

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**May 29, 2025**

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[Translation]

### EDUCATION / ÉDUCATION

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon.

[Original]

Today, I'm going to start again by trying to unravel a little bit more about what exactly this government is doing with its cuts to education. The Minister of Education has been trying to evolve her comments and her discourse about the cuts and the chaos that she's causing in the department. I would like to give her an opportunity. As she is trying to reset her discourse, I would like to give her an opportunity on the floor of the House this afternoon. I'm going to ask her some simple questions. How many teachers are you going to redeploy into the classrooms? What is the number? Where are they coming from? Let's start with those and see if we can get straight answers from this minister. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the resources that we want to redirect toward the schools and the classrooms. Although we haven't landed on a number yet, we will. We've estimated that around 150 teachers could be redeployed back into the classrooms. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, hey, that's kind of a start, so I might call that a B-. I asked about where the teachers will be coming from. I'm expecting to hear: From the school districts. Can the minister please confirm that these are people who will be coming from positions in the school districts? Thank you.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the teachers will be coming from the district level and from the departmental level. We have teachers working in different facets of the education system. With our redeployment, we would like to bring the resources back to the classroom level. That's where the students need support for literacy, numeracy, and chronic absenteeism, which, I would argue, are exactly what we should be focusing on in education.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Okay, so we're getting somewhere today, Madam Speaker. I'm going to test the minister's ability to explain how well she knows these positions. If I ask her about education support services, numeracy in K to 5, numeracy in French Second Language Grades 6 to 8, behaviour specialists, speech-language pathologists, numeracy in French Second Language Grades 6 to 12, ISD in-school counselling, complex behaviour in-school counselling, school-to-work coordinators, science

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and innovation coordinators, elementary school literacy, middle and high school literacy, subject coordinators... These are all positions that exist within the school districts. Does the minister know the level of education required in order to be able to work in any of those positions? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To respond to the Leader of the Official Opposition's question, yes, I do know what is required to be a teacher. I also know that it's really important to provide the resources and supports needed at the classroom level. That is why our government has invested \$200 million more this year compared to last year's budget.

Now, a lot of the confusion lies in the difference between the \$250 million that was requested and the \$200 million that we provided, which was more than the year before. That means that it was more. We have asked the districts to do an important exercise, and that is to assess how the dollars are spent. We're doing that important work right now.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Okay, Madam Speaker, here we go. It must be lunchtime because we're getting word salad again. I specifically asked whether the minister understood the level of education required to do those jobs in the districts, not to become a teacher. But I can tell her the answer. The answer is that you have to have a master's degree—a master's degree—to perform any of the functions that I just mentioned. This is very important.

Now we're going to get down to the root of the issue. I want to ask the minister this: Who is going to replace people in positions that require a master's degree? In some cases, these people have two master's degrees, given the extra training needed to do these positions. Who is going to be used to replace the people in these positions when, as the minister explained, they are put back into the classroom? Who is going to replace these people? How much is it going to cost? How long is it going to take to replace them? Who is going to do these jobs once the people are removed from these positions? Thank you.

[Translation]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I am well aware of the education required to provide specialized services. I'm thrilled that we have such highly specialized teachers in New Brunswick. It's a wonderful situation. The professional development of our teachers is very important to our government. We hope to continue seeing professional development grow.

Highly specialized teachers are so effective that we want them to work with students. We want them to work as closely as possible with students to support them in their learning, in the classroom, in school, and even at the district level. There will still be resource staff in

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the districts. We are just rethinking where highly specialized resource staff can best serve our students.

[Original]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): This would be amusing if it weren't so serious, Madam Speaker. The minister is exhibiting a complete lack of ability to answer a basic question in this House. This concerns the education of our children. This is going to impact mental health supports and the education of our kids. These jobs are important jobs in the districts, and they need to be done. They require a certain level of specialization, which I just explained to the minister, but she is not answering. That tells me that the government members have no plan. This is just like a budget not really being a budget, but a negotiation. They have no plan.

I will ask the minister this again, and I will just pick one position at random: complex behaviour and school counselling. How long does she think it will take to hire somebody with the particular set of skills for that particular position? Or are those positions going to be cut out of the districts? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, once again, for letting us share our vision for education. We want to keep all those specialized resources within the system. This exercise is pushing us to decide exactly where we want them to be. If they're at the district level, we want them to be closer to students. They're still there. They're still in the system. They're still contributing. They are still sharing their expertise. They're just doing it closer to students, because we know that's where those resources need to be. They need to be providing that expertise closer to the students so that we can increase literacy, increase numeracy, and reduce chronic absenteeism.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, let me see whether I can encourage the minister to go a little bit further. If people are going to be taken from the district and put into the classroom, will they have a full teaching load? Thank you.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Those types of details are being negotiated right now with the districts, because they are the ones who are closest to the ground level. They are valuable partners for us. That level of detail is being really well thought out and negotiated.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about what collaboration looks like. Our government values collaboration and values relationships. That means that we're having conversations, and then we're deciding together how to move forward. I can't say this enough, because it seems to be quite foreign to some people in this House, but that's what collaboration and

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negotiation look like. All those details will be well thought out and communicated with New Brunswickers. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The only thing that's foreign in here, Madam Speaker, is reality to this government. What the minister is saying does not line up with what is happening with teachers. I asked a specific question.

If teachers get taken out of a district and put into a classroom, will they be teaching a full course load? The minister absolutely could not answer because she doesn't know. That is what I am trying to illustrate here.

The reality is that the government has to have a plan. It does not have a plan. If government were doing something right, then that would be great because it would be helping New Brunswickers. However, in this case, they are doing something wrong because they don't know what they are doing.

For coaches and leads, there are two branches. There is the curriculum branch and the educational support services branch. A curriculum branch person who has extra training is going to be back in the classroom. Somebody who is with educational support services will continue to do the same role, but those roles are going to be done in very different ways. I'd like an explanation from the minister. Will teachers in the curriculum services branch have full-time teaching roles?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are negotiating with the school districts to determine exactly how we will use the highly specialized resources we have available to us in the education system to better support our young people.

When we cooperate, negotiate, or work with other parties, we don't come to the table with a preconceived idea or solution to impose on the system. We work with our partners. That's what we're doing. That doesn't mean we have no ideas or visions with respect to the direction we want to take, because we know resources must be dedicated to the classroom. The classroom needs to be stabilized. That's what teachers, parents, and students have told us. We are working with our partners to reach our objectives together.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): My heavens, Madam Speaker. I'm almost at a loss for words. Unfortunately for the government, I'm not quite at a loss for words. You know, I recently had a conversation with a teacher who had been in meetings with the minister, and these were her words to me: It was toxic positivity. That is all we're getting out of this minister.



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The reality is that they are cutting mental health supports to students. There is literally a change in how they are going to work with students with mental health issues. They are being told that these students are going to have to be in crisis in every single facet of their lives before they get an intervention. This is how serious this is becoming. That is why I am pushing the minister to give us these answers. It's to try to illustrate to New Brunswickers that they need to be extremely concerned with the direction in which we are going. Can the minister confirm that the department will force students to be in an extreme position in all facets of their lives before it gives them intervention? Thank you.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for illustrating that we are in constant conversations with our partners. We absolutely are. We are working together to find ways in which we can increase literacy and numeracy and reduce chronic absenteeism because those are the priorities that we have chosen for our education system.

Now, I'd like to take a minute to think about the battles or the priorities that the past government chose. There are so many that come to mind, but changes to French Immersion come to mind. That was a weird priority, to me. Wanting to dissolve district education councils (DECs) was also an interesting priority. Picking on vulnerable students in our classrooms was also an interesting—

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): This is absolutely shameful, Madam Speaker. I asked about the risk to students due to the changes that the government is making, and the minister has come back...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The House Leader can just wait his turn. Maybe your Premier will have to have a little talk with you.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Yes, and we're asking questions. I'll ask the minister, who needs to answer them.

(Interjections.)

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Order, please.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, I asked a direct question about how the government's changes are affecting the mental health of students, and the minister talked about the record of the previous government. This tells me that she is not taking this seriously and that she does not understand.

I'm going to give the minister another chance to get on her feet and confirm that the government is making changes in the classroom to the detriment of these kids with mental

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health issues and social needs and to explain the vision she says she has to New Brunswickers so they can understand it.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to once again talk about the \$200 million that our government is investing in education. We value the well-being and mental health of students so much that we've targeted part of that \$200-million investment toward behaviour intervention mentors who directly support the mental health of students in the classroom at the school level.

Another thing we are doing is school food programs. If we're concerned about the social well-being and the basic needs of our students, we need to make sure that they are well fed. That is a priority for our government. We will make sure that students' basic needs are met to support their well-being in the classrooms and in the schools.

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Two Thursdays ago, a Radio-Canada Acadie release stated that dozens of positions will be cut in the Francophone sud school district as it must comply with the Holt government's budgetary requirements. According to the article, 25 teachers who held support roles will be reassigned to classrooms. These employees notably supported students with behavioural issues. Seven instructional leadership positions are being eliminated. Community agent positions and library attendant positions are affected as well as administrative positions. The executive director of that district made an interesting statement. She said: The employees at the ministry understand our reality. Now the government? That's where we feel it doesn't understand our reality.

My question to the honourable Minister of Education is: As not only the head of the ministry where the employees understand the situation but also a member of the government, how do you reconcile that the ministry gets it but the leadership doesn't?

[Translation]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to tell you how we are working with our partners. We are working with departmental officials and people working in school districts. We are working with parents. We are working with teachers.

I like the question that I was asked because it reflects reality. When we work with people in an authentic and real way and we have open hearts and minds, we may not always agree. It's good that we don't always agree because that creates a safe space that fosters dialogue and sharing ideas. That is how we can find solutions for our education system.



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[Original]

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. These are quotes from the Education Minister in an article published by the CBC on May 22.

*"We're looking at, yes, potentially redirecting some funds from elsewhere, maybe setting out our targets on the longer term instead of short term,"*

The minister said that the government was "sort of surprised" at some of the cuts.

When asked who had moved too quickly, the minister responded as follows:

*"Everybody. The government. We did. We pushed. We're impatient. ... We all have a sense of urgency where we want to see change right away."*

She further said:

*"We — as a government now, as candidates, people who ran in an election — had a different idea of what the economic situation was going to look like when we made our election promises,"*

Well, my question to the honourable Minister of Education is this: With such an unabashedly frank and transparent interview, can she now say that her own government got it wrong when requesting cuts to the education sector and that the decision to do so was not done with foresight and was not thought through?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to talk about teamwork. Yes, this is an excited team. We feel passionate about this. We want to see change, and we work together toward those goals.

Yes, when asked who did what, my response was: We all did. That's because we work together, which, again, seems to be a foreign concept to people on the other side of the House. We are working together. We make decisions together. We move together. We are a passionate bunch of people who want to see change.

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is my own opinion on the state of education in this province. It has been tinkered with. It's not functioning as it should. It has been examined and reexamined. It has been bandaged. Our issues go back decades. Simply put, it needs a revamp, and there needs to be a total paradigm shift in the way we go about educating our youth and children in the province.

Now, I love this province and all it has to offer, but, admittedly, I'm tired of it being a diamond in the rough. I want our children, our youth, this province, this nation, and this globe to recognize what we are, what we can do, and what we have. My question to the honourable Minister of Education is this: Has she ever considered, contemplated, asked,

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requested, or thought about a commission on education? Is that something that the minister has ever contemplated or will contemplate?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite, the Education Critic, for his opinion on the education system. I also read about his opinion on the education system, which he shared with a journalist. He called it “quite abysmal”, which I found was quite sad because what we’re seeing now is a reflection of the past government. In the past years, we’ve seen a decline in literacy rates and numeracy rates and an increase in absenteeism. That’s what we’re trying to fix. That’s what we’re working on.

Thank you, once again, to the member opposite for sharing his opinion. I’d much rather use evidence and data.

(Interjections.)

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Order

## AGRICULTURE

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, the *Telegraph-Journal* reported that more than a dozen food bank contracts with New Brunswick’s farmers have been suspended due to a funding shortfall. This is lose-lose, hurting farmers and food bank users. The government needs to fix it by properly funding Food DEPOT Alimentaire. Farmers have had the rug pulled out from under them as they have lost the contracts that they rely on to sell their harvests.

If we step back from this example and look at the big picture, it’s clear that our food system is precarious and dysfunctional. I don’t see any concerted effort to help farmers or support food sovereignty. Instead, we see this government moving in the wrong direction. Will the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Fisheries commit to stable funding and government contracts for local food to enable more of our food to be produced locally?

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): I recognize the minister of fisheries, aquaculture, and fisheries. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Finnigan** (Kent North, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, L): That’s close enough.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member opposite for her question. As you know, I have always been passionate about agriculture, and I have always tried to get as much local food as possible to our plates, especially in our public institutions.

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I can tell you that, since our government took office, we have done a lot of work to get concrete results with respect to local food. The partnership with Food DEPOT Alimentaire, for instance, which mostly provides food to food banks, has enabled many of our producers to provide local food, at a rate of nearly 50% right now. Local food worth \$2.5 million is being purchased. We want the initiative to grow. When it comes to meals in schools, it's certainly...

[Original]

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, in order to expand the program with Food DEPOT Alimentaire, this government needs to adequately fund that program.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, New Brunswick only produces 9% of the vegetables that people in the province eat. We lost 20% of our farms between 2016 and 2021, and less than 7% of farmers in New Brunswick are under the age of 35.

Madam Speaker, agriculture is in crisis in New Brunswick, and I haven't seen any concerted effort by the Holt government to help farmers. Stable contracts are needed, but the government must also ensure that the amount of local food purchased by our public institutions, including our hospitals, increases. Will the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries set ambitious local purchasing goals for New Brunswick's public institutions?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, you had a twofold question, and I will take the liberty of thanking you for your challenge. You know, Food DEPOT Alimentaire has been quite a helpful organization for feeding hungry people in our province. We have provided it with \$1 million in funds in years past. Last year, there was an emergency situation, and it went up to \$2 million. In all reality, it's very probable that we're going to be there again.

As you point out, farmers need predictability. It's not enough to say there might be an emergency and not provide them with funding because they're putting seeds in the ground today. So we're working closely with the Department of Agriculture and New Brunswick farmers so that we can bring some predictability. We recognize that this is an emergency that's not going to go away, so the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Social Development, and the Department of Health are negotiating very actively to provide predictable funding for our farmers growing food here in New Brunswick. Thank you for the challenge.

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### PARAMEDICS / TRAVAILLEURS PARAMÉDICAUX

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. New Brunswickers, especially rural New Brunswickers, got some encouraging news this week from Ambulance NB. After seeing some initial success, Ambulance New Brunswick is extending a pilot project designed to address some of the longest response times in New Brunswick. Improving ambulance response times has been an ongoing challenge over the years, so any good news is great news. However, among the good news comes some very troubling news about paramedics. Ambulance New Brunswick is operating with a 28% paramedic shortage. Can the Minister of Health advise the House just how many paramedics Ambulance New Brunswick is short on and what the plan is to fill this shortage? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, you know, the paramedics visited us yesterday. We were pleased to honour them for what they do in our system. There is a shortage. We make no bones about that. If we don't do something to fix that shortage, then we're no further ahead. So we are negotiating with ambulance attendants, and I would say that this is a time to look at becoming a paramedic in this province. There will be some announcements and discussions in the days ahead. Thank you for the challenge. We are up for that challenge. We are going to help paramedics. I would also like to say that they met with us yesterday and had some good suggestions on how they can further improve collaborative care and what they can do in the ambulance before they come into our hospitals, and we're quite excited by all of that. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I stated, improving ambulance service response times has been an ongoing challenge over the years. But you would never know it if you read the Liberal election platform. There's no mention of ambulances or paramedics in the platform. The same holds true for the Holt government's throne speech: no ambulances or paramedics mentioned. In the minister's mandate letter from the Premier, we read: "Our platform focuses on the priorities that matter most to the people of this province." Apparently, the Holt government is ignorant of the importance of ambulance services to New Brunswickers. Again, there's no mention of paramedics or improving ambulance services in the minister's mandate letter. I asked the minister a while ago about recruiting American doctors who wish to come to Canada and learned that there's no special effort being made. Can the minister tell us if this holds true for American paramedics?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, I would like to advertise that there is a lot that we do that is beyond what's in our mandate letter and there is a lot that we respect that might not have been

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included in our mandate letter. Paramedics in this province are that proof, to the point where they are making very powerful suggestions on how we can give better care on the front lines.

We are very aggressive in how we train paramedics so that they will work here in New Brunswick. As I said, you can prepare for good news in the weeks to come.

I'm also pleased to recognize, as you did, the pilot project that was established for community-based ambulances versus a bigger distribution system. Thus far, it looks very promising. It's a pilot. Pilot results can be positive or negative. This one looks positive. We're glad we extended that for 60 days. At the end of the day, this will guide us in identifying the type of ambulance service we should provide in New Brunswick—all of one, all of the other, or some mix. I think that the—

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): The time for oral question period has expired.