

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**June 3, 2025**

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[Translation]

### EDUCATION

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm grateful to you.

[Original]

I'm going to start today with a follow-up for the Minister of Education. Friday was the deadline for districts to resubmit their budgets and to negotiate with the government in relation to what they would look like. Just as a refresher, those budgets help determine how many people districts are going to be able to hire to work inside their buildings. I would like to ask the minister this: Has any district resubmitted its budget as of the Friday deadline? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I'm very excited to share the great news. Because of the collaborative process that we've been going through, six of the seven districts have submitted their plans.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, that's great news, Madam Speaker. We're starting off with a direct question and a direct answer. That's very much appreciated, certainly, by the people in education who have been impacted by the decisions of this government. This is great news.

So, six of the seven districts have resubmitted. What is the timeline for the government to tell them whether their submission has been accepted or not? What are the strings that are going to be attached? Are the districts going to be able to rehire people they need, or is the government going to tell them where they are supposed to put their resources? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. All plans have been accepted. We are analyzing them now. We're coming up with some specific direction as to how we're going to move forward. The direction that we, as a government, have given—and have always given—is that we want to redirect resources back to where the students are. That means in the classrooms, in the schools. We continue to give those guidelines as we move forward and work on the specific plan with the districts.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Okay, so, Madam Speaker, I've said this on a number of occasions. I think that when government does something that's good for the province, we'll agree. I don't think that we're

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philosophically very different from the government. We agree that it's always better to have capable teachers in the classroom doing the work that's necessary with students.

However, it's not about the "what". It's about the "how". It's about how the government members have arrived at this. They've started this process, and the number has been bandied about. They want to put about 150 teachers back in the classroom. On numerous occasions, I've asked: How many? How long? What's the timeline? I never get an answer.

I'm going to ask the minister very directly: Can the minister explain how many teachers, in both the Anglophone and the Francophone EECD sectors, are currently on secondment? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**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 the support for our vision to keep resources exactly where they're supposed to be—close to students, at the classroom level and the school level, so that we have the best possible teachers teaching our students how to read and write. What's amazing about that is that when you have that great connection between a teacher and a student, the student wants to be in school, so we'll be able to work on chronic absenteeism.

Now, for the specifics about how many teachers we are moving back to the classroom setting, I'm going to have to look into it and get a response for the member opposite.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I think the Minister of Education glossed over that question on the test a little bit, Madam Speaker. The question was this: How many teachers do you have seconded on the Anglophone side, and how many teachers do you have seconded on the Francophone side? The answer is that 45 teachers on the Anglophone side and 23 on the Francophone side are seconded to EECD. That's 68 teachers who are on secondment, out of the classrooms, and in the department.

The government members have been talking about how they want to get resources closer to the classroom. Again, philosophically, we agree. The issue we're having is with the "how". They've gone after the districts, they've made \$43 million in cuts, and now they're saying: Well, now you have to redo this. The districts are scrambling.

In total, there are 68 teachers who could be brought back into the system. Did the minister ever consider taking teachers off secondment and leaving the districts alone? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, we've asked districts to do part of the work, and we at the department are doing part of the work as well. Yes, part of that is making sure that the best-qualified teachers are being redirected back toward the classrooms, back toward the schools. Of course, we're going to work from the department level as well.

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**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. How many?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, we are currently working toward a collaborative process. We haven't landed on a number quite yet. I will be happy to share that number as soon as we land on something.

Right now, we are in talks with the districts. They have just submitted their plans. They're going to tell us how many teachers from the district can go back to the classroom at the school level. Based on that number, we'll be able to figure out how many we need at the department level. See, it's a collaborative process, and we're waiting on their specific plans so that we can propose our specific plan as well. Together, we will have a complete and coherent plan.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Oh, Madam Speaker. This has just been cyclical. The government members say: We're going to collaborate; we're going to do all these things. They've never once, in any of their releases anywhere, talked about EECD being involved in having seconded teachers moved back. I think this is a brand new concept to the minister. They have bandied about a number of about 150 people, and 68 is almost half. They could have almost half the number of teachers they want back in the classroom by taking people off secondment and moving them back into the classroom. Have they considered this? Can the minister describe the work being done by these teachers on secondment and give any reason that they couldn't be moved back into the classroom immediately? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, we have considered who the teachers are who are currently working in the department; that is one aspect of the plan. Since the beginning of the process, we have been studying redeployment requests presented at the district level and also at the departmental level. This is something that was part of our initial plan. Now, we are working to determine who must keep working in the department, who must keep working in the district, and who we want to redirect to schools and classrooms. We are currently doing this work. Yes, we will do it, and it is underway.

The process of working together takes time. It includes a conversation or a back and forth that requires a bit more time than presenting solutions and imposing them. I understand why the opposition is a bit impatient because it is used to imposing...

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[Original]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Oh my heavens, Madam Speaker. Impose? My heavens, the Liberals told the districts that they had to make \$43 million in cuts and then tried to evade responsibility for it. Now they're saying: Well, now we're willing to collaborate.

I have absolutely no confidence in this minister or this government's ability to handle this. Madam Speaker, teachers are upset. They have to redo the work that they had to do initially based on information that they were given by this minister and this government point-blank. Now that they find themselves in this situation, the government members are saying: Oh, we're going to negotiate it.

I asked this last week, and now that the minister has had a chance to maybe reflect a little, I'm going to ask it again. With the cuts to ISD, are we going to have our coaches and leads from ESS—those are our resource and guidance counsellors—in the classroom, or are they going to continue to do the same work they've always done but just at the school level? How many kids will they be able to help? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. With ISD, we want to make sure that those resources are available close to where the students are. They have told us this multiple times before. When times are hard and when they need that extra support for their well-being and mental health, they turn to the people who are around them. It's really important to have those resources at the school level, so we're looking to make sure that those teams are exactly there, at the school level. They will continue to provide the good services that they have been providing to our students, such as those mental health supports that we recognize are so important. The resources are still there. We're just making sure that they're exactly where they need to be to best support students.

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, an article in CBC stated: "Anglophone South eliminates library worker jobs". ASD-S is eliminating 13 full-time and 5 part-time library worker positions in an effort to maximize its budget as mandated by the department. This happened just days after the government promised more collaboration to mitigate the impact of budget cuts. In fact, the districts were told that the department wanted to collaborate and would consider adjusting their funding in relation to the proposals they submit, which, by the way, was supposed to be done last Friday. The government mandated that. Negotiate means to agree or compromise in discussion.

My question is this: As the deadline for districts' funding proposals has come and gone, can the minister tell us the new budget cut amount that the districts will be dealing with now?



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So, for six out of the seven districts, what are we dealing with? Instead of \$43 million, what is the new number?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned before, the deadline to submit these plans was Friday. We're looking at them right now. We have six of the seven, so we have a lot of good information and good data to work with right now. We're looking at where we're going to land in terms of a number.

However, I'm really glad that the member opposite mentioned the media and articles. On our side of the House, we look at articles in the media as well. I would love to bring everybody's attention to an article that was published on June 1. The title was: "The PCs' struggles to get their facts straight". We also read the media. Thank you.

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Oh, it's another article. This is from May 20. It's called "Building a stronger N.B. through education, communication and planning", and was in the *Telegraph-Journal*. It says:

*The Fredericton Chamber of Commerce recognizes education as the cornerstone of the Knowledge Industry. As a vital societal and business investment, education can foster economic growth, workforce development, and societal well-being.*

It further states:

*As evidenced in national and international reports, investing in education is among the most impactful actions governments can take. Such investments foster innovation, competitiveness, and societal resilience, particularly in vulnerable sectors like healthcare and housing.*

My question to the honourable minister is this: Are these cuts really the kind of impactful action that leads to innovation, competitiveness, and societal resilience?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to share how our government is investing \$200 million more in education this year compared to last year. We completely agree with the member opposite. Investing in education is vital to our society and to creating the blossoming and prosperous New Brunswick we want to see. We couldn't agree more. That's why we are investing.

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week, the Premier, in her own words, stated: Education is the most important thing we do in this province. I recollect she made the same statement at the NBTA retiring teachers' luncheon. Education can be both formal and informal, and raising our children, teaching them, empowering them, and building them up are crucial.

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My daughters have partaken in the WE Believe conferences, which are usually held at Harbour Station in Saint John. The most recent one was on May 15, with over 7 500 on-site students from many ridings. These conferences are dedicated to inspiring positive change among young people, and their mission is to inspire and empower youth to realize their potential as agents of positive change. My question to the honourable minister is this: If education is indeed the most important thing we do in this province, and if the wellness of our youth is such a priority, then why, the day after such a successful event, were the organizers told that their funding has been cut and that they are now on the hook?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, this \$200-million investment we have contributed to the education system is, first and foremost, for stabilizing the classrooms. That's where we are redirecting the resources. We are redirecting the resources to the classrooms, at the school level. That's where the students are. There are other types of activities that are super helpful, and we like them as well. However, right now, we need to stabilize the classrooms first. That's how we will increase numeracy rates and literacy rates. They have been tanking over the past years. That's how we are going to get chronic absenteeism under control. It has been skyrocketing over the years. We need to stabilize the classrooms. That's exactly what we're doing with targeted investments.

## HEALTH CARE

**Ms. Scott-Wallace** (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Madam Speaker, I've had some big concerns in my riding in the past little while. Sadly, I'm getting a lot of my information from the rumour mill. That's discouraging when this is so important. I'm going to try to get some answers here for the people of Sussex.

A couple of months back, mayors, MLAs, and the Minister of Health visited the Sussex Health Centre, where the virtual Teladoc was receiving rave reviews from staff and patients. Now, I'm hearing that not only is this technology, which is being used in several provinces, not going to add more hours to the Sussex ER, contributing to it opening 24 hours per day this spring or summer, as Horizon had planned, but also that Teladoc is being eliminated. Can the Minister of Health please tell me whether Sussex is losing its short-lived Teladoc technology? If so, why?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I think the member opposite answered her own question. We were hopeful that Teladoc would increase ER hours. As you know, we are committed to increasing ER hours in Sussex, and Teladoc did not do that, not by one hour. So we're revisiting our interaction, our communication, with Teladoc. There are possibly other opportunities in this province for Teladoc to actually increase ER hours. We haven't completed the pilot at this point in time.



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We're reevaluating our relationship. I think that it was an experiment. We learned lots from it in terms of the value of virtual communication. People liked it, but it dealt mostly with patients who could be seen in family doctors' offices. We're going to grow that in Sussex. While it didn't do what we had hoped it would do, as it was a pilot, an experiment, we learned lots through that process. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Scott-Wallace** (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Madam Speaker, from what I understand, October is when this pilot will be completed, and October is far from being here. Am I hearing correctly that Teladoc, which has been so helpful in providing diagnoses to eliminate long wait times in our ERs, will be moved from Sussex to another location for a few months and then be terminated altogether by fall? If so, is that also happening at the Charlotte County Hospital?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, as has already been stated, Teladoc did not increase the number of hours in the Sussex emergency department by one minute. It did not do what it set out to do. Did it do other positive things? Yes, it allowed people who needed family practice types of care to get it in the emergency department, but that's not where they need it. We need to support the collaborative care clinics in the Sussex area, and we are working hard to do this. The pilot has not stopped. We still have opportunities to learn from that pilot. Where else it will be used in the province is something that is being negotiated between Horizon, Teladoc, and other communities. It's far from being completely done. Currently, we're still working with Teladoc to see where its value might best lie. Thank you.

**Ms. Scott-Wallace** (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you, and I thank the minister for his answer to that. But I must say that I'm not feeling a lot of comfort in what he's saying. I don't think that people in the riding will either, because at least there was some hope or a plan. We don't hear of any plan now. I think it's only fair that the constituents in my riding hear this government's plan for the reopening of the Sussex ER overnight, because virtual care, with a pro medical team, including nurse practitioners, advanced care paramedics, and respiratory therapists, was expected to be part of the answer all along. Before Christmas, the Premier said this to me:

*Because they have a collaborative government that is listening and prepared to be flexible, we're going to deliver better hours in the ER ... as quickly as possible. Under an old model, the commitment was for the spring. We're going to improve upon that.*

These were her words before Christmas. Well, spring has sprung and then some, Madam Speaker. What's the plan before this Legislature closes? What news does the minister have for the people of Sussex? What are you intending to—

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, I'm glad to be given a chance to rise and speak about this. We are

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committed to collaborative care clinics. Sussex has been one of our first 10 clinics to do this. We are putting resources into that, including overhead coverage.

I would like to remind the House that Sussex is one of the communities that has started a residency program for ER physicians who also have experience in family medicine. That is right out of Sussex, and it shows the calibre of education that occurs in this community. The graduates of those programs will serve communities like Sussex. We have done quite a bit to enhance the care that people receive in family doctors' offices, and we continue to strive toward providing 24/7 coverage in the Sussex area. We just have not done it with Teladoc at this point. Thank you.

## FIRST NATIONS

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): *Woliwon*, Madam Speaker. This government has committed to relating with First Nations on a nation-to-nation basis, a relationship to be built upon our Peace and Friendship Treaties. In fact, Wolastoqey Treaty Day is officially tomorrow, though celebrations were held in Neqotkuk, Tobique First Nation, on Saturday. The original treaty of 1726 was signed with the Peskotomuhkati, Wolastoqey, and Mi'gmaq nations to end a three-year war and establish a legal relationship between them and the British. In particular, they recognized that the British could only establish new settlements on their lands lawfully, subject to future negotiations. Well, that is not how things transpired, Madam Speaker, so the three nations have looked to the courts to address their Aboriginal title.

The Premier said she wants to resolve Aboriginal title through negotiation rather than litigation. Can the Minister of Indigenous Affairs say when those negotiations are scheduled to begin?

**Hon. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much for that in-depth question. We have been very clear that we agree with the courts. Discussions about legal claims or title claims are best held around the negotiating table and not in front of the courts. That is the reason we have instructed the lawyers from the Attorney General's Office to kind of transition from litigation to more of a negotiation-based approach.

It's a little bit difficult for me, obviously, to go into the details of where we are with negotiations. Obviously, the matter is still before the courts. I can reassure the member opposite that a nation-to-nation based approach is very dear to us, and it is the approach we are going to take. I am very confident that with collaboration and good discussion, we will be able to move forward with this. Thank you.

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**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): *Woliwon*, Madam Speaker. The *sakomak* of the First Nations in New Brunswick have repeatedly called on the government to establish an inquiry, with their participation, to address systemic racism against Indigenous people in the law enforcement and justice systems. Instead, the former government decided to commission Dr. Manju Varma to broadly investigate systemic racism and make recommendations to government. She made 29 recommendations to address anti-Indigenous racism—29. That is fully one third of her total recommendations. They deal with systemic racism in justice, health, education, and the public service along with important recommendations to make an unprecedented effort to revitalize and protect Indigenous languages.

Can the Minister of Indigenous Affairs describe how he is addressing these 29 recommendations concerning Indigenous peoples in New Brunswick?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. D'Amours** (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Acting Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As my colleague opposite mentioned, the whole issue of systemic racism is very important for all of New Brunswick.

Certainly, over the next few months, as I have already mentioned in the House, we will work very hard to implement the recommendations in the report. We will certainly keep working on the file.

I think that everyone, in the province and in the House, must work on eliminating all forms of systemic racism in the community and throughout New Brunswick. That is what will enable us to have growing communities capable of moving into the future.

Rest assured, Madam Speaker, that we will not stop working hard to ensure that racism is eliminated in New Brunswick. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

## SCHOOLS

**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Madam Speaker, the parents and students in Grand Bay-Westfield have been very patient for many years. They have two old schools that don't provide the assets that are required for today's educational needs. A few months ago, the minister advised that the workers' rehab centre, just outside Grand Bay-Westfield, would be studied to see whether the engineering plans were in order and whether we could move

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forward with it. She said she would have an update by the end of the session. I am just wondering where we stand.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to update the House on that very specific request. I am going to have to get some information on it, but I will be happy to update you before the end of the week. Thank you.

[Translation]

## HEALTH CARE

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

[Original]

I just want to return to something that the Minister of Health brought up because I found it rather interesting. He talked about the Teladoc pilot not doing what it was supposed to do, which is why the government cut the pilot off early. However, the pharmacist pilot was very successful in doing what it was supposed to, yet the government is not renewing it.

We're hearing two different messages. This government talks about evidence, data, and so on and so forth. We know that there's a gap. There is going to be a gap now without this Teladoc service, which the member for Sussex-Three Rivers said was clearly helping people.

Now, I'd like to ask the Minister of Health this. The pharmacy pilot was helping people, but they cancelled it. They're saying that Teladoc wasn't helping, so they cancelled it early. What evidence or data can he give us to prove that there was no sense in completing this pilot? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, a pilot is a pilot. We learn things through them. We have learned lots from both pilots. We learned that people in Sussex need primary care. That's what they were getting through Teladoc. We are going to grow our primary care services.

What we learned through the pharmacy pilot was also positive. People felt that they were being cared for when they weren't otherwise. They got good service from our pharmacists. However, we also need better collaboration between our community-based pharmacists and other health care providers—collaborative care. We are actively negotiating with our Pharmacists' Association so that we can do something that gives better care to the citizens of New Brunswick and to the people in Sussex than the pilot did.

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We learned lots from both pilots, which had a start and an end. If we don't learn something and go forward, then what's the point of a pilot? I'm glad you brought up both of these. We learned lots. We will give better care to New Brunswickers through what was learned through these pilots. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister gave no answer on evidence and data and no answer on where the evidence is of what government members' decisions are doing to actually help New Brunswickers. There's clearly a gap. People were receiving care, and the government members didn't continue the pilot. People were receiving care with Teladoc, and now the government members are going to cancel it. They're not going to give it a chance to get to its full termination point so that we can understand the true scope of data. I don't think that not finishing the scope of a clinical trial would be a smart thing to do as a medical practitioner, yet this government is doing it. There's a gap.

For this clinic that the government members want to open, they've already said that they're not going to do anything very different. Now, in addition to seeing a gap in service for people from Teladoc, we don't even know when this collaborative clinic is going to open. What are the government members going to do to help cover the service time? Now that this pilot has been cancelled, what are they going to do to make sure that people are served between now and the time that clinic opens? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, yes, I'm a physician. I read research. When there are good things in research and there are not such favourable outcomes, trials are cancelled. It's as simple as that.

In this instance, we did learn some positive things. We learned that people need the care of the pharmacists in our communities. We're going to continue that in a different way. We're going to stop the part that has been shown not to have changed anybody's life. The life expectancy didn't change in this pilot. People were developing a dependency on pharmacists alone.

It was the same thing with Teladoc. There were positive things that showed us that we needed more care in the community. We're going to do that. It showed us that we didn't give a minute more of overnight care in Sussex, so we're not going to continue with that. We're going to work with both pilots to get a better outcome at the end of the day. Thank you very much.

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