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Monday 11 December 2006

Lundi 11 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 décembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION
(APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE
DE 18 ANS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 6, 2006, on the motion for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 52 for a couple of reasons. One is because it turns out that there has been quite a bit of interest in this particular bill from the people of my community, but I'm going to get to that a little later on.

Since I'm the first speaker on the bill tonight, I thought maybe it would be important to outline what the bill is about. People may recall that when this bill came forward from the government, "learning to age 18" was what we were talking about at the time or what the government was talking about at the time. There were also some other pieces to the bill when it originally came to us that included things like preventing people from getting a driver's licence, for example, if they weren't going to stay in school till age 18. So there were some measures that were initially in the bill that aren't there now at this point, which is third reading debate, but they were there at the beginning.

Some would say that they were put there on purpose to try to distract people's attention from the whole idea of punishing kids by forcing them to stay in school and threatening, that they keep that threat there that if they don't stay in school, they're not going to be able to get their driver's licence. That way, by raising that spectre and getting people's ire up on that issue, the government

was trying to detract or trying to create an illusion that there was nothing else of severe consequence in the bill.

Of course, looking through the bill, there are many, many problems with it, but in effect what the bill does and the most problematic part of the bill as it even stands today at third reading debate is this idea of equivalent learning credits, so that young people who have had a challenging time in high school, who are not engaging very productively or well in the course curriculum being provided by high schools, can more or less get those credits from outside organizations or agencies to make up for the fact that they're not able to necessarily get that credit at school. So it's an equivalent learning kind of program.

Part of the problem that not only myself and my wonderful critic, a former teacher in this area, Mr. Marchese from the riding of Trinity–Spadina—not only do we have significant concerns about this concept, but so do many, many others. Anybody who's interested in this issue needs only to log on to Hansard and look at Bill 52, particularly the Hansards of the committee hearings where many people came to speak to this bill, and you can hear for yourself exactly the problems they were identifying. I'm going to be referring to some more of those in detail in a few moments.

What the equivalent learning proposal is or what the government's claiming it's going to do is to increase the educational opportunities that are available for students who are in danger of leaving school. But the problem is, the bill itself is pretty much silent on the details of what that equivalent learning is going to look like. There's no real fleshing out of that concept and no identification of exactly who is going to set the standards, how they're going to be set and who's going to be able to make sure that the standards that are put in place are actually monitored over time to ensure that the equivalent learning is a learning and enriching experience for our young people. None of that is defined in the bill. In fact, it's left up to very non-rigorous, from my perspective, and very ephemeral procedures that nobody is really going to keep account of.

1850

The problem is that there is no significant definition or accountability in this legislation that can make us feel, as parents, particularly—I'm a parent, and my son is in grade 9 this year, so he's just starting his post-secondary experience. As a parent, I don't find that this bill makes me feel that the education system Ontario once prided itself on is going to be upheld and reflected in this

alternative learning scheme that the Liberal government has brought forward.

Needless to say, as I read through our own briefing notes and spoke to my colleague Rosario Marchese, our critic, about this, I got pretty concerned. We were worried about not only the definitions, the procedures of accrediting organizations that will be able to provide these learning credits, but we were also concerned about the location where these credits are going to be achieved or gained by students. Who is checking to make sure that the various facilities, organizations and locations where these credits are going to be offered are actually going to be up to snuff and are going to be appropriate places for young people to obtain credits? I can't believe how fast time is going already. I can't even finish what I was going to say on that.

Interestingly enough, as I read on and on in the Hansard what people were saying about this bill, two things happened to me. One is that I personally grew more and more concerned about this government's scheme for these alternative learning credits. In fact, I got pretty outraged that the bill seemed to be moving at such a quick pace and that there really wasn't a heck of a lot of time for people to make their voices known on this. So the one thing that happened was that I personally got very, very concerned as I continued reading through Hansard.

The other thing that happened to me was that I grew prouder and prouder of the students, teachers, parents and school board trustees in my city, the city of Hamilton, for standing up for public education. I can tell you that they came out in droves to the hearings in Toronto. Hamilton was extremely well represented in terms of the comments to this government on this bill. Most of these presentations said to the government that their scheme of delivering credits through equivalent learning programs was not only wrong-headed but was just totally wrong, period, for a number of different reasons. It was wrong for students, it was wrong for teachers and it was wrong for the education system of Ontario. But it is just too bad that the Liberal government has not been listening to the concerns that have been raised by these individuals. I am getting a little bit ahead of myself.

One of the things that I think is important to acknowledge is that it is not just one group or organization. Oftentimes government will say, "Well, you know, it's this one interest group that has raised a concern." In this case, we had students coming to committee, we had teachers, we had trustees, and I'm going to read from a letter sent by my trustees from the Hamilton–Wentworth District School Board, our newly elected board of trustees. They sent a pretty strongly worded letter dated November 21. Let me just quote from it because it encapsulates to a great extent a number of the concerns that have been outlined by those various organizations through the process of the public hearings on this bill.

"[W]e are concerned with the implications of the application and delivery of the government's intentions." This letter from the Hamilton–Wentworth District School

Board is dated November 21, 2006, and it's addressed to Minister Wynne.

The Hamilton–Wentworth District School Board's "board of trustees has significant concerns about equivalent learning, quality and accountability. We realize that there are currently two credits for accreditation towards a secondary diploma that can be earned outside the school system. These are credits granted by the Royal Conservatory of Music, which has known curricula and evaluation, with a nationally recognized standard.

"Extending credits to other bodies outside the secondary school system causes the board of trustees some alarm. Without known criteria for recognition of what might be considered equivalent standing, the credits might not meet those requirements presently made by secondary schools or by the Royal Conservatory of Music. Without stringent accountability measures in place the notion of 'equivalent learning' has the potential to significantly devalue the OSSD certificate.

"The purpose of the curriculum in place within the education system is to provide employers with identifiable benchmarks for earning"—my margin is cut off here a little bit. The photocopier cut off a word, and that's a big word: "learning" and "earning"; that's a big difference in terms of having a letter cut off—"for learning and transparency in education. Without these parameters, it is our opinion the proposed notion of equivalent learning will lead to educational opportunities that lack structure and rigour." That's coming straight from our school board. "Unfortunately, this aspect of the proposed legislation has the appearance that the government is comfortable outsourcing education." Now, this is from the newly elected board of trustees in Hamilton, who are extremely concerned with the government's wrong-headed perspective that they're taking on Bill 52 on this idea of equivalent learning.

"There are further difficulties. Even with institutions that have known and creditable evaluation practices, such as community colleges, a credit in the college setting is given after only 45 to 55 hours of instruction, not the 110 hours of instruction required by secondary schools."

It goes on to say, "The expansion of opportunities outside of the existing system could have devastating impacts—"in schools (music, dance, technology), which would lessen the accessibility of a range of courses available to all students." So in contracting out to these other organizations, in fact what this scheme does is erode the school system's—the existing school board's—ability to maintain programs that are so vital for the rest of the students to be able to participate in, like music, dance and technology. "There is the potential that school boards might lose funding as eight of 30 credits could be provided outside the school system. And there is the possibility that the concept of certified instructors, entrenched in the college of teachers, could be undermined by parallel institutions with unqualified instructors setting up courses outside the school system to obtain equivalent credits for students."

It concludes by saying, “We would appreciate ... if the minister will reconsider aspects of Bill 52 that deal with equivalent learning.” Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board “would prefer that the minister achieve these outcomes through the intent of the language of the act by ‘building on the creativity and strength of Ontario’s education system.’” That, ironically, is in the preamble of Bill 52 but, interestingly enough, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board thinks that those words ring hollow when applied to the government’s intention in altering the public education system to allow for equivalent learning credits.

Interestingly enough, many of those very same comments were repeated over and over again by various stakeholders in the process of the public hearings on Bill 52 at committee. In fact, I’m going to just read it out right away in case I don’t get any of these specifics on the record. I’m just going to read out a list of the people from Hamilton who showed up here in Toronto to make comments on this bill: Susan Pretula, chair of Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School parent council; Jean Lewis Knight, president of Westdale Home and School—Westdale is where my son goes, Westdale high school—chair, Wentworth parental involvement committee, vice-president of Hamilton-Wentworth Council of Home and Schools; Lee Gowers, Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, Hamilton-Wentworth Council; David Smith, a grade 12 student from Ancaster High School who actually came here to Queen’s Park to talk from a young person’s perspective—again, very negatively—about this bill. In fact, I’m going to read some of David’s comments into the record in a moment. We had Jack Bruce, a teacher in Hamilton; Ryan Scott, a secondary school teacher in Hamilton; Norm Uhrig, a teacher in Hamilton who was bringing comments from another teacher named Sara Waite; Chantal Mancini, who is also a teacher, and she was bringing comments from another teacher named Leisha Dawson; Carmelo Iachelli, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Those are only some of them, but just by indicating those names it’s very, very clear that certainly people engaged in public education in the city of Hamilton have significant concerns about what this bill is going to do. In fact, I held a round table on education in the city of Hamilton not so long ago, on Friday, October 20. Again, our critic from the Trinity–Spadina riding, Rosario Marchese, gave us the pleasure of coming to Hamilton to talk to education stakeholders just about the state of education generally. Interestingly enough—maybe not surprisingly, considering how much of a concern this bill is in the city of Hamilton, or at least for the stakeholders in education in Hamilton—Bill 52 came up during that dialogue.

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Now, this education dialogue wasn’t specifically put together to talk about Bill 52. In fact, it was an effort to sit down and talk to people engaged in public education about what they saw and could identify as concerns in the education system, because we keep hearing from govern-

ment that everything is okay. Of course, if you’re not engaged in the education system, you’re going to think everything is okay. But in fact, the education round table in Hamilton very clearly showed me that everything is not okay, and one of things that’s not okay, amongst many, many others, including the lack of change to the funding formula, the lack of resources for special-needs kids, the lack of funding for things like full-time librarians, art, music and those kinds of initiatives that still do not exist or are not accessible to many kids in many schools—nonetheless, amongst all of the other things that are not okay in Ontario’s public school system, Bill 52 came up. It was an issue that was generated by people that participated in the round table.

Here’s what they had to say: “Bill 52 takes jobs out of secondary school, permits shifting of up to eight credits to outside agencies.... Eight credits taken out of school” equates to 28 teachers coming out of that school. The effect of this shift is a cost to parents. In other words, people were concerned that as we shift to these outside agencies, these outside agencies or organizations—whatever they might be—may in fact be charging fees to enrol the students in these credit courses, thereby putting a price on the credits and creating another user fee for the parents.

Interestingly enough, we went through a number of user fees that are currently in place, and it was quite clear to see that many parents and families of low means would have difficulty with the existing user fees, never mind the spectre of having more user fees on them. But interestingly enough, the other side of that coin, of course, is that where there’s a user fee, there’s somebody interested in benefiting from that user fee, hence the very real concern, the very problematic issue, of a slide into the privatization of our school system, which, again, has been raised by a number of teachers as well as school board trustees, parents and students.

The bottom line is, the system is losing kids at risk, particularly those who have special needs. Our teachers were quite concerned about the very obvious loss of some of those specialty schools that the Ontario public school system used to provide, like vocational schools. I remember they existed when I was going through high school as a younger person.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I had way more time. I have my tabs here of all the wonderful quotes from all the great people from Hamilton who came out to speak to this, but I think the best quote is really going to come from—not the best quote; I shouldn’t say that. I think it’s appropriate to put on the record in this forum the remarks made by the student who made a presentation to the committee, because it’s the students’ voices that are extremely important in this debate. This is a gentleman named David Smith. He’s a grade 12 student at Ancaster High School in Hamilton. He attended committee on Thursday, October 26. Here’s what he had to say:

“The truth is, these credits are nowhere near equivalent to that of a traditional high school credit because in quantity and quality, time spent and the actual

effectiveness of the learning or training provided is nowhere near that of a high school level. It is truly inequitable for a student to be able to go to Wal-Mart and stock shelves for 45 hours and get two credits for that, while a student in the traditional system has to work 110 hours in a classroom setting in order to get one credit. Furthermore, the actual amount of work done in these placements is yet unspecified and would likely be far less rigorous than that of a traditional classroom setting.”

He goes on to say, “Although many respected institutions are able to provide these courses, they would probably ask for tuition from students. As well, in the Student Success Commission it has been said they would receive funding for each student. That seems a little bit like double-dipping, does it not? The problem with giving the money to these institutions for taking the students is that it would dig into funding for music, sports, fine arts and drama. Keeping 85% of students in school until they graduate is not really worth it when you’re taking out of the school system what that 85% stays for.

“The next issue is that students doing work for credit at a third-party employer take jobs away from students who need them.”

I found that an interesting perspective. What David is saying is that, yes, you’re creating these placements, but at the same time it’s making it more difficult for students who are staying in school to find the part-time jobs they need to top up their incomes and be able to save for their post-secondary education. That’s a big problem.

David concludes with this: “I sincerely hope that in future students can be made aware and be invited to take part in the decision-making process.” This is after he talks about his frustration, that he only knew about this two weeks prior to attending committee.

“In conclusion, I believe that, first of all, we have a right to know about changes to our education. It should be made clear to the students of Ontario. The equivalent credit system proposed by the bill not only takes essential funding out of schools but it allows students to get credits they really don’t deserve. There are plenty of programs already in place in school systems in non-traditional learning, and they work, so why mess with them?”

I would say that the government is wanting to mess with them because again they’re refusing to deal with a flawed funding formula that simply doesn’t let school boards provide the kinds of education and training that young people need. Today, coincidentally, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic school board sent me a copy of a letter they sent to the minister saying, “Concurrent with the board’s duty to be as fiscally prudent as possible, the provincial government has the responsibility to ensure adequate funding. The board calls upon the government to increase funding to a level which ensures we are able to continue to provide quality education for today’s students.”

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I’m pleased to participate in third reading debate on Bill 52, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18). At the outset, let me say that we pointed out to the government that they had it wrong from the very title of the bill. Learning to age 18 is not something that the government can impose; it’s not something that can be accomplished by legislation. What must be achieved through legislation is an appropriate framework within which learning can take place. I believe that the government has learned its lesson, because at the very outset we raised serious objection to the punitive measures of this bill.

When the bill was first released I issued a news release, dated August 29, calling on the government to withdraw Bill 52. It calls on the McGuinty government to withdraw what we called “legislation that is punitive, ill-conceived and will prove to be counterproductive.” I said on behalf of the PC caucus that, “The proposed bill would force students to stay in school until the age of 18 and will strip dropouts of their driver’s licence.” We made it very clear from the very outset that we felt that not only would this bill not achieve its objectives but it was counter to the very principles of learning.

We subsequently went into public hearings, and there was not one submission throughout the entire period of time—in three successive days of public hearings, not one person came forward to support the punitive measures of this bill. I was observing throughout those public hearings the posturing of the members of the government who were there throughout those public hearings. They were very uncomfortable with the notes given to them by the Minister of Education to defend the bill. I won’t betray any confidences, but my good colleagues—I have many in the Liberal benches who would share with me their concern over this provision of the bill. But, as good soldiers, they forged on; they continued to give the story of the day about how this bill would serve the students of Ontario well. It didn’t matter if it was the teachers’ unions, it didn’t matter if it was parents, it didn’t matter if it was students who came forward, consistently the message was, “Do away with not only this punitive measure of this bill but do away with the entire bill, because it’s nothing more than window dressing for a government that is addicted to propaganda.” To that end, the bill served the government well.

1910

But in the final analysis, I want to say, as I participate in this bill—and I expect to take my full time; perhaps to the chagrin of the government members, I intend to take the full time that I have to debate this bill. In my remarks today, I intend to draw attention to a number of critically important issues that relate to the education portfolio, to our education system in general, and specifically to the McGuinty government’s failure to deal with the most fundamental issue facing the education system in this province today: the education funding formula that

determines how funding is prioritized and allocated within our education system.

I will point out how this government is continuing to ignore the fundamentals of education while pushing forward its propaganda campaign that distorts reality and in fact harms the very stakeholders of our education system: the students, the teachers, the parents and the taxpayers. Specifically, I will talk about the need to update that funding formula, how and why not updating it has put fiscal pressures on school administrations across the province and hampers their ability to deliver the essential education programs that are so important to our students.

I also will discuss how Bill 52, in whatever form it now finally is before the House, is simply more window dressing that does not help but in fact draws attention from the very challenges that are facing teachers, students, school boards and school administrators across this province.

Bill 52, in its earlier form, which included that section to force students to stay in school until 18 or risk being stripped of their driver's licence, was condemned, as I said earlier, by absolutely every stakeholder in this province. But I was there, other members of this House were there, as the Minister of Education defended her colleagues, the previous two Ministers of Education, initially Gerard Kennedy, who initiated this bill, and then Minister Papatello, who had the opportunity to save face for the government with all of the education stakeholders, but who forged ahead. Minister Wynne was now forced to sit in those public hearings and take the abuse from the stakeholders. And even she, in the face of all of the presentations that she heard, continued throughout that period of time to defend why this punitive measure that was being proposed in this bill was going to be in the best interest of students.

I'm pleased to report to people in this province today that, thanks to their objections—because clearly this government doesn't listen to members of the Legislature, and it seldom listens to its own backbenchers. But it wasn't about what I, as the education critic for the official opposition, was saying, because I said this from day one. I want to congratulate and I want to thank the many stakeholders—the parents, the teachers, the teacher unions who came forward, and the students themselves who day after day came forward—who were willing to make presentations to the standing committee, and thank them for pointing out the smoke and mirrors that this bill really represented.

Rather than asking the question, "Why are students dropping out of school?"—which is the right question for any government to ask—this government's Bill 52 had the presumptive and simplistic answer, before they even consulted with students or with teachers or with parents: "Young people drop out because they're lazy and they need to be forced to learn." That was the answer from this government, or, "The driver's licence is so critically important for today's generation of young people that they'll do anything—they'll even stay in school—just to

keep it." That was the attitude of this government. How wrong were they?

What this government was not prepared to do but what became very, very clear as we followed through on our public hearings was that what the government should be doing is looking at itself and asking, "What is the fault with our education system that is causing young people to drop out, that's causing them not to be interested in continuing their learning? What is it about our education system that is demotivating young people? What are the shortcomings of our education system that particularly young people at risk are forced to leave the school system?" Why wasn't the government asking those questions? "What is it that we can do to improve our support systems within our education system that will engage young people and perhaps especially for those young people who are challenged, who are learning-challenged, who perhaps learn somewhat differently than the average student in the class, that perhaps it's not a function so much of learning as it is that they need to be taught differently? What is it about our education system that is starving our school system of the necessary resources so that we can address those aspects of the education system so that our schools and our teachers have the necessary resources to deal with those important questions?" It hasn't occurred to this government or to this Minister of Education to even ask that question.

In a sense, there was a victory over Bill 52. As a member of the official opposition, I'd like to say that this experience was one of the rare moments when I was heartened in the course of this Liberal government's past three years, because there was a win for the public. There was a win for the public because, at the end of the day, their common-sense persistence in challenging this government over this punitive measure in this legislation won out. As a result of that, we're debating Bill 52 today, it having been amended to withdraw that punitive measure.

It caused us a great deal of encouragement when we were able to issue a press release on November 3. The heading of that press release was, "McGuinty Government Folds on Licence Suspensions for School Drop-outs." We gave the credit to the many education stakeholders who came forward in those public hearings to impress on this government how wrong it was. So now it's a matter of saying to the government, "Not only should you have listened to stakeholders on the punitive measure of the licence suspensions; you should've listened to them on the rest of the bill too," because the vast majority of proposals that we have and the vast majority of witnesses who came forward asked them not just to withdraw that measure of the bill but to withdraw the entire bill. Over and over again, we heard, whether it was from teachers, administrators or students, that this bill is simply unnecessary, that all of the alternative learning initiatives this bill purports to establish are already here. In fact, they were established in 1999 by the former PC government under Elizabeth Witmer as the Minister of Education. Under that framework, all of those

alternative learning opportunities were created in legislation. The problem was that the system was starved of the necessary resources and funding to be able to deliver those alternative learning systems effectively.

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As I said before, I want to thank all of the stakeholders who came forward and took the initiative. I want to thank those who wrote e-mails, such as Katie Toksoy, who said, "We believe that genuine motivation is self-motivation arising out of a desire to learn and reach goals, not out of fear or coercion or punitive legislation."

I want to thank Gerald Dickson from Kingston, who wrote to his MPP, John Gerretsen, our Minister of Municipal Affairs. He said this: "Acquisition of a driver's licence should depend only on being able to acquire and demonstrate the skills and behaviour needed to operate a motor vehicle safely—nothing more. Legislation such as this increasingly restricts personal freedoms for purposes that are not necessarily in the interests of those it affects."

Al Amos wrote to then-Education Minister Gerard Kennedy, who didn't listen to him either. But Al Amos wrote the following: "One cannot force a youth to stay in school. I believe these students need to get away from the traditional school environment into a system of learning alternatives. Trade schools, working for credits in the job place, co-operatives with employers are but a few ideas."

I want to thank all of the many other education stakeholders, as I indicated before, who came forward to make their submissions and ultimately created such an overwhelming public pressure on this government that they were prepared to allow us to amend this bill to at least withdraw that aspect of the bill. So I say, congratulations and well done to the public in Ontario and in small measure thank the government for at least agreeing to amend the bill on this basis.

Having said that, we will be debating Bill 142 tomorrow. In the course of the debate on that bill, I mentioned at the end of those public hearings last week, on the Thursday, that what was so disappointing about that entire process of deliberation on that bill, as it was with virtually every other bill we have considered under this McGuinty government, is that notwithstanding the many amendments that were put forward by the official opposition and the third party, at the conclusion of that process not one single amendment that came from the opposition was accepted by the government—not one. And yet this is a government that wants to talk about parliamentary reform, democratic renewal, that went to the point of actually appointing a minister with responsibility for democratic renewal. Under the guise of democratic renewal, they want to look at how people are elected to this place. Should we be looking at a new system of how to elect MPPs to this place?

I would say to the government that before you involve yourself about whether it should be a first-past-the-post system or proportional representation, look at this House first. Let's talk about how business is conducted in here. The people of Ontario are not nearly as concerned about how they elect their MPPs as they are with how they

conduct themselves when they get here. The people of Ontario need not be nearly as concerned about whether their MPP is elected by proportional representation or by a first-past-the-post system as, when they get here, will their voice be heard? Will they actually have an opportunity, whether as a government backbencher or whether as a member of the official opposition or the third party—will the voice of that individual MPP be heard in that place? Will the process of committee hearings be legitimized? Will there actually be a day in this Legislature when members of the government who are members of a standing committee will not be under orders from the minister of the day not to think for themselves? Will there ever be a day when members of the government, when they hear an amendment put forward by an opposition member, will actually be able to think for themselves and say, "You know, that makes good sense," and not have to worry about being disciplined by their whip, by the minister or by the Premier because they happened to vote in favour of that amendment because they really believed it made the legislation a better piece of legislation?

I, as a former government whip, know of what I speak. I know that that is how government business is done, and I resent it. I'm simply saying that it's time for us as legislators in this place to change how we do business or suffer the consequences. And the consequences are a cynical electorate, who are staying away from the polls in droves. They don't want to vote because they know in their hearts that voting is often futile.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sure the member for Oak Ridges is going to relate that to Bill 52.

Mr. Klees: Yes, Speaker. I was relating it precisely to Bill 52, because my point was that while we were engaged in deliberation and debate on Bill 52, we went through second reading debate in this place. The members from the third party who were debating the bill called on the Minister of Education to withdraw the bill, to withdraw portions of the bill. How much were we listened to? Not at all. Then we went into public hearings, and in public hearings, over and over and over again, not only did we hear from the public, but we in the official opposition and members of the third party did the best we could to represent proposals for amendments to this bill. And where are we today?

I gave credit to the government for withdrawing the punitive measure as it relates to drivers' licences, but they did so begrudgingly. So I want to stand here today and give credit—not to us in the opposition, because the government would never listen to us. Had it not been for the persistent advocacy of the public, of education stakeholders, we would not have one change to this legislation. So I believe Bill 52, in one way, was landmark. A very major portion of a piece of legislation was changed, and for that I thank the public.

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The other aspect of the amended Bill 52 that this government is extremely proud of has to do with the provisions for gaining equivalent learning credits. Again,

on that issue alone we heard from many witnesses to the public hearings that they were extremely concerned about the implications of what the government legislation will lead to. The problem with this government initiative is that, frankly, it's no initiative at all in terms of its intent, because the intent is already here in this province.

I would like to share with you what the Ontario teachers' pointed out in their submission to the committee: "... expansion and increase of the availability of equivalent learning opportunities is already possible under Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999."

What the OSSTF and others said they wanted from this government is less political grandstanding in terms of making alternative learning programs available, and what they need is more money to ensure that the framework that was already established in legislation in 1999 could in fact be adequately funded so that those programs could be delivered effectively. But this government chooses, rather than to deliver a cheque, to deliver a bill; in this case, Bill 52. What stakeholders in this province are saying is, "Forget the bill. Give us the money." Fund the programs. Ensure that school boards and teachers have the resources to deliver the programs so that our young people can in fact have the benefit of the good intentions of your Bill 52.

I want to refer to a report on school funding that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives published in October of this year.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): You are quoting that group?

Mr. Klees: To the government House leader, not only am I quoting this; I gave credit to the government today, Mr. House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: It must be the holiday season.

Mr. Klees: Sure. It is the holiday season. It just shows that some in this House actually have a balanced view of what we're here to do. I am quoting this because I've read the report many times, and I believe that this report states in very clear terms what the issue is in this province with regard to education, and it draws attention, beyond the photo ops that this government is so well known for, beyond the media releases and beyond the smoke and mirrors, and actually goes to the heart of what the issue is in this province today.

I want to point out—and I'm going to read from the report, because I want to be sure to give credit to the author and I want to ensure that people in this province know that this is not a political document. This is an independently researched document that speaks to the funding crisis that we have in the province today.

"What makes the [education] debate particularly difficult to grasp this year is that both sides are telling the truth." This is with regard to the education funding challenge. "The province is indeed spending more. And school boards are indeed facing program cuts to balance their books...."

"The principal contributors to this year's funding squeeze are" as follows, and here is the key to what I think people in this province need to understand and comprehend so that they're able to, on the one hand, understand why the Minister of Education can actually stand and say that they've increased funding in education, and, on the other hand, understand why we have school boards across the province facing deficits. I quote from the report: "New provincial initiatives and commitments which require additional spending by boards will increase costs by more than the overall increase in operating funding."

Fundamental to understanding what is happening here is that this government, in the three years that they have had the opportunity to manage the education portfolio, has been drunk with the need to have new funding announcements, new program announcements, every week. There isn't a week that goes by that we don't have a new announcement from the Minister of Education. The problem is that none of those programs, or very, very few of them, have, first of all, been consulted about with stakeholders. They have nothing to do with the fundamental need of education in this province. They are always welcome, and usually the Minister of Education will make those announcements to rousing applause, and often standing ovations. The reason for that is they are always very selective target audiences that the minister speaks to.

So what we've had consistently for three years in this province are dribbles of announcements of \$2 million here, \$5 million there, \$10 million here. Over a period of time, we have an accumulated additional spending of in excess of a billion dollars by this government. But what has been ignored is the fundamental need to update the basic education funding formula that delivers essential funding to students across this province so that special-needs students receive their funding, so that transportation is adequately funded, so that supervision can take place adequately within our schools.

And so we have teachers who are frustrated. Yes, on the one hand, they were given very substantial increases. But isn't it interesting that even the teachers' unions have found it necessary to call news conferences condemning this government—on the one hand thanking them, of course, for new long-term contracts and for infusing an additional \$600 million into the education budget to pay partially for those new contracts, but in the same press conference, those same teachers' unions condemned this government for shorting school boards on many of the essential programs within their schools so that school boards are forced to rob Peter to pay Paul, to transfer funds from special education to shore up those teachers' contracts.

Teachers in this province and teachers' unions don't want anything to do with that. They are simply saying that if you're going to announce new teacher contracts, fund them totally. Don't put school boards into the box of having to meet the requirements of those new teacher contracts that were unilaterally negotiated by the Minister

of Education and then short school boards on the other side with programs so that we cannot adequately fund education in this province. That's precisely what this government has done, and it's catching up to them. There isn't going to be a day of rest for this government until they address the promise that they made. Speaker, you will know what that promise was, amongst a few other promises that the government forgot about, and that was to address the updating of that funding formula.

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I want to deal with the funding formula issue. This is the Report of the Education Equality Task Force. This is a task force that was commissioned by the former PC government to address the issue of the funding formula. It was the former government that introduced the funding formula that was to restructure how education is funded in this province. The objective was to bring equity and fairness into funding of education across the province so that we wouldn't have a situation where students from a wealthy board had advantages over students perhaps in rural Ontario or northern Ontario, where the tax base was not as supple as it might have been in some other areas of the province. So the intention was to provide per-student funding.

At the time that that funding formula was implemented, a great deal of research had been done. It was understood from the very beginning that as this funding formula got implemented, there would be a need for the government of the day to review this funding formula on an ongoing basis to ensure that any unintended consequences that may be negative would be addressed; that as it became evident that additional resources were needed in certain programs, be it transportation, be it capital, be it special needs, there would be an ongoing review. In response to that and consistent with that commitment by the former PC government, this report, called the Rozanski report, was commissioned.

I want to read into the record what the objective of that report was, publicly so stated. I quote from the report, page 3: "The government announced the Education Equality Task Force in its speech from the throne on May 9, 2002. I was appointed"—this is Rozanski speaking—"to review the province's student-focused funding formula and to make recommendations on ways to improve equity, fairness, certainty, and stability in the funding of Ontario's students and schools."

Rozanski goes on to talk about how that report was conducted:

"I also received hundreds of oral and written submissions on a wide range of education and education funding issues from individuals, school boards, and education and other organizations during round table discussions and in public consultations throughout the province.

"Since students are, after all, the focus of Ontario's education funding formula and this report, I am grateful that I was able, while conducting public hearings around the province, to visit some of Ontario's schools and to meet students and their teachers and principals."

He concludes: "Finally, I would like to thank the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer, Minister of Education, for her support and for encouraging me to offer candid advice on ways to improve Ontario's education funding formula."

I wanted to read this into the record because we continue to hear a great deal of condemnation of the funding formula. The condemnation, I suggest to you, should not be directed towards the funding formula, which was a very honest attempt at delivering equitable and fair funding to education in Ontario; the condemnation should be directed towards this government that refused to accept the recommendations of Rozanski and implement the increase in funding that he recommended in his report. I want to make it very clear that the previous government, upon receiving the Rozanski report, made a commitment and began the implementation of the Rozanski recommendations. The fact of the matter is that even Mr. Mackenzie in his report acknowledged exactly that.

So it is not a matter of the report or of the funding formula; it is a matter of a government that chose to ignore a third party, independent report that made very specific recommendations regarding increased need for funding of the fundamentals of education in this province. The government ignored it and chose rather to go on the road with their dog-and-pony shows to increase funding for programs that no teacher called for, that no parent endorsed, that were simply the creation in the minds of some people in the Ministry of Education. For what purpose, we perhaps one day may find out, but I'd suggest that it's for no other purpose than to sell the story of this government; it has nothing to do with the foundations of education. That's the exposure that, over time, this government will get.

I want to refer to a number of other submissions that I've received from people. Again, these are teachers. These are people who are on the front line of teaching in our schools every day. They are appealing to us in the opposition to pull the plug on these road shows that this government is bringing forward.

I want to point out that the education minister claims that the funding formula meets the boards' needs for funding their programs. Yet why is it that the funding deficits continue? Why is it that we continue to hear from school boards every week in this province that they're facing a funding crisis? The ministry's own website—don't take my word for it, members of the backbench; go and look into your Ministry of Education's website—acknowledges that 12 of the 72 boards had deficits in 2004-05. That has nothing to do with the previous government; my friends, that's under your watch. A number of boards have had to resort to accounting acrobatics, robbing Peter to pay Paul, taking from reserves to ensure that their deficits are covered. I ask you to go and talk to your own school boards. Go back to your ridings, my friends. Talk to your school boards and ask how many of them have had to go into their reserves to meet their operating expenses, to meet the shortfalls of the

funding that is committed through your Minister of Education, forcing school boards to spend the money there, but there's no cash coming from the Ministry of Education. Check it out for yourself.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I did.

Mr. Klees: If you did, then you should be lobbying your Minister of Education to come up with the bucks to make sure that there's a match between the commitment that you make verbally and the good tones that you emit during your photo ops and the reality.

Among the flaws of what is happening here by not addressing the Rozanski report—and by the way, I have had occasion to talk to many of those stakeholders. I've asked one simple, simple question—and whether it's school board administrators, whether it is teachers, whether it is representatives of teachers' unions, I've asked this simple question: If the government of the day, if the McGuinty government, were to have implemented the recommendations of the Rozanski report, would we be in the problems that we're in today? The answer is no; the answer is a resounding no.

So one more broken promise, but this one's important, my friends. It's a broken promise that is so fundamental to education. We have a Premier, a self-proclaimed education Premier, who either doesn't understand that the answer is under his nose, that the answer is here, and continues to condone a Minister of Education who says, "We're going to have to review this. We're going to have to study this," or he's simply part of the game. The fact is that the answer is there. Update the funding formula, get it right, and you're going to solve your problems.

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School operations and maintenance are a fact. Today, school operations and maintenance are underfunded by more than \$350 million across the province and \$115 million in two Toronto school boards. Adult credit courses are underfunded by nearly \$125 million in the province. ESL funding in this province isn't appropriately linked to the additional education needs of students whose first language is not English. Funding for students at risk through the learning opportunities grant is today \$250 million below the level recommended by the expert panel whose work established that original grant. These are factual numbers. I don't understand why the minister feels this is such a mystery.

With the reconfiguration of teacher salary benchmarks, there is now no provision in the funding formula for local priorities. Almost every study of education funding in Ontario has recommended a local priorities allocation of 10% of the operating funding, and we have none.

In effect, no action has been undertaken, as I said before, on the Rozanski report, and as a result the elementary and secondary education system in Ontario will continue to operate in an atmosphere of perpetual fiscal stress. For three successive Ministers of Education now to stand in their places day in and day out and say, "There's peace in the valley and all is well in education, thanks to what we've done for education in the province

of Ontario," is without question the greatest story ever sold. Unfortunately, many people in Ontario are buying it, except the people on the front lines who are waking up to the fact that this government is selling and not delivering. That's the problem. The more the front-line people in the service of education are willing to come forward, as they're beginning to, to reveal the truth about this government, the more parents of students will come to understand that every time the Minister of Education shows up in the community to make an announcement, they should read between the lines, because what it probably means is that it's yet one more diversion from the truth.

The funding formula inadequacy means that students with the greatest needs unfortunately are being short-changed in this province. I've spoken about a lot of general issues and one of the issues that I believe the people of Ontario will never forgive this government for is that during the election campaign we heard Premier McGuinty make a promise to parents of autistic children: "Elect me Premier and I will extend funding and support for children with autism beyond the age of six."

Interjection: We did.

Mr. Klees: Even to this day I hear members of the backbench in response to that statement saying, "We did." It shows that they've sold even their own backbenchers on believing that is the case. I will introduce you, sir, to parents across the province who will differ with you, and they'll ask you, "If in fact you did that, why am I mortgaging my home so that I can provide my autistic child with the support that your Premier promised your government would provide? Why is that?" I would suggest to you that what you need to do is to look at the promise you made during the election campaign and now look at what you're not delivering and ask yourself if there is any reason at all why people in this province shouldn't be cynical about government, about politicians, about every time they hear from a member of any government level making any commitment. It's on your shoulders. That's what is on your shoulders.

You know, we can talk about this and justify it as much as we want. The fact of the matter is that the people of Ontario know full well what is taking place. The people of Ontario see it every day, and I really do believe that they're starting to get a sense that this government is much more interested in photo ops and in announcements. This government has learned the art that if you say something enough times with enough conviction, eventually people will actually begin to believe it. But that's not integrity. Integrity is saying the truth. It's one thing for someone to stand up in their place and say, "I would like to be able to do something and we will see if we can," rather than what we heard from these people, and we continue to hear it. We continue to see a defence of the indefensible by this government because they really do believe either that somehow people don't care, people don't listen, people have short memories or, according to what obviously the government believes, "We can do whatever we want and we can get away with

it.” I don’t think that’s true. I think the day of reckoning is coming.

I want to read into the record a comment from Ms. Susan Rab of the OSSTF. She says, “Our membership has grave concerns about the impact of Bill 52. If passed, it will negatively affect student learning and has the potential to undermine public education in the province of Ontario.” This is now post the amendment; this is moving on. Understand that we have done away with the punitive measure of this bill. The government has withdrawn that. Now what educators are concerned about is what remains of this bill: that education standards will be, are going to be, compromised by this government, once again a cynical tack on the part of this government to meet their artificial 75% pass ratio.

There are two ways to achieve that, two ways to ensure this irresponsible promise on the part of the government that 75% of students are going to pass—two ways. The first is that you increase the ability to learn, you increase the standards, you increase the teaching methods, you increase the resources into our schools and to the front lines, and with teachers you improve the programs. That’s one way.

The other way is to water down standards, and you’re right: That’s what you’re doing. You’re watering the down the standards. There isn’t an educator in the province of Ontario who doesn’t see that, through Bill 52, that’s precisely what you’re doing. All you have to do, all anyone has to do, is to look at the record, look at Hansard, and you’ll see the submissions from educators who are saying that that’s exactly what the plan of the government is. You’re lowering the standards. You’re going to devalue what the Ontario secondary school diploma means. That’s what you’re doing. You’re going to make it easier for people to pass, to get their diploma and, yes, as a result you’ll have a lot more people passing. But in the final analysis, in a global world where people are competitive, students don’t have to compete with John and Mary down on Maple Street in Aurora; they have to compete with their peers in the next province, in the next state, in the next country and in the country around the world. Those are countries that aren’t lowering standards; those are countries and jurisdictions that continue to increase the standards to qualify for their diplomas and for their certificates of graduation.

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At a time when the rest of the world recognizes the importance of the best education money can buy, this government is selling our students down the river, and it’s a sad day for education in Ontario.

The chief government whip smiles.

I want you to listen to George Lamoureux of the OSSTF, district 17, Simcoe county: “With the proposed legislation, we would lose precious dollars to outside agencies that offer a program that is less comprehensive and lacks the integrity of the current credit system.”

Kelly Morin-Currie, OSSTF, district 23: “The implementation of Bill 52 could lead to a devaluation of the Ontario secondary school diploma and the secondary

school environment in Ontario. No amendments are possible which would adequately prevent the harm caused by the introduction of widespread equivalent learning credits by unspecified and unlimited providers of equivalent learning.”

I want to refer as well to a comment made by Donna Marie Kennedy, the president of OECTA: “OECTA believes that Bill 52 is unnecessary and that its goals can be achieved by reforming the basic curriculum documents which provide the basis for granting credits in Ontario secondary schools.”

Isn’t it interesting that the very stakeholders who advocated and supported unabashedly—and it’s their right to do so—the Liberal Party throughout the last election. I don’t know how many members of the Liberal Party were elected in the last election because of the support of teachers’ unions across the province.

However, here’s the interesting thing: My friends, why aren’t you listening to the very people who got you elected? You’ve turned your backs on them. You’ve changed your principles here. Listen, even the former government did not allow non-credentialed individuals to teach our alternative learning programs. That’s why you’ve brought in Bill 52, so that you can change the framework under which those programs are being delivered in this province. You see, they’ve caught on. They have caught on to what you’re attempting to do here.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Klees: Thank you, Speaker.

Interjections.

Mr. Klees: I don’t know why the chief government whip is getting so exercised about this comment, and to the government House leader, I don’t understand your reaction. You know what this bill is. You know what you’re doing. You know why you’re doing it. And you also know that your stakeholders are absolutely right. You also know that you’re going to have to answer for the actions you’ve taken here.

In closing, I want to simply say once again that I believe Bill 52 is landmark in one respect. It’s landmark in the respect that we had a piece of legislation that at the outset made no sense—no practical sense. It was a piece of legislation that was put into the window by this government purely for its own partisan reasons. It was an effective centrepiece for them so they could talk a good game, but when the light shone on the details of this legislation, it became very apparent that it had no substance, and the substance it did have was in fact punitive and negative and would hurt education rather than help it—landmark in the sense that the opposition at least was successful in exposing the error of the government’s ways; and landmark that the government in fact withdrew that part of the legislation that was so highly offensive; and landmark, I believe, in one other way, and that is that the government refused to go the full distance that its stakeholders called upon them to go, and that is to withdraw the entire bill. From what I under-

stand, what is very clear to me, those stakeholders will hold this government responsible for compromising the very principles on which they got elected. They said one thing; they're doing another. Even in today's cynical world of politics, there is a price to pay for that.

Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I look forward to the consequences of the government's actions resting on their shoulders.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Are there any questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's a pleasure and a privilege. I thank Mr. Klees and Ms. Horwath for their comments.

I'd like to pick up on one of the comments that Mr. Klees put before this House. He asked the question, why are students dropping out of school? I would certainly maintain that we're all concerned in this House about that question. Why are students dropping out of school, and in essence, who is the victim of a student dropping out of school? I would assert, and I think we would all agree, that the real victim of the school dropout rate—and we're talking about 30% of students, which is a significant number. Almost 45,000 students, who are covered by this bill, drop out of school before they should. Now, who are the victims here? Clearly, I think we'd all agree the real victims are the students who drop out, the students themselves.

I wanted to share with this House and those who are listening at home a story. I'll call this young woman Jenny. I know Jenny rather well. Jenny left school at age 15, in grade 10. I think her case is very typical; it's not atypical at all. It's typical of the students that I've counselled as a pastor; it's certainly typical of those whom I've worked with in congregational life who work with young people; it's certainly typical of the kind of student, or ex-student, one might find at an establishment like Covenant House. Certainly, I'd like to acknowledge the work of all those counsellors and agencies that deal with those students, many of whom hit our streets in Toronto and become homeless.

This young woman, Jenny, left school at age 15 in the middle of grade 10. Her family life had become a nightmare. Her parents were divorcing; there were loud and raging battles. Before she turned the age of 13, a beloved uncle who lived with them killed himself in front of her. It was a suicide in front of her. Just before she left school, her mother died. She wasn't an unintelligent young woman. This young woman actually got straight As all the way through public school. She was a debating champion in her grade 8 class. She had everything going for her. Now we'd call her post-traumatic. Obviously, there were other issues than laziness or wilfulness in her decision to leave school. This young woman simply couldn't cope.

Now, the answer is what? Is the answer to fine her parents, to fine her? Is the answer to offer up some amorphous equivalent learning program? No. I think anybody and everybody who has compassion in this House

would agree that the answer for that young woman and for many young women and men like her is to have suitable counselling, to have enough educational assistants, to have school psychologists, to have that network of support that needs to be funded, that needs to be part of our school program.

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In fact, if I look at Hansard, I read here from the words of my colleague Mr. Marchese when he was discussing this bill. He said, "You're not dealing with the issue of mental illness unless you provide services. One in five students has a mental illness, and we have decried and attacked the government on a regular basis saying that they need resources, that we need resources. Unless you deal with those issues, those kids are at risk."

I would assert that when you're looking at 45,000 children, or 30% of the student population, and you're looking at one in five children who have need of counselling, there is some overlap there. This bill does nothing to address that overlap.

But I want to walk the listeners through a little bit of the ideology of this bill. How did this bill come about and what happened through the amendment process? Certainly it began as a bully bill. It began as a way of blaming the victim. "What are we going to do if kids drop out of school? Well, we'll take away their drivers' licences. We'll fine them and their parents or we'll fine those employers who try to employ them." I ask you, when I talk about this young woman, in any way would any of those moves help her?

I had the pleasure a couple of weeks back of going to a wonderful place called the Ground Level Café in Parkdale–High Park. This is a group sponsored in part by World Vision. They work with school dropouts, kids who hit the streets in Toronto. They provide them jobs and training and then, hopefully, get them involved in programs so that they can go on to productive lives. The counsellor there shared a story and a statistic with me. He said that 85% of street youth don't want to be on the street. Now that sounds like an obvious assertion, but sometimes I think, and perhaps this government thinks, that it's the fault of the child, because, after all, we're talking about children here. They're children who are 16 to 18 years old, but we know they're still children. We who have young adults as children know that 16- to 18-year-olds often react rather than act or pro-act. He was saying that all of the kids they see, all of the young adults they see who have ended up on the streets of Toronto came from some sort of abuse, some sort of trauma, some sort of problem.

We know, for example, that 40% of students who have special needs, who need special programming, everything from just an ESL course to far more than that, are unable to get it because of lack of funding. I would certainly agree with what's been said before, that really the problem here is a lack of funding in our school system so that we can implement the kinds of programs our children need. There's no question about it.

It started off as this bully bill. Now, some of the bullying has been taken out of it, the threat to a driver's licence. Most of the young people and the children I see on the streets of Toronto, the last thing on their minds is a driver's licence, as if any of them could ever afford a car. However, of course in the rural areas—and I remember as a rural country minister—it's your livelihood. So it's either all encompassingly important or it's not important at all. Either way, it's a very ineffective tool to force a child into school. Most of the children we see on the streets of Toronto have run away from home, so how will fining their parents help get them back into school? You cannot force children to learn. You cannot bully young people into learning.

So yes, I'm pleased that the driver's licence piece was taken out of this bill. Unfortunately, the fines are still there. What have they done? They've simply raised the fines from \$200 to \$1,000. For most of the children I see who have dropped out of school and are on the streets of Toronto or working at McJobs, a \$1,000 fine is laughable to them. They either can't afford it or they wouldn't consider paying it and they'd have to go to jail rather than pay it. This is not an effective instrument for encouraging young people to learn; this is just bullying. This is simply bullying.

Then we get to the real hub of the bill. This is the hub of the bill, and we've learned that both from what Ms. Horwath said and what Mr. Marchese said before, that really the government's not particularly interested in bullying children. It turns out what they're really interested in is contracting out teaching to so-called equivalent learning programs.

Well, here's an example of an equivalent learning program. I'm quoting from the Ottawa Citizen here: "The province has generously included IT call centre workers in the apprenticeship plan"—this is for Dell computers—"subsidizing their wages by allowing Dell to collect a tax credit of \$5,000 per employee for three years. The actual training period for the call centre workers is two to three weeks, Dell says."

So is this the equivalent learning? Is this an example of equivalent learning? Perhaps barista training is an equivalent learning experience. Is that what we're looking at? Is stocking the shelves at Wal-Mart an equivalent learning experience? I mean, of course this is going to degrade the whole concept of education. But you know, there's nothing in Bill 52 that precludes any of that. In fact, it gives the education minister oversight. First of all, as if principals don't have enough to do, they're going to provide oversight for all of these extra equivalent learning experiences. I think most principals, who are so overworked as we speak, will tell you that they've got many other things to do rather than that. But let's say the minister takes it upon herself or himself in the future to oversee this particular aspect of Bill 52. If they do, what will they find and how will they define what is an appropriate equivalent learning experience and one that's not? There's nothing in Bill 52 that speaks to any of that, so we're asked simply to trust in whatever

the minister decides is appropriate or inappropriate, no guidelines provided. I find that distressing. I certainly would agree with our teachers and others, trustees, who also find it disturbing. I find it disturbing that there are no guidelines. Again I quote here, from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, who say, "The scope and delivery of so-called 'equivalent learning' opportunities ... are not exclusively for students at risk. Without clear guidelines, equivalent learning could open the door to outside 'providers,' and the start of a descent along a slippery slope towards vouchers." We have only to look south of the border to see what equivalent learning and what a voucher system gets you in the way of public education. In fact, this is a small step to the privatization of our education system. So let's be honest about it. That's what this is. Bill 52 is a step toward the privatization of a public school system that is now underfunded.

But let me go back, because I know all of our members here are a little bit sleepy at this time of night. Maybe they're not paying attention as they should. So I'm going to go back to my original story, and that was the story of this young woman named Jenny. I want to ask, how could we help this young woman, a young woman who comes from a traumatic background, who leaves school at the grade 10 level? I'll tell you how she was helped. The story has a happy ending, and I know all the members in the House love a story with a happy ending. This story has a happy ending. This young woman was helped in a number of ways. First of all, she was able to access a school psychologist, so she was helped with all of the trauma that led to her leaving school. She was able to access a wonderful social agency called the Fred Victor Mission in downtown Toronto and some wonderful pastoral care, and the name Reverend Zwicker needs to be read into the record in terms of that. Then she was helped by an extremely affordable high school equivalency program offered by unionized teachers in a community college. Of course, this was in the days when you could actually afford to go to a community college if you were on student welfare. She was helped by a welfare system that actually paid her enough to eat and pay the rent and go to the equivalent high school learning experience that was taught by unionized teachers. I'm sure at this point it's not a surprise to anyone in this House to tell you that that young woman was myself and that I'm standing here because of a unionized school system, because of a public school system, because of a social assistance program that was funded and because of tuition rates at the community college that were affordable to someone who had very little money. All of that is gone, and all of that is now totally buried with Bill 52.

So what are we dealing with here? We're dealing with, as I said to begin with, the first step—well, maybe not the first. The first was the funding formula and, of course, some of the things that my colleagues to the right brought in, but certainly this is a large step toward the privatization of what should be a healthy public school system.

What I say in my remaining minutes is that everybody listening to this and all the teachers and all the trustees and all the parents who care about children and care about children at risk, we'll not punish them, we'll not punish their parents, we'll not beat up on the victim or blame the victim, but we'll actually look at the root, the systemic cause of why young people drop out of school and address those causes. And guess what? It costs money.

If this government really cared about the 45,000 students who are dropping out, the 30% who are not finishing school, they wouldn't bring in bully tactics. What they would do is fully fund our school system. They wouldn't bring in so-called equivalent or the door to equivalent learning programs; they'd actually lower tuition at the post-secondary level and provide some real alternatives to students who really want to get an education but can't afford to. They'd reinstate things like school psychologists and education assistants. They'd reinstate all of those extracurricular programs that have been cut, those after-school programs that go into making a whole person—not a half person but a whole person.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): And that's what we're doing in our public schools. That's exactly what we're doing in our public schools.

Ms. DiNovo: Oh, yes. I hear a little bit of flak from my left, but left in seating only.

Mr. Brownell: I know what teachers are doing.

Ms. DiNovo: Clearly people in the House have woken up.

Just to conclude, again, so nobody missed the salient point, if the McGuinty government really cared about children at risk—and we're talking about children at risk—then they would reinstate all of those necessary positions that have been cut from our schools, they'd fully fund our school system, they'd fix the flawed

funding formula, they'd provide post-secondary equivalent programs to students who can't afford them now because tuition rates have been raised 23% to 26%, and they wouldn't open the door to the privatization of what should be a healthy public school system.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Are there any questions and comments? Further debate? Are there any other members who wish to speak to this bill? Seeing none, Ms. Wynne has moved third reading of Bill 52. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

There being more than five—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Yes, I have a lot more than five. Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

Don't call in the members because I have here a note from the chief government whip. It reads as follows:

"Dated December 11, 2006, to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Minister Wynne for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act be deferred until the time of deferred votes on December 12, 2006."

Orders of the day.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 2024.

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