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| Saskatchewan | 27e | 2e | Discours sur l’éducation | 29 avril 2013 | Russ Marchuk | Minister of Education | Saskatchewan Party |

Thank you, Mr. Chair. And good evening, everyone, colleagues. I’m very pleased to be here with ministry officials to speak to the Ministry of Education’s 2013-14 budget, and I’m looking forward to this discussion that we’ll have tonight on education.

With me today to help answer questions that committee members may have are: to my immediate right, Cheryl Senecal, deputy minister; to her right, assistant deputy minister Donna Johnson; to my left, assistant deputy minister Greg Miller; and in behind me I’ll ask staff to just kind of indicate by raising their hands. We have Lynn Allan, the executive director of the early years branch; Tim Caleval, executive director, student achievement and supports; Jennifer Colin, executive director, information management and support; Rosanne Glass, executive director, strategic policy; Val Lusk, acting executive director, education funding; Lori Mann, executive director, corporate services; Sheldon Ramstead, acting executive director, infrastructure. Is Doug here? Yes, Doug. Doug Volk, executive director, Teachers’ Superannuation Commission; Brett Waytuck, executive director, Provincial Library and literacy; and Angela Chobanik, director, educational financial policy, education funding.

Mr. Chair, before we discuss the ’13-14 budget, I’d like to take a minute to explain how education figures prominently in Saskatchewan, in the Saskatchewan plan for growth. In Saskatchewan our growth as a province is directly linked to increasing the level of academic performance, including improved graduation rates for all Saskatchewan students. This begins with the early years through high school completion. A growing economy requires a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. High school completion is one of the foundations for further education, training, and employment opportunities.

In the Saskatchewan plan for growth, the Government of Saskatchewan has committed to reducing the graduation disparity between First Nations and Métis students and their non-Aboriginal peers by 50 per cent by 2020; to leading the country in high school graduation rates by 2020; to ensuring by 2016 all school divisions will consistently and transparently measure, report progress, and support instructional practices to achieve desired outcomes.

We know that Saskatchewan’s First Nations and Métis population is young and growing, which makes it essential to reduce the graduation rate difference to help them achieve their full potential. Achieving this goal will require the collective work of the government, First Nations and Métis organizations, students, teachers, parents, administrators, and school divisions. These are challenging goals for the province but they are the right goals to set for all Saskatchewan students. We need our young people to be full participants in the future of our province.

I also want to highlight the significant accomplishments we’ve made over the last few years, accomplishments that are having an impact and are improving the quality of life for all of Saskatchewan people. Our government is proud of its record in supporting pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] education.

The 2013-14 budget is about balanced growth. It’s a budget focused on sound economic growth and shared prosperity. It’s a budget that continues to make students a priority by investing in the pre-K to 12 education system. Our education, library and literacy, early year sectors all play an important role in helping Saskatchewan people to be successful citizens. As a result, overall funding for education has increased by 6.7 per cent from ’12-13. The overall funding for school divisions is $1.775 billion, an increase of 2.3 per cent which includes a $40.6 million increase in operating funding in the 2013-14 year. This is in the context of the government fiscal year.

In terms of the school divisions’ fiscal year, funding will increase by $54 million or 3.1 per cent. Included in this support to school divisions this year is an increase of $17 million for enrolment increases of 1,930 students in 2012 and forecasted enrolment increases of 2,654 students in 2013.

Investment in infrastructure has been a priority and continues to be and will continue to be. Since November 2007, the Government of Saskatchewan has committed more than $600 million towards 43 major school capital projects and approximately 900 additional projects.

The 2013-14 Ministry of Education budget also includes a commitment of $119.6 million in capital funding, an increase of $7.2 million or 6.4 per cent to advance a number of school projects. Included in the capital funding this year is $36.9 million for 10 projects under construction; $31.9 million to continue construction on co-owned projects; $28.2 million, an increase of 9.5 million for preventative maintenance in renewable capital asset management system and new relocatables; $18.7 million, an increase of $14.7 million for the construction of major capital projects in Hudson Bay, Leader, and Martensville.

These projects were approved in principle in 2012-13: $1.9 million to begin planning on new projects in Langenburg and Gravelbourg; $1 million to automate the major capital process; and $1 million for an expansion of 15 new pre-kindergarten programs.

This budget also provides an investment in early learning and child care which includes $63.4 million in funding, a $589,000 increase for funding in 15 new pre-kindergarten programs in 2013-14.

Since 2007 our government has made a significant investment in pre-kindergarten, increasing the number of programs from 155 to 301, a 94 per cent increase. The pre-K expansion will serve approximately 240 more vulnerable three- and four-year-old children and their families. Across the province, approximately 4,816 three- and four-year-old children and their families will have access to a pre-kindergarten program.

As a government, we have also made significant investments in child care since 2007, including a 48 per cent increase in the total number of spaces. Also included is the development of 500 additional child care spaces. This brings the total number of new child care spaces allocated since 2007 to 4,435. The estimated total number of spaces, when all allocated spaces are operational, is 13,740 spaces.

We also remain committed to highly literate citizens with equal access to information. There is a $500,000 increase for CommunityNet, part of which will provide 31 new high-speed Internet and network connections for libraries in rural and remote locations. $100,000 will be transferred to the province’s library systems to support them as they take on complete responsibility for the interlibrary loan. And this budget also includes $100,000 to provide access to online talking books for people with perceptual disabilities.

Community-based organizations connected to the Ministry of Education offer valued programs and services for our citizens. A number of community-based organizations will receive a lift in funding based on 1 per cent of their salaries. This increase in funding to CBOs [community-based organization] is part of our ongoing commitment to support a variety of programs and services such as specialized care for our most fragile and vulnerable youth.

Continuing to invest in the early years is critical to improving student outcomes. There is $5.9 million, an increase of 3.9 million in funding for the necessary infrastructure that will enable us to share the individual student level information with parents, students, and teachers in a more immediate way so we can actually use the information to help students succeed. Let me be clear that this $5.9 million investment is an investment in our students.

I’d like to talk a little bit more about some of the tools that will be introduced through the student achievement initiative. We know that how ready students are to learn when they first start school has an incredible impact on how well they do throughout their school career. To that end, we will be using tools in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. One of those tools is called the early years evaluation. This is a direct, one-on-one assessment of student development in several key areas. This is already being used by school divisions across the province and has had some impressive results.

Something else that will be introduced for the early years is the Aboriginal holistic assessment of oral language. It’s an interactive, play-based assessment of language, the first of its kind anywhere. It will also include information from parents, elders, and educators. The Aboriginal holistic numeracy assessment will also be used. This will be another interactive, play-based assessment of numeracy, another first of its kind. Again it will include information from parents, from elders, and from educators.

You know, they say that in grade 3 you stop learning to read and begin reading to learn. That’s a big transition for our students and we need to do everything that we can to support them in that transition. For that reason, grades 1 to 3 will see diagnostic level reading data collection. They will also see data collection of number sense.

Beyond the early years, we want to be able to provide immediate feedback to teachers so that timely results can help inform classroom instruction. For that reason, we will be using online assessments of curriculum outcomes in the following areas. Grades 4 and 7 will see assessment of treaty understandings and language arts. We are the first province to have mandatory treaty education, so we will also be the first to assess treaty understanding. Grades 5 and 8 will be assessed in math and problem solving. In grades 6 and 9, science and technology assessments will be administered. And in grades 4 through 12, a perceptual student survey called Tell Them for Me will be administered.

It’s all about student success, and student achievement includes the education, library and literacy, and the early years sectors.

There are too many students in this province still not completing high school. We know that only 72 per cent of our students overall graduate, and we need to do better. And only about 30 per cent of our First Nations and Métis students actually graduate. This is something we simply can’t accept. We have set goals. Our goal as a government is to ensure that Saskatchewan leads the country in graduation rates by 2020. And that’s why this budget also includes $3 million in funding dedicated to provide a response to recommendations from the joint task force. The joint task force has conducted research and extensive consultations across the province to provide practical recommendations for improving First Nations and Métis education and employment outcomes. The $3 million committed in this year’s budget is seed money. It’s meant to help move forward some of the short-term recommendations that the joint task force have presented. Our commitment extends well beyond the $3 million, as illustrated by our commitment to fund on-reserve driver education. That money is outside of the $3 million we budgeted.

We are also continuing our investment in initiatives under the First Nations and Métis education and employment strategy, including First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund of $3.8 million; pre-kindergarten programs of $4.2 million, and pre-kindergarten capital of $1 million, summer literacy camps at $500,000, and the continuation of the Aboriginal individual achievement accounts grants of a half a million dollars.

These are the highlights that I wanted to point out in this year’s budget. And this concludes my opening remarks, and we look forward to the discussion on education and the critical role that it plays in our growing province. And I thank you for that time, Mr. Chair.