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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Ontario | 31e | 4e | Discours sur l’éducation | 21 avril 1980 | Bette Stephenson | Minister of Education | Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario |

It is a pleasure to introduce this afternoon the 1980-81 estimates of the Ministry of Education with a brief statement outlining a few particularly important developments which have occurred since the committee met in November of last year to debate the 1979-80 estimates.

At that time, I think I reported quite extensively for the benefit of the members on the full range of activities within the ministry. Given that recent and relatively complete statement, I don't feel that it is necessary to make an extensive one at this time. There are, however, some items of particular interest and: importance that I thought I should outline.

I would like, first of all, to summarize for you and the record the action that has taken place in regard to asbestos in the schools. I wish to re-emphasize my ministry's concern about the presence of asbestos materials in Ontario schools and the potential health hazards that may result. In 1968 and 1974, the ministry issued memoranda to all school boards warning of the dangers associated with the use of asbestos powder in art classes. That warning has certainly resulted in the elimination of that material from art programs in the schools.

I also have recorded within Hansard the actions which were taken in discussions held with school officials involved in building about the warnings which were issued at that time regarding the use of asbestos materials, particularly the spray-on materials within school structures.

It is only more recently that information has indicated the health hazard from deteriorating friable asbestos-although that warning was issued earlier-in exposed locations or in duct works within the schools has obviously became a much better known subject.

On June 25, 1979, the Ministry of Education asked the school boards, the universities and the colleges in the province to conduct a visual survey to determine the prevalence of materials, which might contain asbestos which should be subject to confirmatory analysis. A list of the school boards that have responded up to April 1, 1980, has been tabled in the Legislature.

On December 3, 1979, representatives of the ministries of Health, Environment, Education and Colleges and Universities approved finally the manual entitled, Inspecting Buildings for Asbestos, which was prepared by the occupational health and safety division of the Ministry of Labour. On January 25, 1980, this manual and an accompanying memorandum pertaining to the necessary remedial action were sent to all school boards, colleges and universities. As a result of this action a large number of bulk samples of products having the appearance of asbestos have been or are in the process of being analysed for asbestos-fibre content.

I am advised that the time far the lab work for the bulk samples has been reduced, and we anticipate an analysis time of approximately two weeks. In those cases where the presence of asbestos is confirmed, corrective action will be undertaken by the school board in accordance with the instructions set Out in the ministry manual.

At this time, the ministry continues to provide information to school boards respecting bulk sampling, coating materials and procedures. At the same time we are liaising with other ministries, the US Environmental Protection Agency, certain consultants, product manufacturers, contractors and laboratories to ensure that the information which we are relaying is as factual and as current as possible.

In the area of the general legislative grants, the ministry has taken two major initiatives:

In French-language education funding, new funding mechanisms have been introduced for 1980 to encourage the provision of French-language education programs at the secondary school level by increasing the overall level of funding for secondary school French-language instructional units. A reorganizational grant has been introduced to offset the start-up costs associated with the establishment of new homogeneous French-language secondary school entities. The small-school weighting factor has been improved substantially. 'This will provide additional support for both small, homogeneous French-language secondary school entities and small mixed-language secondary schools.

A French-English mixed-school weighting factor has been introduced tad encourage the expansion of course offerings in the minority language of the mixed secondary school, whether that language be French or English.

The per-credit amounts of $45 in the case of secondary pupils enrolled in grades nine or 10, and $50 in the case of pupils enrolled in grades 11, 12 and 13 have been maintained for 1980.

The per-credit amounts of $45 and $50, the reorganization grant, the small-school weighting factor, and the French English mixed-school weighting factor are funded at 100 per cent.

There has been provided, as well, financial assistance far small elementary schools. That weighting factor has been improved far 1980 by increasing the level of support far schools with fewer than 10 pupils per grade. Thirty-eight school boards benefit from this change with an additional amount of approximately $300,000 being provided for 1980.

As well, there is financial assistance for small secondary schools. That weighting factor has been improved substantially far 1980 in recognition of the acute problems, which are facing certain small secondary schools. Far 1980, additional support is being provided far secondary schools with fewer than 120 pupils per grade, rather than 80 pupils per grade as in 1979, which are located mare than 20 road miles from another secondary school of the same language, rather the Bill 25 road miles, as in 1979. This will be calculated on a current basis. Twenty-three school boards benefit from the change with an additional amount of approximately $1.9 million being provided for the year 1980.

In relation to Indo-Chinese refugees, the ministry has mounted a special effort to meet the needs of these persons as Outlined to you in introducing our last estimates. The latest figures as of March 8, 1980, indicate that approximately 16.000 have arrived to date and that as a consequence of present commitments; an additional 7,000 can be expected.

As I indicated during the debate of the 1979-80 Ministry of Education estimates, we undertook to review the matter of the time lag in funding the English-as-a-second-language programs and services, provided by school boards to assist in providing services to all newcomers, but of course particularly in view of the large number of Indo-Chinese.

I am pleased to say that effective January 1980, the language instruction-weighting factor will reflect current programs and services. This means there will be additional grants provided in 1980 to offset the cost of these programs on a current basis. This funding arrangement was announced to school boards in February, 1980, together with the release of the 1980 general legislative 'grants information.

The enrolment of Indo-Chinese children in the regular day school, and hence their eligibility for regular per-pupil funding, will be recognized in the same manner as for all pupils in the system. They will be measured on a current basis.

Mr. Chairman, since the release of the final report of the commission on declining school enrolment on January 8, 1979, the ministry has conducted an analysis of the 107 recommendations in report and of the broader policy issues, which they raise.

In addition, each of the 45 briefs from the field in response to the final report has been carefully considered. This official response is now complete and I expect will be tabled in the Legislature during the course of these estimates. This will be an important document which will outline not only new initiatives the government is proposing hut will place in a general policy context the many steps which are in process or which have already been completed since the commissioners' report was received.

The large number of research reports on topics associated with declining enrolment, generated by the researchers under contract to the commission on declining enrolment, has been made available on request to educators, trustees, and members of the general public.

Mr. Chairman, school closure has been a topic of intense interest to educators and to the communities affected. A memorandum to chairmen and directors of school boards on December 3, 1969, advised each board that the province would require them to prepare and issue 'a definite policy on the procedures to be followed in determining school closure.

These procedures will have to meet general criteria established by the ministry. Tentative criteria were proposed in the memorandum and we are now in the process of finalizing these following dialogue with local directors of education, organized by the regional offices. These criteria definitely will require that school hoards take into consideration not only the effect on the children but also the social impact on the community of a potential closure. They will ensure that every possibility of continued use in a way of benefit to the community is explored before a final decision is taken.

The Ontario assessment instrument pool, OAIP, is being developed to assist educators in the areas of evaluation and reporting. This curriculum-based resource will provide a wide variety of assessment material and techniques in both English and French, which are being carefully prepared to reflect important goals and objectives in the Ontario program.

The initial group of contracts is now nearing completion and we expect to have assessment materials available this fall in the following areas mathematics/mathematiques, grades seven to 10; English, grades seven to 10; French as a second language, grades six to 10; history, grades seven to 10; and geography, grades seven to 10.

Throughout 1981 assessment materials in a number of additional subjects will become available: mathematics/mathematiques, grades four to six; anglais, grades four to 10; francais, grades our to 10; chemistry/C'himie, grades 11 to 13; physics/physiques, grades 11 to 13; histoire, grades seven to 10; and geography, grades seven to 10.

Teachers, trustees and officials are generally supportive of the concept of the project and of the positive effect improved assessment procedures can produce. The Ontario Teachers' Federation has nominated representatives to the advisory committees associated with each contract. The Ontario School Trustees' Council and the administrative officials' organizations are extremely interested in the project and are anxious to be involved in the implementation stages.

At the same time, all three groups have concerns about the potential misuse of the materials 'and the harmful effects that could result from such misuse.

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, we do not believe this will happen. Standardized tests have been freely available for many years, tests with an even greater potential for misuse because they do not always relate to current Ontario curriculum objectives. These materials are widely used and to our knowledge, are used with due caution 'and in appropriate ways. I have no reason to believe this tradition will be reversed or that the people who have until now used standardized tests in appropriate ways will suddenly cease to do so. In any event, we shall make every effort to inform the field about the proper use of the materials and to caution against what we feel to be improper uses.

Some of these concerns, Mr. Chairman, about possible misuse spring from the fear that the materials may be released suddenly without adequate introduction and preparation. I would like to assure you that we would not be acting precipitately. We are giving high priority to the development of an implementation plan. We will be fully cognizant of all the concerns that have been expressed and will be discussing the plan thoroughly with all those concerned before acting upon it. We shall not proceed unless we believe that the materials are of the highest quality and that arrangements for their handling have been thoroughly worked out.

In all of this we are relying heavily upon the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which is our principal contractor. In bringing the initial contracts for this ambitious project to a successful conclusion, the institute will, I feel, conclusively demonstrate its value to the education community.

Over the past few months, 11 provincial review reports have been completed and disseminated widely for use in the educational community throughout Ontario. At the present time, an additional nine provincial reviews are being conducted. It is expected that the reports from this series will be ready for distribution during the first term of the 1980-81 school year.

Early in the fiscal year the following curriculum documents will be produced and distributed:

Energy: A series of 16 documents outlining ways in which students can become involved in the conservation of energy.

Special days: A kit with suggestions and materials leading to the understanding and observance of occasions such as Remembrance Day, Commonwealth Day and Citizenship Day.

French as a second language: A curriculum guideline outlining ministry policy on core French programs in all four divisions.

Mathematics: A curriculum guideline for the intermediate division.

Bias: A document giving suggestions to publishers and authors in order to avoid racial, religious or cultural bias in learning materials for schools.

As I announced in the House on April 14, an in-depth one-year study of secondary education in Ontario is now under way. Mr. Duncan Green, director, Toronto Board of Education, is the project chairman.

I announced at that time the membership of the steering committee, and membership of the evaluation, reaction, and design committees will be announced later this month. There will be about 40 members on the four project committees, three quarters of whom will come from the business and public sectors of the province.

The reports from this project will deal with assessment, evaluation, reaction and design, and will culminate in recommendations, which will indicate the ways and means whereby secondary education can operate in the best interests of the students and our society as we approach the 21st century.

Work is near completion on the technological studies guideline. The document embraces 41 technical and vocational subject guidelines. Of these, 24 authorize courses for both intermediate and senior divisions, while the remaining 17 cover courses offered in the intermediate division only. The document will be printed for distribution to the schools later this year.

The ministry gives high priority to guidance services within our schools. We are continuing to promote the use of the Student Guidance Information Service, SGIS, in the schools in the province. An audio-visual slide package has been developed and sent to each participating SGIS School. This slide-tape package, available in both English and French, will assist school counsellors in the promotional usage of the computerized information service.

A new guidance resource document entitled, Curriculum Ideas for Teachers, Primary and Junior Divisions, was printed and distributed to all elementary schools in February and March of this year. This document reiterates many points, which are an integral part of the educational philosophy outlined in The Formative Years and in Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions.

The activities described in the document are designed to assist children to do the following:

To develop a sense of personal identity and an understanding of their own potential; to learn to respect the individuality, rights and needs of others; to learn how to relate effectively to others; to develop and maintain confidence and a sense of self-worth; and to develop career awareness by looking at workers and their interdependence within our society.

To assist school boards with the planning of special education programs and services, in compliance with the proposed responsibility legislation, a comprehensive information manual has been drafted for distribution to school roads in 1980. Some of the topics included are these: legislation and policies, ministry publications available, programming strategies for pupils with special needs, teaching- education provisions, professional support services, research in special education, a guide to professional materials, and a complete set of definitions for Special education.

A school-board planning guide is being prepared for use in a pilot project to help school boards plan to provide programs for all of their resident pupils as the responsibility legislation comes into force. The guide is designed to determine the pupils in need and the steps by which the resources needed for helping them can be made available.

We are continuing to expand our exchange programs for students and teachers. A student exchange program with West Germany, which was implemented several years ago, is being expanded to Quebec and France.

For Quebec, the successful two-year pilot project with a few school boards is being made an ongoing program offered to the entire province. Forty Ontario school boards have met with ministry officials and are now interviewing students for the 1980-81 three month exchange of approximately 150 students from each province.

For a new pilot project involving four Ontario school boards is now at the student interview stage. This 1980-81 program will involve approximately 25 students from each jurisdiction.

The international teacher exchange program has now been expanded to include Belgium. Two teachers from each jurisdiction will exchange posts in 1980-81; teachers of French as a second language from Ontario exchanging with teachers of English as a second language from Belgium.

Arrangements have been made for a new initiative for the cultural and linguistic development of Ontario's francophone teachers in French-language instructional units. With the co-operation of the Comité d' Accueil Canada-France and of the Ministry of Education in France, a four-week program of French studies will be offered to 20 Ontario educators at Tours, France. The program is 'being designed to meet the specific needs of French-language educators.

In the area of correspondence education, since September 1979 INWATS telephone service has been providing Ontario residents with toll-free telephone access to the correspondence education branch. The ministry's Stucoont Guidance Information System is in place and the "storefront" capability of the education program has been expanded, with the result that almost 10,000 individuals were enrolled at the counter at 909 Yonge Street in the 1979-80 fiscal year.

The correspondence education branch is now capable of providing a completely bilingual service including reception, counselling, a wide range of learning materials, marking, evaluation, and follow-up.

These are just a few of the topics the ministry has had before it since we last met, which wasn't very long ago. There are doubtless many others, which you will wish to raise during the course of the debate and I look forward to a vigorous and very positive discussion.

Thank you.