

FOR THE LOVE OF CHILDREN AND THE WORLD*

(Submission to the Manitoba Education Review Commission)

I. Introduction

I thank the Manitoba Education Review Commission in advance for their willingness to be part of the renewal of our educational dialogue for the sake of our children and our world. The importance of the role of public education in the continuous re-creation and sustaining of our democracy cannot be overstated. Both are at risk if we do not consciously commit ourselves as citizens to the task of endlessly nurturing the public dialogue which makes both education and democracy even thinkable. Our very human freedoms and hopes for our young are at stake every time we make educational decisions and political decisions that affect their education.

In this submission, I will respond to the framework provided but, at the same time with a mix of humility and audacity, I offer personal perspectives and comments for consideration on that framework itself. Further, as a long time educator but more as a caring citizen, I feel obligated to participate in the Commission's efforts knowing that I will be implicated, along with all of you, for the consequences [y]/our work – a recognition that our theories made public might have real effects on real people. Whenever people don't talk to each other honestly, about matters important to human flourishing, I believe that part of the human world is destroyed, just as it created and re-created every time we engage each other in joyful, democratic dialogue.

This review is deeply personal for me as I have committed the better part of my life to working in, and attempting to improve, education for our children and young people. During my 54 years in the system I have been a teacher, a counsellor, a work education coordinator, a principal, superintendent, Dean and professor. I am currently working with several schools, several school divisions, superintendents, principals and teachers as well as with several First Nations, the Manitoba First Nations School System and supporting those working with several newcomer groups.

Some of the criticisms of public schools and the people in them hurt, some sadden, frustrate and anger me for their lack of understanding, empathy and support for the very public treasures that made their current privileges possible. All of them cause me fear and anxiety for the future well-being of our children and our society. I do find most of the public criticisms to be unjustified and unhelpful and, to that end, I take issue with some of the alleged "truths about reality" in the guides provided, as well the proposed "solutions" being floated in governmental pronouncements. Finally, I wish to assure the Commission that what I have to say is non-partisan – my loyalty is to education and I have found that partisan politics and education are uneasy bedfellows.

I often refer to Manitoba as a little “island of freedom” in the Canadian political, economic and educational context. In Manitoba politics, we “wobble about the middle,” mostly avoiding extreme ideological swings and the polarizing rhetoric which often accompanies them. Similarly, our economy, while not always as robust as we would wish it to be, has not been subject to stark “boom and bust” cycles. Our citizens generally accede to the whims of government with relatively little rancor or dissent. In education we have avoided, partially because of legislation but also because of general good will, the work disruptions which have plagued many other jurisdictions. And we have enjoyed a mostly cooperative collaborative relationship among and between the representative organizations in the education system. While we might wish to “perseverate on our woes,” we Manitobans live in a special place which should give us pause about making abrupt, revolutionary changes to our educational relationships, structures and programs, indeed our schools.

Our public schools, of course, serve many societal sources. In addition to educating they provide custodial places for children while their parents are engaged in other activities; they train our young in workplace dispositions and conduct and, in some high schools, actual job skills; they provide safe places for children to make and rectify mistakes which will guide them later in life; and they socialize our young to living with an array of diverse others. Relatedly, at their best, they educate, nurturing and acquiring those values and norms of conduct which are fit for public life and citizenship.

David Coulter, a colleague of mine and I, as part of a discussion on the meaning of education, asked hundreds of people of all ages, from children in grade 5 to trustees to teachers to doctoral candidates in education, to think of someone they considered to be educated and then to share their choices for the sake of discussion. Almost without fail, the answers were the same: *educated people* are wise, honest, humble, curious, thoughtful, open-minded, empathetic, engaged and good communicators – self-regulating with a sense of responsibility to others and society in general – not pushovers but not self-centred.

Only rarely did credentials like degrees come into play, and no one ever mentioned high marks, skill in solving quadratic equations or even good spelling. These were seen as good things to know, but not necessarily essential to live good lives. Also, broad general awareness and depth of knowledge and skill in some areas were seen as necessary, but certainly not the same knowledge for everyone, challenging the notion that all people must acquire the same knowledge – as in one conventional view of schooling. Today, we might also consider one of Ursula Franklin’s cautions on today’s systems, that they are so technology and management driven that we overlook important understandings and judgment about the human condition.

Our children must learn to live in a systems world which relies on rigid time constraints, rules, regulations, structures, predictable answers and results from technocratic truths – in one sense a cause and effect world where we can predetermine outcomes. Equally, I think more importantly for human flourishing, they must also be educated for a lifeworld shared with other humans, a

world created by values, mores, norms, conventions, and traditions – where relational truths are created by human dialogue, interaction, collaboration, cooperation and attempts at consensus. Any educational review should, in my view, seek to define a reasonable relationship between the systems world and the lifeworld where both are honoured. This is the real challenge presented in the template provided by the Commission, which sacrifices living well for managing well.

Finally, the review purports to be about “improving student outcomes, ensuring long-term sustainability, and enhancing public confidence in Manitoba’s K to 12 education system.” The first has been the one constant in the education community dialogue; the second is more a question of moral acknowledgment and political will; and, the third has more to do with governmental rhetoric influencing “public” opinion than with thoughtful antipathy. While the third matter is not dealt with in the six areas of focus I will respond to it in my conclusions.

II. Long-term Vision

(What should the goals and purposes of K to 12 education be in a rapidly changing world?)

Without being overly picky, I wish to suggest that K to 12 implies *schooling*, not education, and it is just this semantic turn which causes us not to let go of the legacy of the Industrial Revolution. K to 12 suggests a relatively rigid, lock step, sequential learning experience which we have known for some time to be an inaccurate, perhaps even dangerous, metaphor for the education of our young. To it we tie notions of measurable progress, standards of achievement and successful completion and time bound ideas like time to completion. While they obviously serve well to organize human beings into systems, they do raise the question about their relationship to education.

Education, as opposed to schooling, demands that our reach far outstrips the strictures and limitations of school systems. At the level of greatest abstraction, education means assisting our children and young people to learn how to live good lives in both meanings of the word: becoming and being a good person and a person that contributes to the goodness of the world of other people. Education, at its very essence, is a very conservative concept and activity in which we try to conserve the best of what we have learned about how to flourish in the world.

Historically, we have not asked our children to serve political agendas, to fix the economy or to remedy our social ills – nor should we – those are adult responsibilities. While we should prepare them for assuming these responsibilities when they become adults, they should not be burdened by them even though they are directly affected by them. Our schooling, and its programs, can only assist in this task – the remainder of the task falls on families, caregivers and society in general.

We also would do well to remind ourselves that schools are a reflection of society more than society a reflection of schooling. We cannot expect the school system to fix itself in a broken society. Teachers, by and large, teach what society believes to be important for children to know or, in other words, what the world is like as opposed to how it should be. The point is to respect the sophistication of children and young people enough to seek understandings of the adult world, or the world we adults have created, for the sake of figuring out how to make it better when they assume adult responsibilities.

No matter how quickly the world is changing, particularly technologically, helping prepare our children to take their rightful place as adults participating in democracy, in a global, capitalistic economy and in their increasingly diverse communities remain the major purposes of education and schooling. Put another way, the world will not end, or even be threatened if not all our children learn complex mathematics. On the other hand if they don't learn democracy the world as we know it will end, becoming even less a welcoming and affirming place for some of us.

As for the goals of schooling our current societal challenges need to be in the background of everything we do in schools. Our young should understand what has brought us to where we are and what we adults are trying to do about the following (in no particular order and by no means, conclusive): Indigenous reconciliation and retrieval; environmental reclamation; diversity/newcomer appreciation; child safety and protection; global and local economic disparity; meaningful democratic engagement; competency in developing and employing emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and ethical use of social media. A very tall, unprecedented challenge!

Finally, an overriding concern is that, in regard to the purposes of schools, there seems to have been some erosion in education's being seen as a public good versus a private good. The consequences of that inclination is that people, place their personal interests or concerns before that of the collective or the whole. They exhibit less understanding of, are more critical of, and less supportive of, public schools and what is needed to sustain and renew them. Simply put, the public good of schooling overrides private interest, and our private lives are enhanced if we live them by public values and norms. Neither does the shift of focus toward private interest bode well for the work of governments in the long run.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT THEY REAFFIRM, AND COMMIT THEMSELVES TO, THE PUBLIC PURPOSES OF EDUCATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THEIR ROLE IN RENEWING DEMOCRACY.

III. Student Learning

(What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba?)

Excellence means children are presenting their best work, which also represents their best effort at the moment, on worthwhile, meaningful work. To make judgments about this type of excellence we need involvement from their parents or caregivers, their teachers as well as themselves. This type of excellent achievement is weighed against past performances and observations, and to that extent, it is a moving developmental concept where students build upon their past behaviours, actions and practices.

Children justify certain behaviours based upon their observations of adults. When they are young they tend to emulate or imitate the adults in their worlds. As adolescents, as they are developing and testing their individuality, they often act in opposition to what they believe to be undesirable adult conduct. As mature adults we expect people to critique their own beliefs, values and conduct and make revisions accordingly. All these are subjective, referenced to public norms, and related to the above idea of excellence.

Excellence also means excelling in particular tasks or activities judged by the criteria, external to the child, which define them at the best and demonstrated by competency including thought and application. In this case excellence described as full expertise always remains an unattainable ideal even in the most mechanistic, industrial production context where we strive for perfection but don't always expect it. Thus, as humans, we strive to approach excellence as opposed to achieving it.

Excellence in education is more a values based, meaning making concept where we judge achievement and consistency through observation, interaction and experience, rather than a results and outcomes based process where we judge achievement by products or performance. Where they are related respectively is that in the first case we base satisfaction over time as in *generally excellent*, and in the second we base satisfaction on an event or occurrence (like a one-time test) which demonstrates that excellence is within one's capabilities.

While this may seem as a rather obtuse response, the question itself has obtuse aspects, perhaps implying that if certain conditions are present all children will achieve certain predetermined outcomes – this is simply reaching too far.

But this reaching too far may also be what we are expecting of our current school system. Based on recent experience, we may have approached the limits of discipline-based and grade-based curricula and standardization of assessments in spite of great strides in differentiated instruction. Lately, improvements in achievements based on international testing have been at best

incremental. Adding to that we have no evidence that standardized test scores and comparisons released months after tests took place have any relevance in improving student or school performance which result from more direct response and immediate intervention.

We seem to be doing reasonably well with about 80% of our students under the current system. However, that same system also seems intractably unresponsive to our Indigenous children and young people, and increasingly so to trauma-experienced newcomers, the consequence being that we lose people in the process as opposed to tracking their achievements. What is interesting is that, if Indigenous students or newcomers reach and participate in the post-secondary system, their completion percentages match those of others.

We also know that where there are strong parent-child-school relationships children are more likely to do well at school. Conversely, we also know there is a strong correlation between lack of educational achievement, home dysfunction and low socio-economic status in communities and homes. While the schools may, and do, mitigate some of the negative consequences of poverty, hunger and dysfunction they cannot relieve or eliminate them. That remains within the purview of the larger society and governments.

What we do know is that conditions of hunger and absence of safety, shelter and clothing all inhibit children's ability to attend school and to concentrate when they are there. We also know that lack of empathy for others, outright discrimination based on negative stereotypes, and bullying based on difference can affect how children, even groups of children, succeed in school. These conditions all undermine schools efforts to have children experience excellence in achievement.

Finally, while student achievement correlates very strongly with strong, consistent teaching, it is not enough where the above negative conditions intervene or prevail. I address part of this issue in the next section.

RECOMMENDATION 2

THAT THE COMMISSION ENCOURAGE THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, REGARDLESS OF HOW ARRANGED AND ORGANIZED, TO EXPLORE AND ORGANIZE VISITATIONS, STUDENT EXCHANGES AND INTER-SCHOOL COLLABORATIONS LIKE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITES BETWEEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

RECOMMENDATION 3

THAT THE COMMISSION SUPPORT THE RECOGNITION AND LEGITIMIZATION IN THE CURRICULUM OF LAND-BASED AND OTHER EXPERIENTIAL AND CULTURALLY BASED EDUCATION.

RECOMMENDATION 4

THAT THE COMMISSION OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT, SUPPORT AND VALIDATION TO SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO EXPERIMENT WITH OTHER CURRICULAR FORMATS LIKE CROSS-AGE THEMES AND TOPICS, COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND LEARNING IN DEPTH, AND OTHER STRUCTURES LIKE CHANGES IN THE SCHOOL YEAR LIKE YEAR ROUND SCHOOLING .

RECOMMENDATION 5

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND FURTHER STUDY OF CRADLE-TO - GRAVE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT TRACKING AND THE ROLE OF PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION.

IV. Teaching

(How can teachers and school leaders become more effective?)

Manitoba probably has the most competent teaching force that it has ever had. The five year teacher education program has not only resulted in greater disciplinary expertise but also in teaching prowess. The real concern in teaching is teacher shortages in some rural areas and remote Northern communities, and a shortage of substitute or supply teachers even in urban areas.

In some communities, in spite of their best efforts and incentives of various types, every year some schools begin the year short of teachers and principals and some, in fact, never have their full desired contingents. As a result teachers assume leadership they did not choose, teach outside their areas of expertise and cover large classes. Students in those schools go for long periods without qualified teachers. Not only is this hard on the existing staffs but also it is devastating and disastrous for students and communities.

Any remedy in the area of teaching and leadership must first address these issues.

I have shared the following perspectives with the Faculties of Education, the Deputy Minister of education and the former Minister of Education.

“Overall achievement rates of children in Northern and First Nations communities are unconscionably low and not reflective of their abilities and are, at least in part, due to significant teacher shortage in many Northern and First Nations communities. Many First Nations communities never achieve full certified teacher complements. Retention rates term-to-term and year-to-year are extremely low in some communities, ie. staff turnover is high and educational continuity for children is low. Even out-of-province teacher recruiting does not relieve this situation. This situation prevails even though there is no overall shortage of teachers. Once teachers experience life in the North and First Nations communities, even if they initially saw it as entry or short term employment, many perceive this as a preferable way of living and lifestyle.”

I have recommended that teacher education leaders consider revamping their programs to allow internships and residencies for teachers candidates, based on the rationale which follows. The greatest factor in children’s educational achievement is the quality of teaching. Internships and residencies would increase the potential/likelihood for teacher retention. They would add to the complement of adults in schools who are working with children.

Furthermore, internships require a different type of commitment from both parties than do traditional short term practicums. As teacher candidate competence and expertise increase so are likely the competencies and expertise of supporting teachers who experience greater demands for expertise in their practices. Internships are more likely to lead to longer term commitments than shorter term practicums.

Additionally, I believe that entry into teacher education programs could and should be made more rigorous and perhaps targeted to particular locations in the province. All candidates, in addition to submitting to Child Abuse Registry and Criminal Records Checks, should take a prerequisite course in child protection, eg. Commit to Kids from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. Qualifying candidates from Indigenous and newcomer communities might receive incentives to pursue teacher education. Relatedly, teacher candidates’ programs for rural, Northern and First Nations communities should contain a community service component which would prepare them for extra-school leadership expectations.

In keeping with this proposal for a more experience-based teacher education program, there should be similar mentorship programs for school leaders which might involve shadowing and mentorship arrangements of reasonable duration either prior to appointment or immediately upon appointment.

I believe discussions regarding teacher education and school leadership programs with internship/mentoring foci could use the following as guidelines for initiating discussions:

- Each education faculty in Manitoba commit, at least in the short term, to one cohort (30-35 students) of rural, Northern and First Nations teacher internship per year;

- The internship constitute the second year of the program following an initial year of classroom instruction and orientation to rural, Northern and First Nations school realities (perhaps short practicums at the beginning and end of the first year in the program);
- The Faculties (perhaps through Deans' Council) consider a collaborative partnership for supervision, support and evaluation of teacher interns;
- The Manitoba Government, MTS, MSBA and MASS be approached as partners in this venture to supply logistical resources and services, perhaps even contributing collectively to internship stipends and accommodations;
- Rural, Northern and First Nations communities indicate how many teacher candidates they are willing to take on and conduct, through MFNERC, MFNSS, remote rural, Frontier and Northern Divisions invitation and orientation sessions prior to the recruitment, selection and acceptance of students into the program;
- Rural, Northern and First Nations communities indicate how they are willing and able to support teacher candidates in their communities eg. housing, stipends, transportation and, perhaps, even bursaries; and,
- Rural, Northern and First Nations communities actively encourage and recruit students from their own communities.

Finally, in terms of increasing the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders, current provisions for Professional Development seem adequate as do the Professional Performance Evaluation systems. What could prove worthwhile, and perhaps more effective is more consideration of time and opportunities for collaboration, a strategy where teachers share their expertise and act as checks on their own and others practices. This would be most successful if initiated by professionals themselves.

RECOMMENDATION 6

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT IT INITIATE NEGOTIATIONS WITH FACULTIES OF EDUCATION, SCHOOL DIVISIONS, FIRST NATIONS AND MTS, MSBA AND MASS WITH A VIEW TO INTRODUCING AND IMPLEMENTING INTERNSHIP AND RESIDENCY PROGRAMS IN RURAL, NORTHERN AND FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES.

RECOMMENDATION 7

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT IT INITIATE NEGOTIATIONS WITH FACULTIES OF EDUCATION, SCHOOL DIVISIONS, FIRST NATIONS AND MTS, MSBA AND MASS WITH A VIEW TO INTRODUCING MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR ASPIRING AND NOVICE SCHOOL LEADERS.

V. Accountability for Student Learning

(How can the education system develop a stronger sense of shared accountability for student learning?)

In my experience, regular reporting schedules laid out by policy or regulation on key aspects of education and schooling help develop a very powerful sense of public responsibility for those matters. A good example is regular parent-teacher conferences in which teachers and schools feel obligated to provide comprehensive accounts of what they are doing for children and rationale for their actions and activities. Other examples are the reports that many school divisions provide to their publics regarding their plans, including new initiatives and planning cycles.

To those reports I would add the types of accounts I am most familiar with, those of Seven Oaks, Pembina Trails and Frontier School Divisions which include reports on student leadership, parental engagement and community outreach always framed in terms of common goals and public interest. They are the results of planning processes already mandated by the Ministry.

Finally, I would like to see the return of annual Education reports from the Minister of Education reinforcing Provincial directions, reaffirming Provincial commitment to public schools and summarizing Divisional activities. The shift here is that *accountability* consists of systems' giving an account of what they did, why they did what they did, what they believe happened as a result of their action and where they are headed next, as opposed to holding people to account for their purported failings on testing events or by threats of sanctions.

The Commission should also take into account that consistently, according to regular surveys, citizens have indicated their willingness to increase their own taxes in the interest of supporting the education system. This is, in a sense, a strong affirmation of the accountability that most citizens feel toward schools.

RECOMMENDATION 8

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND THAT THE GOVERNMENT DEVELOP AN ANNUAL REPORT ON EDUCATION INCLUDING THE MINISTRY OF

EDUCATION'S ACTIVITIES OF THE PAST YEAR AND PLANS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT AND RATIONALE FOR SAME.

VI. Governance

(What type of governance structures are needed to create a coordinate a relevant education system?)

Education is a home fed, home grown activity – it happens where children and young people live their lives so there needs to be a reasonable balance between a somewhat local and the provincial involvement. That balance can best be achieved by a respectful and representative dialogue between locally and provincially elected jurisdictions. While the Province may wish to redefine “local” through amalgamation, I believe it would not serve either the province or the school system to arbitrarily eliminate the local representation and quiet the local voice in education.

Education is at least as important as infrastructure and other community services, and in my view, having Boards of Trustees is just as important as having municipal councils. They both ensure a somewhat local voice on behalf of their constituents and, similarly, they were traditionally separated for very good reasons, one of which is to ensure that local resources are used in such a way as to meet and enhance both of their civic, but distinct, responsibilities in a locally responsive, reasonable, relevant and concerted way.

We could learn from the newly formed Manitoba First Nations School System that negotiated agreements with each “local,” however defined, makes for greater commitments to the whole and more harmonious relationships in the longer term. In that same vein, it would seem disingenuous to me to amalgamate arbitrarily and indiscriminately, although some amalgamations might certainly be encouraged. We do know that amalgamations cost more, often distract from real educational agendas for extended periods of time, and that large systems are neither more effective, efficient or essential to educate children. There is no known correlation between amalgamation, greater centralization, and student success. In fact, if there was, we would have to close many of our rural schools and move those children to our cities.

In my view, the current structures and division of roles and responsibilities between levels of government are appropriate and function well to achieve provincial educational goals.

On a related matter, private schooling, particularly home schooling, should be studied and reviewed to ensure that it is compliant with Provincial legislation and regulations in the interest of children and society. No recommendation follows as this question seems to be outside the purview of this Commission’s mandate but, nevertheless current practices raise serious concerns about whether societal responsibilities to children are being ensured.

RECOMMENDATION 9

THAT THE COMMISSION REAFFIRM THE VIABILITY OF, THE IMPORTANCE OF, AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN MANITOBA.

VII. Funding

(What actions are required to ensure that the education system is sustainable and provides equitable learning opportunities for all children and youth?)

In regard to funding, the sustainability of the education system is closely related to the governance system, as are the questions of equity and equality.

In the 1990s there was an effort made by trustees, with encouragement from the Government of the day to apply the test of “ability to pay” to Board-teacher bargaining. It became clear from all the arbitrated settlements that the “inability to pay” argument would not stand up, because it was deemed to be more a matter of discretion and choice than it was a financial reality. It seems to me that lack of sustainability based upon financial capacity would suffer the same fate. It follows then that the level of funding available to school systems is based on political will rather than some notion of shortage.

School divisions in Manitoba, although often protesting the level of funding or other related constraints determined by governments, have in the end by and large followed Governments lead and lived within recommended or imposed limits. Direction from governments regarding tax increases have also generally been followed and, in fact, some school boards have even taxed under the allowable guidelines. Past experience shows that school boards are very sensitive to, and responsive to, local conditions and very wary about losing the support of their taxpaying citizens. And school systems do their best within the limits that the public provides through its local boards.

Regarding the share of the costs of schooling, it seems to me that this will always be cause for dialogue and dissent. Contrary to what appears to be implied when people speak about the removing of taxing authority on property from boards of trustees, neither the level of taxation nor the sources of taxation have changed where governments have assumed total control. The only real changes have been who collects the taxes and, in many cases, where the local money is spent. Taxes collected by provincial jurisdictions tend to end up in general revenues meaning that where local money stayed local before it is now diverted away from the local, sometimes to other locations and other commitments.

Furthermore, there is no real evidence to suggest that centralizing finances provides more equity. Fundraising is just one aspect of the complexity of this issue, because advantaged communities would resist having their efforts curtailed while demanding equal treatment, and are quite able to provide more opportunities and materials than disadvantaged ones. In schooling, as in every other public provision, equity and equality of opportunity remain an ideal to be pursued but never realized, because it is a subjective value-based concept rather than a fiscal one. In practical terms, the public interest is to provide some notion of adequacy and reduce the impacts of inequities, something which appears to best be achieved at a somewhat local level. It is fair to say that many school divisions have been reasonably successful at reducing the disparities of impact on children by allowing school officials the discretion to respond to matters linked to poverty, hunger and inability to participate for a variety of reasons.

Schools are the sites where the equity responses are most meaningful because they are the places where principals can supply necessary materials to needy students, where they can waive fees for curricular and extra-curricular activities, and where children can be fed if necessary. What they are often doing with these decisions is ensuring that needy students and families can participate equally with other students, and they generally do so discreetly protecting the dignity of those who receive these considerations. It is also hard to imagine that decisions made at a distance removed from the children actually supported could be made in a timely fashion. Meaningful equity decisions require immediate responses dictated by individual circumstances and not overriding fiscal policies.

In my considerable experience governments and boards can never provide enough funding to satisfy people. Money is always a dissatisfier, as perceived necessity or desirability always outstrips willingness to pay. There is no way for funders to escape this fundamentally political issue. However, there are ways to receive greater acceptance of fiscal decisions. One way is to involve representatives of all the recipients/participants to in regularly reviewing funding formulas and levels, with advisory capacity to the Government. In fact, I would recommend possible participation from groups like the Chambers of Commerce, Assembly of Manitoba Municipalities, the Manitoba Metis Federation and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in addition to member organizations formerly involved. It would send the clear message that education is everyone's responsibility. Relatedly, the second is to provide explanations and rationale for all fiscal decisions made whether popular or not.

Finally, I find it hard to accept that we have a tax crisis or that property taxes are as regressive as some would have us believe. What we do have is a tax system that places demands on those least able to pay disproportionately. Relatedly, what we do have is a tax regime that is too convoluted and complex to be open and transparent. Thirdly, we have tax rhetoric, by the very people who need the resources to provide essential and desirable public services, that is often misleading, unhelpful and divisive.

What we need is an open honest reminder of the need for taxes and the opportunities they provide to improve the lives of our neighbours, workers and fellow citizens, and not just in times of emergencies like floods and forest fires. What we need is for our leaders to remind us that education is more an investment than an expense. What we also need is a public review of taxation policy with a view to eliminating some obvious inequities, and simplifying and clarifying the taxation process. This matter is not just an education issue and should be decoupled from any school review.

RECOMMENDATION 10

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT IT RE-CREATE THE INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION FINANCE WITH EXPANDED REPRESENTATION TO REGULARLY REVIEW THE EDUCATION FUNDING REGIME.

RECOMMENDATION 11

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT THEY UNDERTAKE AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF TAXATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES.

RECOMMENDATION 12

THAT THE COMMISSION RECOMMEND TO GOVERNMENT THAT IT RENEW ITS COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION AS AN INVESTMENT AND TO THE PURSUIT OF REDUCING UNWARRANTABLE INEQUITIES.

VIII. Summary and Conclusions

I have steadfastly supported the view that public schooling and its public purposes need constant ongoing renewal to remain meaningful and healthy. It is also my belief that our democracies are at somewhat of a crossroads given the incivility and divisiveness of current political rhetoric, rhetoric where it is hard to imagine *governance by all for the sake of all*. Education is an obvious necessity for the maintenance and sustainability of democratic life, being as dependent as it is on notions of the inclusion of all and the equal worth of all. It is the one human enterprise, currently promoted and affirmed through our public school system, that attempts to build a cooperative, collective public with a common interest or good as its ultimate goal.

The human ideal of the common good means that there is a place and a space for everyone and that, when anyone is left out for whatever reason, we all feel cheated or if we have somehow failed. It also means that we create, re-create and renew to the extent we are able that democratic world through respectful and caring interactions and relationships with all others regardless of

difference. Such is the ideal of the public school system, and such is my hope for the work of the Education Review Commission. I wish us all well.

***Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.**

Hannah Arendt (1968) *Between past and future* (193)

SELECT REFERENCES and GOOD READING

ARENDDT, Hannah (1968) *Between past and future*, New York: Penguin Books.

BETHKE-ELSHTAIN, Jean (1993) *Democracy on Trial*, Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press.

COULTER, David L. & WIENS, John R. (2008) *Why Do We Educate? Renewing the Conversation*, The 107th NSSE Yearbook, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc.

EGAN, Kieran (1991) *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape our Understanding*, Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.

EGAN, Kieran (2011), *Learning in Depth: A Simple Innovation that Can Transform Schooling*, Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.

GREEN, Tom (1990) *Voices: The Educational Formation of Conscience*, Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press.

Respectfully submitted

John R. Wiens

776 Montrose Street

Winnipeg, Manitoba

R3M 3N3

john.wiens@umanitoba.ca

(204) 489-7639