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| Ontario | 31e | 2e | Discours sur l’éducation | 26 avril 1978 | Thomas Wells | Minister of Education | Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario |

Mr. Chairman, I have a very short opening statement as we consider the 1978-79 estimates of the Ministry of Education. I welcome the opportunity to be back here at the social development committee and discuss these estimates. I think we had a very productive discussion last year, and I hope we will find that some of the ideas put forward at that time have come to fruition in the ministry and in the education system.

I am also happy that all three of us are back here again, the critic for the Liberal Party, the critic for the New Democratic Party and myself, all in our same roles and eager to spend the next 20 hours vigorously debating and discussing the education system again. However, we do have a new chairman, and I am pleased that you have had a chance to be well seasoned with the consideration of the annual report of the Ministry of Health.

These estimates represent an expenditure of $2,399,363,000 - a very considerable sum of money. It is interesting when we look at the estimates that we find they represent an increase of 2.4 per cent over last year's complete estimates-that is, the original printed estimates and the two supplementary estimates, which we all know that we pretended at different times after our original estimates were considered by this committee.

The increase represented by the Education rates this year, as I say, is 2.4 per cent $57,229,300. I would like to just indicate, as 1 am sure many of the members know the breakdown of that particular amount money, that very large sum of money, is follows: There is 82.1 per cent for general legislative grants, which is really a pass huge payment; it is the province, through the Ministry of Education, attributing to the operations of the local school boards of this province, the local educational system. Another 13.8 per cent of the estimates that we have before us today represent money that goes into the Teachers' Superannuation Fund and commission under various headings and votes. Another 0.6 per cent represents transfers to other agencies, such as the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the Ontario Educational Communications Authority and a few others.

Therefore, we find that about 96.5 per cent of these estimates are really transfers to other agencies, and 3.5 per cent represents the direct operating expenditures of the Ministry of Education. That sum is about $84,189,000. Of that amount, 1.4 per cent is spent in the head office, 1.6 per cent in our institutions, and 0.5 per cent in our regional office operation. So of the total budget we are considering here today, 3.5 per cent is the direct operating cost of the ministry and the rest, as I say, are transfer payments to various other bodies concerned with the total education system of this province.

It’s always well when we are considering estimates of the Ministry of Education to consider what the role of the ministry is. I think it could be best put in these terms, that the role of the Ministry of Education is to give direction and co-ordination to the public education system in Ontario under the direction and the Acts and regulations of the Legislature of this province, the goal being to provide equality of educational opportunity for the young people of this province and, in the case of the Ministry of Education, up to the end of the secondary school system.

The role of the ministry also involves, of course, operating directly special schools of our own-schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, correspondence schools, schools in developmental centres, schools in training schools, and the Ontario Teacher Education College, which of course highlights one of the other roles of the ministry, which is to give direction and guidance in the area of teacher education.

These roles are carried out through an organization which involves a head office that has in it about 25 per cent of our total complement-the head office is here in the Mowat Block-and a network of regional offices around the province which has about 13.4 per cent of our Complement.

The regional offices are the field operation where the policies, the direction, the monitoring, the reviewing are earned on. In fact, I would like to mention that in keeping with some of the things I think I mentioned a year or so ago, our regional office role is changing. I think I could say it is becoming more aggressive. Provincial reviews are being carried on, monitoring of school boards in each region's area is occurring and, of course, the other idle of providing consultative assistance in curriculum, and in finances is going on also.

Our regional offices have been subjected to a fair amount of scrutiny; the fat has been trimmed off, and they are being made to be a more aggressive and mare useful field tool to further the direction that the ministry gives and the assistance that it provides to the school boards in this province.

The other tales relating to the special schools, as I indicated earlier, are carried out of course by the special schools that are located and operated by the ministry across this province.

To these remarks I would like also to stress that education in this province is a endeavour. Certainly that has always been my philosophy as minister. The rare of the ministry having been stated as being to give directional to co-ordinate, the Coordination process involves working jointly and cooperatively with a number of groups in what I will call the educational community. It involves meeting with them, consulting with them, listening to them and, I think, mutually co-operating for the better of education.

Certainly, as I indicated, the ministry is a provincial authority that is to give direction and lay down ground rules for education, but the delivery of the system, the operation, is carried out by boards of education. That's the first group that we, of course, must work with and co-operate with. Those boards of education employ teachers and it is teachers, of course, who are on the firing line.

People often say to me in one breath that they wish we could have la quality education system, and then in the next breath they spend 10 or 20 minutes attacking teachers, without realizing that it is the classroom teacher, primarily, who decides whether you have a quality education system or not. They are the people who are on the firing line and they are a very integral and big part of the education system. Only when you have good teachers operating with a high degree of morale and feeling that they have the confidence of the people they are teaching, and the people an whose behalf they are teaching, do you really have a quality education system.

I would like to say here, Mr. Chairman, that I think the teachers of this province, taken as a whale, are an excellent group of people and they are doing a fine job. I think the trustees of this province are administering the education system in a very excellent way. Somebody will immediately bring out all the exceptions to this statement.

Certainly, there will be exceptions but I think, as I have said many times, too often we can dwell on the exceptions and the negative part and forget the positive part, which is that there is a large group of trustees in this province who, at same sacrifice to themselves, are serving their community by administering the education system and working with the teachers and others in the system. The teachers themselves, having taken, I would say, a fair amount of public abuse through the media and other areas in the past several years, are still operating at a very high level and are providing good quality education.

I was very heartened the other day to read, as some of you may have read, about a poll done by Martin Galdfarb for the Toronto Star, where he asked people how they felt about the education system. Unlike most palls I have read in the last three or four years, the majority of people said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the education system. It thought this was very good. It was very heartening to me. It showed that the battle a lot of us have been fighting to have some confidence in the system seems to be taking hold. I think that's due in large part to the wonk that trustees, teachers and same of us in the ministry have been doing.

Just to show you how we operate in this joint endeavour process in the Ministry of Education, there are, of course, various groups-the school administrators and supervisory officers, teachers and others, and trustees meeting with a lot of ongoing committees at the staff level in our ministry. I, myself, hold regular meetings with 'the Ontario Teachers' Federation; we had four official meetings last year. We meet regularly with the Ontario School Trustees: Council; there were a couple of those last year. We had a meeting with the association of large school boards. The Ontario Association of Education Administrative Officials met four times with the deputy minister on an official basis. 1 met twice with the directors of education or chief executive officers of all the school boards in the province. One of the meetings was an all-day session to talk about their problems and for them to give us some help and direction in various areas. We met with the Catholic supervisory officers, a couple of times with the Home and School Association, and once with the Catholic Parent-Teachers.

I probably missed some groups and if I did miss any and they read this and are disappointed or miffed, I apologize but that is the list that came to my mind as I was jotting these notes down before this meeting today. But I think that illustrates the kind of meetings that are going on all the time as we view the processes of the Ministry of Education being one of working with various groups.

Of course I didn't mention the many meetings that we do have with people from Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the Ontario Educational Communications Authority. I guess we put them in different category from these educational institutions but they are also partners in the whole process with us.

I'd like to conclude by saying that I've used these opening remarks to offer a bit of an explanation about these estimates and to illustrate how I feel about the role of the Ministry and Minister of Education. I'd like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Education at this time because we have a very hard-working, competent staff in the ministry. It's a staff that has been continually whittled down, and that makes the job even tougher. I think I was looking at the complement figures today and there are about 62 fewer working in the ministry at this time now than there were last veal. That means everybody is shouldering a little more of the work, and a little bit of the fat, if there was any has been cut out.

The staff of the ministry does an excellent jab and at this time I want to tell the members of the committee that I'm very proud of the work that they do. I'm very pleased to say that this is about the seventh time that I had been presenting the estimates for them and the kind of co-operation that I've had over the many years has continued, and I compliment the staff.

We'll have lots of time to discuss each individual item as we come to it and that's why I've refrained from talking in detail or in depth about any particular area. I just want to say that if you were to ask me what my directions were for the next year, they are to continue in the manner we have been doing to develop and preserve the high quality public education system we have in this province.

We will continue to focus on fundamentals in the school system which we have been adopting, not however in doing that to neglect some of the important areas such as moral and values education, on which I have always put a very strong emphasis. I feel these have to be continually stressed in the Curriculum and with those in the school system.

We'll continue to encourage the development of a strong and vibrant French-language school system, a minority language school system in this province, consistent with the legislation and I think the wishes of the people of this province. We're doing many things to strengthen that system and to guarantee those people whose mother tongue is French that they will be able to be at home in this province in the education system in that, their mother tongue. We'll continue to put emphasis on teaching French as a second language and encouraging more and more young people to learn it and to learn it well.

We'll also, I think, in this year, be putting much emphasis on the whole area of special education, a term which has come to cover a whole multitude of specialties. Without going into details about that right now, suffice it for me to say that better and more available special education programs will be one of the thrusts of the ministry as we move ahead with this very large budget that we be asked to administer by the Legislature of this province.