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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Nouveau-Brunswick | 49e  | 2e  | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits | Le 16 juin 1980 | M. Charles Gallagher | Ministre de l’Éducation | PC |

Mr. Chairman, prior to discussing the estimates of the Department of Education, I would like to take a moment to make a few other comments.

I extend my congratulations to Lieutenant-Governor and Madame Robichaud for the manner in which they carry out their duties as representatives of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth in New Brunswick.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, I express again best wishes to Mr. Speaker as he continues to perform the duties of his office in such a capable manner.

The economy of the constituency which I represent, Carleton North, depends a great deal on the forestry and agriculture industries. During the last year, major changes Which have been contemplated and enacted by this government will have a direct effect on many of the citizens of Carleton North. Through the efforts of my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and the potato producers, a great many of whom live in Carleton County, efforts are being made to provide a marketing program which will help promote and protect this important part of the agriculture industry. Having been involved in agriculture for a number of years, I look with encouragement at the results which are being achieved through this cooperation, and which can continue to be achieved with participation by all those involved in the growing and marketing of potatoes.

Legislation which is before this House at present will have an effect on those who work at the harvesting and marketing of our forests, and this involves many residents of Carleton North. The philosophy behind what my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources is planning for this industry seems to have the support of those involved in it, and I believe their participation in much of the planning is another example of how programs work when everyone concerned cooperates. I trust that the two new programs will benefit these

industries in my constituency and in the entire province, because they represent a very large segment of the total provincial economy.

With a mixture of rural and small urban communities in Carleton North, the highway system is of great importance and over the last several years roads have been constructed and maintained as funds became available. My constituents have impressed upon me the urgency of funding reconstruction of the original main highway between Florenceville and Bath, especially the worst section between Bristol and Bath, and resurfacing of the road from Bristol to Juniper, a heavily traveled route which links several communities to the road network on the east side of the St. John River.

Mr. Chairman, before proceeding to a discussion of the plans of the department for the coming school year, I feel compelled to mention a few highlights of the year now ending. As I suggested to the annual meeting of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association on Friday, May 30, the year has undoubtedly been dominated by two events, the receipt of the Finn-Elliot report on the organization and boundaries of school districts and the strike by 3000 nonteaching school board employees which closed most of our schools in April.

The Finn-Elliot report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on March 26, and my department and the government have studied it with the utmost care since that time. I hope hon. members have read it and have developed a full understanding of its 37 recommendations and their implications.

To review the activity to date, the government has already acted upon two of the report's recommendations. The school board elections, which would have been held in May of this year, have been postponed until 1981 to allow time for indepth evaluation of the report. As recommended by the committee, we have also appointed a full-time coordinator to see the report through its study and implementaion stages. He is Mr. Azarias Doucet, the former coordinator of district services in my department, who has for the past two years been executive secretary to the FinnElliot committee and is well qualified for this complex task.

As I stated when I tabled the report, the government has al so accepted in principle the recommendations that schools and school districts should be reorganized on a homogeneous or first language basis. In fact, this policy had been placed in operation long before the committee made its recommendations. On July 1, 1978 the formerly bilingual District 4 at Bathurst was divided into two unilingual school districts, District 4-1 (French) and District 4-2 (English). A year later, on July 1, 1979, the formerly bilingual District 3 at Dalhousie was also divided on a language basis into Districts 35 and 36. I am pleased to say, Mr. Chairman, that in both cases the reorganization appears to have worked very well. The paired districts occupy the same boundaries but serve the two different population groups. Schools have been reorganized on a first language basis and are functioning well. There is reason to believe that a similar reorganization would be equally satisfactory in other bilingual school districts.

The Finn-Elliot committee has extended the unilingual principle to school districts which are not now considered to be bilingual but which have a small minority language population. Their recommendation is that a minority language school board may be established within the larger district upon request by parents of at least 30 pupils of elementary school age. I feel this is an innovative and very practical approach to the educational needs of our small minority language groups and I am recommending to the government that, the principle be adopted. The detaiIs, of course, could change as the overall structure of the system is studied during the next year.

In my final comments on the FinnElliot report, I want to calm many fears it has raised in various sections of the province. The report recommends the elimination of five of our present school districts and the amalgamation of their territory with adjacent and larger districts. Quite naturally, this proposal has met with strong opposition in the school districts concerned. Much of this opposition has been reported to me and in the press and I know that several hon. members present have also received objections from their constituents. I can reassure both the members and the residents of the districts that it is not the government's intention to eliminate any of our present school districts. There may be some minor changes in boundaries for increased efficiency, and some districts will undoubtedly be divided along language lines, but there will be no changes without the closest consultation with the districts involved.

Mr. Chairman, a few minutes ago I mentioned that the other major event which dominated the past year was the strike in April involving 3000 nonteaching employees of the school boards. Although the Finn-Elliot ,report probably has greater long-term implications for education in this province, the strike certainly had the more immediate impact. It lasted three weeks and, by stages, it succeeded in closing nearly all our schools. Efforts were made to keep the schools open and these efforts were largely successful during the first week of the strike. After that, it became progressively more difficult.

Mr. Chairman, I want to go on record as being deeply grateful to the many thousands of people who tried, with varying degrees of success, to keep the schools in operation. The teachers and school principals, the district office staff from superintendents to business officials, parents who organized transportation and, of course, the students themselves all played a part in the provincewide effort to keep the schools open.

Compromise on both sides brought the strike to an end after three weeks. It was the first time such a thing had ever happened in the public school system of New Brunswick. Granted, we have had localized walkouts and slowdowns and work-to-rule campaigns but never before a provincewide strike that shut down 96% of our schools. It was a serious situation; however, by making better use of the bargaining process in the future, similar situations may be avoided.

Mr. Chairman , the formula budget lies at the heart of our education financing system in New Brunswick. It was introduced at the start of the 1976 school year in an effort to make the financing of the school boards more reasonable and equitable. I am pleased to report that the aim of formula budgeting has been largely realized, with only a few districts still being funded at slightly above the provincial average, although they are gradually being brought to the average. All the districts which were very poorly funded before 1976 have now been brought up to the provincial average.

The formula requires constant monitoring and occasional changes to meet the needs of the system and the individual school districts. This year the basic weighting factors for elementary, junior and senior high school pupils are unchanged because they reflect the actual cost of the program at the three levels. The previous weightings for bilingual school districts and minority language students have been replaced by a single language factor of .10. This will provide additional funding for districts serving both language groups. The weight ing factor for immersion programs remains at .05.

The formula is being amended this year to recognize the extra costs involved in operating both small and rural school districts. In each case, a weighting factor of .03 will be applied. A small school district is defined as one having fewer than 2500 pupils; a rural district is one which has no municipality with a population

of over 3000. Fourteen school districts will benefit from the rural factor alone. Several districts, incidentally, will qualify as both small and rural and will benefit from both factors.

Mr. Chairman, declining enrolments are one of the most difficult problems faced by many of our school districts. Under the basic formula, grants to school districts decline in direct proportion to enrolment but, in actual fact, costs do not drop as rapidly as enrolment so the district which is losing students each year is placed in a difficult financial predicament. Last year we tried to alleviate the situation by partially funding up to 150 additional pupil units. This was a great help to a number of school districts but it didn't do much for those with greater enrolment declines. This year, we propose funding a declining district either on the basis of last year's actual enrolment or this year's projected enrolment, whichever is greater. I think this plan will take the financial sting out of declining enrolments, at least for the coming year.

Teacher certification levels have posed a problem for some school districts since the introduction of formula budgeting in 1976. A highly certified teacher is automatically a highly paid teacher, so when a large percentage of the teachers in a district have high certification, the cost of salaries becomes a burden to the district. Until now there has been no provision in the formula budget to cover this factor. To establish a fair means of assisting these districts, we have taken a provincial pupil-teacher ratio of 20-1, and we will use this to calculate a district's adjusted teaching force. Using the most recent payroll information, we will determine how much above the average those teachers are being paid. The district will then be paid the difference, after first deducting the amount the district is already receiving above the provincial average.

The changes I have outlined indicate a fine tuning of the formula to enable it to meet the needs of all school districts. Generally, the system is receiving wide acceptance and we think the factors being added this year will also find a ready reception in the school districts.

Mr. Chairman, one of the major features of my department's estimates is the large amount of additional funds which we have allocated to certain programs and projects. These additional funds are over and above the amounts which would normally be budgeted to cover increasing costs. They reflect the importance which is being attached to either rapid expansion or extensive updating in these areas and I would like to discuss each in turn.

The biggest package of additional funds has been placed in Vote 20-48, Major Repairs and Renovations. Money which we spend now to repair older school buildings will save many times the dollar value in the capital budgets in the not-too-distant future. Buildings which are' allowed to deteriorate completely have to be replaced eventually by totally new and very expensive structures. A proper repair and renovation program can often keep older buildings in satisfactory service for many years, with a saving of millions of dollars.

Normally, the major repairs budget increases by about 10% each year.This resulted in a figure of $3 841 200 for this year, and we then added a special allocation of $1 million to bring the budget to $4 841 200. The extra $1 million will be used for special repair projects on designated older schools that are of key importance in the school system. Some of those buildings are in need of extensive repairs, and it is our intention to carry out the work with these extra funds and keep those schools in dependable daily operation.

Another area which has not received enough attention over the last few years is school equipment. This is a broad category which includes microscopes and all the other essentials for science labs, power tools and hand tools for industrial arts, typewriters and adding machines for business education, sewing machines and stoves for home economics, to name only a few of the most obvious items. Our program to supply equipment to new schools has been functioning very well but there is a tendency to overlook the fact that even the best of equipment eventually wears out and must be replaced. For the last few years, some of our school boards have done an out standing job of keeping the old equipment functioning. We are going to do some catching ,tip this year and so we have added half a million dollars to the normal school equipment budget, and this will be specifically aimed at the replacement of existing equipment.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Education and the people involved with pupil transportation in the school districts are justifiably proud of the safety record set by our school bus system. Our record has been envied by many other jurisdictions of similar size in North America. The bus drivers, of course, deserve much of the credit but it must be shared with the mechanics in the district garages who maintain the buses, with the district transportation officers who schedule the routes efficiently and safely, and with the principals, teachers and parents who instruct the students in safe school bus procedures.

We are determined to do everything possible to maintain the safety record and to improve on it where possible. I am pleased to announce that we are working on a testing program that will evaluate all school bus drivers in New Brunswick. Extra funds have been included in this year's transportation budget to cover the evaluation program. A joint committee of union and management is presently evaluating the safety programs which are available for bus drivers.

Mr. Chairman, I am now going to, move into the area of Educational Services and I want to discuss for a few minutes those categories that have required extra funds to be added to the traditional budget. An extra $360 600 has been allocated for additional textbooks required by new programs in health, physical education, music and art. The largest single requirement for new textbooks is for the Healthful Living Program which will be implemented in the English schools over the two-year period starting this September. In my remarks to this committee last spring, I mentioned that a Health Curriculum Advisory Committee was working on this new program in health education at the elementary and junior high levels. The Healthful Living Program has come through its pilot stages very successfully and will be implemented in Grades 1 to 4 and in Grade 7 this fall; Grades 5, 6, 8 and 9 will follow next year. The program identifies five basic areas of health education and follows each through the various grade levels. The five categories are: mental and social health, growth and development, safety and first aid, nutrition and dependency causing substances. The textbooks are colorful and challenging, and in the pilot projects they were enthusiastically received by the students.

Last spring in introducing my department's estimates, I discussed two physical education programs which were being developed for use in the English schools. I am pleased to report, Mr. Chairman, that those programs are now ready for implementation. The elementary program will be offered in Grades I to 3 this September, and in Grades 4 to 6 the following year. Extensive in-service training has been conducted this year for teachers of Grades 1 to 3, and will start in the fall for teachers of Grades 4 to 6. The basic aims of the elementary program are to develop physical fitness in the younger students and to teach a wide variety of fundamental motor skills. At the secondary level, most high schools will begin offering the new Health and Physical Education course this September. This course will be compulsory but it can be taken in any three high school years.

In the Francophone sector, new physical education programs are scheduled for both the elementary and junior high levels. These projects, including in-service training for teachers, will begin in September. The Program Development Branch of the French Educational Services Division is also helping to support a special project at the University of Moncton. This program is conducting research on health and hygiene in the elementary school and the findings are expected to be useful in future program planning in this area.

The additional funds allocated for school books will also provide texts for a new junior high art education program. It was specifically designed for New Brunswick students and has been piloted in 26 of our junior high schools over the last two years. The program will be implemented in Grade 7 this fall and in Grades 8 and 9 over the next two years. This new curriculum is designed to bridge the gap that has existed for several years between the elementary school art program and the senior high school art course. It is a very flexible program containing a wide variety of learning experiences from which the classroom teacher can select those best suited to the individual class. It also contains helpful guidance for the teacher who does not have the services of an art coordinator or who has very limited access to reference material in art.

In the area of music education, several pilot projects are planned for the 1980-81 school year. New teaching strategies and materials wi II be evaluated at the elementary level. These projects will involve up to 60 classes in Grades 1 to 3. At the senior high level, a minimum of four high schools wi 11 conduct pi lot projects to evaluate a broader approach to music education.

Mr. Chairman, a major addition of funds for second language programs indicates the great importance which the government attaches to this area of the curriculum. The regular second language programs could be carried on with only a fractional increase in budget this year, but it was clear that new activities were also needed, and an additional $500 000 has been provided to put them in place. The largest portion of the extra budget will be used to hire additional staff for what is known as The Twelve Hundred Hour Program. Our objective is to encourage alI school districts to make available at least 1200 hours of second language instruction for each student. This is the amount of time required to help young people become proficient in a second language to the point of meeting basic social demands and satisfying simple needs related to school and work. Special assistance in terms of financial and human resources will be provided to nine districts to help them achieve this aim; they are Districts 10, 14, 16, 17, 26, 29, 30, 31 and 32.

For those parents who want a higher level of fluency in French for their children, immersion programs are well established in 11 school districts. There are over 4400 students from Grades 1 to 10 enrolled in these programs. Most districts have established early immersion programs where children are taught in French from Grade 1 but I am pleased to see that some interest is now being shown in the late immersion approach which is also a very effective way of achieving fluency in the second language. Curriculum development for the immersion classes will be a priority in the 1980-81 school year and part of the additional funds have been earmarked for this purpose. vIe are also making good progress in the development of curriculum in both French and English second language training.

The third area for extra funding is a summer immersion program for students in Grades 9,10 and 11. This program will be offered in French second language in Moncton and English second language in Fredericton. The cost is being shared with the Department of the Secretary of State in Ottawa.

Mr. Chairman, the teaching of the second language is an ongoing priority of my department. Our aims are realistic and attainable, and we will continue to seek further financial support from the federal government in an effort to improve the already substantial level of second language instruction in New Brunswick.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to mention one more item before leaving the overall subject of language, and that is the Langue Maternelle, or French as the mother tongue. There is a very real concern among the

French-speaking population that the French language is slowly being eroded. If that concern is well-founded, and I believe it is, then the most logical place to begin fighting the erosion is in the classroom. Accordingly, we are now placing new emphasis on the quality of the language in the French schools. In cooperation with the University of Moncton, we are continuing a program of inservice training for teachers of French as the first language. These courses are offered at the school district level and they include speaking, listening to, reading and writing the French language. Another element of Langue Maternelle is aimed at the senior high school level. It is a project which will produce locally six brochures of exercises for the study of French grammar.

New Brunswick is officially a bilingual province and more than onethird of its citizens are French. The French culture and language must be protected, and the French public schools have a vital role to play in that effort.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to bring to the attention of the members some of the new and expanded programs which my department will be providing for handicapped children during the next year. Special education services have been developed as a priority program for the past decade. The program had a budget of just over $1 million at the beginning of the seventies; as we begin this decade, the estimate is just under $8 million.

Mr. Chairman, we are proud of our special education programs. This year over 2500 pupils with learning disabilities were served by specialists. With an increase of over $300 000 in this program, more children will be served during the coming school year and services, such as speech therapy and audiology, will be expanded. Under the Comprehensive Plan for Children with Learning Disabilities, School Districts 4-1, 4-2, 5, 6, 7, 15, 24, 25 and 27 wi 11 move into the implementation phase, while School Districts 1, 2, 9, 19, 32, 33, 35 and 36 will expand their service system in order to serve more pupils. Funds have also been provided to assist Francophone districts to develop pupil instructional materials in collaboration with the University of Moncton.

The program for learning disabled pupils. has been developed by each school district to meet the district's particular needs. Those needs were identified by citizens who have become ac t ive on planning and advisory committees. These people, who number over 200, continue to work with the school district's professional staff to ensure that learning disabled pupils will be identified as early as possible and will be remediated by a competent staff.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to pay special tribute to this group of dedicated men and women. I also wish to announce that the department is organizing a conference on June 20 and 21 of this year in order to provide an opportunity for the members of planning and advisory commit tees to exchange information on their services for learning disabled children, to suggest future directions, and also to receive up-to-date information on the topic of learning disabilities from practicing specialists.

Learning disabilities are complex and some children are not fully helped by the most intensive remedial program a school can offer. Fortunately, the number of these severe learning disabilities is small, but there are those very few children who require programming which can best be carried out in a special residential setting. To serve these pupils, we have asked the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority to consider such a program for all the Atlantic Provinces.

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority continues to provide educational services for hearing handicapped and visually handicapped pupils. Every effort is made to provide these specialist services as close as possible to a child's home. To meet this objective, we have increased services at the local level. Last year the province employed two consultant teachers and two itinerant teachers to serve visually impaired children in Anglophone and Francophone school districts. This year we have budgeted for two additional itinerant teachers to serve Districts 20, 21, 22 and 23 and Districts 8, 9, 10 and 4-2, together with additional tutoring time for Francophone visually handicapped children of preschool ages as well as those in the school population. With this additional staff, all areas of the province will have access to these specialist services.

In addition to the expanded services for the visually handicapped, there will be an increase in services to the hearing handicapped. A new class will be opened at Petit Rocher for pupils who require intensive programming and who were unable to be placed in the existing classes for hearing handicapped pupils in the northeast. These additional services will have a direct effect on our transportation system. Getting handicapped children to and from school is often a complicated and expensive service. At the present time our transportation policy provides for door-to-door transportation for any handicapped child who cannot be transported on a regular school bus. Specially equipped vehicles which can accommodate wheelchairs will continue to be purchased as we gradually improve our transportation capability. In addition, contracted vehicles will continue to be an important part of our transportation system for handicapped pupils.

Mr. Chairman, last year in my remarks concerning special education, I mentioned that school boards and voluntary groups which sponsor classes for mentally handicapped children under the Auxiliary Classes Act were working closer together. This year I am happy to report that School District 27 has become a sponsoring society under the Act and that School Districts 2 and 26 have agreed to work with the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded in order to bring the auxiliary classes into the public school system. This kind of cooperation together with new instructional programs for mentally handicapped pupils, such as the physical education program which will be introduced in Francophone auxiliary classes next year, will strengthen the auxiliary class program and will encourage integration.

Mr. Chairman, there are two pilot projects in the area of industrial education that should be of interest to hon. members. The first is related to forestry education, a topic which was discussed in the Legislative Assembly just a few days ago. The project is a wood harvesting component and it was introduced last fall in District 27. It will continue in that district in the 1980-81 school year and will also be expanded to Districts 9 and 24. The Department of Labour, Forestry Training Unit, and local industry are cooperating in this pilot project. The new component stresses knowledge and skills related to wood harvesting and an awareness of forest management principles.

The other program is in the field of agriculture education, and will be introduced this September at Carleton North High School in District 30, Sussex High in District 18, and Petitcodiac and Salisbury High Schools in District 16. The curriculum has been designed in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture and is intended for students in either Grade 11 or 12. The program will try to create in the student an appreciation and understanding of the scientific, economic and occupational aspects of the agriculture industry.

Food services in the pub lic schools has been the subject of increasing attention lately at both the departmental and district levels. A part-time consultant is now on staff to help in the development of district plans for school food programs. She is also encouraging the provision of some form of food supplement in places where a number of students must remain at school over the lunch period. The food service consultant is working closely with the Program and Planning Branches of the department in the initial planning of food facilities for new schools and as well, she is helping to review existing programs in individual schools and in updating them where necessary. She is also providing valuable assistance in other areas, such as monitoring services provided by contracted caterers. We expect that her work wi II result in long-term benefits for the provision of food services in our schools.

Mr. Chairman, I have discussed some of the programs that we are planning for next year and our intentions for the school system in New Brunswick. We are still operating under many difficulties, most of which are centered around restricted funding and declining enrolments, but I also see progress being made in curriculum development, special education, second language training, school buildings and in other areas.

The difficulties we face in New Brunswick are not unique. In the last three years I have traveled to many other jurisdictions in Canada and have found that nearly all of them are confronted with the same problems. I am also encouraged to find that people in other places have a lot of respect for Maritimers in general and for our education system in particular.

Testing programs are administered at three grade levels in our schools each fall, and some of the results have been compared with similar tests used elsewhere. It has been found that in general the scores of New Brunswick students are equal to or better than those of their peers in other provinces and states. This tells me that we are keeping pace, that education in New Brunswick is not falling behind the rest of the country. And we seem to be turning out a well balanced individual, a young adult with his feet on the ground, common sense in his head, and a wi 11 to succeed in his heart. I have been told by other ministers that Maritimers are welcome in their provinces because of their dependability, their willingness to work and their desire to learn. Education can't take all the credit for this, of course, it must be shared with the home, the church and our life style, but education has its part to play and is playing it well.

Mr. Chairman, I have indicated in my remarks that this is a time of change and opportunity for education in New Brunswick. I am absolutely certain that we have both the people and the system to meet the challenge.

Thank you.