

November 9, 2016

[Original]

## Education System

**Mr. Higgs:** Our opposition office reached out to the NBTA to ask what clause there might be that would prevent classroom teachers from speaking up about our broken education system. We were advised that it is a labour law, that you have a duty and a loyalty to your employer and you cannot speak out against it publicly, whether a teacher or anyone, as it would be considered insubordination and be grounds for dismissal from any job. I am sure that the Premier would agree that the teachers indeed have a duty and a loyalty to their employer, the same employer that we have. For all of us here on the floor of the Legislature, our employer is the people of this province, of New Brunswick. Does the Premier agree with that?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** As I said yesterday, we have made it very clear that how we developed our education plan was by listening to teachers. The minister and I met with over 100 teachers. We had great feedback, great suggestions, and many concerns raised. There was no sense in that room that the teachers could not say exactly what they wanted to say. The teachers had good feedback and constructive feedback. The teachers had great things to say about some of the things that are happening in the province, and, yes, they raised many of their concerns.

[Translation]

We very clearly indicated that we wanted to work with teachers, and we maintain an ongoing and very positive dialogue with them. Moreover, with the education plan we introduced, we are also giving them more flexibility than ever before. We are very much looking forward to working with teachers and, of course, to investing more in education.

[Original]

**Mr. Higgs:** I am sure that the Premier would value the knowledge that our teachers can share if they are allowed to speak freely, and I would be very interested in seeing the report that was developed from all those responses of, I think, 100 teachers yesterday and maybe 200 today. However many, I would like to see that report, so I would appreciate it if the Premier could table that.

The Premier must understand, as I do, that we cannot fix our education system without the teachers' involvement. The Premier must also understand that we must find a way for our teachers to feel free to share without worrying about their jobs. This does not seem like something that should be terribly difficult to figure out. I will gladly work with the Premier to make this happen sooner than later. Could we develop a clause that would say: Teachers, we need your help. We want all your input. Let's talk freely and openly!



Would the Premier agree to that? Can we work together on that strategy?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Once again, we are working very closely with teachers in the province. In fact, our education plan was developed in consultation with them. Furthermore, our plan will give them more flexibility than ever before in their classrooms so that the necessary steps can be taken to get results.

[*Original*]

What I find odd is to have the Leader of the Opposition get up today and talk about, again, the fact that he thinks that the education systems are broken. They are not. There are challenges, but there are so many opportunities. There are so many people working hard, working long hours, and doing everything they can to make sure that we have the best education system possible. Again, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to stop calling the system broken. It is demoralizing and, more importantly, it is inaccurate.

**Mr. Higgs:** Classroom teachers may not yet be able to share their wisdom publicly, but rest assured that there are many teachers sharing their priceless knowledge with me privately. Teachers tell me that our education system will not be fixed until parents as well as teachers get support and training. Out of the typical classroom, as many as half the parents are not able to support their children's learning at home. Remember, over half our population is functionally illiterate. So many children who enter our schools lack a stable home life, or their parents do not value the role of education for their own children. How can we help those parents? That, in turn, will help the teachers. Does the Premier agree that, in order to fix the system in education, we must also address the concerns of those parents at home who also need our help?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Once again, we maintain a very productive and even tight-knit dialogue with teachers. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that teachers come talk to him; of course they are talking.

As we know, the New Brunswick Teachers' Association President, in the Anglophone sector, said that the challenges our system is facing can be explained by the cuts that were made when the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance. He made cuts in education.

Furthermore, Annick Carter, a teacher from Moncton, said this, directing her comments to the Leader of the Opposition: The education system is not broken; it requires additional resources to meet the needs of all students.



Here is another remark directed to the Leader of the Opposition: The education system is not broken; the Grade 2 literacy rate for the Francophone sector has increased in the last 15 years. The Director of Pedagogical and Educational Affairs from the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick said this.

Teachers are talking and condemning the remarks from the Leader of the Opposition.

[Original]

### French Immersion

**Mr. Higgs:** In the matter of early immersion, our New Brunswick teachers are telling me that many of our children do poorly in both languages because so much of the fundamentals—language arts, math, science, and social studies curricula—gets muddled and misconstrued because the teaching of the second language can often be difficult in all subjects. They may feel that continuing their efforts in the current French program, rather than beginning a new program in Grade 1, makes the most sense. Children need to be fluent readers, writers, and thinkers in their own language before they enter into French immersion. This is what I am hearing from teachers.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** Children need to be writers and thinkers in their own language before they get into French immersion. I will reiterate. The program that a few of the parents can support with learning at home in any way... Can the Premier understand their concerns—their concerns that they want to be bilingual? Our system has shown us that they are not. Some 65% are not achieving that goal after 40 or 50 years. There is obviously a problem...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The Leader of the Opposition likes to talk about people coming up to him and talking about these issues. What about all the people who participated in an independent, nonpartisan report that was given to the previous government about French immersion? What about the hundreds and hundreds of parents, students, teachers, and educational leaders of the province who went up and spoke to that panel—a panel made up of co-chairs who were past Ministers of Education of a Conservative government and a Liberal government? Hundreds of people participated and told that panel what they would like to see happen with French immersion.

Why is it that the Leader of the Opposition gets to decide whom he listens to in the province? There were hundreds of people who talked about the benefits of early immersion, and, of course, there were people who talked about the challenges of the system as it was. As we have said many times, we are going to do everything we can to mitigate those challenges so that we can offer French immersion as early as possible to our youth here in the province.



**Mr. Higgs:** We can talk around and around, but the results speak for themselves. The teachers who are speaking up are speaking on results. As for the issue that we did not implement it and that we did not promise it in a platform promise, it was because we got a lot of letters from teachers saying: We do not have the results of the program until Grade 12. That is why it did not become a political commitment, as has been done with this Premier. As a result, they are in a box.

I am pleased to report that I met this morning with the Minister of Education and the deputy ministers in relation to fixing our education system. I am very encouraged by that meeting. The tone of our conversation and the exchange of ideas and positions have made me feel more than ever that we are finding a way to work together for the benefit of our children and our future. I must say that it was a different tone than what I have been receiving from the Premier. However, I hope that this morning's meeting is a good first step toward changing the Premier's tone as well in the days and in the weeks to come.

I believe that the next step is for the Premier and me to sit down together and follow up on this morning's meeting, because the elephant in the room...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I appreciate the fact that the Leader of the Opposition finally took the briefing about the education plans. I do not appreciate the condescending tone from the member opposite. He talked about changing the tone, and, in that very argument, he has been very condescending, which is unfortunate. What is even worse is that he has just admitted that he was very happy to come on the floor of the Legislature and criticize the education plan that we built with New Brunswickers, despite the fact that, when he was the Finance Minister, they had no plans for education except for cuts.

He came in here criticizing the system, calling it broken, and all of this was before he even took the time to get briefed on the education plans. It was offered to him before, and, instead of taking the briefing, he came on the floor of the Legislature to spit out rhetoric, to criticize the education plan when he knew nothing of it, and, of course, to keep telling people that they should be demoralized because, in his opinion, the system is broken. It is not, and we are going to make it happen.

**Mr. Higgs:** The Premier forgets that I was in there, in government, for four years. I know exactly what the system was, I know exactly how it is, and I know exactly what the results are. I speak from results, not rhetoric. The results are not reflecting what we need in our classrooms in this province. The teachers, with passion, have said to us: We need to look at this. We need to change it.

The elephant in the room, where I was a few minutes ago, is that you have a 10-year plan that nowhere reflected the need to move from Grade 3 to Grade 1 immersion and to do it before the results of the current program were in place. That is a purely political commitment that flies



in the face of a 10-year plan and the stability that you have proposed to be the best path forward.

I am excited about the people in the department. I am excited about the department's moves forward in areas where I have seen improvements in the past, and it is moving forward on that. However, Mr. Premier, you are throwing up a roadblock with this immersion decision that is based purely on politics. Will you change that?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We simply do not agree. We took a report that was commissioned by the previous government, of which the Leader of the Opposition was part, to look at French immersion, to talk to experts, teachers, students, and everybody who was concerned about the issue. They came out with a recommendation that Grade 1 was the right spot. We have also listened to people who had some concerns and who have some concerns with the way it was done before, and we will do everything we can to mitigate those concerns.

I want to assure the Leader of the Opposition that we know he was in government for four years. We know because a lot of the challenges in the education system are because of the cuts that he made to education. A lot of the problems that we face in our economic growth are because he thought he would be able to cut his way to prosperity. We know that he was in government because we saw the worst job creation record ever, for any government. They just do not get it. You cannot cut your way to prosperity. You have to invest in people.

**Mr. Crossman:** I have more questions regarding the government's platform promise to change early immersion back to Grade 1. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has frequently mentioned that many experts say that the earlier children start, the better. I do not think that anyone is arguing that point. Certainly, I am not, but I do not know what the experts would say about getting an earlier start in an education system that has room for improvement, especially in the areas of classroom composition and support for the classroom teachers.

I do not know what the experts would say about a government that brings forth a 10-year education plan with no mention of this big change and then announces the change just a few weeks later. This brings me to my first question. Why was the change not included in the 10-year education plan?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Well, we can agree with the opposition on this one. Earlier is better, and we are going to provide the best opportunity to New Brunswick youth to be able to learn a second language, based on the hundreds of people who commented on this important subject a few years ago to an independent panel that made a recommendation to put it back to Grade 1. We agree with the member opposite on that.

I know that many MLAs on the other side agree with this. Many of them campaigned on this issue in 2010. Many of them were very pleased to see their government commit to putting French immersion back to Grade 1, and I am sure that many of them were very disappointed



when the former Minister of Finance and his Cabinet decided to renege on that promise and not put it back to Grade 1—I know. Ask Craig Leonard, the past Minister of Energy. That guy ran around Fredericton going door to door, talking about how much of a shame it was that French immersion was changed and that it had to be in Grade 1. I know that many of his colleagues here today believe the same thing.

**Mr. Crossman:** It appears as though the government is putting a platform promise ahead of people, namely, our children, and that is a shame. The government members broke lots of platform promises, and it did not seem to bother them. Why did they choose to keep this one?

I would like to ask them a question about the 10-year education plan document. I would like to ask the minister whether the two authors of the 10-year education plan wanted to include a reference to the platform promise to change early immersion back to Grade 1. I will frame my question like this: Did the authors refer to the early immersion change, and, if so, why was it not included in the 10-year education document?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** It is interesting to see the opposition members squirm. They do not understand when somebody makes a promise in their platform and the person actually . . .

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Moncton Southwest will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** They do not understand how somebody could actually make a promise in their platform and fulfill that promise.

When we ran in 2014, we said that we would bring early immersion back to Grade 1. We made this decision and position because we saw the report that was commissioned by the previous government that made that recommendation. It is a report that, I want to add, was built by listening to New Brunswickers. That included teachers, students, parents, and those who were concerned about the issue. We are basing it on a very independent and thorough process. We are basing it on, as the member opposite said, the data that says that it is better to go early, and we are going to do it in such a way that we mitigate a lot of the challenges that were there before. We are happy to say that we are going to invest more in education to get this and more things like it done.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Crossman:** If I understand the situation correctly, the government is bound and determined to ram ahead with this change to early immersion despite pleas from teachers for stability. I hear from teachers and administrators every day. I pulled over last week and talked to one administrator in the province who spoke for half an hour, at length, about not being listened to. The administrator said that they went to the panels. He said that he had messages within their staff meetings to move on, and they were not included.



The government seems to be ignoring the NBTA as well. The government is going to ignore pleas from parents. The government is going to ignore the advice of the official opposition. The government is going to ignore the recent education assessments that tell us that the system needs work. Why, despite all these red flags, is the government going to shove this change through?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Once again, I repeat that we are in no way ignoring teachers.

We can recall what some of the teachers have been saying. One person said, directing comments to the Leader of the Opposition: The education system is not broken; it requires additional resources to meet the needs of all students. We agree with these comments, and this is exactly what we are going to do.

Someone else directed the following to the Leader of the Opposition: The education system is not broken; the Grade 2 literacy rate for the Francophone sector has increased in the last 15 years.

Once again, we agree that the system is not broken; there are challenges, but work must be done with teachers and financial support provided to them in order to get the results everyone wants.

[*Original*]

We are listening to teachers, and that includes the NBTA. We listened when they said that a lot of the challenges that we face in education right now are because of the former Finance Minister's cuts to education. Worry not. We are going to work with teachers and invest more in education than any government in the history of our province.

[*Translation*]

## **Nursing Homes**

**Ms. Dubé:** We all agree that seniors built this beautiful province that we enjoy today. Therefore, the least we can do is to ensure we are giving them the care they need to have good quality of life in their twilight years.

For some time—since the very moment the Domaine des Bâtisseurs home opened in Edmundston—the staff, the administration, and the community have very clearly been calling for more staff to care for seniors.

I am asking the minister then: Is she prepared to add more staff to this home in order to ensure that seniors there are well cared for?



[Original]

**Hon. Mrs. Harris:** I thank the member opposite for the question. What an opportune time for me to stand here as the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to New Brunswickers. We all have the same ultimate goal, which is to ensure that seniors are getting the care that they need and deserve.

As we know, the nursing home that we are talking about in Edmundston is not funded for employees on the basis of our regular standard. In fact, the nursing home receives funding for additional full-time employees above the standard for a home of this size. Keep in mind that the employees in nursing homes are not members of the public sector. They are employees of the board of directors. The boards need to be responsible and manage all the labour relations and employee performance, and that is what they are doing. Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Dubé:** The minister's response this morning is a bit sad to hear. The community is very clearly crying out and sounding the alarm. Mainly because of the infrastructure, staff members are also very clearly saying they may not have the ability or the means to provide the appropriate care that is requested and to which seniors have a right.

The minister even said on Radio-Canada: Listen, we have budgets and must live with them, investments are made everywhere, and these are decisions the government is making in all areas. Now is the time to make investments for seniors, since it is not normal for those experiencing incontinence to have to wait a long time before getting assistance. I am asking the minister another question: Can she hear the heartfelt cry from seniors, families, staff, the administration, the community, and me, as their representative? Can the minister. . .

[Original]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mrs. Harris:** We certainly are listening to every single issue that we hear about seniors in New Brunswick. I have been going around visiting nursing homes. In fact, I am up to 22. I have met with over 24 different stakeholders. I will continue to listen, and I will continue to act.

The Department of Social Development is not responsible for the day-to-day operations in the nursing home. It is the responsibility of the board of directors and the management of the nursing home. However, New Brunswickers need to know that we ensure that residents receive the best possible care and that Social Development does this by ensuring that nursing homes comply with the *Nursing Homes Act's* regulations, standards, and policies. We are listening, and we are making sure that our seniors are getting great care. We will continue to do that.





[Translation]

**Ms. Dubé:** If the minister says she is listening, that means it is time for her to act, because everybody agrees that seniors are not receiving the care they should.

Again, I am asking the minister to open her heart and to look at this situation, since there is a problem. She has to sit down, and she just has to find solutions. Yes, the board of directors manages daily operations, but it works with departmental regulations, standards, a budget, and so on.

I am asking the minister to use her authority and to look at what is going on to solve this problem in Edmundston, not in two weeks, not next month, and not three months from now, for there is a crisis right now. So, I am asking the minister to respond to the seniors' needs.

[Original]

**Hon. Mrs. Harris:** For the record, I do not need any member on the opposite side to tell me to open my heart to seniors in New Brunswick because it is wide open. What is happening with seniors in this province? There are some really good things happening, but, because of past mistakes and people ignoring things that have been going on, I am here, and I am doing my best to make sure that it gets fixed.

I will tell you one other thing. The department investigates every single complaint—no exceptions. We acted immediately, and departmental representatives visited the nursing home to discuss the concerns. We are acting. We are listening. We are getting things done on this side of the House. Seniors and how they are cared for are most important to me, and I am getting that job done.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

## Mental Health

**Mr. Coon:** The national average for spending on mental health care across Canada is 7% of provincial health budgets. The Canadian Mental Health Association is encouraging all provinces to increase their spending to 9%. In New Brunswick, we spend under 4%—less than 4%—of our health budget on mental health care. As a result, we have a crisis in access to mental health care services in our province.

Can the Minister of Health ensure that funding for mental health services is brought up to at least the national average in the next budget?



**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** I know that mental health is a topic near and dear to the member's heart. He has raised this issue many times during budgetary estimates and the like. I continue to assure the member opposite that we are making significant investments in mental health. We are going to continue to make more investments in mental health.

There is the Action Plan for Mental Health, which is an action plan for 2011 to 2018. In there, many initiatives have been undertaken under this government or are being continued from the previous government, whether it be the Integrated Service Delivery model, whether it be the FACT teams, whether it be our commitment to look at community treatment orders, whether it be our network of excellence, or whether it be the centre of excellence in Campbellton where we are going to be investing significant dollars. We do take mental health very seriously, and we are going to continue to invest significant amounts of money in that sector.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Coon:** The Action Plan for Mental Health in New Brunswick is not producing the intended results. Here, the number of calls to the police having to do with mental health crises has increased by 40% over the last five years. What is the Minister of Health doing to make sure that patients who have mental health problems do not end up in the justice system?

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** As I said, we are investing more in mental health since we see this as a very important issue. It is true that we still have things to do, but we keep working on it. We are very closely following the recommendations put forward in the Action Plan for Mental Health in New Brunswick, which covers the period between 2011 and 2018. We are making significant investments.

There is a particular model I want to mention, this being Integrated Service Delivery. We have seen that in places where we established this model, whether in Charlotte County or the Acadian Peninsula, waiting lists have virtually been eliminated. We are now going to implement this program across the province.

So, we are making very specific investments to make sure we provide services to New Brunswickers when they need them.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Coon:** The problem is that the problems are getting worse. It is getting tougher. This is a life-and-death issue for many New Brunswickers, particularly for youth. Just a few weeks ago, CTV reported the case of Amanda Browne, a young woman who had attempted suicide three times over the course of three months. In Amanda's experience, there is no professional therapy available to New Brunswickers like herself who are in crisis. Will the minister ensure that the kind of professional therapy needed in these cases is provided so that we do not let Amanda down?



**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** Again, I do not want to take away from the importance of the questions coming from the leader of the third party. Mental health is a very serious issue. However, it is an issue on which New Brunswick is making significant gains.

We are taking what were pilot projects that have proven to be successful, and we are rolling them out province-wide. Whether it be the ISD model or whether it be the FACT teams, these are initiatives that have been tried, tested, and proven to have concrete results for our children and for adults who need these services. We are now taking these programs and rolling them out across the province. We are going to see significant investments. We are going to see positive results.

I come from a Health Ministers' meeting just a few weeks ago where New Brunswick was being mentioned as one of the provinces to watch when it comes to mental health because of the innovative initiatives that we are undertaking here in New Brunswick.

### Protection of Personal Information

**Mr. Northrup:** Just moments after the Legislature closed for the summer, a story went up online about a massive privacy breach within the Department of Social Development. A briefcase filled with keys, names of people, and their phone numbers was stolen. These keys and personal information belonged to 600 seniors and low-income New Brunswickers. Through access to information, we have discovered that the focus of the government was to keep this from the public and out of the media until the Legislature rose for the summer, and it succeeded.

My question is for the Deputy Premier who is now the Minister of Families and was the Minister of Public Safety when the massive privacy breach occurred. Why was such an effort made to keep this a secret, out of the media, and was the Privacy Commissioner advised of this affair?

**Hon. Mr. Horsman:** I am very honoured to stand in the House today. I want to assure the member opposite that nothing was hidden. Immediately, action was taken once the crime happened. I want to thank the staff of Social Development at the time, who acted right away so that nobody was in danger. Everybody was safe at the time and continues to be safe. It is unfortunate that the member opposite would put this onto an employee who was trying to work hard and do what was best for the clients.

It was a crime. Unfortunately, crimes happen, and that is where the blame should be laid: on the person who committed the crime. We will continue to work hard. Nothing was hidden. We worked hard. People were safe. Doors and locks were changed immediately to make sure that people were safe. The mental anguish about whether they were safe... It was a crime, and, unfortunately, crimes happen in our province. People looked after it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The time for question period has expired.

