|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Manitoba | 40e | 3e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du Ministère de l’Éducation | 8 avril 2014 | James Allum | Minister of Education and Advanced Learning | New Democratic Party of Manitoba |

I'm honoured to be doing my very first Estimates process as the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, and I'm very proud to be doing it right here in the Chamber. It strikes as a moment of–to reflect on how great it is to work in this Legislature, how important it is to be part of a great democratic society and certainly, Mr. Chair, to be a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba. It's a great honour and a great privilege for me personally.

      And to be appointed the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning, as I say, an incredible privilege and incredible honour, and I look forward to a good dialogue with my friend across the floor. And I'm certainly proud of the work that the Department of Education and Advanced Learning has done over the years. I'm extraordinarily proud of the work that my predecessors have done, and I feel extremely honoured to be a part of this process.

      Mr. Chair, as you know, our government is committed to investing in Manitoba and ensuring that we grow our economy, invest in infrastructure and create good jobs for Manitobans. To fulfill this commitment, we have to ensure that Manitobans have the skills and training they need to get a good job. This means that Manitoba's education system has a key role to play in ensuring that our province is able to grow and to prosper.

      Our province, like other provinces across the country, has weathered some difficult economic times over the last number of years. Our government remains committed to serving all Manitobans, and we know that challenging times are not the time to make reckless cuts, as our critics would have us do. We also know that funding for education is an investment in our shared future, and this is why we are investing in education and training so our kids will have every opportunity to learn the skills they need to get good jobs and stay in Manitoba to raise their families.

      With Budget 2014, our government renewed its  commitment to public education funding. In January, we announced an additional $24.4-million investment, bringing our total funding for public education to $1.24 billion. This means that since we first formed government, overall funding has increased to four–by $470 million, or 61 per cent, a record that meets or exceeds economic growth every single year. Our funding to schools ensures that no school division receives less money than they did the previous year, even in the face of declining enrolment in some cases. Our education system is well funded, and school divisions have been given the tools they need to ensure that funding goes into the classrooms, not the boardrooms, and provide for the highest quality of education possible for our students.

      Budget 2014 also confirmed our commitment to  Manitoba's post-secondary sector. While other provinces are freezing and cutting funding to colleges and universities, we invested a further 2.5 per cent in universities and 2 per cent in colleges. Funding for universities and colleges has more than doubled since we've formed government. We are proud of our record of keeping university affordable and accessible for students. Our government has frozen university tuition fees to the rate of inflation, and this means our students enjoy the third lowest university and second lowest college tuition fees in the country. Our plan for post-secondary is working. Since we've formed government, enrolment at colleges and universities has increased by more than 44 per cent. We have made substantial investments in supports for students, including more than $240 million in grants, scholarships and bursaries for this year alone, providing over $90 million in tax rebates to students who stay and work in Manitoba and reducing interest rates on Manitoba student loans to prime. Our post-secondary system in Manitoba is strong, accessible and provides a quality, affordable education for Manitoba students.

      We are also making investments into our public schools infrastructure. We've invested over $1 billion since forming government in public school capital projects, including 21 new schools and 14  replacement schools. We have also completed extensive renovations and additions to dozens of existing schools and made significant investments in new gyms, science labs and shop classes. As I speak, we are building and expanding schools in Amber Trails, Thompson, St. Boniface, Waverley Heights, Brandon, Steinbach, Sage Creek and Waverley West, not to mention the new school we recently opened in Winkler.

      In 2011, our government announced that kindergarten to grade 3 classes throughout Manitoba will be limited to 20 students by September 2017. Parents know that the more one-on-one time their children have with their teacher in these crucial early years, the better equipped they will be to become lifelong learners. That is why this year we are invested–we invested a further $12.4 million to build or renovate 21 new classrooms in eight schools across the province. We also invested an additional $3 million to hire at least 50 new teachers for the upcoming school year. This brings our commitment for smaller class sizes to $39 million–$29 million for capital spending, $10 million for operating. To date, we have worked with our school division partners to hire 213 new teachers and have reduced the number of K-to-3 classes with more than 24 students by 41 per cent.

      Our government has worked to make our schools stronger, safer and more inclusive. After a long process, we were able to proclaim Bill 18, The Safe and Inclusive Schools Act, to give Manitoba more tools to fight bullying and cyber-bullying. We know that students can't learn when they don't feel safe, and this legislation will help ensure that schools have   appropriate policies and consequences in place  for bullying and other serious incidents. Schools will also have to accommodate school groups that seek to promote diversity and create human diversity policies that will help create safe and inclusive learning environments.

      Our government believes that all students, regardless of the background or their sexual orien­tation, deserve to be safe in Manitoba schools, and we will continue to work with our partners to make this the everyday reality in all our schools.

      We are also making it easier for parents to be informed about their children's progress in school. We have now rolled out a parent-friendly report card and are in the process of launching a parent-friendly curriculum website. Currently, parent-friendly kin­dergarten to grade 8 curriculum is online so that the parents have an easier time understanding what learning outcomes are expected for their child. By giving parents the tools they need to see their child's   progress and their expected learning out­comes, parents can become partners in their child's education.

      Our government also brought in The International Education Act to regulate the international education industry in Manitoba and protect international students. The first-of-its-kind legislation will promote Manitoba's reputation as a destination choice for study, by putting in safeguards to protect against unscrupulous recruiters and practices in international education. This builds on our pioneering work to establish an off-campus program for international students, introducing an international student's dream into the Provincial Nominee Program, extended health-care benefits to international students, and provide tuition tax rebates to help attract students to study, work and stay in Manitoba.

      Mr. Chair, our government's record is clear when it comes to ensuring our school system is well resourced, but we're also committed to ensuring our students are equipped to enter the 21st century workplace. At the heart of this are three important components: quality, skills training and career training. Parents expect that when their child is in school they are receiving the best education they can. The education system must ensure that it lives up to this trust by ensuring that we give our students every opportunity for good jobs and a bright future, based on a high-quality education. This is why we are ensuring that schools focus on the fundamentals to make sure the students have the foundational skills in math, reading, writing and science they need to take advantage of future opportunities.

      Our government knows that training options are only one of a part of ensuring our students have a bright and rewarding future. Students will 'leed' to know and understand that their–what their options are while they are still in high school. That is why our government announced a new $1-million fund for career development in schools to help students develop clear paths–career paths. This is in addition to the $1-million fund we announced on quality and the $1 million we announced for skills training related to equipment in schools.

      Our government is working to ensure that our education system at all levels is well resourced and provides a quality education for our students. We want to ensure that there are no wrong doors in the education system, and that as students transition from the K-to-12 system to higher learning or the workplace, they have the training and the knowledge they need to reach their full potential to stay here and live in Manitoba.

      Thank you, Mr. Chair.