



First Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 18, 1995

The House met at 8 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(continued)

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

**Bill 5—The Education Administration
Amendment Act**

Madam Speaker: Will the House please come to order. To resume Orders of the Day, second reading on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), Bill 5, (The Education Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration scolaire), standing in the name of the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk). Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing? [agreed]

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak tonight to Bill 5, The Education Administration Amendment Act. This is a small bill, some would say it was a slight bill, but it does deal with education, which is a matter of concern to all Manitobans. It is a bill which has ambiguities which I want to draw the minister's attention to, and it carries with it the prospect of changes which may be more far-reaching, I think, than perhaps even the minister imagines.

At first glance it has three relatively innocuous proposals. First, it allows the minister to make regulations concerning the establishment of school advisory councils. Secondly, it allows the minister to make regulations concerning the duties of principals, and thirdly, it authorizes the suspension of students from school by superintendents and principals, something which is already in practice in almost all Manitoban schools and which is already provided for in the bill.

It is of course a bill that we have seen before. This is the season for Tory reruns and we are looking again at the bills which they brought in to us before the election. It appeared before in the guise of Bill 3. On

that occasion it contained the provision that individual teachers be enabled to suspend students from both classroom and school. On introducing it, one of the many ministers of Education—in fact, one of the delights of speaking about education in this House is that it does really allow you the full range of cabinet participation. It has been like the revolving door over there in Education, at least ever since I have had the opportunity to observe it.

One of the former ministers of Education, the last but one, I think, in introducing this bill, the former member for Morris said that this would be a key part of the Tory platform for the election, and in fact he then went ahead to devote most of his speech to attacking the Liberals whom I am sure at that point he believed were the opposition during the election. It was of course the kickoff to a campaign that the member for Morris was never to fight.

Our response in the Legislature was to argue that this was indeed a bill for the Tories to go to the polls with. It displayed in many ways an understanding on the part of the minister that was really very unreal about the school community. It was clear that the minister did not understand the pressures on both teachers and principals from both the social, a financial and an educational perspective.

At the time, we argued that all Manitobans wanted to see safe classrooms, both in the intellectual and the physical sense. All of us expect when we send our children to school that they will be in a safe environment, that they can learn in an atmosphere free from disruption, free from bullying.

The issue for us was not about support or disciplined school environments but how that best could be achieved. The government, according to Mr. Manness, believed strongly that allowing every teacher in Manitoba to have the power to expel students from school, not just from the classroom, would achieve the goal of safe, disciplined learning environments. As opposition should, my colleagues and I pointed out some of the pitfalls of this approach. Some, more familiar with schools than I, pointed out the difficult

position that this put teachers in when dealing with parents of a student who might have been suspended.

The classroom teacher then is put in the position of becoming the target alone for particular sets of parents, a most undesirable situation for all of a school community. It is one which present practice avoids. Teachers in fact know that they have the support of a consistent discipline policy and that they have the support also of the school and the school board.

In my response to this proposal, I indicated my concern with two elements. First, I asked the government to show us how the existing system where every teacher has the responsibility for maintaining order in his or her classroom and where every teacher may send a disruptive child to the principal, I asked him to show me where this had broken down, where was it not working and for whom was it not working. What was the scale of this breakdown? Was it occurring in urban areas, in rural areas, in suburban districts? Was it occurring in a certain number of classrooms, was it occurring in large schools or small schools? What was the nature of the question that he was trying to answer with this bill?

At the time, we had a different minister of Education who was, and I always was struck by this about the former member for Morris, what great aversion he had to research. He used to physically shudder at the question of research. He never seemed interested in the causes or indeed asking any of the penetrating questions that could have been asked about this particular piece of legislation. He had an Alice-in-Wonderland approach, I thought, to all of this. He believed that the changes he proposed to the education system would answer any questions that Manitobans might have had. Clayton had the answers, but he never got the sense, I think, that there really was a question behind those answers that he was prepared to apply to schools across Manitoba.

The Department of Education has had four ministers, at least in my time in this House. I have referred to it sometimes as a revolving door. In fact there probably are a few more ministers yet who may serve in that particular place. There is an Alice-in-Wonderland quality too to the whole aspect of

departmental policy and to the formation of department policy.

If you had to look for an analogy, the Mad Hatter's tea party might be what you would think of, not Alice's nightmarish dreams or travels down dark tunnels, although that might be part of it too, but certainly the Mad Hatter's tea party where everybody changes hats for no apparent reason, and they all move once around the table in a kind of random shuffling and sorting.

Whatever problems Manitobans believed or knew existed in Manitoba, Mr. Manness believed could be solved by his proposal to allow teachers to suspend students from school. Those of you who were in the House at that point will remember perhaps the great sneers and guffaws that came from the Tory side of the House, when one of our members, who was indeed a teacher and who said teachers do not want that responsibility, this is counterproductive—the former member for Rossmere. I remember very well the torment and the abuse that was heaped on his head. So I am much interested to see that now that particular section has indeed been withdrawn from this bill.

Bill 5 is unlike Bill 3, and that particular proposal has been withdrawn, and it is right that it should have been withdrawn. We pointed out to the government at the time to give individual teachers this responsibility was to create a situation where discipline could be and likely would be inconsistently applied not only across the province but within individual schools. This, as any teacher, as any principal, as any parent could tell you, is a setting for disaster.

The foundation of good parental practice is the consistent application of policies and codes of behaviour that are supported by everyone in the home. It is of no benefit to any child to have parents who can be set against each other. It is of no benefit to the child in school if discipline is inconsistent from classroom to classroom to classroom. That is why, over the years, most school boards and most schools across this country and in other countries have given this role to one person, usually the vice-principal, sometimes the principal. Consistency is the issue. Clear rules consistently applied should be the aim of every school

and, we have reason to hope, of every Minister of Education.

Why was this government not concerned about that? The minister was not concerned because in fact he believed he could have one set of rules applied in exactly the same way across Manitoba by hundreds of different teachers. Within that same bill, Bill 3 in the last session, was the provision that the Minister of Education would set the regulations under which the classroom teacher would suspend a student. No longer would it be the responsibility of the school board to set the guidelines. No longer would it be the role of the principal to establish the practices that would set the standard for the school. Only the minister in Winnipeg would set the rules.

Those rules would be set by regulation. The minister had no intention of sharing with the House or the public any of the principles which might guide him. This would be done by regulation after the fact. Nor did the minister intend giving much responsibility to school councils, not those in existence nor yet those he was about to encourage to form. That particular minister, like many of his colleagues, was a great centralizer. He did not trust local authorities. As I pointed out to him at the time, he had already cut a great centralizing swath through our system of local support for education by capping the taxation powers of local school boards. He took the same Janus-like two-faced approach to the powers and the issues of classroom discipline. He pretended that this was a form of empowerment for individual teachers. In fact it reduced the teacher to the role of doorman. The teacher could point to the exit, but only the minister would set rules for suspension, a disciplinary policy, for the whole province.

* (2010)

Madam Speaker, criticism came not just from the opposition but from teachers, from parents, from superintendents, from school boards, from principals. Many spoke through their organizations and, had the bill ever gone to committee, would have argued vigorously in person about such proposals. But this was not a bill bound for committee; this was a bill bound for the election. Its purpose was to show tough-

talking Toryism. It was wrongheaded, misleading, inconsistent, and they knew it to be so. Indeed, once the opposition became evident, they backtracked very quickly.

I do not know if anyone else had the opportunity to debate education with Conservative candidates during the election, but it was quite an experience. I say this, knowing that the member for Riel (Mr. Newman) was part of those debates as well, as was the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe), certainly at some of the ones I was present at. It was, Madam Speaker, a very unusual experience, particularly after having debated with Clayton Manness in this House; it was like, as some might say, proverbially trying to nail jelly to the wall. It did not matter what criticism came up, what question was asked from the floor, education policy during that election was like an auction. It was up for negotiation. All candidates seemed to have the same line, the same approach. It does not seem to me that it was an issue of inexperience or that they were unaware of bills or of the action plan. It is possible, but unlikely. It seemed to me a particularly "flexible"—and I put that in quotes—approach to party policy on education at an election time.

As we had predicted, that bill and that proposal took the Tories only to the election, and then it was backpedalling all the way. Now, in this session, we are offered Bill 5, which contains some similar provisions on school councils, but no mention of the role of teachers in school discipline. It has just disappeared. No explanations, no mea culpa, no apologies, nothing. What a surprise. Now here we are in 1995, the Mad Hatters have all changed hats; they have all moved a place around the table. We have another Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) with another set of proposals—so many ministers, so many twists and turns in an area of government and of government policy which is of such immediate importance to so many Manitobans and where consistency has such a significant role to play.

The bill before us, Madam Speaker, allows a teacher to suspend a pupil from a classroom, not the school. In most school jurisdictions, this is already the case in principle and in practice. There will be no change here for the experience of most Manitobans unless the

minister intends to give a different interpretation or a different meaning to the word "suspend" than is normally incorporated in the present practice of sending students to the office of the principal or vice-principal. So what is the minister's purpose in this bill? Reading the minister's introduction to this bill, the present minister, it is very difficult to determine why.

Bill 5 also authorizes the principal and the superintendent to suspend students from school. Again, this is no different from the practice already well established and already well provided for in the existing public schools administration act. Is this simply padding for an already very slender bill?

Bill 5, however, does retain that great centralizing tendency of the previous minister. It provides that the minister, not the school board, not the principal, not the superintendent, but the minister, by regulation, will provide for all circumstances under which pupils may be suspended, the periods of suspension that may be imposed, and for any other matter relating to suspensions. Here is yet another minister who does not trust local school boards to continue their role in defining discipline policies.

Bill 5 removes from school boards one of the areas for which they were responsible to their local citizens. This government proposes to take it away. Why? Was it not working? Where was it not working? What is the problem that this addition to the powers of the minister will solve? Does the minister intend to bring in rules which are substantially different from those already in existence at the local level? We should know, but we examined the minister's speech in introducing this and could find no answers.

But Bill 5 thus creates the conditions for divided authority and weaker accountability. Under this proposal, the school principal is now directly accountable to the minister as well as continuing to be accountable to the school board. In matters of suspension, it is the minister who will set the rules and who will also set the duties of principals. Will the principal also still be accountable to school boards for other aspects of discipline that do not involve suspension? Presumably so. Why has the minister chosen to divide discipline matters in this way? Why

will there now be divided policies, fractured accountability and what will its impact be on the accountability at the local level? It is not impossible to be a servant of two masters, but it is difficult and it does need a clear understanding on the part of all parties.

Madam Speaker, why is there no role in suspension policies for the much vaunted school councils of this government? This seems to me to be a most significant and deliberate omission. The Tory vision of Manitoba education adds responsibilities of curriculum, financing and planning to local authorities, but at the same time withdraws substantial areas of power from the local control, and in the past of course has chosen to use provincial power to limit the power of local authorities to tax their citizens.

Surely there is a most significant role for a school community to be involved in determining discipline codes, including suspension. Madam Speaker, discipline which is understood by parents, understood by the community and students and in which all of them might have had a part in determining the principles and practices is a form of discipline which has a much better chance of success. Why would a minister who claims to want to see parental involvement and well-ordered classrooms remove this sphere from school councils?

* (2020)

The answer lies, I believe, in a Tory desire to exert more direct control over individual schools and individual principals. It is clearly, I believe, determined to bypass school boards, and it is a pattern which we have seen elsewhere in Conservative jurisdictions. You can look at some of the states, particularly some of the more rabidly Republican states; you can look at Great Britain where exactly the same pattern has been put in place. The central authority through the creation of governing councils, through the allocation of financial responsibilities to individual schools and principals has been enabled to create—and it has intended to do this—a market system in education. It has often been the first step in putting in place vouchers or putting in place other elements of direct competition between schools.

I do not believe, however, that is part of our Manitoba tradition. There has always been a very clear preference, very strong local attachments to local school boards, and we can see it now in some of the presentations that have been made to the Norrie commission, the great concerns that people express, not just in large far-flung school boards or school districts, but also in smaller ones too, of the closeness that they feel to their locally elected school trustees. I think that is very Manitoban. I think that is very Saskatchewan as well, but prairie people have a long history of strong attachment to school districts and to their local trustees.

We do not know what principles the minister is going to follow in all of her proposals for suspension regulations and directions to principals, but surely in examining this bill we should have had some indication from the minister on the ideas she will be putting into practice, because the real issue is that issue of consistency and consistency of discipline. If the minister proposes to bypass school boards in this way, surely we are deserving in this Legislature of having some idea of the kinds of policies which she intends to put in place.

Madam Speaker, we do know that this bill removes from legislation the rationale that suspension is for students whose "behaviour is detrimental to the welfare of the school community." Why has the government removed that rationale? What does it intend to substitute as a guiding principle for the regulations it will create for every school in this province? The short answer, like the long answer, is also that we do not know.

Neither minister, in introducing either Bill 3 or Bill 5, gave us any sense of their purpose or their intentions in this aspect of the bill. Did they think that perhaps no one would notice? Why do they not explain themselves? Why such distance, why such disdain for public debate over matters of this kind?

It seems to me, Madam Speaker, that the removal of that phrase has drawn attention, rather than hidden it, to the lack of an expressed set of principles in the legislation. The Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties has written to the minister and to the opposition expressing concern about this. They also

have drawn our attention to the lack of guidelines for appeal from students and their families.

Will appeals from this legislation be directed to the minister or to the school board? Will appeals be heard by a committee of parents or by a committee of deputy ministers? Will there in fact be any appeal from the minister's decision and the minister's policies on suspensions? Will there be any appeal from the actions of a superintendent or of a principal who interprets the minister's as yet undisclosed regulations in an unusual or unfair manner? Perhaps in committee the minister could give us some idea of her intentions in this area. Indeed, I would like to indicate to her now or to her staff our intention to ask such questions during the committee stage of this bill.

Most Manitobans at the moment have the opportunity to appeal decisions of suspension to their locally elected school board. Will that still exist in principle and practice, or are Manitobans, through this legislation, about to lose yet another element of local responsibility and local accountability?

Madam Speaker, of concern to many educators in this new policy is the minister's intentions for those students who are suspended under her as yet undisclosed guidelines. Will there be a protocol? Will there be a plan for the treatment of disruptive students? The response of the last minister was that that was the parents' responsibility and he had no intention of taking any action or indeed, it seemed, any interest in the fate of those students who were suspended or expelled.

Does the new minister adopt the same attitude? I expect in fact that the answer is the same, although the language may be somewhat different and perhaps less direct.

Should the child be a child of a single parent, does the minister anticipate that the parent should take time off work, risk losing the job and hence his or her ability to provide at all for that child? That is no solution for a family or for a long-term situation. What supervision will there be for a disruptive child in such circumstances? What does the public have a right to expect? And most important, how will the minister's

regulations or protocols, if they will exist, work to change the behaviour of such young people.

Some students undoubtedly are prepared to change their behaviour after the shock of a suspension. Others are not or, indeed, are unable to do so without assistance over a relatively long period of time. Surely to goodness the goal for a Minister of Education, for this Assembly, for school and for the community and for the parents is to change the behaviour of such young people before they become adults. How will the minister be addressing this? Will she adopt the cold and calculating stance of her colleague the Minister of Justice that only punishment can change behaviour?

Madam Speaker, most Manitobans see it differently. Any teacher and most parents will tell you that. Many of these disruptive young people, and I am putting it perhaps in the mildest of terms, are so inarticulate, sometimes functionally illiterate, sometimes hungry; many of them come from homes where only violence speaks. They have for the most part no alternative to offer even if their spirit were willing. It takes time, it takes effort, and it takes a whole community to work with many of those children.

To let them loose on the street, disruptive and angry and unsupervised, with no plan to reintegrate them into some form of public education or of community support, is a very, very clear recipe for disaster. I say this, Madam Speaker, not to excuse the disruption or the disruptive behaviour, but to underline for the minister that an educational plan for such students is of the utmost importance for the school and for the eventual protection of the broader community.

Does the minister who arrogates to herself the creation of a suspension policy for all Manitoban schools intend to equally offer to all Manitoba schools the plans and the supports for the long-term education for change of some of these students?

Madam Speaker, finally I come to the section of the legislation which enables the minister to develop regulations for the establishment of school advisory councils, including the formation, composition and mandate. Let me say from the outset that school advisory councils are a good idea. We support them.

In Winnipeg No. 1 and other school divisions, they have existed in a variety of forms for a number of years. They are not new. They have been part of the changes in education in many jurisdictions over the past decade. But here in Manitoba in 1995-96 one of the passing parade of Tory ministers of Education is offering the legislative framework for such institutions. We can only applaud the intent, if not the speed.

As is so common with this government, Madam Speaker, the policies and the responsibilities of the advisory councils will be set centrally by the minister. There will be only one model, and yet we already have many successful and many successfully operating school councils across the province.

What is going to happen here is that success and diversity will in fact fall to conformity and to centralization. That is cause for concern. It is cause for concern that this will not be done in open public debate. It will not necessarily be the result of consultation, and the public has good reason to perhaps be suspicious of government plans for advisory councils.

*(2030)

An Honourable Member: No, they are not.

Ms. Friesen: Well, I hear the Deputy Premier say they are not, but I do not think he has talked recently to the parents of the School for the Deaf. Now there we had a very good example of an advisory council for school leadership. In fact, the first one in the province formed according to the guidelines set by the minister. An enthusiastic and dedicated group of parents. But what was the response of this government to that first advisory council? It was to refuse to meet with them. Over and over those parents had to phone the minister, and they had no alternative because the minister in effect is the school board for the School for the Deaf.

What do we know about their plans for such councils? Well, we do know something because they already formed the basis of some discussion in the last session of the House in December 1994 under the earlier guise of this bill as Bill 3.

As opposition, we pointed out at that time that it was important in creating such institutions to clearly indicate in the bill the membership, the electorate, the responsibilities, the reporting and the accountability mechanisms for these school councils. The government has clearly chosen not to do that. So we must look to the guidelines that they have already published about the formation of school councils for some idea of the principles and practices which may emerge.

Now, Madam Speaker, the previous ministers, so many ministers, so many shifts in policy, but the previous minister was not prepared to allow all parents to be represented on school councils. Those who worked for the school division in any way were not eligible, nor was there to be any teacher involvement.

During the election and in the earlier debate perhaps even this government recognized the inherent unfairness in this approach, and for whatever reason they did change their mind. I give them credit for that. Just before the election, they said such would no longer be the case, and school employees could now count as parents.

The current documents, however, do not define the electorate or the franchise. They do say that those who vote can include the parents of children who are attending the school or those who are members of a community in the school catchment area, but does this mean, for example, that only Canadian citizens will vote?

What constitutes community members and who will decide? What are the criteria for membership on advisory councils? Should not all those who are eligible to vote be eligible to serve? Will citizenship again be a criterion? Will the minister be enshrining in regulations the principles of composition that exist in the action plan document? We do not know.

No provision is made for the representation of nonteaching staff, and finally there is concern that teaching staff can only be represented in a nonvoting capacity.

Madam Speaker, the experience of school councils from a variety of jurisdictions suggests that when all the school community is represented in such a way there is a much more harmonious atmosphere. There is a much better opportunity for co-operative relations and for coherent school policies, and that is surely the goal that we are all aiming for.

We applaud and support the goal of involving parents in the development of school communities and parent councils and advisory councils, but we want to underline that the school is a community made up of many different components and often different programs.

One of the schools, for example, that I represent has three parallel programs running. It is going to be important to establish in regulation, to establish in the composition of school councils care that each of those programs will have a voice and is seen to have a voice. Many existing school councils already exist that have found ways to adapt to those particular local conditions.

Let me take a little detour here to follow the origins of this bill. Four ministers ago, the member for Roblin-Russell (Mr. Derkach) put out a discussion paper for legislative reform in education. He posed a number of questions, not entirely in a neutral manner, but he posed them. It was distributed to the community, and the community over a number of years, I believe until 1993, was able to have some discussion and some input into those questions that the member for Roblin-Russell had indicated.

The successive minister, now the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Vodrey), appointed a committee to conduct hearings chaired by Mr. Roy White. They duly heard citizens and reported back to the minister with 106 recommendations, and that was in February 1993, not that long ago in the legislative framework of this particular government. In reporting to the minister, the panel said they were very impressed with the sincerity, enthusiasm and the quality of the briefs which were presented by Manitobans to their panels.

Madam Speaker, 106 recommendations, and it is surprising we have heard so little of them. So many

recommendations on so many important issues, and so many hundreds, indeed thousands, of Manitobans who made their voice heard on those particular occasions.

I must admit that the reason perhaps I turn to this set of recommendations is I do have one that is a particular favourite. It never seems to have found its way to this House. I particularly want to draw it to the attention of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns). Let me see, I think it is No. 105. Is it? Number 102, sorry.

It is about patriotic observances. It says, reports that many Manitobans have a sense of belonging, a sense of pride in their country and a sense of appreciation for the democratic system, heritage and culture of Canada. I wish that was something that they had managed to convince the last and present ministers of Education who are about to take out Canadian history from our schools. However, perhaps we can discuss that at a later time.

It was also their view that students—and this is what I think might interest the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns)—should be required to sing O Canada!, and a suggestion was made that the singing of God Save the Queen, a favourite hymn of the Minister of Agriculture, be optional since Canada is now an independent country. That was something that I thought perhaps—I wondered if that was finding an echo. Was there a republican heart that was beating in the Tory caucus? Does our sovereign lady know that the Minister of Agriculture in his government's report considers that Canada is an independent country that should not sing God Save the Queen? This is in recommendation 102.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, I read very precisely from the report of this government. The report of this government says, those who wish to have God Save the Queen sung as a reminder of past history should be accommodated. That is the report of this government.

I thought the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) would enjoy that one, and I did wonder perhaps if it was representative of the beliefs of the Tory caucus.

Let us look at what the report said on school advisory committees. It had some good recommendations on school advisory committees. It said, and I am quoting from recommendation 25—and remember this is as a result of listening to thousands of Manitoba parents—that it should provide for parents of students attending a particular school to establish a local committee of which a majority of members are parents, and that the minister has put into his and her guidelines. Good.

It also says that it should define the role of the committee to include providing advice to the principal and the school board regarding matters related to that school and performing such other duties as the school board may delegate to it. It should provide authority to school boards to delegate certain duties or functions to the committee. Finally, and most significant and most divergent from the proposals of the minister are that it should grant authority—that is the legislation should grant authority to—and require school boards to make rules for the establishment, selection and dissolution of school advisory committees, that is that they should be responsible and they should be delegated from the school boards, as indeed they are now, as indeed those which are successful are now.

The minister chose, both the last minister and this present minister, to take an exactly opposite approach, to take from the centre and to direct the creation of school councils which are responsible in part—one has to assume to the minister—but which have very little to do with school boards. What concerns me here is that this is the panel which listened to Manitobans. Between 1993 and 1994 when this legislation was first introduced under the guise of Bill 3, did the minister listen to new voices? Were there new committees which were established? What happened? Why is there a clear difference of opinion from the report of the panel on legislative reform and the proposals included in the minister's bills? I think that is something that I hope the minister will have a chance to talk to us about in committee when we go again to hear the concerns of Manitobans.

In the minister's guidelines it will be the minister's responsibility to dissolve councils which are, and I quote, not functioning in keeping with the mandate of

the advisory councils for school leadership as defined by the province. Again, a clear division between the panel's version of the functioning of advisory councils and that of the minister. Manitobans wanted a clear role for school boards in the formation and operations of advisory councils, but the minister chose to follow a different path. I indicated to the former minister, the former member for Morris, that this was a dangerous and undemocratic path he was travelling. For a minister to take upon himself the power to dissolve a duly elected local committee, local council, is a very dangerous precedent, one that should be taken only with great care.

Madam Speaker, we need to know what appeals there will be from the action of a minister who dissolves such a duly elected council. We also need to know whether the minister will be applying these powers of formation and dissolution to existing councils, and indeed that is a very serious concern amongst those many school councils which cover over 80 percent of Manitobans and which are successfully in operation now. They are very concerned that the powers in this bill will be used to overturn the kind of situation which they have created over the last few years.

Madam Speaker, I know that my colleague, the member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk), will be discussing that issue. She raised it with the minister a number of times in Estimates, and she will be following up on this.

Finally, I think we have to acknowledge that school councils work best when they have support, when the principal is confident, he is trained or she is trained and is enabled to do the job. And I draw this to the minister's attention because it is fundamental to success, and we know that when school councils are successful everyone benefits.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired.

* (2040)

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw attention of all honourable members to the loge to my left where we have with us this evening Cyril Keeper, former MP for Winnipeg North Centre from 1980 to 1988. On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this evening. Order, please.

* * *

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to speak as a member of the opposition on Bill 5 that has been presented to the House.

Ever since my term as a kindergarten student in the Durban, Manitoba, elementary school, I have been involved in education as a student, as a teacher, as a principal. Actually getting elected to the Legislature was the first year that I have not been directly involved with education, so I would love to take this opportunity to speak on Bill 5 which does make some proposals concerning Manitoba education.

I want to start by quickly pointing out exactly what the bill purports to do or tries to do. First of all, this bill will allow the minister to regulate the duties of school principals, not just regulate the duties of school principals but broaden the range of duties that school principals are expected to do within the schools in Manitoba. It is a change of the job description that principals have become accustomed to. It is an expansion of the responsibilities that school principals perform within our schools. That I think we have to be clear of right up front.

The other thing that the bill purports to do is establish school advisory committees, school advisory councils. The bill also authorizes suspension of students, problem-behaviour students by the superintendents and school principals.

Those are the three things I think that we need to keep uppermost in our minds as we debate the merits of Bill 5. I want to make sure that my comments are within those parameters and that people listening also

remind themselves of the three main prongs of this Bill 5.

I want to move on to what I think is good with the bill. First of all, I think an improvement was made from Bill 3 to Bill 5 in terms of the government changing its mind in terms of teachers having the ability to suspend students from school. I think a very intelligent decision was made to limit that to teachers suspending from classrooms. There are some cautions that I think need to be pointed out in terms of teachers having the right to suspend from classrooms, but I will get into that a little bit later.

The other thing that I think has gone right on this bill from Bill 3 to Bill 5 is the inclusion of teachers and staff on the advisory committees that are being proposed through Bill 5. I think it is absolutely essential that teachers' input be taken into consideration and that teachers and other staff members be included amongst those who participate in Parent Advisory Councils.

So I think those two points I want to make sure that I am on record of giving the government credit in seeing the light. Whether it was through a lot of opposition or whether it was through a lot of arm twisting or persuasion of whatever sort, I want to make sure that the government gets credit for making those good changes to its legislation.

I do though have some concerns. I must say that my concerns outweigh my credit that I gave the government. I want to begin by pointing out that there was a definite lack of public input into the process of Bill 5, a definite lack of public input into collecting information upon which to base a renewal of Manitoba education. My understanding is that one meeting was held, some parents were invited to the meeting, and that was it. Now I do not know if the members opposite feel that that is adequate to review and renew and make substantial changes to Manitoba education, but I do not think that is enough. I think educators and parents and students deserve more than just one meeting with several people invited, special invitations. I think we need to do a much better job of soliciting support, soliciting input and using that input to form the basis

upon which we can make laws concerning Manitoba education.

My other concern deals with the role of the principal. I am very concerned with the increase in the role of the school principal. I am very concerned with the increase in responsibilities that have been put onto the shoulders of one person within our education system.

The situation before Bill 5 is that principals already have too much on their desks to deal with. I speak through personal experience as a school principal in a Manitoba school division in our public school system when I say that you can have the best plan that you could ever come up with as a school principal on how you are going to deal with things through the day. Invariably, your plan gets tossed out the window by about nine o'clock in the morning because everything changes. By the time you get through the opening exercises at school in the morning, you could have a dozen or more issues on your desk that were not there when you first arrived very much earlier in the morning.

* (2050)

So we have two things happening. Right now, we have a situation where the job description of school principals is right now too wide. This government is adding to that burden. They are adding to the responsibilities of the principal. Again, I question the amount of time, the amount of effort put into collecting the input from school principals and their associations, and I question the amount of effort that went into soliciting their opinions when it came time to make the decision of whether this government was going to increase the responsibilities being shouldered by our school principals.

Worked into this mix as well with school principals is the fact that more and more school principals are taking on more and more teaching loads in addition to their administrative duties. Now you cross that with the provisions in Bill 5 for the increase in responsibilities, and I think you are putting much too much pressure, much too much responsibility in the principal's office.

The other trend that is happening across the province is the reduction in the administrative teams in schools and school divisions, reductions in the number of vice-principals across the province, which ends up meaning a reduction in the number of people in a school whose responsibilities include the administration of the school.

Another concern that I have is in regard to the advisory councils that have been supposedly set up in Bill 5. I am worried about the role that the advisory councils will be playing. Part of my worry is that the government does not know what role the councils will be playing. Therefore, there could end up being a humongous, a very large discrepancy between what the advisory councils do and what the elected, democratic, incorporated school boards and their trustees do.

The other thing that I find kind of funny about it is that the government, the minister—and even throughout the media throughout the election campaign—described the councils as something new, this new innovation, something new and something wonderful. Well, I can remember student teaching back in the late '70s in a school in Brandon, Manitoba, where the parent advisory group was not something new even back then. They have been around for a long time. What kind of makes me laugh about this is I can imagine the next piece of legislation coming from this government. What kind of new things are they going to come up with next? Maybe what they will come up with is that they will maybe replace the Gestetners in schools with photocopiers and call it something new, will replace slates in the classrooms with blackboards and call it something new.

Parent councils are not new. Parent councils have a history. They have a history within the province. They have a role in some schools that have been there for years and years and years. It is not anything that the government should be grabbing onto that is new.

The other thing that I am concerned about when we start talking about parent councils is, how are we going to determine whether or not the councils are going to have any kind of independence, whether they are going to be locally controlled or whether, as Bill 5 suggests to me, the minister and the provincial government will

end up controlling the Parent Advisory Councils, controlling their agenda.

Why cannot local committees continue to organize as they have been, setting themselves up with the support and the recognition of the minister? For an example, a Parent Advisory Council in Norway House, Manitoba, is going to develop, evolve differently than the Parent Advisory Council in my constituency of Dauphin and different from many of the urban constituencies here in the city of Winnipeg.

Why would we want the Minister of Education to come up with some sort of standardized plan and enforce that standardized plan for Parent Advisory Councils on areas of the province that have very unique, very different backgrounds, very unique problems that cannot be solved with one provincial model.

In my area, the parents, as in the rest of the province, take education very seriously. They have come through a school system that has different values, a recognition of a different history than what other parts of the province do. It would not be fair in the Dauphin riding or in Norway House to take the values of an urban education system and impart those onto the local people who we would prefer to see making local decisions. That is a very grave concern that I have about Bill 5.

Also I am very concerned about the relationship of the school board and the role of the school board and the board of trustees in relation to the Parent Advisory Councils. There are some advantages in the Minister of Education delineating between the role of the school board and a parent advisory group. Let us not forget that the "A" in parent advisory group stands for advisory.

The school board, the board of trustees are an incorporated, democratically, freely elected group who provide their members of the board, the trustees, with a certain amount of protection through their incorporation. It is no accident that these school boards are incorporated. They are incorporated to provide that protection. They are incorporated to provide protection

for not only the trustees but the employees of the school division.

Now, if we do not think through what the role of the Parent Advisory Councils is, then we may end up in a situation where we have Parent Advisory Councils making decisions normally reserved for school boards without the protection of incorporation.

Now I do not know about everybody within the confines of this room right now, but I would be a little bit hesitant of putting my name forward to become involved in a parent advisory committee and then be asked by the school division to take a stand on something that I could get myself legally or financially in trouble for. My point is that at the same time that we have to take into consideration local interests when it comes to advisory councils, we also have to take into consideration legal and financial ramifications that are involved in the running of a school division today.

Another concern that I have connected with Bill 5 has to do with again the increasing responsibility that is put onto the shoulders of the school principal and not just the school principal but that school principal's staff, but at the same time not making a provision for extra resources. The hard reality of Manitoba schools out there right now is that as we are putting more responsibility onto school principals and their staffs in the school, we are cutting back on the amount of resources that are available to provide the best possible education for our students.

A simple, quick example of this is the number of students coming through our schools who have special learning needs. What we end up doing is that we start by addressing these needs by hiring someone who is specially trained, in-serviced and is working specifically with a child with special needs. The next thing we do is that we subject this person to a reduced workweek. Then we take the paraprofessional that we have hired, and we do not bring them back on September 1. In order to save money, we start them on October 1 in many cases. That is strictly because of the budgetary restraints that have been passed on from this government down through the line to the principal's desk.

Another concern that I have that is reflected in Bill 5 is the lack of co-operation with the community. It seems to me what Bill 5 is purporting, what Bill 5 will eventually do is end up with more decisions made centrally here in the city of Winnipeg rather than having it being locally controlled and based in the communities. That is a trend that I think each and every one of us, all 57 of us, should be working and speaking against.

I want to take a few minutes to look back over what has been done over the last period of time just to see how that relates to what is proposed here in Bill 5. I want to provide, as my colleague for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) did, a little bit of a history of where we are at today and why we have some of the problems that we do have in education today.

The first thing that I think we ought to consider is the lack of priority that this government has given education generally over the last six years. I say that based on the amount of confusion that has taken place with the merry-go-round of Education ministers that we have had, and I say it also because I know, as well as Manitobans know, the cutbacks in funding that have taken place in the public school system and also in the post-secondary education system.

* (2100)

The reason I know that those cuts have been made is that when I was the principal at the school in Rorketon, Manitoba, I had to sit on my side of the desk and actually implement the cuts that the government dreamed up in their offices in Winnipeg. It is not that easy to look across the desk at a teacher aide and tell that teacher aide that she is no longer needed in the school and send her home to a husband who is a farmer and trying to make ends meet with a family at home. It is not very easy for school principals to look across their desks and close down their library for part of the year because they do not have the funding.

Madam Speaker, first of all, over the last six years there has not been a holistic approach to education. There has not been a holistic approach to providing the best for the children in our province. The attitude has been that when you make the cuts, they just affect

education. That is not reality. When you make a cut, there are all kinds of different ways that a student's life is affected.

One that I want to draw particular attention to that all rural members should be concerned with is the cut to the rural dental program. If you think it was just a cut that saved money in that one small, little part of the budget, then you are absolutely dead wrong. That will play out over the years and end up costing Manitobans a lot more money than what it saved you in your budget, and all you have accomplished in the meantime is that you have denied some children access to dental services. That is not what we are here for. We are not here to cut children off of dental health. We are not here to set the lives of children back. I would hope that we are here for the benefit of children, and that is one example of how one cut can affect students in a number of ways. The thing that we have to remember is that these cuts do not just take place in a vacuum. There are all kinds of different spinoffs whenever a cut by government is made in education.

The other thing that I want to point out is the unfair treatment that this government has shown private schools as opposed to public schools. It is absolutely ridiculous that while this government talks about fairness and while this government talks about economic restraint and all these economic realities that we have heard so much about, that they can sign deals with private schools increasing substantially their commitment to private schooling and at the same time decrease public school funding to an unacceptably low level. It is also absolutely incredulous to me that the provincial government would talk about fulfilling court obligations in the area of private schooling and talk about a decision that has been made by the courts when no decision in fact has ever been made. It is simply an ideological stand that the government is taking.

Another trend that has been occurring in education that disturbs me is the loss of staff such as clinicians, psychologists and speech pathologists which simply transferred the salaries of those folks who were providing essential services in our schools from the provincial government's budgets to that of the local school board. So what it meant was that those local school boards that had a whole bunch of money in a pot

somewhere could afford to pick up the salaries of clinicians and speech pathologists and psychologists or they could turn around and raise taxes to do it. But that did not matter to this Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) and this government, because they were not raising the taxes, the local school board trustees were doing it. So that was politically correct for this Tory government.

The other problem of course in that is that when you look at raising taxes at the school board level, it is not even. It is not fair. Not every part of this province has the same ability to raise taxes as another part of the province. As a result, some provinces with a lower tax base could not hire back or, to be more correct, sustain the cut that the provincial government made, because they did not have the tax base or the fund beforehand to take up that slack. So some students in some parts of the province who need the services of speech pathologists, psychologists and other clinicians have to go without. That I do not think is fair.

There was a lot of talk by this government of a student health protocol at one point. I wonder what has happened to all that talk? There has been no effort by this government and worst of all no action by this government to do anything about the student health protocol. This is an opportunity for this government to take some action in the area of the health protocol that is proactive, is preventative and in the long run will save money, and it is something that I encourage this government to move on, but it is something unfortunately that I have not seen this government take any action on yet, and I look forward, if there is that kind of support from the member for Niakwa (Mr. Reimer) and others, to some kind of action in that area.

Another area that I am greatly disturbed about and adds to a general malaise in the morale of educators and those receiving education today is the cancelling of student social allowances. Over the summer I had a number of opportunities to talk with people who have fallen between the cracks in education, especially in the area of funding, because each level of government is content to sit back and point fingers at each other and pass the blame, pass the buck.

* (2110)

While the buck is being passed from one level of government to another there are very real people out there struggling along, trying to better themselves, and they cannot because of their economic situation.

For example, a young woman approached me in my office in Dauphin just at the turn of the month, the beginning of September. She has been living day by day on her own with two kids, living on welfare, wanting to work her way off of welfare. She has been trying to take some courses at Assiniboine Community College in the Parkland campus in Dauphin, but she cannot get to first base. She is stuck in a Catch-22 situation, because she cannot afford to leave her home to take the courses. She cannot afford to enrol in the courses and she cannot get the funding that she needs.

So the government ends up federally and provincially funding someone on welfare instead of funding someone to educate themselves, train themselves and then go looking for work, very shortsighted on the part of the provincial government and something that I think they should look at and try to take some responsibility for.

One of the keys to good education is professional development opportunities for teachers. Now we can come up with all kinds of simplistic, right-wing Tory-[interjection] I am trying to look for a polite word to describe what I am about to say. I am trying to explain that professional development for teachers is something that is positive that you can actually put some money into that is going to produce results and good results for students. What I do not like to see is the cuts that are occurring in professional development, the cuts in money being put in towards PD and the amount of time being cut by the provincial government for teachers to participate in these.

The direction I see this government heading with Bill 5 is that you think that you can control a classroom simply by coming up with a rule that teachers can suspend students from classrooms when in fact the more productive way of doing it is providing the professional development and relying on some research and some of the expertise out in the field to improve the classrooms for students so that you minimize or

prevent the amount of disruption in the class before you have to suspend a student.

Another factor that is producing malaise within the classrooms and causing problems in our education system is very simple. It is the increase in class size that we have been experiencing in schools throughout the province. Again, the problem varies from one area to the next, but it just makes common sense that one person dealing with a larger class is going to experience more problems. Now this relates right back to funding again, and this government has been cutting that funding, forcing school principals to combine larger and larger classes, to combine different grades with each other without providing at the same time the type of PD experience necessary for teachers if they are going to successfully manage the students within their classroom.

I am very concerned—and this relates back to what I was saying about private and public school funding—about the gap that is arising between those within our province who have access to high-quality education and those who have access to education not quite of the quality that some Manitobans experience right now.

Another very simplistic, narrow-minded, unproductive, ineffective measure that this government has proposed recently is the implementation of standardized tests at the Grades 3, 6, 9 and Senior 4 levels in education. First of all, my objection to this approach is based on the fact that not all people learn the same way. Every student is an individual who learns in his own individual way at his own speed. To force that student into a standardized test situation which is worth a third of his final grade in some cases is to deny all the research and everything we know through our teaching experiences that makes sense. We are taking a student and pounding him into our very narrow concept of measurement in education. It takes the ability of teachers to evaluate their students out of their hands.

I think we have spent too much time and money on professional development sessions on evaluating pupil progress to now turn around and take all that responsibility out of the hands of teachers and give it to

the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh) from her office in Winnipeg. That makes no sense.

In the area of standardized testing, I am wondering here if I could get the assistance of one of the ministers across the way in helping me with this question that I have. I wonder, when the cabinet was picked, was there a standardized test given? Was there some sort of aptitude test given? Was any kind of diagnostic tool used to determine whether you got into the cabinet or not? My suspicion is that there was no standardized test given.

My conclusion therefore is, does this cabinet not have any standards, because it seems to me that the premise upon which standardized test is based is that we have to have standards in education, so if there was no standard given to the cabinet as they entered the cabinet back in the spring, would that not logically mean that there are no standards within the present Tory cabinet?

My point is, is that there are different ways to measure standards other than a standardized test, and all you are doing with a standardized test is increasing the amount of pressures for teachers to teach through the curriculum and not account for the different learning styles of students along the way. In connection with that too is the inconsistency that has taken place from one Minister of Education to the next in the area of our blueprint and the changing of one government policy to the next and the total absolute inconsistency involved in education over the last six years.

Madam Speaker, we hear a lot from this government on teaching the basics, going back to the basics, whatever those basics may be. I would challenge the Minister of Education and anyone from the opposition to show me a classroom where the basics are not being taught today. The mistake we are making is that we are not taking those basics and teaching the kids how to use them in the real world. The kids know the basics; they do not know how to apply the basics that we have taught them. That is something that we need to address, and we do not address that by taking out paid political announcements attacking teachers. We do not address that kind of a

problem by sending kids out of the school on Filmon Fridays. We do not address that problem in education by cutting the amount of money going to post-secondary education. We do not address the problem of the basics not being used by reducing the number of professional development days for teachers. That does not make sense. That is not logical.

I think there is a much better way of doing things in education, and I would hope that this government has the common sense to listen to submissions in education and to the constructive things that we in the opposition do come up with every now and then. I think the first thing that the government has to do is look at stability in the area of funding.

It is absolutely frustrating for a school principal to sit down at his or her desk, try to figure out a budget for the school for the year when you have absolutely no clue as to how much your budget is going to be reduced. The stability part of it, as close as the stability gets to it, is that you know you are not going to get an increase. You know you are not going to get frozen. You just do not know how much you are going to get cut from one year to the next, and that makes it very hard to do any kind of long-term planning other than a year-by-year, very Bill 2 kind of short-term mentality.

The other thing that I would suggest that this government needs to do as opposed to what it is suggesting in Bill 5 is that it get serious with its support to small schools and small class sizes. I do not think we need to accept just holus-bolus, this attitude that bigger is necessarily better. Bigger is not better. The smaller schools in my experience as an educator and school principal are much more effective in No. 1, producing creative students who go into the outside world and succeed, and No. 2, a lot fewer behavioural problems in which you will not have to be dealing with teachers suspending students from the classroom and you will not have to deal with ministers also taking on the responsibility for suspension of students.

I think what we need to do is commit ourselves to a process for public input, something that has been lacking, something that has been absolutely lacking over the last six years. I think that, instead of saddling the existing staff with a whole bunch of new

responsibilities as we see in Bill 5, what we need to do is turn to other people and bring them into the schools to provide the services that students need and that will eventually save us money. In that area, I look at bringing nurses into the schools. I would suggest nutrition programs for school-age children as a preventative method, a preventative approach to health care.

* (2120)

I would suggest a province-wide tracking system for information on students. The system that we use today is not efficient. It is not effective. It does not help school principals. It is expensive and it does not work. One way to locate the students within your system who could become behavioural problems is to invest a little bit of money into an information system to track the students from one school or one school division to the next. Do not rely on suspensions. Do not rely on the big stick and the punishment kind of things that we see coming in the last little while. Think of some things that could prevent these problems from occurring in the first place.

I want to put my plug in here again for history as being a required course and phys ed, and I also want to put the plug in for the expansion, the advancement of distance education in rural Manitoba as another way of alleviating a lot of the pressure that is being built up within the public school system.

I know that sometimes in the statements that I have made today some of them might have been a tad critical of the government, but I want you to think back to a show called Maxwell Smart where they had the cone of silence come down when they were in the room, and I do not want this dome up here to become a big giant cone of silence in which we sit and yell back and forth at each other, and we do not make a little bit of difference at all in the public school system. My hope is that some of the positive things that we suggest from this side will be taken seriously by the government and that bills such as Bill 5 and others would be at least greeted with some kind of openness and some kind of co-operation. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): I want to start with a quote from a woman named Hannah Arendt who speaks about many important issues, but education is one. She says that education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token to save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable.

I want to start by going straight to the heart of one of the great myths about our education system today and that is that it is somehow ineffective. Madam Speaker, you were a teacher and others in this House have been teachers. The minister sitting opposite me was a principal in a small town in Manitoba, a fine small town, a fine school, and there are many others around this Chamber who have been or who still are teachers. One of the joys in my life in the last five years was that I got a chance to become a teacher, albeit of adults, at the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, both in continuing education and in undergraduate education.

I would like to suggest that it is unhelpful in the extreme to characterize the public school system as somehow failing desperately and in need of enormous reform in order to save it from failing our country, failing our children and failing our future. The young men and women who have joined us today for the first time in this House as Pages, and have perhaps had their eyes and ears opened in ways which might not be altogether instructive for them, I hope will nevertheless understand that we do try to do useful things here. When I look at them and look at their school records and know the school divisions from which they come, I know they are not failures. I know that those young people that we are being helped by are not failures, the schools that produce them are not failures, the teachers who work in them are not failures.

So the issue for me, Madam Speaker, is how can this bill and how can this Chamber strengthen what is demonstrably a very successful system? I think we need to say that our country and our province did not become the envy of many in the world by having terrible public schools. It did not become, according to the United Nations, one of the two or three best places in the world because it had terrible school systems. It

did not become the wealthiest country in the world, according to the World Bank's most recent report, because it failed to have a decent education system.

So the principle from which we start this whole debate is I think a mistaken principle and that is that somehow our public school system has gone to wrack and ruin and it has to be radically reformed, radically renewed because it is failing our children and our country. I reject that.

I hope that members opposite join with me in affirming and supporting many wonderful things that take place in our education system. I would point out just a few in my own constituency. An inner-city school, by any description, started this year a program in Grade 7 for girls only, one of two programs that are focusing on helping young women to maintain their interest in maths and the sciences in particular and to offer a different learning environment from the typical junior high school. A very fine program in a very fine school.

The member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) and the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) have both pointed out the obvious, that for many, many years in this province there have been effective parent councils effectively advocating on behalf of their communities, interacting with staff and with parents and with children, to make their schools better places to learn, better places to be, safer places, more effective community-building places.

So we should start from the assumption, Madam Speaker, that we have in place a very good system. We have in place a system we can build on, that we can strengthen. When you want to strengthen and build on something, you do not go at it with a broad axe. You do not go at it with across-the-board measures that fail to take into account the uniqueness of each school, each community and each neighbourhood.

One of the things that I was very privileged to do in the past five years was to do quite an amount of work with the Northwest Territories Department of Education and some work with a number of Indian bands in northern and central Manitoba. In the Northwest Territories, Madam Speaker, there are some

very interesting things that happen with parent councils. They do not just develop curricula; they write whole courses, and they produce the materials for them.

I will just tell you a little anecdote of a school division in Baffin Island, which out of a room that is smaller than half of our benches here, they have produced over 250 basal readers. They are all Innu and aboriginal people's legends. They are in plastic covers like the nice books that we give our young children and grandchildren. They have the sign language dropped in through Macintosh computer programs which they have designed themselves and market around the circumpolar world.

These are people who by our standards are uneducated, and a number of them are by our standards illiterate. Yet, they have produced 250 basal readers marketed around the world because they not only sell the artwork which they do locally, they sell the computer program for designing the syllabics of any circumpolar nation to drop into these readers. That is perhaps the most exciting result I have seen from a parent council developing curricula.

But across our Frontier School Division, across our northern and across our urban school divisions, we find parent councils of many different kinds struggling with issues from curriculum sensitivity in terms of the race and language composition of the school to questions of creative playgrounds and how to maximize children's abilities to learn and grow and develop in their particular neighbourhood.

I think it makes no sense to do as this legislation proposes, to turn over the power to create and uncreate and to regulate parent councils across this province when at least 80 percent of our schools are already served by them. Some are stronger, some are weaker, Madam Speaker, but passing regulations about their composition will not strengthen any of them and may well weaken a good number of them.

So I would ask the government to reconsider the advisability of centralizing in the minister's office the power to regulate what are essentially local voluntary bodies which ought to take on the hue and the colouration of their local community.

* (2130)

I was speaking earlier to the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe), and I was saying to him that I thought that we had to get used to the idea that effectiveness in public policy is not the same as tidiness, that it is not always tidy to have parents effectively involved in schools because they will become involved in their own ways, out of their own community's history, out of their own sense of what the priorities are.

In some communities, it will seem right to them to have a small council, and in other communities it will seem right to them that the whole community should assemble to consider things that are important to that community, so centrally regulating something like a voluntary parent council makes very little sense to this side of the House, Madam Speaker.

I think it is also important that the bill enable the minister to say right off the bat, all existing councils are fine. He may want to, or she may want to, if there is yet another change in that ministry, which seems to revolve fairly frequently, offer some advice about successful councils that have been effective in the inner city or successful councils that have been effective in the north. Offer advice, but do not tell local school councils how to operate or what priorities they ought to have. It will not help. It will not strengthen the very good work that is already being done.

In terms of the issue of suspension, the government has seen the silly error of their initial proposal of giving individual teachers power and responsibility which virtually guaranteed that they become in conflict with their employers. It was a silly proposal, and I am glad that the government saw the error of their ways and recognized that an individual teacher should indeed have the right to remove a pupil from a classroom but not from the school.

I would say again that another quote from the same philosopher is I think instructive in terms of the basic issue here. Again Hannah Arendt said education also is the place where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from the world that we call ours and leave them to their own devices, nor

strike from their hands their undertaking of something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing the common world.

I agree deeply with my colleague from Dauphin, the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), who said that the real issue here in discipline is not giving the power to the teacher to suspend, but giving the tools to the teacher to manage the classroom more effectively. That is a learnable skill. It is not a skill that comes naturally to all of us, but it is one which I am sure you, Madam Speaker, learned over your years in teaching. I am sure you shared it with student teachers that might have come under your direction.

So I think that it is very important that regulations and proposals such as these take into account the fact that the real issue here is the supporting and skilling of teachers and teachers' aides so that they can manage disruptive behaviour in the most effective way possible. As a teacher of adults, I did not have that problem, but I know that teachers have to have the ultimate ability to resolve a conflict situation in their classroom. We need to give them the tools to make that an absolutely last resort rather than a first resort. This legislation speaks only to the last resort. It ought to speak more to the first.

In terms of the question of what parent councils and teachers are going to do to strengthen their ability to educate our children, let us face square on, Madam Speaker, the fact that this government managed by I think sheer incompetence to avoid having an information system which might have given any of their four ministers of Education some useful data on which to make some policy decisions.

When I was a bureaucrat in the Department of Education for a previous government, it became clear that we had no student information system. This may come as a bit of a shock to the Pages, maybe even to some members opposite who have been lulled into thinking that we actually know what is going on in our school system. The fact is that we have not had, and do not now have, a student record system. There has not been a functioning student record system in this province for almost 10 years now. There are more than eight years of unentered data sitting in various

buildings in this province in the form of hard copy, disks and tapes. They are not in compatible formats and they do not contain consistent information.

Four ministers of Education ago, there was a proposal which had been accepted by a previous government to put in a standard information-system approach in Manitoba. That minister ended that system which cost the province only \$100,000 for a site licence, site licence meaning a licence for 800 schools. That minister ended that system on the spurious notion that somehow the tendering system had not been used in spite of the fact that not only had the tendering system been used entirely properly, but, by some fortuitous stroke of luck, the low tender was a Canadian firm and was the choice of all of the impartial educational folks who staff the committee that chose the software in question.

Madam Speaker, within one year of implementing that system, 200 schools were on line. The Minister of Education of the day cancelled that initiative. Eight years later, we still have no student record system, and we have managed to spend \$3 million getting there. We have spent \$3 million—not a \$100,000—to have no student record system in place. So when the Minister of Education, whichever one it happens to be, arises and says we have a 25 percent or a 30 percent illiteracy rate in this province, that minister is not speaking about Manitoba. That minister is speaking about a Statistics Canada report which deals primarily with illiteracy in the adult population of Canada.

Let me tell you what group is 34 to 38 percent illiterate, functionally illiterate. The group of our population that is 34 to 38 percent functionally illiterate is people over the age of 65. They are people who went to school 45 years ago. Those are the folks who are functionally illiterate on today's standards. When you actually examine the 16- to 34-year-old age group, what you find is that only 6 percent fall below the test of functional literacy. So 94 percent of our people 16 to 34 are able to deal with the standard daily requirements of literacy. That is an outstandingly good success rate, not the kind of terrible rate that ministers of this government and other Canadian commentators who do not take the time to do their research but just parrot back Statistics Canada numbers.

So are our schools effective at producing literate students? Yes, they are. They are not only successful at producing literate students, they are successful at producing absolutely excellent students like a young man in my constituency who, in the International Baccalaureate program, ranked in the top 1 percent of 7,000 students from around the world who wrote the IB program this June. They are capable of producing young students like Sarah Krindler [phonetic], who is in the first year of university, having come out of an inner-city public school with a 98 percent average, a full scholarship, and she is 16. The public school system is producing absolutely wonderful graduates.

Now, are there problems? Of course, there are problems. Of course, there are problems, Madam Speaker, and I would like to talk about a few of them. The chief problem in our education system is not in our education system; it is in our economic system. The chief problem of our education system is poverty, child poverty. When more than one in four of Manitoba's children grow up and live most of their childhood years in poverty, they are at risk not only of a poor educational outcome for their lives, they are at risk of a poor employment outcome, a poor health outcome, a poor relationship outcome. They are simply at risk on every conceivable criterion. When 25 percent of our kids are living below the poverty line, I think it is a mark of great success that only 6 percent of them, according to the numbers I just gave you earlier, are functionally illiterate. It is nothing less than a miracle that our schools in spite of the burden of poverty have been able to do so much with these kids.

If we were really concerned about the effectiveness of our public school system, what would we do for those kids? Madam Speaker, we had a debate here this afternoon in this House around the issue of child poverty, and, unfortunately, this government chose to amend what could have been a very powerful resolution to have a united and nonpartisan attack on the canker of child poverty. Unfortunately, it chose not to do that, but to talk out this particular resolution with, I think, a sad choice of politics over the real priorities of children.

So what would we do? We would first of all make sure that everyone understood pregnancy, conception

and birth, and they would start to understand that not when they were 16 and pregnant but they would start to understand it when they were much littler. We would understand that family life education was something that started when children were tiny, not when they suddenly showed threats of puberty. So, first of all, we would take human sexuality education seriously in this province.

Secondly, we would make sure that every pregnant woman was encouraged with appropriate incentives and especially incentives for low-income people to seek medical advice early in their pregnancy to get appropriate nutrition, early diagnosis of any kind of condition which might negatively affect the pregnancy, that she and her partner if possible were given lots of preparation for childbirth, that they were allowed to then have adequate access to early childhood rearing information so that in those critical first couple of years we minimize the opportunity for risk and we maximize the opportunity that that child would come to the school system with as much readiness as a child of a wealthy suburban parent.

* (2140)

There is nothing wrong with those children having advantages who come from wealthy or adequately wealthy and intact families. The challenge, Madam Speaker, is to identify all those at risk and give them the same kind of advantage, not simply out of some kind of bleeding-heart concern for the poor. That is a justice issue. If we do not do it out of that issue of justice, which I wish we would, at least do it out of narrow self-interest in our own economic future well-being. The burden of such children on an economy is a very substantial burden. So, first of all, make sure the children are born well, are nourished well and have an adequate early childhood before they come into our school system.

The second major area, Madam Speaker, if we were serious about educational reform, would be that we took early childhood and child care seriously as an initiative. Dr. Fraser Mustard, I spoke on this this afternoon, but I will recount very briefly the startling findings that have been coming through the Institute of Advanced Research in Canada. Dr. Fraser Mustard,

who is head of the institute, gave a paper to a conference here a couple of years ago where he pointed out that our immune systems, which you would think were unavailable to us to have much effect on, were actually programmed as children by the environments in which we are raised. That is, if we are fed and nurtured and experience the world as a positive place as little children, and I mean zero to about two, that actually has an immune system effect. It has only been discovered in the last four or five years.

It may seem arcane to some, but it is an incredibly important finding because it allows us to understand how important it is to make sure that babies get all the nurture they can possibly absorb, that every nickel we invest in early childhood is going to be repaid to us many, many times over by having children who are, quite simply, physically stronger, because their immune systems have been programmed with love and have been programmed with good food. They will then protect that child much in the way that breast milk protects children but in some even more amazing ways; they will be protected for the rest of their lives.

What would we do then, Madam Speaker? There is abundant evidence from the United States of America and from Canada that early childhood education, that is, education which starts at about age 3, pays enormous dividends in the development of children on and through the rest of their lives.

The Headstart Program which was developed in the United States under the war on poverty under Johnson in the '60s was initially seen as a failure. It was initially seen as a failure because early research suggested that while there was a beneficial impact of the early childhood education in the first stages of it, that beneficial impact wore off, so the first look at this suggested it was not worth the money.

However some people looked a little farther and what they found was that if the supports were continued through early elementary school till about Grade 5 or 6, then the effect was permanent. Then we began to see lower crime rates, lower acting-out behaviour kind of rates, lower drop-out rates, better

education attainment and therefore better employment opportunities. The payoffs from early childhood education were very, very significant.

I refer you, if you want to look for further evidence of that, to the Coleman report which is the basic long-term report of the effect of that whole time of educational renewal in the United States, a very major study.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about the responsibilities and rights of principals. On page 21 of the blue book, of which I suspect there are probably 10,000 or 20,000 copies still available, the responsibilities and roles of the principal are outlined. There are things like participating in the hiring and assigning of teachers and taking parental and community input into consideration and administering and managing the school consistent with creating an effective learning environment, all those kinds of nice things.

These are the things that principals have been doing since principals became principals. This is a very poor and very overly brief summary of what principals are taught to do by our various programs that teach principals so they can get their certificates. There are things that principals were doing when I was in school back before trees. In other words, putting them in a nice little box here and saying this is a blueprint for reform is kind of like putting Back to the Future on every parent's desk. There is no blueprint for reform here, and in fact the statements about a principal's role here are very weak, very wishy-washy.

Let me tell you what the schools excellence literature says about the role of the principal in developing and supporting excellence in education. There have now been about 15 years of research in the whole schools excellence movement, and it is very interesting that whether you read Peter Coleman's work from British Columbia or whether you read work from the United States it does not really matter, the findings are all very similar. They are almost intuitive. They are really the things which we I think know but perhaps we do not always act on.

For example, one consistent finding is that if a school has clear goals that have been worked at with the teachers and involved the community, particularly the parents, and at the level of high school if they involve the students, that school will be, in general, a stronger school than one that does not have goals. Pretty intuitively straightforward, Madam Speaker. Nothing particularly remarkable there.

There is another finding. That is that if the principal spends most of her or his time providing pedagogical leadership instead of filling out forms for the Department of Education, that school will, generally speaking, be a stronger school. All things being equal, if the principal has average principal-type skills and is able to spend her or his time helping their teachers do a more effective job, the school will be more effective. Nothing very striking there either.

Another finding in the schools excellence literature, Madam Speaker, is if the kids in the school, if the learning environment is one in which the students spend relatively large amounts of time on the tasks of learning, whether they are instruction or whether they are small-group work or whether it is research in the library, whether it is peer work, with it is interage tutoring, whatever the tasks of learning are, as opposed to wasting their time in busy work, then the school will, generally speaking, be a stronger school.

Another finding: If the school has annual objectives and the objectives are stated in very clear terms, for example, this school will retain 90 percent of its pupils through the end of Grade 12—an objective—if the school has those objectives and has in place some systems to measure attainment of those objectives, generally speaking, it will be a stronger school.

* (2150)

Now, there are no surprises here. There is nothing particularly remarkable about any of those findings. Anybody who teaches organizational behaviour or management will tell you the same thing is true of a company. A company that knows what its goals are, that spends time on its tasks and not on nonessentials, where the CEO is busy working with the key staff instead of playing golf, those kinds of companies will

do better than ones that have the other kind of conditions.

The point, Madam Speaker, is that things this government has done do not add much to that. Instead of releasing the principal to spend more time on the tasks of pedagogy, the principal is to be taken up with more tasks related to the Department of Education and its various bureaucratic requirements. Instead of supporting the schools with an information system that might indeed provide useful information about the attainment of educational objectives, this government has spent \$3 million to not produce an educational tracking system. Instead of producing the kind of supports to teachers to teach them some alternative ways to manage behaviour, this system gives teachers the right to simply exclude children from the classroom.

I remind people of some of the things that writers are saying about what is happening in general with problem children. In Noam Chomsky's terms, for example, some of our children become nonpeople.

I remember the director of Child and Family Services talking about throw-away children, throw-away children who are no longer seen as particularly valuable to their communities or to their families or teachers. They are children that are too much trouble so we will just throw them away. We will just move them out.

Then the Minister of Justice (Mrs. Vodrey) opposite wonders why we have so much tension among young people who feel that they do not belong and feel that their community has left them out. Well, we create the conditions. In some particular books, we sow winds and we reap whirlwinds, and the whirlwind that we are seeing of behaviours among young people that we find troubling are sown by poverty. They are sown by an education system that has been constrained, has been told that it is a failure, has been demoralized.

Madam Speaker, if we want to talk about morale, we should take a look at the Department of Education. I have not ever in 30 years in this province known a department or a centre of government with lower morale than the Department of Education. It has been

torn and driven from one extreme to the other, back to basics, fire half the staff, bring in some new people, call for continuous testing but lay off all the assessment people, no system for monitoring progress. This is a department which is seriously, seriously demoralized and it is responsible for providing some kind of leadership to 200,000 students in Manitoba. This is a department that is not in any position to provide leadership, because this government has demoralized it to the point of dysfunctional behaviour.

An Honourable Member: I think you are hitting a nerve over there.

Mr. Sale: Well, there are not many nerves left.

Madam Speaker, this is a government whose vision of education is to raise funding for private schools while they freeze funding for public schools. This is a government whose vision of support for education seems to mean that those who can afford to move their children out of the public system are to be supported.

The public system is simply to be blamed for everything that is wrong in our society. The teachers are failures, the administrators are failures, the boards are failures, the parent councils are failures. They have all got to be renewed; they have all got to be radically changed.

If the member was listening earlier, Madam Speaker, he would have heard me say, the very first thing that we have to understand is that this system that we have built over many years is a tremendously successful and effective system. It is your government that seems to feel that it is not effective, that it is failing, and I tell you, it is not failing. In spite of all the things you have done to it, it is an effective and caring system. It nurtures children in spite of all the odds that you put on it.

You want to see some really effective schools, Mr. Minister, go into the inner city of this city. Go into William Whyte school and see what you can do with a community that has every count against it and in spite of that those children are nurtured, they are successful,

the community is involved in its school. That is because they fought against all odds to make it so. You need to become a defender of that kind of school and not an attacker.

Madam Speaker, there is this notion somehow that our schools are not preparing people adequately for work, that somehow employers do not like the students that we turn out. Let me suggest that we should be talking to schools like South Winnipeg Tech and its excellent programs where young people and adults can enrol at any time in a wide range of courses, can progress through at their own pace, can challenge for credit and, ultimately, when they graduate, they graduate not only with some good skills but they graduate with a guarantee. That school guarantees that its pupils are employment ready, and it is prepared to stand behind them. Is this the system that is not preparing students for work? I do not think so.

The truth from UNESCO, for example, Canada has produced a glut of engineers, scientists and mathematicians, the first among G-7 countries in graduates per capita, but the sadder truth, Madam Speaker, is that less than 25 percent of the graduates of mathematics and science from our universities have found work in their related areas of education. The problem, if there is a problem with our education system, is that there is little employment very often at the end of it. The worst part of being a university teacher was in the March and April period when my students would come and say: Have you got any ideas where I can find work? I cannot find work. I have a 3.5 or a 3.7 GPA, and I cannot find work.

That is the sad failure. We are turning out wonderful graduates. They are turned out into a world that does not appreciate the skills they have and has little place for them.

Nuala Beck, who is one of this government's favourite people—they like to bring her in for conferences—she points out that for every job created in high-tech industries in the last ten years, 11 have been lost. That is, this myth that we have to have everybody skilled for high-tech jobs is not borne out by reality. In

fact, what we need is to have people schooled for citizenship, schooled in creative thinking, schooled in relationships, schooled in productive citizenship, not schooled in narrow disciplines, because the world is changing too fast for those narrow disciplines. They have graduated with a narrow skill, and the world has moved on while they were being schooled.

We need kids who can problem solve, who can think creatively, who can work collaboratively, who understand what co-operation, what collegial work is all about, not the rugged, success-oriented individual. There is not much room for them in the kind of world that we have any more. We are going to have to face the fact that relationship skills in the century to come, the skills of building and nurturing and making communities safe and good places to be are going to be some of the most important skills that we can impart to children, that the skills of citizenship, the skills of compassion, the skills of finding ways to work with people of many values, many colours, many cultures to build those kind of strong and safe communities is the most important skill basket we might be producing.

An Honourable Member: Do not forget honesty.

Mr. Sale: Well, I am sure that that is a very important value, and I am glad that you reminded me of it. It is interesting coming where it comes from.

In conclusion, we will vote against these amendments. We will vote against them because they bring the heavy hand of government in to parent councils, where it has no place. We will vote against it because it fails completely to have any vision of education that has applicability to the kind of world that we are moving into.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity of addressing this bill. I wish that members opposite would reconsider in particular those parts of the bill which deal with the parent councils and the advisability of ministers of Education legislating how parent councils should be composed, comprised, governed, dismissed or created.

The Minister of Education has no role in that particular place, except perhaps to offer some case studies, some advice that might be helpful. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hour being 10 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 18, 1995

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(continued)

Debate on Second Readings

Bill 5, Education Administration

Amendment Act

| | |
|-----------|------|
| Friesen | 3041 |
| Struthers | 3049 |
| Sale | 3056 |