

November 8, 2016

[Original]

Education System

Mr. Higgs: We have a broken education system, and I want to help fix it. So again today and for as long as it takes, I will extend a hand of cooperation to the Premier and to the Minister of Education.

This is not about looking for blame. It is about an opportunity for the Premier and the minister to take the initiative and the responsibility to fix it. When only 20% of our Grade 6 students are achieving acceptable performances in math and science and only 50% in reading and writing, we have a catastrophic situation on our hands. This compares with Nova Scotia achieving 70% levels and Alberta, 85% levels.

I understand that this is the second year that Grade 6 students were assessed. Last year was the first time that this was done, and those results were framed as a pilot. Has the Premier seen the results from last year, and will he share those results with the House?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition wants to help us, but it is difficult for me to believe. He says he wants to help us, but he has not even accepted a briefing on our education plan yet.

Last week, the Leader of the Opposition said that our education systems were broken. He also said he did not like our plan. Despite all this, he did not accept our minister's invitation to receive a briefing on our education plan.

Therefore, how can the Leader of the Opposition come here today and tell us he wants to help us and work with us when he does not even want the information on what our plan can offer to New Brunswickers?

I will tell you what our education plan will offer. It will help teachers get the flexibility they need to help our young people grow. The plan will also enable us to support teachers financially. We are very proud of our plan, which was developed with New Brunswickers.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: I am looking forward to that briefing. I am sorry that I was not able to attend the first one, but I will certainly attend the second one.



The Programme for International Student Assessment began its first survey in the year 2000. Its emphasis rotates every three years among reading, mathematics, and science. In 2003, the emphasis was on mathematics. In all five areas surveyed that year, New Brunswick performed significantly lower than the Canadian average.

My point is that this is not a new problem, and I would suggest that this is further evidence that the system has been broken for some time. Last week, I asked the Premier whether an analysis of the recently released education assessments was being done and when we might expect the results. I did not get an answer, so I will ask again: Is an analysis being done, and can we get the results? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We are analyzing every day in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. I have to say that I have been touring the province over the last six months as the new Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, meeting with the teachers and meeting with the stakeholders who are involved with us. Yes, there are assessments. We are working on them because we have raised the bar. We have a lot of work to do, but we are working together collaboratively, meeting with a lot of people.

I tell you, I am hearing wonderful stories around our province every day in our education system about true leadership that is happening in our schools and happening in our communities. Those are the stories that we need to be talking about, telling the rest of New Brunswick that there are very good things going on in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

I will continue to work with them. I will have a chance to brief the minister in the next couple of days, with our department, to show all the good things that are going on in the Department of Education. We will let New Brunswickers know that we are raising the bar and we are moving forward.

Mr. Higgs: Over the last 12 years, the provincial literacy assessments for Grade 2 reading in the English prime program have gone from a low of 59.4% to a high of 83.6%. Since that high, the score has dropped to 73.8%. Those are the numbers, but numbers without context are just numbers. Why has there been a decline in the last six years?

I would suggest that we should turn to the classroom teachers for their expert opinion. They might not have the complete answer, but we will never get the complete answer without their input. Does the Premier agree that the classroom teachers must be included in fixing our broken system, and would the Premier agree to treat the situation with the sense of urgency that it deserves?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I cannot agree with that statement. Our system is not broken. Our system has challenges, but it has lots of opportunities. What is unfortunate is that, clearly, the Leader of the Opposition has not been briefed. He has not taken us up on the invitation to be briefed on the education plans, or he would know that those plans were built by consulting educators.



They were built in a nonpartisan way, listening to experts and making sure that we have the best system possible to offer our youth.

What I find amazing is that the Leader of the Opposition is getting up to criticize our education plans, yet, when he was the Minister of Finance, that government had zero plans for our education systems. Members opposite got up on the floor of the Legislature and admitted that they had no plan for education. Well, we put one in, listening to teachers and educators from across the province, and we are going to support them financially to improve our results. The only plan that the Leader of the Opposition had when he was there was to cut into education.

Mr. Higgs: Classroom composition has been identified as one of the many contributing factors in the assessment results that we are discussing. Classroom composition was highlighted by Guy Arseneault of the NBTA, and I must assume that this was based on input from the membership. If classroom composition is indeed a factor, we must address that. No problem was ever solved by ignoring it.

I believe we need the input of teachers on classroom composition, among so many other categories. If what they are working with now has little or no chance of success, what would a classroom composition with a good chance of success look like? Will the Premier agree with me that we must ask our classroom teachers what they believe a successful classroom composition should be?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Of course we must work with educators across the province, and of course we must listen to them. This is precisely what we did to develop both our plans for our education systems. This is precisely what the minister and I are doing: We recently met with about a hundred teachers from across the province to listen to their ideas on how we can improve our systems.

[Original]

The Leader of the Opposition wants to quote the President of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, but I have to paraphrase again one of the comments that he made recently. Some of the challenges that we face in our education system right now are because of the cuts that the former Minister of Finance, who is now Leader of the Opposition, made when he was in government. He cut into education, and the President of the NBTA made it clear that those cuts are being felt today.

Luckily, we have a government that is focused on education. We are focused on supporting our teachers and giving them the flexibility that they need, and we will be the government that invests the most in education in the history of our province.



Mr. Higgs: There lies the problem. It is not a money issue. Throwing money at the solution will not fix it. A broken system will not be fixed by throwing money. In fact, in 2003, if you look at the system, there was a \$964-million education budget with enrollment of 120 000. In 2012 and 2013, in that range, we are talking about a \$1.4-billion education budget with an enrollment of 100 000, which is an increase of 41% while there was a decrease in enrollment of 20%. Money will not fix a broken system.

It is a complex problem with a complex solution. Part of the solution will come from the teachers who are in the classroom at this very moment. Until we give them a voice, until we let them speak out honestly and without fear for their jobs, we cannot fix this broken system. Will the Premier agree to work with me in developing a mechanism by which active teachers can share their knowledge without fear of reprisal?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: There it is. There lies the biggest difference between the Leader of the Opposition and what we, as a government, are trying to do. We believe that investing strategically and investing more in education is what we need for our province to get on the right track.

The Leader of the Opposition believes that we can cut our way to prosperity. He believes that we can cut into education and still have a strong economy. He believes that we can cut into education and still have a strong social fabric. Luckily, we do not believe those things. We believe that investing in our youth, investing in our education system, investing in training opportunities, and investing in our people are the best investments to get our economy on the right track and the best investments to make sure that we have the best quality of life for all New Brunswickers.

Today is a great day because it shows the stark choice that New Brunswickers will have in a very short while between a government that will want to cut and a government that will continue to invest in them.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Higgs: Do you want to know why I am passionate about results? It is because the teachers are telling me that they can do a better job. All they need is to be able to teach. I would like to know the list of teachers who had input in the 10-year plan. Let's see what they said about the 10-year plan and what specifics they want to deliver. Let's let the teachers teach. Why did Guy Arseneault talk about the problems? He said that teachers need an opportunity to teach. You are not just going to keep throwing money at it. You need to give them the opportunity to do what they were trained to do.

I say it again: The 10-year plan... It is great to have a document. You need a document with a clear path forward, developed by the people who are going to make that clear path. Once



again, will you allow the opportunity for teachers to speak openly about the system that we have in this province and about the way forward to improve it?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Of course, teachers are invited to tell us what we can do to improve the education systems. I can tell you that this is how we developed our education plan.

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and I sat down with about a hundred teachers in the province, and they told us what they thought were challenges and opportunities. We are all ears, and, in fact, our education plan shows this very clearly, because we are giving our teachers more flexibility.

[*Original*]

I again have to stress how today is a great day because it shows the difference between the philosophy of the Leader of the Opposition and our philosophy. We believe that we have to invest in our youth and in our people. We believe that we have to invest more in education. We believe that we have to listen to teachers and educators across the province about where to make those investments that will help us get the results that we need in our education system. He believes that we can cut our way to prosperity and that we should cut in education and cut in health care. Well, that is not our way.

French Immersion

Mr. Jody Carr: Another contrast is that the government and the Premier feel that they can tax their way to prosperity, and that is not a solution for this province either.

In all the consultation and all the listening to teachers, a change to early French immersion was not found in the 10-year education plan. Yet, the government is moving forward regardless of a call by teachers for stability. Last week, we found that the government does not yet have an implementation plan. The 2012 report on French immersion said that, for a change to Grade 1 to be successful, recruitment, training, language proficiency, and student support services will be needed.

Currently, the school districts find it difficult to recruit teachers who can teach in a second language. According to the calculations for moving to the new French immersion, one third of English classes will be converted to French immersion classes and there will be a need for 200 French second language leaders. Can the government confirm that the number is 200, and can it confirm that it is going to make this a plan in place...

Mr. Speaker: Time.



Hon. Mr. Kenny: As we know, earlier is better. We have heard that from numerous studies, not only in New Brunswick but also throughout the world. We see examples around the world of young students learning two or three different languages. We have made a commitment to move forward on early French immersion, as it was before. We are going to look at the resources that we need to put in place. We have been in consultation with teachers throughout the schools, and we have been listening to the district superintendents and the principals. We will do the right thing to make sure that we have the proper composition of our teachers throughout the province and that we will be able to have the best education system in New Brunswick moving forward.

Mr. Jody Carr: The school districts—the Anglophone West School District, in particular—and the teachers have said that they do not want a change in early French immersion. The government says that it is listening to teachers. Why will you not listen to teachers, keep stability in the school system, and not make this change at this point?

Currently, school districts are finding it difficult to recruit teachers who are able to teach in a second language and who also have the proficiency. We have school districts that are hiring nonteachers because they speak French, yet they are not trained in teaching. This is a current problem. The 2012 report said that, to address this, recruitment and training in proficiency will need to be put in place.

There is no implementation plan from the government at this point. This change will require 200 teachers to be moved from the English-language program to the French immersion program. Can the government confirm this, and how is the government planning to address this concern?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: The member opposite has some numbers that he came up with—the 200 places that he is looking at. We have our own internal numbers that we are looking at. We have also talked with the NBTA in this case. We are analyzing where we are going forward. We are going to put the resources in the right places to make sure that we will be able to implement this program. It is going to take some time to come up with the exact numbers, and that is what we, as a government, are doing. We are doing this right. We are doing a proper consultation, and, when we have the proper information, we will be able to release it to New Brunswickers.

I want to say again that earlier is better. We believe that, and we made a platform commitment on that. We have also consulted with people throughout the province over the past number of years. We believe that what we are doing now will put the right resources in the right place. It will be challenging. We understand that. We are going to work with New Brunswickers to get this thing done, and we will have the best education system moving forward.

Mr. Jody Carr: This says it all. The government says that it consulted, or that it is consulting. It already consulted on the 10-year plan, and there is no mention of a change to early French immersion. Teachers have already told this government to maintain stability, as they told the previous government. As well, the minister cannot provide any numbers on how many teachers



this change will require. I have calculated that this will require 200 teachers to be converted from the English program to the French program. These are teachers who will need to speak in the French second language and who will need to be trained in that regard. The minister has not provided the numbers.

As well, the government has no implementation plan. This is the concern of the opposition and the teachers—the chaos that this is creating and will create when there is no plan in place. In addition, we need to have additional student support services to make sure that the streaming effect is addressed. This was a key question in 2012. Can the minister tell us how the government is planning to address these concerns? What resources are in place, and where is the implementation plan?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is really hard to tell whether the opposition is coming or going today. First off, its members want to criticize our education plans. The opposition did not even have education plans. Its only education plan had to do with the former Minister of Finance cutting into education.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have the Leader of the Opposition, I would say, irresponsibly getting up and saying that our education systems are broken. Then we have the former Minister of Education getting up and saying that the opposition members want stability. If the opposition members believe that the system is broken, which we do not, why would they be advocating for stability? They do not know whether they are coming or going.

I suggest that they have a caucus meeting to discuss what they want to talk about on the floor of the Legislature. We know, and it is clear for us. We are going to invest more in education, we are going to invest more in health care, and we are going to invest in the people of New Brunswick to ensure that we have a strong economy and a strong social fabric. We will not cut, as the Leader of the Opposition would like us to do.

Job Creation

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Premier needs to stop getting Len Hoyt to draft his answers here in the House.

Since the 2014 election, our province has lost 300 jobs. There is, in fact, no job growth but, instead, job shrinkage. The Gallant government spent a lot of time and a huge amount of money rebranding job creation in our province. The result of all this time and money was an agency called Opportunities New Brunswick. This new Crown corporation has yet to present any sort of report to this House. Over halfway through its mandate, this government's own creation tasked with job creation has yet to file a report. Is that because it has not actually created any jobs yet? When will this government file a report in this House?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: To start with, Opportunities New Brunswick does a good job. The staff of this agency works incredibly hard. The agency signed agreements to create thousands of jobs here in the province. We look forward to the member opposite doing his research and finding out about the announcements that were made. There are more announcements to come.

[Original]

He talks about the job situation in the province. I think it is important to note that there is actually an increase in jobs since the start of the mandate. It is 2 000 jobs. I think it is really important to note that, in the past five months, we have seen some good job numbers come out of Statistics Canada. In fact, in July, we had 5 000 jobs added to the economy, with 1 200 added in June and 4 400 added in September. It is really unfortunate to see the opposition members focus on some of the challenges, and there are some. Why would they not mention all the good things that New Brunswickers are doing and that New Brunswick businesses are getting done right here in the province?

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Premier talks about doing his homework. He quoted a figure in this House, and that is a very interesting figure that the Premier is quoting. I would ask the Premier this: Would he like to tell this House how this figure he is claiming can actually be verified? Are people actually working at these jobs? We have the research of statistics New Brunswick as the foundation for our figures. What verification can the Premier provide for his?

The Statistics Canada Web site indicates that, in September 2014, there were 354 100 jobs here in our province. That same agency reported last Friday that there are now 353 800 jobs in our province. That is a difference of -300 jobs so far in this Premier's mandate. The numbers are online and easily accessed and verifiable. How can the Premier justify his figures?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have not seen any stats come out of statistics New Brunswick, but when it comes to Statistics Canada, I can quote the numbers. We have had this debate 100 times already. The opposition wants to use the numbers from September 2014. We were not able to make one decision regarding government until October 7, so, of course, we use the 351 800 jobs. We now find ourselves at 353 800 jobs so, yes, there have been 2 000 jobs added since the start of the mandate.

What is important to note is that there are still challenges. We are not going to pretend that there are not. There are still economic challenges facing New Brunswick and the country, but we are working so hard with businesses and job creators across the province. They are doing a great job. We saw that in June, July, and August. In the past five months, we have created 5 400 more jobs in the province.

Mr. K. MacDonald: Perhaps a little less time in Davos and a little more time working for the people of New Brunswick would be in order.



In September 2014, Statistics Canada reported that there were 354 100 jobs in New Brunswick. On Friday, Statistics Canada reported, as I have said before, that there are 353 800 jobs in New Brunswick. There are now 300 fewer jobs than there were in September 2014. Put another way, our province has not gained a single job since September 22, 2014. Instead, our province has lost 300 jobs. The Premier promised to create 5 000 jobs—new jobs—in the first year of his government. He has not created a single new job. Instead, he has lost. He promised 10 000 jobs over the four years. How does the Premier explain the loss of jobs...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: In October 2014, there were 351 800 jobs in the province. In October 2016, there were 353 800 jobs in the province. That is 2 000 jobs that were created during our mandate.

Does that mean that we do not face economic challenges? No, not at all. We have challenges. We acknowledge that. We can feel it. We know that New Brunswick businesses are working hard to overcome these challenges and seize opportunities that are before us. The whole country is facing economic challenges.

However, I like to focus on the fact that, in the past five months, there have been 5 400 jobs added to the New Brunswick economy because of the hard work of New Brunswickers and because of the hard work of job creators. As their government, we will do whatever we can to support them in ensuring that we have a strong and vibrant economy right here in the province.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Steeves: Nova Scotia's Premier McNeil is on record as stating that Nova Scotia will not implement a carbon tax, as he stands up for Nova Scotians. Newfoundland and Labrador's Premier Ball backed up his Environment Minister for walking out on carbon tax talks, as they speak out in support of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall has used perhaps the strongest language, as he stands up for his people against the Trudeau ultimatum on carbon tax, and, just last week, he wrote a blistering letter to Saskatchewan's federal Minister Goodale. However, here in New Brunswick, the Premier, his caucus, and all 10 federal Liberal MPs have betrayed New Brunswickers. They are standing up for Trudeau and standing up for the carbon tax. Will the Premier explain why he is betraying and turning his back on New Brunswickers?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Our priority is to grow our economy, but this must be done in a sustainable way. Our economy must in fact be developed responsibly, which means that we must play our part to combat climate change.



[Original]

Climate change is by far this generation's most important and significant challenge. We all have to step up and do more. No decisions have been made yet. We had a great process with the steering committee, made up of all political parties represented in the Legislature, that went around, listening to New Brunswickers. New Brunswickers were clear. They want us to step up and do more to combat climate change, all the while growing the economy. New Brunswickers were also clear that they want us to look at a pricing mechanism on carbon.

We just cannot agree with the opposition's tactic or strategy of fighting the Trudeau government. We believe that the Trudeau government's focus on growth is right for New Brunswick. We want to work with it to grow the economy, combat climate change, and invest in our people.

Mr. Steeves: Our province depends on agriculture. Agriculture is going to be hit hard by a carbon tax. Our province depends on trucking, and trucking will be hit hard by a carbon tax. Our province depends on forestry. Forestry is going to be hit hard with a carbon tax. These industries and countless more are already taxed out. They have been hit with higher business property tax, income tax, fuel tax, corporate income tax, HST, a huge increase in workers' compensation, and the looming CPP hike. Jobs continue to be the number one concern for the people of New Brunswick. Does the Premier not agree that his carbon tax, on top of all these others, will have a negative impact on job creation?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, no decision has been made. We have greatly appreciated the work of all political parties represented on the committee. This committee was mandated to look at what more could be done to combat climate change. We received the recommendations, and we will soon have a plan, not only to do everything possible to grow the economy of our province, but also to combat climate change.

[Original]

It is very odd to have the member opposite—who, I think, is still the critic for social development, but maybe that has changed—speak to the carbon pricing mechanisms that we are looking at. Also, in the same breath, he criticized the fact that we have raised the taxes on the 1% richest in New Brunswick to pay to invest in education and health care.

It is odd that I remember him getting up and speaking against the minimum wage increases, which is just odd. You would think that he would understand the importance of that for those who are working and trying to make it happen in the province. It is odd for them to be against the free tuition that helps those who need it the most get the education...

Mr. Speaker: Time, Mr. Premier.



Mr. Steeves: Yes, and do you know what? As the critic for social development, I do understand that. Far too many New Brunswick families are getting by from one paycheque to the next—or, in a lot of cases, not getting by. These are not just lower-income New Brunswickers. These are all New Brunswickers, at many income levels. All of them are taxed to the max. A carbon tax will push these New Brunswick families over the financial brink. Does the Premier agree that a carbon tax will increase the cost of living for these families, be they low-income, medium-income, or high-income families? The low-income families are already suffering, and he wants to make them suffer even more. Does the Premier agree that food and heating and electricity will all rise because of a revenue-grabbing carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: If the member wants to get up and talk about those who are living paycheque to paycheque, where was he when we were introducing free tuition for struggling families to be able to go and pursue a university or college education? Where was he when the Leader of the Opposition was criticizing our taxing the 1% richest so we could invest more in education and health care? Where was he when members of his party were opposing the minimum wage increases? Where was he when we were working with the Trudeau government to enhance CPP for New Brunswickers? Where was he when we offered the most generous HST rebate to the low- and middle-class families in the province?

Where are the opposition members when we are working hard to help New Brunswickers who are struggling, to help New Brunswickers who are living paycheque to paycheque? I will tell you where they are. They are advocating for us to cut in education. They are advocating for us to cut in health care.

Government Spending

Mr. Fitch: We are now in the eighth day of November, and the Finance Department has still not issued the supplementary employee lists and the supplementary supplier lists. They are way, way overdue. For the benefit of the taxpayers who would like to know why these lists are so important, these lists reveal the hiring done by the government and the supplier list gives us a more accurate picture of how many tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent by this government on self-promotion, advertising consultants, and Liberal friends. Can the minister responsible for spending and finance tell us why these lists have not been produced?

Hon. Ms. Rogers: We do not have this list yet, but I will do my very best to provide it to the member opposite and make it available just as soon as possible. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

