

December 6, 2016

[Original]

French Immersion

Mr. Higgs: We all have had a couple of weeks for reflection on the political change to the entry point for early immersion. I anticipate that the Premier, not unlike myself, has been getting calls, letters, and e-mails, most recently from the retired teachers association, all expressing concern that this change is being made at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons. All available data would direct us to conclude that making this change is simply a bad idea.

At this time, it needs to be done differently. We need to understand the results of the current program before moving forward. The most recent results of the Grade 1 entry point indicate a success rate of only 10%. Does the Premier agree that the data of the past Grade 1 entry would certainly indicate that it is not the solution for the future? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am certainly disappointed to hear what I am hearing from the opposition today. We have debated this—I think that this is probably the 10th day in the Legislature—pretty extensively. We have made it very clear that we have been talking about restoring French immersion to Grade 1 in this province for years.

In 2012, when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Finance, his government asked a bipartisan, independent group of individuals to look at French immersion and it came out with the recommendation of restoring it to Grade 1. I am very surprised and disappointed to hear the opposition continuously try to give the impression to New Brunswickers and to the people in this Legislature that the decision was made for any other reason than the fact that this nonpartisan, independent commission came out and said that French immersion should be restored to Grade 1. We promised during the campaign of 2014 to do that, and we are doing it here in this province now.

Mr. Higgs: Evidence-based decision-making was a commitment by the Premier. The evidence tells us that, in 2002, 1 783 students started Grade 1 immersion and, by 2013, in their Grade 12 year, 823 presented for the proficiency test. The evidence tells us that over half either dropped out or did not care to take the test. Of those who took the test, only 30%, or 231 students, met the expected standards. In summary, 1 783 started the program, and 251 finished the program and met the acceptable standard.

Based on these numbers—1 783 started and only 251 finished—would the Premier describe the Grade 1 entry point for early French immersion as a success for this group of New Brunswickers? We can do so much better. All our children should be coming out fully bilingual. We just cannot keep repeating the past. Let's change the dial. Thank you.



Hon. Mr. Gallant: I do not understand why the Leader of the Opposition continuously pretends that no report exists, a report that was done by two former Education Ministers, one from a Liberal government and one from a Conservative government, a report that was done by meeting New Brunswickers—teachers, students, teacher assistants and other educators, and, of course, experts. I do not understand why the Leader of the Opposition glosses over the past and pretends that this report does not exist. It was commissioned by his government.

This independent, nonpartisan process that was very stakeholder-engaged, came out and said that restoring French immersion to Grade 1 was the right thing to do. There were challenges with the way that it was done in the province before. We know that, we recognize that, and the report recognized that. That is why we will do everything that we can to mitigate those challenges, overcome those challenges, and make sure that we have the best possible education system for our children.

Mr. Higgs: The Premier's very own cochair of the 10-year education plan, Karen Power, said that she was against changes and implementing more confusion in the classrooms of our province.

Let's take this examination step a little further. In 2013, the year that we are considering, there were 6 449 students in the Grade 12 class. Some 4 666 of them did not start Grade 1 immersion. Another 382 started Grade 1 immersion but dropped out by Grade 5. A further 960 dropped out by Grade 12, and another 572 did not meet the standard. Out of 6 449 graduates, we produced 251 bilingual graduates. That is 3.9%.

The Premier and his government have not chosen to provide any proof that this politically motivated return to Grade 1 immersion will give us any better results than what we have witnessed in the past. Perhaps the Premier has been waiting for just the right moment to explain why this change to Grade 1 will give us better results. Can the Premier offer any proof that this will be the case?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The report—the report that was commissioned by the leader's government when he was Minister of Finance, that was done in an independent fashion, that was done in a nonpartisan way, that listened to New Brunswickers, teachers, educators, and experts—recommended that French immersion be restored to Grade 1. That was in 2012. When we went into a campaign in 2014, we made a promise that we would follow the recommendation of the nonpartisan, independent commission and that we would do so in a way that would mitigate and overcome challenges that the system was facing before.

Of course, we are going to do everything we can to make sure that this new iteration of French immersion in Grade 1 will work for the people of New Brunswick. We are going to do that by investing more and investing strategically in our education system.

Mr. Higgs: Today, the Programme for International Student Assessment has released its triennial report. Early reports show that Canada ranks within the top 10 in all three of the



subjects covered, namely, reading, math, and science. When the results are later broken down provincially, we will learn how New Brunswick students are faring compared to the rest of Canada and the world.

The most recent assessment results from our own provincial Education Department do not give us much cause for optimism. Four out of five Grade 6 students are not getting their math and science, and almost half are struggling with reading. Again today, I will extend a hand of cooperation and ask the Premier that we work together and focus on the 10-year plan that his team is developing - a 10-year plan built by the teachers. Bring stability to our system, and let this stability last beyond an election cycle. Premier, let's make it happen.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The 10-year plans for our education systems have already been developed. It is unfortunate that when the Leader of the Opposition was part of the Conservative government caucus, he was not invited—or he did not raise his hand—to be part of the group that advised us on the 10-year education plans. However, these plans have in fact already been developed.

We worked with teachers, experts, and New Brunswickers to develop two education plans for our two systems, and these plans will help us get the results we need and want. The ship has already sailed; the plans have been developed.

I have probably repeated this five or six times for the Leader of the Opposition; I hope he understands now. What we have to do now is to invest more in education and not to follow the policy of the Leader of the Opposition who, when he was Minister of Finance, made cuts in this sector.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: The problem is that this change that is being proposed for the early entry point at Grade 1 is not part of the Premier's own 10-year plan. It is not condoned by one of the co-chairs of that plan. That is the issue. We have two plans that are very much conflicting.

In the public interest, as a result of the dismal assessment results, the Premier has a unique opportunity to engage New Brunswickers and start on a path to fixing our education system once and for all by doing things differently. The assessments, even if we cannot be certain what they will mean, certainly support the idea that something is not working. I think we can agree on that point.

I hope we can also agree that the experts with the knowledge and experience to put us on the right path are the classroom teachers. I am certain that we can also agree that teachers are reluctant to speak openly and frankly for fear of harming their careers. It is a sensitive issue, but



it is our children's future. Can we agree that we need to hear from the teachers, with no conditions or restraints attached?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Maybe we have to go back in history a little bit to find out why we are where we are right now, with the challenges and opportunities that we as a province face. When the Leader of the Opposition was Minister of Finance, his government had no plan for education, so we made a commitment that we would develop 10-year education plans with teachers and educators, listening to experts. That was exactly what we did. The plan is developed. It is strong, and it is going to give us the pathway that we need to have the best education system possible here in New Brunswick.

I think we also have to point out another interesting fact of our history here in the province. We have teachers speaking out. We have the President of the NBTA saying that a lot of the challenges that we face in the system now are because of the cuts that the then Minister of Finance, who is now Leader of the Opposition, made to education. He said in this Legislature that the education systems do not need more money. Well, we do not agree. We are going to invest more. In fact, we are going to be the government that invests the most in education in the history of our province.

Mr. Higgs: The President of the NBTA says that the challenges in the classroom are far greater than they ever were and that the last thing that teachers have a real opportunity to do is teach. That is what the President of the NBTA said. He said that we need to stop meddling in the classroom, as the Premier is proposing to do with this change in the entry point, without having the results to do it. He said that they need to have a chance for stability in the system, and that is what we are proposing.

The Premier is proposing a 10-year plan—a 10-year plan that can build stability, a 10-year plan that does not include this political change that is being proposed. Let's get on your 10-year plan. Let's get on a cycle of improvement and stability, and let's work together to do that. I will sign off on it. You get the classroom teachers involved in the solution for the 10 years, and I will sign off on it in the next year, in the next six months, so that we do not meddle with it. We will fix it once and for all. Let's take this opportunity to make a real difference and a real political change, and let's build a future for our kids.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition was perhaps too busy campaigning during the leadership race for his party, because, frankly, he does not understand the process that took place.

We added some of his team members to a steering committee so that they could give us their advice and suggestions for improving our education systems.



[Original]

In this nonpartisan approach, we listened to experts, teachers, stakeholders, educators, and New Brunswickers, and we developed our 10-year education plans. They are developed. They are done, and they were done in exactly the way that the Leader of the Opposition says that they should have been done. This should be a positive thing.

Now, we find ourselves with the Leader of the Opposition drawing a line in the sand. He thinks that the system does not need more money. We want to invest more in education. In fact, we want to be the government that invests the most in education in the history of New Brunswick.

Mr. Higgs: Unlike never before, we are taxing the working class of this province. We are asking them to pay more and more and more for less. I am asking for strategic investment in areas that work.

We have teachers saying no to this instability in the classroom by having a sudden curriculum change. We see the DEC chairs saying: No, we do not want this to move forward at this time. We see the retired teachers' association saying: No, we do not want this. The school districts are saying no. How many more people do we need to say no? We need to listen and to say: You know, maybe they have a point. Maybe just throwing money at it is not the solution after all. Maybe, if we listened to the classroom teachers, they will actually find a way to fix this, because we have not been successful.

History will show... Ninth place is not our target. Number one is our target, and we should be working to get there. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not sure that there was a question, but I can tell you one thing. There is a clear, stark difference between our government and the one that the Leader of the Opposition would like to lead. He would like us to cut in education. He would like us to cut in health care. He would like us to cut our investments in infrastructure. We want to invest more in those things. He is again saying today, as he did just a few weeks ago, that the education system does not need more money. He is saying today that, when we invest in education, it is throwing money around.

We beg to differ. Investing in education is the best investment that we can possibly make for our economy. It is the best social equalizer and the best way to ensure that we have a strong social fabric. We on this side of the Legislature are going to continue to invest more in education. We are going to invest strategically in education, and I can guarantee you that we will be the government that invests the most in the education system in the history of our province.

Mr. Crossman: I have been contacted by many parents who are unable to get answers to their questions about the political change to the early French immersion entry point. I will be trying to get answers on their behalf over the next few days. One question that comes up time and



time again is this. How many students are actually participating in the French immersion program? I am sure that the minister has basic figures on enrollment and participation at his fingertips, so I will ask him to share these figures with us. Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development inform the House of the percentage of Grade 3 students who opted to take early French immersion in Grade 3 in September 2016?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is disappointing. I thought that the member opposite, the Education Critic, would have a much more conciliatory tone. When he got elected, I thought he would be somebody who would really try to have a good discussion with the opposition and with the other parties.

For the opposition members to continuously call this a political decision is unfortunate and disappointing. Not one of them has yet acknowledged that there was a nonpartisan, independent report that was sanctioned by the previous government, when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Finance, asking what should be done about French immersion. This nonpartisan, independent, and stakeholder-engaged process came out with the recommendation of Grade 1.

Will the opposition Education Critic at least acknowledge that there was a report in 2012 that was nonpartisan and independent and that recommended that we restore French immersion to Grade 1, or is he going to continue to use the tagline that everybody in this Legislature and everybody watching knows they are trying to use for political purposes?

Mr. Crossman: Once again, no answers for us. The parents of kindergarten-aged children are very concerned about hearing about the district education councils, retired teachers, and the NBTA agreeing that it is a bad move. I myself attended meetings last week, and there were no answers for the parents regarding the entry point of Grade 1. We are trying to find measurements for the Grade 3 entry point as well, and we cannot seem to find any.

Can the minister advise the House as to what percentage of Grade 3 students opted to take French immersion in September 2016 and also the number of students who elected to go into Grade 1 early French immersion in September 2007?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, the opposition does not want to recognize that an independent and nonpartisan report was prepared. A committee did a comprehensive study, after listening to New Brunswickers, experts, students, and teachers. This committee then recommended that we restore the early French immersion entry point to Grade 1.

[Original]

I can see why the member opposite does not want to mention the report. It is because he agrees with it. He said in this Legislature that earlier is better when it comes to French



immersion. He said it himself. He agrees with the report. Will he at least get up today and—not do what the Leader of the Opposition is doing—admit that this report exists, that this report was independent, that this report was nonpartisan, and that this report recommended restoring Grade 1 French immersion? They made this recommendation four years ago.

Mr. Crossman: We do have the numbers. Let's consider the evidence. In September 2015, 42% of students opted to take early French immersion. In September 2007, the last year that the entry point of Grade 1 was offered, 31% of the students opted to take early French immersion. It seems to me that 30% more opted to take the early immersion program at the Grade 3 entry point as opposed to Grade 1. Will the minister commit to this House today that those gains in participation will remain after the change in September 2017?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to get up and point out that they are still not acknowledging that this report exists.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: This report was commissioned in 2012 by their government, by a Conservative government, in which the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Finance. He knows that it exists. He was there when it was commissioned. That they will not mention word of this report now is very frustrating, disappointing, and surprising.

The member opposite himself said that earlier is better when it comes to French immersion. There is one thing that we can agree on: We have to improve the way that it was done before. We agree with that. We are going to restore it to Grade 1, as the report recommended that we do in 2012 and as we promised that we would do during the campaign and in our platform in 2014. We are going to do so in a way that will mitigate the challenges that the system faced before. How are we going to do that? Unlike what the Leader of the Opposition would do, we are not going to cut in education. We are going to invest more in education.

Enbridge Gas New Brunswick

Mr. Stewart: The 50-year monopoly that this government is attempting to give to Enbridge is clearly not in the best interest of our province. We will continue to ask meaningful questions about the Enbridge deal, and I am hopeful that the minister will be willing to provide factual, meaningful answers. Can the minister advise this House as to what happens in 2018 and 2019 if the price of gas increases? This deal is fixing distribution rates at a 3% increase. Under market-based rates, if the price of gas increased, distribution rates would fall. Does this bill mean that users of natural gas are open to large bill increases if gas prices increase?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Thank you very much for the question. Something that I find rather ironic and interesting is that the member opposite mentioned whether the minister would answer some



questions about this. I would be very happy to. As a matter of fact, the committee's last day was on November 25, which was 21 days after the bill was announced, after the deal was announced. Not one substantive question came from the opposition. We spent four days in committee. I had staff on hand for all four days. We were up for about three and a half hours in total during the four days. All it was, was a rant and a rave about this poor deal and everything else. There was not one substantive question brought forward by the opposition.

However, I can tell you something right now. Some \$820 million is going to be off the backs of every man, woman, and child in this province. That is what is really important as we go forward on this deal.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Stewart: All New Brunswick knows that not only can we not get questions answered in question period but we cannot get them answered in committee either. I am asking the minister questions on behalf of 12 000 or so Enbridge customers who face an uncertain future in relation to their future gas costs. A lot of New Brunswickers operate on a household budget. A lot of New Brunswickers plan for the future based on the best financial information available. This deal brings a lot of uncertainty for these gas customers.

As we are aware, Enbridge is currently seeking a 30% increase for 2017. This fact seems to get shrouded by all the other harmful aspects of this deal. Can the minister get on his feet and advise this House whether there will be any adjustments in 2018 and 2019 if the current 30% increase for 2017 that Enbridge Gas applied for is accepted by the EUB?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: It was under the opposition's model for 2017-18. It was under the opposition's legislation. The fact of the matter is that, during the questioning, during the rants and raves and the obnoxious comments that were coming from the opposition... The fact is that it is the EUB. I have faith in the Energy and Utilities Board. I am sure that the members opposite have faith in the Energy and Utilities Board. I hope that they do.

One of our utilities, NB Power, asked for a 2% rate increase. It went before the Energy and Utilities Board, and it received 1.7%. It put its best business case forward. It put its revenue requirements forward. That is exactly what Enbridge will be doing. It will be putting its requirements for revenue forward before it gets anywhere.

The members opposite keep talking about how this deal stinks. The only thing that stinks in this House is over there because the members opposite do not understand the real math of this deal.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Savoie: On a point of order.



Mr. Speaker: If you want to burn your time for question period, go ahead.

Mr. Savoie: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Have we decided? Order, members.

Mr. Stewart: Why all the inaccurate rhetoric? The deal was ending in 2019. Why would we need a 50-year monopoly? As the business model for this, as I understand it, Enbridge depended on investments of \$300 million and 70 000 customers. We have learned that the investment turned out to be half a billion dollars and attracted only 12 000 customers. We are aware that the current Enbridge deal was due to expire in 2019.

Given the fact that Enbridge only attracted a fraction of the customers needed for its business model to be any sort of success, did this government at any point consider what would happen in 2019, when the current deal expired? Did you discuss the possible takeover of the system by NB Power in 2019? Has this concept been discussed inside your office or the Premier's Office?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I really appreciate the questions this afternoon. Along the same lines as before, with regard to the rhetoric... I think that what the members opposite really need to do is read the old deal, read the new deal, and maybe get a technical briefing so that they understand it a bit more. The fact of the matter is that the members opposite took a contract and ripped it up—completely ripped it up.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: That \$820 million was what every man, woman, and child was exposed to. That is per capita. That is \$1 100 per New Brunswicker.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Riverview will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: That is \$1 100 per child, \$1 100 per senior, and \$1 100 per each hardworking New Brunswicker.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: You cannot take a contract and rip it up.

(Interjections.)



Mr. Speaker: The member for Riverview will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: The fact of the matter is that \$820 million has been removed from the backs of the people. The onus is not on the backs of the people. There was \$900 million—it was the same thing—for Coleson Cove that we had to clean up. It was \$1 billion for the cost overrun at Point Lepreau that we had to clean up, and it is the same with the \$150 million...

Spray Program

Mr. Coon: It is almost 2017, and the widespread spraying of glyphosate over our forests and under our power lines is still permitted—I know, it is incredible—despite the devastating impacts it has on wildlife and despite its role in eliminating our beautiful mixed-wood forests in favour of spruce plantations. Will the Minister of Environment and Local Government stop issuing permits for the spraying of glyphosate on forestland and NB Power rights-of-way?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: First of all, I would like to thank the member for Fredericton South for his question.

You know, given everything that has been said and written, I appreciate and understand that there can be concerns and fears about the safety of this product. However, the government of New Brunswick must continue to rely on the evaluations and studies done by Health Canada experts. In this context, we must make evidence-based and science-based decisions.

As you know, the federal government regulates herbicide application. The province is working in partnership with the federal government to ensure that herbicide application is done safely and responsibly. All pest control products used in the province must be registered by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency. Moreover, my department also issues permits...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Coon: Millions of public dollars are being used to poison hardwood trees so the large forest companies can replace our forest with plantations after clear-cutting them. NB Power started applying glyphosate again under its power lines to avoid the cost of brush cutting. Will the minister use his power under the *Pesticides Control Act*, a provincial Act, to prohibit the use of glyphosate for this purpose?



Hon. Mr. Rousselle: You know, I mentioned the importance of evidence and science. I also mentioned that the Department of Environment and Local Government only issues permits after the product used has been registered by the federal government.

We have heard the concerns. As you know, I am very pleased that the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health and her office made the decision to release the report on glyphosate. The main goal of this report was to look at all available data on glyphosate.

While there is some uncertainty about the product, the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health and her office concluded that glyphosate should not be prohibited. Furthermore, they concluded that glyphosate exposure in New Brunswick is equal to or lower than what is seen elsewhere. Therefore, according to the data we currently have, we will continue in the same direction.

[Original]

Mr. Coon: Last year, the member for Restigouche West and I tabled, collectively, over 12 000 signatures collected by Stop Spraying New Brunswick, a grassroots organization opposed to the use of glyphosate on Crown lands. Today, I am going to table close to 14 000 more signatures, making it the largest petition ever tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

These petitions reflect the views of rural New Brunswickers who have had it with being ignored. They have had it with the way woodlot owners are being treated. They have had it with clear-cutting. They have had it with spraying. They have had it with the decimation of our beautiful mixed forests. This contains more signatures than were contained in the petitions supporting a moratorium on fracking. The government listened to the people then. Why will it not listen to the people now?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As I said earlier, as a government, we must base what we do on science and evidence. As I said, the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health completed a report indicating that glyphosate application at the recommended level poses no increased or detectable risks for human health. I would also like to mention that this product recently underwent a re-evaluation, which is done periodically by Health Canada.

According to this re-evaluation, products containing glyphosate do not pose unacceptable risks for human health. Moreover, I would like to clarify that, last May, a World Health Organization expert group on pesticide residues concluded that dietary exposure to glyphosate is unlikely to pose a human cancer risk. The government must therefore rely on data and science, and this is what we are doing.





**Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick
Oral Questions**

[Original]

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

