

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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EDUCATION

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education's response to the Child and Youth Advocate's report yesterday was really disappointing. The report called out a serious growing issue in the province in terms of partial days and the ballooning number of kids who are not getting access to education in schools. Instead of acknowledging, empathizing, and committing to work on the problem, what we got from the minister yesterday was justification.

What we see from the department is a legal challenge, which is not surprising from this government. It seems that its favourite thing is to take things to court and to pay the lawyers. I wonder whether the minister could explain why, instead of committing to act to reduce the number of kids on partial days, he is trying to use legalese to justify his actions.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As much as I'd like to, I'm going to refrain from asking for the names of the two schools, because I don't think they exist.

In terms of children on partial days, it is an extremely... I take the report from the Child and Youth Advocate very seriously. I'm not sure what legal action we've launched. I'll have to go back and check with the department on that.

This is what's most concerning to me. I can check on PowerSchool and find out all the children who are on partial-day plans and personalized learning plans (PLPs) in the province. It's not a problem to do that in our department. We need to be aware of the ones who aren't registered in PLPs. I have no way of knowing that. We are in the process of investigating to find out where that's actually happening and whether or not children at home are actually receiving the services that they require. Plus, the Francophone districts don't track that data, which is a problem.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate that response from the Minister of Education. I would love to see that we are doing that investigation to make sure that the kids on partial days are going home not only with a PLP but also to actual services and to learning. Better yet, maybe they are not going home but instead to real alternate education environments to get the variation that they need.

I wonder whether the minister could explain this. The Anglophone sector posted a reduction in serious misconduct just some time ago. I'm wondering whether you could let

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us know: How were children on partial days taken into account in that reduction of misconduct?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): I also appreciate that question from the Leader of the Opposition. I think it's an important question. Children on partial days were not taken into consideration when we looked at the success of the behaviour intervention mentors. We are increasing the number of them again next year because they are so successful in reducing the adverse behaviours that disrupt the learning environment in our classrooms.

Partial days are part of a variation to the common learning environment. You know, I have a very sage friend I consult with who wrote a report on inclusion. We have talked at length about variations on the common learning environment and what they require, and it's not simply a plan. There needs to be a plan, but the plan is no good if there is no follow-up and there are no services provided with that plan. In my experience, it's difficult to discuss this with non-educators. We always provide tutoring to go along—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the minister mentioned inclusion. Some time ago, reforms to inclusion were underway. In fact, we understood from this government that they were almost ready to go two years ago. We hear from teachers that they face challenges with the interpretation of the inclusion policy and the lack of resources to deliver the policy as originally intended. I wonder whether the minister could tell us why the reforms to inclusion were abandoned. Would he say that he's been distracted over the past two years?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Well, recently, Mr. Speaker, I have been distracted by the Leader of the Opposition's comments on that podcast in Ontario, comments about parental rights, as well as by the fact that she didn't stand up and defend teachers as not being homophobic. That has been a little bit of a distraction.

However, I believe strongly in inclusion. In looking at the inclusion policy, it isn't so much about the changes. There are some changes that we need to make because the French version and the English version have some language differences and they need to match. We're in the process of doing that. However, the policy isn't the issue. It's the application of the policy around the province. That is where we're focusing our efforts in order to make sure that the inclusion policy—and we're a global leader in inclusion—is applied in the same way in every district and in every school across the province.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

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Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think that's exactly it. The issue is the application of the policy and the ability to apply the policy with the resources required to deliver it. It sounds as though that was acknowledged and planned for. Something was ready to go two years ago, and yet, here we are with no additional resources to support the proper delivery of inclusion. Could the minister let us know why this has been stalled for the past two years? What is going to happen next to improve our ability to deliver on what inclusion was really supposed to be?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, again, it is very difficult to try to explain to non-educators how this works.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): No, I'm not retracting that.

The inclusion policy started in New Brunswick in 1985. It's grown since then, and we've grown along with it. There are growing pains that continue today, which is quite surprising. After 40 or 50 years, you'd think we'd get it right. But there are differences around the province. We are looking at those differences. If having more EAs was the solution, that would have solved all the problems a long time ago.

I value the work that EAs do in the schools. They're extremely important. However, just adding more resources does not solve the problem if you don't look to identify what the cause is.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the history lesson. I'm hoping that we can get to the present and then into the future. Improving our delivery of inclusion has been identified as a priority by this government and certainly by teachers and parents around the province. You can't go into a school without having teachers tell you examples of how they aren't able to deliver what they'd really like to and what kids deserve. So, I'm hoping that the minister can skip to today and tell us... He's just said that it's not EAs and it's not resources. What is the government going to do to strengthen our delivery of inclusion?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. The oversimplification of a problem always leads one to believe that there's a simple answer. When it comes to inclusion, there's no simple answer because, across the province, inclusion is applied on an individual basis to meet the needs of each individual student. We create personalized learning plans in conjunction with parents, our professionals, our methods and resource (M & R) teachers, and our teachers in order to meet the needs of these students. This is present-day. We're going to continue to do that, but there are some differences across the province. We're looking to see how we

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can have everyone in our small province doing the same thing. One of the challenges is that the districts have some latitude in how they apply the inclusion policy, which really shouldn't be the case. However, it is.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the teachers and the parents who are listening to this are getting extremely frustrated. While the government has stated that this is a priority and teachers have been stating that this is a priority for many, many years, we have a minister telling us: Well, we're looking to see how we might... There's clearly no plan going forward as to how the government is going to improve the outcomes for all students in this province so that every kid has access to equitable education. Can you tell me one new thing that you're going to do in the coming months that will make things better in the education system to include all learners?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): I appreciate that question. In the next few months and in the next mandate, we're going to start by looking at why the Francophone districts don't know how many students are on partial-day plans. I think that's an issue that needs to be addressed, and we're going to address it. We have people who are paid to do the job of looking after these plans and keeping track of the plans in the schools and the districts so that when the department asks, it can get the data. Unfortunately, the data doesn't exist, or they don't know what the data is. That's a major problem. That's one of the places where we're going to start.

What we're not going to do is another study because three studies have already been done on inclusion. With some of them, not all of the recommendations have been implemented. Some of the earlier studies were shelved by other governments. We will look at the Porter and AuCoin report—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, when we ask the minister what he's going to do to make a difference, he points his finger at the Francophone school districts and teachers and says: We're going to start looking at this. That's not an action that the Department of Education is going to take. That's blaming an organization. We shouldn't need to wait until the next mandate to get that data. That data should be coming in the next few weeks.

I want to hear about actions. What is this minister going to do? Don't blame folks. What responsibilities and actions are he and his team going to take on to ensure that we do not see an increase in partial days going forward and so that we have improved results from our inclusion program?

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I want to specify the Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) program. When ISD first came out, it was exciting. Everyone was on board. Now, we see that system is struggling. It's a critical set of wraparound services for students that need the help. What is the minister doing to strengthen and improve the ISD program?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't pointing the finger. I was stating a fact and looking at some of the things we need to do. You know, inclusion isn't just partial-day planning. It's about meeting students' needs in the common learning environment, with variations to the common learning environment in certain cases. Sometimes, the variations are not the same every single day. Every student isn't the same.

Now, when it comes to the Integrated Service Delivery model, it's very successful in some parts of the province. I was fortunate enough to house them in my school, Woodstock High School. We worked very closely together with all our partners. We exchanged information. We put the students first, and we worked hard to meet students' needs.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I'm going to keep trying, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate some of the things the minister said. It is not just the question of having PLPs for students on partial days. We have to figure out how we will meet students' needs in the common learning environment and in variations of that environment, ideally, still within the school grounds and system. Give me one step, just one thing, that you're going to do differently to ensure we can meet more students' needs in the common learning environment and in schools, rather than sending them home.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I have to say this: Inclusion is a wide range of actions. It's not just sending kids home. That's not really inclusion. When you send a child home on a partial-day learning plan and provide the appropriate support with it, the goal is to bring the child back. That is what the goal is, and that is what we are going to continue to work on. ISD plays an important role in working with our children who struggle in school and outside school. The common learning environment is just that. The variations to the common learning environment continue to be part of what we do.

Where we find that we need to provide more in-service and more professional learning to teachers, we will provide that professional learning so that teachers are able to meet the needs of the students.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After having asked I don't know how many questions, I'm happy to finally see a little bit of progress. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is talking about the training required for teachers. Can he give us a deadline for when this training will be provided? When will teachers be able to take this training that the minister just described?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Franky, Mr. Speaker, professional development is ongoing. There are professional development opportunities during the summer, so teachers can benefit from these opportunities. During the school year, there are professional development opportunities for resource teachers. We also take advantage of scheduled professional development days to provide our teachers with professional development opportunities on inclusive education. So, it's not that we believe improvements are not needed. We are well aware that we could do better on a number of things, but—

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, what the minister is saying is not at all clear. He said, in following up on the Child and Youth Advocate's report, that there will be training opportunities about the need to enable students to stay in school. There will be training on this for teachers. Later, he simply added that, no, it's typical to offer ongoing development opportunities and that this approach has been in place for a long time.

It's an approach that may have been in place for a long time, but what's being done today is not working. What's being done today means 500 students are at home when they should be in school. I want to know what will be changed to reduce that number. The school environment must make it possible to serve students inclusively. So, if the training doesn't change, since I thought the minister was actually going to propose a new initiative, what can he propose? What will change? What new action will be taken to reduce the number of students who are absent from school for part of the day?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, the questions coming from the opposition are all over the place; there's just one issue. According to the Child and Youth Advocate, an estimated 500 students are at home. He concluded that a certain number of students were at home either with a plan that was not being followed or without a plan. I'm working with the Child and Youth Advocate

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and his team to find out which schools were involved and to determine what should be done to help and support them.

There are many professionals in our system who work really hard each day—teachers, teaching assistants, and resource teachers.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, if my questions are all over the place, it is because I am trying to follow the answers the minister is giving. He is all over the place. As we try to get at what he is actually saying, he is spinning himself in a circle and getting lost.

Again, the fact he now says that he needs the Child and Youth Advocate to tell him where those schools are and what those cases are... The fact that he doesn't know is the fundamental root of the problem here. We have kids whom nobody is paying attention to. We have given up on them. We have forgotten about them. We think this: Well, they've been sent home with a PLP.

I wonder whether the minister can tell me how many... Let's take away the 500. Let's go with the 334 that you are aware of in the Anglophone system. How many of those kids are getting services and support outside of the learning environment, not a piece of paper or a PLP to take home but actual services and support delivered at home?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, that is really insulting to our teachers, to our M & R teachers, and to our educational assistants.

As I said before, students who are on a partial-day plan or on a full personalized learning plan are recorded in PowerSchool or monAPPUI. At the department, we have access to that data. If I understood the report from the Child and Youth Advocate correctly, these would be plans that are not being followed. They are either not being followed or not in PowerSchool. As much as the Leader of the Opposition might think that I know how many children in 297 schools might not be on a partial-day plan when it isn't recorded anywhere—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

WORKERS

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, this government often boasts about its efforts to reduce red tape. One way that it could reduce red tape, make things easier for

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workers, and reduce the strain on our health care system would be to end the requirement for sick notes. Requiring evidence from a physician to verify sick leave is ineffective and inappropriate. It results in sick employees attending emergency rooms, walk-in clinics, and their family practice clinics for no good reason.

Nova Scotia has introduced the *Medical Certificates for Employee Absence Act*, limiting the circumstances for which employers can require sick notes. It's expected to save over 200 000 doctor's office visits each year. Will the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour do the same in New Brunswick?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad you asked this question. The Minister of Health was just over across the street talking to the New Brunswick Medical Society to tell them about some serious red tape reduction that we're doing for physicians in New Brunswick. It's work that has been happening between Health and Social Development.

We are removing the need for physicians to be involved in forms in three different instances. We are expanding authorization for other medical professionals to fill out forms to save the physicians from having to spend their time doing the administrative work. We are streamlining the existing forms and processes in 15 different instances, and we are reducing and removing the renewal requirements in 13 instances. If I add that up in my head, Mr. Speaker, this is more than 40 different ways that we are reducing red tape for physicians. This is exciting. This is a big deal for physicians. Thank you.

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, this does not speak to the needs of patients and workers or to the need to get rid of the requirement for sick notes. That would absolutely help the health care system.

My second question today is to try to get to the bottom of when exactly we will see the government's report on paid sick leave. The minister was coy in the House, but in remarks to the media he said that he would not bring New Brunswick workers paid sick days until a majority of other provinces did the same. This is a bizarre way to make policy, Mr. Speaker.

Regardless, he said that the report by his department would be tabled in the House before the session ends next Friday. I know this is a low bar, but will he commit to tabling it before the last day so that he can't escape scrutiny in question period over why his government is not stepping up to require paid sick days for the workers of this province?

Hon. Mr. Turner (Moncton South, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and address the concerns of



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the member opposite on paid sick leave. Our department continues to work on this topic. We're moving forward with it. We've done the analysis. We've talked to the stakeholders, I guess, on this.

As I mentioned before, there are currently only three jurisdictions in Canada that have legislated sick leave, and none of that legislation is as broad as what has been proposed by the Green Party Leader here in this House. They also include financial assistance programs for employers as part of the sick leave program.

We're working on this, but it's a thing that affects not only workers but also employers. It's really important to have a balance between both of them, I guess, so that we see fairness for employers, to make sure they understand what the needs are, and employees, to make sure their rights are looked after. We continue to work on this topic. We're looking forward to it coming forward to the Legislature—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

HOUSING

Mr. Losier (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago, Motion 48 concerning the HST rebate program for new affordable rental builds was unfortunately amended to the following: “evaluate innovative incentive programs” for new affordable builds. Essentially, we presented a concrete, proven solution that our Maritime neighbours had successfully used to increase rental units in their provinces, only to see it transformed into an abstract, vague concept, no different from watching unicorns flying over rainbows. Given the significant shortage of affordable rentals, can the minister explain to New Brunswickers not what was done over the past year but what will be done now to help get more affordable rentals built today?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. As we build our Housing Corporation, the team is working and developing a pathway forward. We, of course, have... I've talked a lot about our *Housing for All* strategy, but that was just a start. It was released almost one year ago, on June 25 last year. There were 22 different measures in place to help address the housing crisis in New Brunswick, many of them aimed at encouraging new affordable rental builds. Most of those 22 items have been put in place, but there's much more work to do. I have said that many times. I'll tell you just one thing because I'm running out of time: We are changing the way we look at how we provide affordable units and the configuration of them to reduce cost.

Mr. Losier (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to that point, the one-year anniversary of the plan is coming around the corner. Not all plans, as we know, can hit all



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marks, but you still have to hit a few marks. It's adjustable, and we have to change and adapt. I don't feel that this has been done. I know we have talked about evaluating, assessing, but the crisis is now. It's like asking the firefighters to put out a fire, but they're standing around talking about evaluating what's causing the fire instead of putting out the fire. The fire needs to be put out now. We need affordable housing built today.

One of the marks that has not been hit is the average rent increase of 2.5%. It has gone up by 10.8%. Again, what will the minister do to address that? Why not bring back the rent cap?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were 22 items put in place in the *Housing for All* strategy, and I've acknowledged publicly that some of them haven't quite hit the mark as we expected they would. We need data to make sure the changes we made are having the impact we need. We have almost one year of data. We're evaluating those 22 items, and we will be presenting some changes to them and introducing new measures. But we can't do that in a data void, so we are taking our time.

And you are absolutely correct—2.5% is where we need to be. Mr. Speaker, we did not believe we would make that shift in 1 year. This strategy is a 10-year strategy with items in it that are immediate that we can put in place in the next 2 to 3 years. That is where we are working to. We will not get there in 1 year. We never expected to get there in 1 year. But we have made a huge impact already. Thank you.

EDUCATION

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of years ago, meaningful work was done to revise Policy 322. That work was based on the Korotkov report. A draft policy was ready to be put in place that was then derailed by the disastrous *Education Act* that this government brought to this House. Thankfully, it got pushed back and sent home, kind of like the 500 kids in this province who find themselves sent home from education.

I wonder whether the minister could tell us very specifically what the status is of those drafted changes to Policy 322. When can we expect them to be introduced?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like a few answers from the Leader of the Opposition as well, such as where the two schools are, what she meant by her reference to parental rights on the podcast in Ontario, and why she didn't defend teachers when they were referred to as homophobic in Woodstock two weeks ago. There are some things that I would like to know, too.



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(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Order, please. Go ahead, minister.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Apparently, she will still be there.

Inclusion is extremely important. We have a lot of hardworking professionals in our system who work hard every single day to meet the needs of our children—the diverse and ever-growing needs of our children. They are going to continue to do that. At the department level, we support districts, districts support schools, and the department—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): I am sorry. The chirping... Do you want to answer?

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Time, minister. Time, please.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Members, order. Order, please.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Minister, please. Thank you.