canada. Our children are going to have to know much more when those tiny, tentative steps up to the door of the kindergarten in 2007 become strides across a graduation stage in 2020. These children are going to engage in a world where jobs that involve just following instructions is gone, replaced either by technology or gone off to other countries. In its place will be a new world that will call on our children, as Louis Armstrong once said, to know more than we will ever know, to be able to solve problems creatively, to be constant lifelong learners, to work cooperatively with people not only in their own office but across international borders, and to do all this with an even stronger sense of citizenship and attachment to their own communities.

I believe that our children are up to the challenge, but I believe it is up to us to give them a head start. That means that politicians have to start setting an example. If children come first, that means that politicians have to be willing to make difficult choices. We will need to be guided by evidence of children learning, not by what is politically easy. We will have to insist on change when results are unacceptable, rather than on the political comfort of the status quo. We will need to ask if, sometimes, financial interests, special interests, and vested interests should give way to the best interests of the children in the classroom. We did that in one way with this budget. It was not easy to roll back some of the tax cuts on the wealthiest New Brunswickers, but it was important to do it because it allowed us, even in a time of fiscal restraint, to make important investments in the classroom.

Ce n’était pas facile pour un gouvernement de dire qu’on devait annuler les réductions d’impôts des plus riches, mais c’était absolument nécessaire. Si on veut bâtir le meilleur système d’éducation au Canada, on veut s’assurer que nos enfants sont au premier plan de toutes nos priorités politiques. Les politiciens doivent démontrer du courage et mettre les enfants au premier plan.

Because of those tough choices made in the budget, I am pleased to announce today that, this year, we will spend more on education than has any government in history. This year, we will spend a record $906.2 million on education, including a record investment of $875.6 million on operations that affect classroom education. To use the old standard of a past Premier: Have we met the challenge of spending more on education every single year with this budget? This government has. As we used to say in opposition, and we deserve to be held to that today, it is not just about spending more year over year.

C’est non seulement une question de plus en plus d’argent, bien qu’on l’ait fait, c’est aussi une question de faire les choix de dépenser l’argent non sur les priorités qui sont nécessairement les plus populaires politiquement mais sur les priorités qui sont les meilleures pour l’apprentissage des enfants. C’est pourquoi notre premier budget cible les salles de classe, parce que c’est la place la plus importante dans l’apprentissage des enfants.

Because we have made sure that we will focus this year’s spending on the classroom, not on

announcements that will allow us to cut ribbons, we will increase the operations budget by 5.7%, a rate that is nearly double the rate of increase of the past two governments combined. In real terms, that means nearly $47 million more in the classroom, and it means we will be spending $559 more on each individual student. To be nonpartisan about it, during the McKenna and Lord years together, the average rate of increase was less than 3%, often less than the rate of inflation. A rate of 5.75% means that our kids will actually gain on the rest of the country, because that is what they deserve. I want to talk a little bit about how we will use this record investment in the classroom. I will also speak honestly and straightforwardly about some of the tough choices we had to make to get it.

Notre première priorité dans la *Charte pour le changement* était les élèves ayant des besoins

spéciaux. Si on refuse d’investir dans un enfant quand il est en difficulté durant sa petite enfance, ce sera plus cher plus tard dans sa vie. Si un élève a une condition comme l’autisme, si un élève a de la difficulté à lire ou à faire des mathématiques, si un élève commence à perdre la passion d’apprendre, c’est vraiment un cas d’urgence. Les enfants ne peuvent pas attendre les priorités politiques d’un gouvernement. Les enfants qui ont des difficultés demandent une réponse urgente des politiciens et des gens à l’école.

As parents, we all know that children grow up very quickly, often faster than the speed of

government. That is why our first priority in the *Charter for Change* was the MacKay report, for kids with special needs. If too many children wait, their problems get worse and worse. This costs us more in human and financial costs later. Last year, not a single new dollar was given to the Department of Education for the implementation of the MacKay report. I am proud to say that this year’s budget invests $10 million on the MacKay report, to help kids with special needs and to meet the deadline, because children deserve not just spending, but spending on time when they need it. For too long, children with autism were told to wait. It was painfully frustrating for parents watching that precious window of opportunity close, that could have turned around a child’s destiny. For too long, because we did not fund ABA therapy in the schools, once a child hit age 5, he was, effectively, cut off. This practice of putting an expiry date on a child’s potential was simply unacceptable. It could have waited for another building. It could have waited for another tax cut. It could have waited for another year. We decided that those children cannot wait. This year, we will meet the *Charter for Change* commitment of investing $1.2 million in training 100 autism support workers trained in ABA therapy, so those kids are finally going to get the help they deserve.

We are also going to invest in more people in the classroom, helping kids and helping teachers manage classrooms. That means we will follow the MacKay report in terms of priorities. This year, we will add 283 teaching positions to the system. One of the largest investments will be on more resource teachers, because that was the first place the MacKay report told us to invest. These resource teachers can help children with special needs and learning disabilities adapt to the classroom. They can be there to manage classrooms that have a difficult composition, and they can make sure that the spirit of learning is kept alive when a child is young. It was an investment we made tough choices to find, but the MacKay report said it, and that is why, this year, we are going to do it.

Of course, the MacKay report is more than just special needs education. If you read the MacKay report and its 92 recommendations, you will know immediately that it actually speaks to an entire education system. It talks about changing our system of education to respect the learning styles and unique strengths of every child, because that is the true definition of inclusion. Inclusion can no longer just be for children who struggle. Inclusion means that all children, with their unique strengths, talents, and destiny, need to find support for their learning styles and interests in the classroom. That is why MacKay talks about gifted children. It talks about returning trades and other interests to the classroom. That is why MacKay talks about having classrooms that use technology strategically, to support learning styles. That is also why, as we invest in our 283 teaching positions and spend $11.2 million doing it, we will invest in the kinds of things that will move us further. We will make sure that there are teaching positions to support teacher innovation, so that teachers with good ideas get the help they need to be innovators and find new ways to turn lights on in kids’ heads.

We will support community schools. This is an exciting new model that sees the school leverage and the potential in the community around it, to turn the entire community into a canvas where kids can learn. This will also help strengthen our commitment to rural education. We will make sure there are teaching positions to help with early childhood, because we know, better than ever today, that a young child begins learning from birth. The process of questioning and observing the world around them starts young, and every child, regardless of what their parents make, or what they do, or their literacy level, deserves help, to be able to arrive at the kindergarten door, ready to learn, with a plan and supports in place. That is why we are going to invest in early childhood.

En ajoutant les positions qui appuient notre plan sur l’éducation, on peut aussi assurer qu’on appuie la littératie, la numératie et l’habilité en sciences de tous nos élèves. C’est pourquoi, cette année, on réduira d’un élève le nombre d’élèves dans toutes les classes du Nouveau-Brunswick. On ajoutera également les postes qui appuieront les initiatives stratégiques pour l’apprentissage en littératie, en mathématiques et en sciences et on va cibler les premières années d’école, où on peut vraiment faire une différence.

These are the choices we were able to make. Because of difficult choices, and to focus on the

classroom, with an investment that more than doubles the average rate of increase of the past two governments, we were able to support things like teacher innovation, kids with special needs, urgent response when children struggle, and support during early childhood, so that every child has an equal chance. Those are the building blocks.

Ce sont les pierres angulaires sur lesquelles on va bâtir le meilleur système dans tout le Canada. I want to be very straightforward about something: This did not come without some difficult choices. I am also announcing this year a capital budget of $30.6 million. While the overall amount of money invested in education is higher than ever before, a greater percentage of it has gone into the classroom side. That means that the capital budget is lower than I would like. It also means that, in order to support some of the children who could not wait any longer, we are going to be asking some communities to wait another year.

There are projects in Moncton North, Drummond, Bouctouche, and Rexton, as I said yesterday in response to the very legitimate question from the member for Moncton Crescent, that are going to be asked to wait a year. I do not pretend that this will be easy. In many cases, these communities have waited a number of years already at the top of a priority list. I acknowledge that we will be asking this of a lot of the teachers, principals, parents, and others in those communities. However, I would note this. In the two platforms, one made a commitment to spend on the capital side, but made no specific commitment on special needs. Our platform made a commitment on special needs, but did not make those particular commitments on the capital side. That is a philosophical debate that can be decided by an election and by debate in this Chamber. The belief is that there are too many children around the province for whom another year of waiting could be fatal to their potential. As difficult as this year will be for some of those communities, another year without help for kids with special needs could be a situation we could never remedy. It was a tough choice, it is one I take responsibility for, and I do not absolve myself from the effects that choice will have.

However, there is some comfort I can give people before announcing the projects we can do within this budget. There are a couple of things that I will commit to today. One is that we will not politicize the district priority lists. We will not change them based on the colour of the riding. Indeed, with respect to the location of the school in Moncton North, I was glad that I had two passionate MLAs of different political stripes, the members for Moncton North and Moncton Crescent, both of whom made themselves available with advice at every turn, and both of whom worked together. I have to admit that both of them pushed pretty hard to change this decision. We will never alter the district list for political purposes, because kids have to come before politics.

I also want to say that there is another practice that needs to stop. There is a running joke that school district offices should be put on wheels because, too often, we politicians spend millions of dollars moving them from one riding to another based on the colour of the local MLA. I know that millions of dollars were spent over the last seven years moving district offices, probably because they felt that those district offices moved in the first place because of political decisions. We could continue that cycle, or we could break it. I know this: Moving a district office from one riding to another never made any child any smarter and never helped a single child learn. If we are going to build the best system, we have to put kids ahead of jobs, we have to put them ahead of politics. That is why we will not waste another dollar on the political tactic of moving district offices from one riding to another, because that is the right thing to do. That is good news for some members on the other side, but kids come first, not politics. I also want to announce a plan to deal with the long-term effects of our capital emergencies. We have to come to grips with some real realities.

Je me rends compte que, cette année, c’est le budget de capital qui en souffrira. Nous avons pris la décision d’investir dans les élèves à besoins spéciaux parce que les enfants ne peuvent plus attendre. Bien qu’on puisse toujours trouver une solution, je me rends compte que je demande beaucoup de la part de quelques collectivités.

We also need a long-term plan to deal with our capital budget. The truth is, if we are honest enough to acknowledge it, that even if we tripled the capital budget this year, we would still not cover all the top priorities of the districts, all those that directly affect learning. For 20 years, building schools has not been a priority. The fact is that the average age of a school in New Brunswick is 40 years. We would not cover all the priority ones by tripling the budget. Even worse, out of the operation side, many years we often spend $1 out of every $8 that should be going to the classroom on maintaining aging infrastructure. It is a problem that cannot stand, but throwing money at it in one year simply to cover a few more priority ones and not address the root causes will not get us anywhere.

That is why, today, I am announcing a long-term plan to deal with what is a real problem on the capital side. First, this year, we will undertake something that the department has been

recommending for a long time and that has been put off too long. If we are going to build schools and we are going to invest in them in the future, then we should make sure we are building them up to the latest standards.

This year, we will undertake and complete a review of building standards, including how to make sure that every school matches the MacKay standards for accessibility for special needs kids and physical accessibility; environmental sustainability; recreation facilities, at a time when we are wrestling with the problem of childhood obesity; and technology standards, so that we can integrate technology strategically into the classroom. Most importantly, we will also review the security standards of schools, so that every school that is built is as secure as possible to protect our kids. We have waited too long to do that review. We will undertake it this year. We will not build another school that is not up to the top standards of the age.

Second, I will ask the district education councils to develop a four- to five-year plan to replace aging infrastructure with new infrastructure in a strategic way that takes full advantage of some of the changes in demographics. That will also mean that the Minister of Finance and I have to make a concurrent commitment that we will be personally involved in the process and will work with them. We will put long-term funding and creative funding models on the table, and we will work with every community individually, not on a plan to throw money at a problem in an election year, but on a long-term plan to make sure we actually get rid of the schools that are not serving our kids well. We will also set clear targets for reducing energy and maintenance costs in our schools, so we can put money into the budget.

As we look at the choice we made this year to spend a little less on buildings and a little more on kids who struggle, some have suggested the Yogi Berra approach: When you come to a fork in the road, take it. They said we should do both. It is important to note that that is easy to say. Indeed, all of us, from time to time, in moments, might be prone to wishing that it were so. We cannot compare our choices of today to a fictional Camelot that never existed.

I would note the last time we had a transition in government. The capital budget in the first year was cut from $38 million to $34 million, and the capital budget did not go above $35 million for the first five years of that government’s mandate. We know that we have to do better than that. It is also worth noting that, in that first year, not only was the capital budget cut by $4 million, but the operations side in the classroom was also cut by $3 million. There are those who will always say that you could have chosen to do both. I will happily table those documents, but you cannot choose to do both. When we debate the choices that exist in the real world, kids or buildings, I believe we made the right choice this year, that vulnerable children cannot wait anymore.

These are the spending priorities as we prepare to launch our five-year plan: helping every child who struggles to get help urgently, investing in resource teachers for children with autism and resource teachers to help with learning disabilities, making sure that we invest in our most innovative teachers, investing in early childhood education, and helping every child master the tools of learning—literacy, numeracy, math, and science. We must always be guided by evidence of children’s learning, not easy political choices. I will not always make perfect choices. I will not always speak perfectly but, as Minister of Education, I will be honest about the choices I have made. I, along with the rest of my colleagues, will always put children first.

So eager was I to talk about the tough choices we have made, and to let everybody go out to the event at lunchtime, that I forgot to make a few announcements about the projects that are being done on the capital side. With the indulgence of the opposition, I will inform the House about them. I believe the members will be familiar with many of these. There are capital projects that are going forward, as we are spending $30.6 million on the capital side.

Dans le district scolaire 1, on va investir 4,3 millions de dollars pour compléter la construction de la nouvelle école, l’école des Bâtisseurs, avec le Centre communautaire Sainte-Anne, à Fredericton. L’école est toujours à l’horaire d’ouvrir ses portes aux élèves en septembre 2007. Il y aura des élèves de la maternelle à la 5e année. De plus, et ceci est très, e très important pour le développement de la communauté francophone à Fredericton, l’école comprendra une garderie française pour la petite enfance. C’est très, très important pour le bien-être de toute la région de Fredericton. Nous allons aussi faire des rénovations, comme l’ancien gouvernement l’a annoncé, au Centre communautaire Sainte-Anne. Les rénovations seront complétées en septembre 2008.

J’ai une autre annonce pour le district scolaire 1. Les accords avec le gouvernement fédéral pour les augmentations des centres communautaires francophones dans les grandes villes anglophones ont été conclus. On va aussi investir 4,8 millions de dollars pour compléter l’agrandissement de l’école Samuel-de-Champlain, à Saint John. On va ajouter neuf salles de classe. C’est une bonne nouvelle pour la communauté francophone de Saint John, qui continue d’augmenter. C’est une bonne nouvelle pour le Nouveau-Brunswick. On va ajouter une salle de classe pour la maternelle et d’autres salles pour l’utilisation éducative. Le projet sera complété en septembre 2007. Il y aura aussi un agrandissement de la garderie et d’autres installations pour la collectivité de Saint John. Ce projet en partenariat avec le gouvernement fédéral est une bonne nouvelle. L’ancien gouvernement a travaillé très fort dans ce dossier.

I am pleased to announce that, in District 2, we will invest another $900 000 at Harrison Trimble High School for the installation of a sprinkler system and renovations to secure stairwell closures to add to the security of that building. In District 10, $2.3 million will be spent to finalize the improvements at St. Stephen Elementary School. This will include a new gymnasium for the kindergarten to Grade 5 classes, and interior renovations for a new cafeteria, new classroom and upgrades, as well as substantial upgrades to the school’s ventilation and heating system. This project should also be completed and in place by September 2007 for the folks in St. Stephen. I am not looking for any particular favour here, but I am glad to say that in District 15, there will be an investment of $450 000 for upgrades at Sugarloaf Senior High School. I know that the member from Campbellton has worked very hard on that. The work will include the expansion of the existing cafeteria and adding a stage so it can be used as a cafetorium to allow for greater extracurricular activities and more of a community feel to that school. That project will be completed by September 2007. This may be the one bit of good news that I actually faced some questions about. I certainly expected it. In District 18, we will invest $4 million this year to begin construction of a new middle school on Kimble Drive in Fredericton, to replace the existing Albert Street Middle School. That is a commitment that has been made for some time. The fact is that we are determined to complete that project by September 2008. Therefore, we will invest $4 million this year in order to make sure that we only have to spend one more year in the existing, outdated Albert Street Middle School. We will also invest $625 000 in District 18 to complete the design toward the construction of a new Grades 6 to 12 school, the Upper Miramichi school, to be located between the communities of Doaktown and Boiestown.