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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 just want to make a few brief comments. Then, as always, I look forward to the questions from my colleagues. While we may have our political differences, we all know that the subject is an important one that we all care about. I want to start by saying, with the greatest of respect, that I look forward this year to our discussions, as I do every year.

This year’s budget for the Department of Education includes some good news, but it also includes some challenges, and I just want to lay those out for the House today. In the last two years, we have seen record increases in education—the two highest increases in over 30 years. Even today, this budget continues the tradition that we are the first government in 30 years to have a higher rate of increase in education than there is in the revenues to the province. Even though provincial revenues are expected to decline slightly this year, there is an increase of around $20 million in the Department of Education. Nevertheless, we have been very clear with New Brunswickers that, given the pressures in terms of teachers’ salaries, the cost of operating schools, and in meeting commitments made in previous collective agreement to reduce class sizes, $20-million increases will continue to pose challenges.

I want to go on the record by saying what our approach is and why we have made the choices we have made in this budget process. In the past few years, we have used five basic pillars to improve education scores in New Brunswick. In the past few years, we have seen the highest increases in literacy since measurement began. We have seen a 7% jump province-wide in literacy rates for children in the early grades, and that has recently been reinforced by a 9% jump for students at the middle school level in the Anglophone school sector.

There are five key components to getting this change. First is measurement and evaluation. The department has identified the NB3 subjects—literacy, math, and science—that are fundamental to future success. Rather than forcing teachers to teach in a certain way, we have said that we will allow teachers more freedom in how they teach, but we will be more focused on results. We now identify the NB3 subjects and we have worked cooperatively with teachers’ unions to target professional development in those areas. We now measure routinely, regularly, and accurately. We provide up-to-date information to parents on the progress in their school on every subject. Those report cards allow parents to be partners in education. They also allow teachers more freedom because they can simply meet the goal. The process of measuring and evaluation is absolutely fundamental to the increases in literacy that we are seeing.

Second, and I think just as important, we have created incentives for success. If it were simply a question of spending our way to the top, we would know right away that other provinces that have higher tax bases would outspend us. Alberta, with its oil, can always outspend us. If we are really going to be first, yes, we have to spend more and we have to spend faster than our revenues are going up, but we also have to be more creative. The Innovation Fund has allowed us to learn why those teachers who are being a little more creative are getting slightly better results. The Innovation Fund does more than just lift a few schools up; it changes the very culture. Now, instead of only rewarding teachers for seniority, we also reward them for results.

There are good reasons to do that. One reason is the projects themselves. Whether it is a program in Devon that allows struggling writers to learn by working with artists to create comic books, whether it is ways of integrating art or First Nations culture into literacy classes so that we reach kids where they are, whether it is finding ways through technology labs in Carleton County or community literacy programs in Rothesay and Woodstock, we find creative ways to get kids reading, not simply to cover the curriculum, but to do something they love doing.

It is that kind of deep learning that recently led the OECD to say that New Brunswick’s Innovation Fund was a model for the rest of the world in developing 21st-century skills. It is also true that a 2007 report by the national governors’ association found that the presence of innovation funds that were not tied to seniority, but tied to results, made a significant difference in the province’s or state’s ability to attract young teachers. Over 16 U.S. states have begun rewarding innovation and results by allowing teachers with good creative ideas to get funding, whether they have one year’s experience or 31 years’ experience. Those jurisdictions attract disproportionate numbers of talented young teachers, and if you do not reward creativity and innovation, you cannot attract creativity and innovation.

The last reason to fund results . . . I know that it is controversial for some who are more comfortable with a system where we just pay every teacher the same. Paying people the same regardless of results, as an economic theory, has failed in almost every area of human endeavour. It is hardly something of which I need to remind small “c” conservatives. That is why it is very important that we make sure that we have a system that offers incentives. When we attract young teachers who want innovation funding and when we reward them, those ideas lift people up. When a teacher in Devon discovers that struggling writers write with more passion when they can create comic books and work with artists, we can apply that around the province. When students at Park Street School come up with ways to use technology to enhance second language development, we can teach others. Providing incentives is as much a part of measurement and is as key to our success as is the measurement.

Third, there are a number of programs in this budget that are maintained and will continue, such as programs that deal with early intervention. The Early Years Evaluation makes sure that we can intervene early.

Les choses que je viens d’énumérer sont absolument importantes. Maintenant, on fait des évaluations non seulement lorsque l’enfant arrive à la porte de la maternelle, mais lorsqu’il est âgé de trois ans et demi, étant donné que, à ce stade, on peut travailler avec les parents et les écoles pour être prêts à l’aider au moment où il arrive à l’école. On a aussi gardé beaucoup de mentors en littératie et on a aussi maintenu les 15 millions de dollars qu’on a investis dans les services, suite au rapport MacKay, sur l’éducation inclusive, la formation et les technologies pour les enfants qui sont dyslexiques. Nous allons continuer la formation de mentors pour les enfants autistiques. Il s’agit de formation qui commence au niveau du baccalauréat en éducation, afin que les enseignants soient prêts à travailler dans les salles de classe inclusives. Il y a aussi des fonds d’innovation pour aider les enseignants à avoir des salles de classe plus inclusives, parce qu’on utilise des nouvelles méthodes pédagogiques.

Quatrièmement, on veut changer la pédagogie au Nouveau-Brunswick, suite au programme des écoles communautaires. Maintenant, nous avons 62 écoles communautaires qu’on retrouve dans des collectivités rurales et urbaines. Quand les enfants lisent, écrivent, font des mathématiques et des sciences non seulement en mémorisant les faits mais en faisant des choses pour lesquelles ils sont intéressés, c’est un niveau d’apprentissage plus fort. Suite au programme de micro-entreprises à l’école régionale de Saint-André et aux programmes d’éducation par des bénévolats dans beaucoup de collectivité — parfois en collaboration avec les municipalités pour engager les enfants dans des solutions —, les 62 écoles communautaires ont utilisé les expériences de la collectivité pour renforcer certaines choses dans la salle de classe.

Finally, and fifth, we have also built the results we have seen by celebrating the strengths of every child. That is absolutely key. Children will read, write, and do math and science better if they can do something they love to do. That is why we have invested over $3 million in new programs in industrial arts so that students with a passion in that area can take those courses and read and write to solve problems they care about. Good schools, like the ones in Caraquet, Harrison Trimble, and the community school in Port Elgin, are finding ways for students to actually do literacy exercises based on what they are doing in the shop, so that they can also develop a passion for reading by using their passion for hands-on work. We have also created numerous physical education, art, and music mentors, and those, indeed, for the most part, are going to continue this year.

We have protected those five pillars: measuring clearly with goals and giving teachers more

freedom; creating incentives for creativity so that we attract creative teachers and do not lose them; making sure we intervene earlier rather than later in aiding students who struggle; making sure we celebrate the strengths of every child through more enrichment, more trades, arts, music, and physical education; and making sure we change the way we teach so that we are not just having more people do the same thing, but we are having more people doing different things.

That is why we have attracted the cooperation of a number of international organizations that have cited New Brunswick as a leader in innovative and community education. That is why companies like Microsoft and Apple have come to New Brunswick to launch pilot programs—they see that culture of innovation. It is why we have seen, recently, members of the business community get involved in record ways, because they understand that we are focused on results.

For all that, there are going to be some challenges this year. As I said before, while we are the only government in the past 30 years that has had a higher rate of increase in education than there has been in provincial revenue, this year, it is no secret that provisional revenues will decline. It is hard to find $20 million more for education when revenues are falling in health and education and salary hikes must be maintained, but we still did that. Even so, there is approximately $30 million in salary increases and, as we now know, $10 million in mandated class size reductions that have to be done.

In tough times, if we are going to demand of the system salary increases and class size reductions, there are going to have to be trade-offs with other areas. I want to talk about how we are going to approach that. First and foremost, we are going to look to see how we can do things in a more efficient way. That means following the Comptroller’s recommendation for $2 million in efficiencies through transportation, and districts are working now to make sure that we have uniform standards throughout the province, as the Comptroller’s Office urged us to do.

It means focusing on our core mission. We will be reducing by $300 000 the grants available to outside organizations so that we can focus the money on our schools and our missions. We will be asking district offices to show leadership. As well, the department will reduce non-salary accounts and all discretionary spending by another $1.9 million. We have also asked people to reduce travel throughout the school system, to find $877 000 in efficiencies for new creative ways to continue to do the professional development that we know is so absolutely fundamental. We have also asked school districts to be full and complete partners by looking for efficiencies and, in some cases, reducing positions at their head offices before we look at school budgets.

We also know, however, that there are some reductions that cannot be avoided because we have to meet the salary and class-size reductions that are in the collective agreement. This year, by freezing the development of further distance learning courses, we will save approximately $2 million. That means that we will still make sure that all students have the credits they need to graduate wherever they live. We are still committed to developing those credits, but they will be put on hold. While we believe very strongly in the Innovation Fund, we also know that we must, across the board, have some sacrifices from everybody. While the fund is still there, the mentors are still there, and the grants will continue, we will ask our innovative learning mentors to be even more efficient and find $1.6 million there.

There are other choices that are even tougher, and I want to talk about a few of those. The student laptop program began a few years ago. At the time, there were two critiques of the program, and I remember who made them because it was I. One said that computers themselves will not solve all our problems and they may not work. The second critique was that there does not seem to be a plan to do it everywhere. On one of those, I have to admit that I was wrong. The reports from the schools have shown that, while adding computers alone does not increase literacy and math scores, when combined with innovative learning grants and other professional development, we have actually seen that those computer classes have generally done better where they are also getting innovation funding. That means that there is promise in technology.

That said, the original program was a pilot program. One cannot, in tough times, defend funding a pilot program for a few schools when the results are already in. This year, we will ask for $800 000 in efficiencies in that program. That is absolutely important because, after all, we now know, through the research, what we were trying to learn in the pilot program. However, our government wants to make a commitment that we will, before the end of the year, provide a discussion paper to New Brunswickers on how to take what is a solid idea right now for a few schools and have a universal technology model for New Brunswick. That is something we are prepared to do. Even as the pilot is a source of efficiencies, we will now ask how we can take what was good about that pilot and put it everywhere in the province.

Further to that, we had to make other choices. There will be a 50% reduction in school intervention workers and a 50% reduction in funding to school libraries. With behaviour interventionists, we are hoping that, as the union said at the time, if we provide smaller classes to some teachers, classroom teachers will be more able to pick up that work. We do not regret giving the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation a choice and asking for its guidance. We now have it. The New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation believes that, with smaller classes, the slack can be picked up. We appreciate its feedback, and we are going to work cooperatively to make sure that happens.

At the same time, I will point this out. We have noticed that we have seen fewer disciple problems at community schools. Good, innovative teaching frequently decreases behaviour problems, because when children want to learn, they are not acting up. We believe that if we focus and work with teachers to have good, engaging classes, we can also reduce the very problem of bad behaviour that necessitated these mentors. We also, of course, made an offer to the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation that we would find an additional $750 000 in efficiencies if it would contribute from the Teacher’s Working Conditions Fund. We would have put that toward libraries. That offer was not accepted. I cannot pretend that it is going to be easy. I can only say this: About 75% of the education budget is fixed according to how many classroom teachers are needed and what they are paid. When one has to cut, as one has

to do this year in order to achieve that class size reduction, there are few other places to look.

I want to thank those dedicated library mentors and workers who work very hard, and I appreciate their work. In no way should this decision be seen as reflective of the quality of their service or the importance of their jobs. It should only be seen as reflective of the challenges the government is facing. It is the fault of no MLA on either side of this Chamber. We will work with teachers to make sure that we can manage these the best we can.

On the last point, I also want to inform the House that, based on the guidance we received from the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation, we will be asking a number of specialists to return to the classroom. This is a tough thing. Some years ago, we signed a collective agreement that said that limits on class size would be reduced by one in each of four years. In reality, that did not affect the 95% of classes that were below the limit. It is a fairly rigid formula. It is not the most efficient formula in the world, because it says that if a class suddenly goes one student above the limit, a new teacher needs to be hired and the class needs to be cut in half. Many people said: Would it not be better to give principals the discretion to take the cost of a new teacher and spend it on the target areas in which they feel the needs are the greatest in their schools? The formula was negotiated by previous governments, and we are going to honour the collective agreement. That will mean—and I want to be absolutely clear about this—that there will be just as many positions as there were before. No teaching positions will be eliminated, but, based on the guidance that we received from the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation, which suggested that reducing class sizes would allow classroom teachers to pick up that work, we are going to ask about 200 specialists to return to the classroom. In general, we have begun work with the districts. We have told them, and they have told us, that the first things to be protected will be literacy, math, and programs for students who have special needs. They will look to take people away from things that, as the union told us, can be picked up by classroom teachers. That may mean, in some cases, creating targeted programs that reduce class size in a particular grade, or that classrooms with challenging compositions will now contribute to the formula. In other cases, those positions will come out of the district office. Those who perhaps had positions serving teachers and helping to guide them, but who were not directly in the classroom, will be back in the classroom. A number of positions, no matter how hard we try, will continue to

touch on those areas. I want to be absolutely clear on this: There are just as many positions as there were before. We will work very hard, cooperatively with teachers, to make sure that, as they told us, we can use that smaller class size to make sure that we give the best possible service to students.

I want to close with this thought. There is no question that we would all love to be back in the days when the Department of Education had an 8% increase, as it did last year. That was the largest increase in a generation. We also know that those days, due to events beyond the control of tiny New Brunswick, are gone for a few years. I want to challenge all politicians in this Chamber, because the only way that we can put kids first is by asking all New Brunswickers to appeal to the better angels of their nature. That means that, even though we can find some money, we cannot spend our way out of all our problems.

It is easy to score political points by simply telling people: God bless you. Government has to

provide literacy, and none of us has to contribute. We know that, in reality, all of us have to put kids first. That will mean we will continue to ask private-sector partners, like businesses, to dig even deeper to build on those wonderful community partnerships we have seen in Saint John, St. André, Port Elgin, and in communities like them, where businesses encourage their employees and give them incentives to get involved and support the teachers in our schools. We will be using the wisdom and guidance of those in community organizations to enrich the education experience.

On va continuer à demander à des collectivités d’être parties prenantes de leur école, comme c’est le cas pour Memramcook et bien d’autres collectivités.

From time to time, we will also ask teachers’ unions and others to help us find creative solutions. After all, the most fundamental promise we have to make to our kids is not that we will put their education first unless it means opening a collective agreement or unless adults do not feel like it or unless it means asking volunteer organizations to do more. The only way to put kids first is to put them first every time and to call upon all of us to see beyond our narrow self-interests and to support kids and teachers in schools.

It is in that spirit that I ask the help of every elected official in this province to help lift our kids though challenging economic times and to continue to build on the success we know that we can get here in New Brunswick. We are small, but we have seen the biggest increases in literacy, not because we got rich overnight, not because we struck oil, and not because we spent more, but because we work together. If we approach things in that spirit, I will continue to be more optimistic every day that we can do right by our kids.