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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Manitoba | 40e | 1e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du Ministère de l’Éducation | 24 mai 2012 | Nancy Allan | Minister of Education | New Democratic Party of Manitoba |

   I'm pleased to be here today to talk about Manitoba's public education system, as it continues to be a cornerstone in improving the social and economic well-being of our citizens today and into the future.

      Our government demonstrates its commitment to education by helping to meet the needs of parents, students and taxpayers across the province. In 2012‑13 education continues to be a priority area as the Manitoba government is once again fulfilling its commitment to fund public education at or above the rate of economic growth with a 2.2 per cent increase to public school funding for 2012-13. This is consistent with funding increases to school divisions at the rate of economic growth since 2000-2001, including the year 2008-2009 when we made the largest funding increase in 25 years of $53.5 million.

      Mr. Chair–or, Madam Chair, 2012-13 is the 13 consecutive year the Province has met or exceeded its commitment to fund public schools at the rate of economic growth, and over the last 13 years funding has increased by $411.6 million or 53.4 per cent. Over those 13 years, funding to public 'schrools' has grown by over $1.1825 billion.

      This increase–excuse me–in funding to public schools is being made despite difficult economic times. It reflects the co-operative work with school divisions, encouraging restraint in order to ensure that the expenditures are managed carefully and property taxes in support of education remain affordable.

      The following are some examples: according to Stats Canada, average property taxes in Manitoba have increased by only 7.4 per cent since 2000, the smallest increase of all of the provinces and significantly lower than the national average increase of 37.9 per cent. Elimination of the education support levy on residential property is complete. The education property tax credit has increased by $350 to $750 since 1999.

      This year's budget sees every school division receiving at least the same level of funding as last year, which provides stability in the face of reassessment effects on funding and enrolment declines.

      Some of the highlights of this year's funding include: $1.2 million in new funding for English as an Additional Language, which includes an additional $100,000 for intensive newcomer support; $1.8 million in new funding for numeracy and early literacy intervention in order to build a strong foundation in math skills and improve reading and writing skills of students; $1.2 million for the new learning to age 18 co-ordinator grant to keep students in school or engaged in educational programming instead of attending school; $2.1 million in funding for the Community Schools Partnership Initiative to support schools in low socio-economic communities to enhance education through strong partnerships; $2.4 million for the Early Childhood Development Initiative to help school divisions provide services for preschool children that increase readiness to learn prior to entry to school; and $1.3 million in new funding for the Aboriginal Academic Achievement Grant to help school divisions deliver programs that target academic success for Aboriginal students.

      Following up on our commitment to provide parents with more accessible, understandable information on their child's academic process–progress, 'scuse' me–and achievement, templates for a new provincial report card have now been released and training is under way to support school divisions in their implementation.

      One of the most important benefits of the provincial report card is consistency, consistency in the language used to describe students' academic achievement no matter where they live or go to school in Manitoba. A provincial oversight committee representing our education partners from Manitoba Teachers' Society, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba School Boards Association, Manitoba Association of School Business Officials and the Manitoba Association of Parent Councilswas instrumental in guiding this initiative. Many thanks are owed to the members of the committee for their incredible participation and input. This government recognizes the importance of the connection between early years' learning and long-term school success.

      In September the Premier (Mr. Selinger) announced the kindergarten to grade 3 class size reduction initiative. Over the next five years, K to 3 classes will be limited to 20 students, and government will fund the corresponding increase in the number of early years' teachers as well as additional classroom spaces to accommodate lower enrolment classes.

      We see this as a very positive step to build a strong academic foundation for our youngest learners by enhancing the student-teacher connection, which we all know is so critical at that age.

      I'd like to again take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the members of the provincial oversight committee for their invaluable assistance in working with my department on the policy and implementation questions, which are part and parcel of such an important and exciting initiative.

      Madam Acting Chairperson, from my comment–from my comments it'll be obvious that our government strongly supports public education. We've invested more than $737 million in public school capital projects to date. We have built 18 new schools, 13 replacement schools and completed extensive renovations and additions to existing schools. This year's record investment of $94.2 million represents the third year of a record $366.2-million, four-year funding commitment to our public schools.

      This year, Manitoba Education will commit $41 million to support the ongoing infrastructure renewal of mechanical, roofing, structural and accessibility systems in public schools and facilities. As well, work and investment continues on construction of three middle schools in La Broquerie, Steinbach and Schanzenfeld and two new high schools in Steinbach and Winkler.

      As well, design and planning continue in preparation for the construction of the new replacement school in Woodlands and a new early learning to grade 8 elementary school in northwest Winnipeg.

      Of particular note, design and planning are under way for the first group of projects announced last year under the Active Schools Fund, a five-year, $50-million capital funding commitment to ensure quality gymnasium facilities are available for healthy living and high school graduation in our public schools. Projects under way include École Saint-Avila, Queenston School, George Fitton School, Fort Richmond Collegiate, Lord Nelson School and École Bonaventure, with others to follow later this year.

      The 44 projects announced under the science classroom renewal fund, a five-year, $25-million capital funding commitment to improve teaching and learning facilities in the sciences, are under way and scheduled for completion by September 2013.

      We are also taking important steps to link early learning and child-care facilities to our public school building facilities by making room for child-care spaces in both existing and new schools with the support and co-operation of school divisions and local communities.

      We continue to monitor the need for schools from both record levels of immigration across the province and from the robust residential development in Winnipeg and Brandon. We can see that stable, increased funding for education pays dividends over time.

      Steadily increasing rates of high school completion demonstrate the social and economic benefits that can result from consistent investment in education. Increased resources to support the hard work of teachers and administrators, trustees and parents, in partnership with the provincial government, have helped improve graduation rates and helped to evolve more 'aternative' approaches to increased student success.

      School and community partnerships provide a wide range of innovative programs to engage, encourage and mentor students, ensuring that schools are safe and accessible places to learn.

      Schools collaborate with many partners to support those who are up–underrepresented in our system, working closely with immigrant, war-affected and Aboriginal students at risk of dropping out of school. These combined efforts have seen Manitoba's graduation rate increase by 17 per cent in the last decade, from 71.1 per cent in 2002 to 83.5 per cent in June 2011.

      There is considerable research that tells us when that students are engaged with learning and their school, they are more likely to successfully complete high school. We know that reaching graduation and acquiring a high school diploma is absolutely critical to participating in our economy, and we are very excited that we have more young people graduating from high school.

      I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to answer questions in Estimates. I welcome my Education critic from–a new Education critic, and I'm very pleased that he is a teacher, a former teacher, I understand–music teacher, and it's a wonderful community that he lives in, and I've had a opportunity to be in the community many times, and I just want to tell him how proud I am of all of the staff, the superintendent, the trustees; they're all wonderful people in his community and I certainly look forward to an opportunity to answer any questions that he has about our departmental expenditures.