

GARDEN VALLEY SCHOOL DIVISION

COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE LEARNING TODAY BUILDING FOR TOMORROW

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**Submission to Manitoba's Commission on
Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education May 2019**

Preamble:

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is an education, and one of the finest and most fruitful investments in the future of our communities is our public education system. A strong public education system is essential to the individual and collective well-being of our province and its people, and to the development of an informed and engaged society. The challenges facing the education system today require thoughtful solutions, shared responsibility, and consideration of proven strategies and programs. Exclusionary approaches, simplistic slogans, punitive strategies and cost-cutting measures that substitute for real solutions distract from the important work needed to strengthen our system and provide an excellent education for all our children. Public education depends upon public support, public participation, and mutual accountability between schools and the communities they serve.

As the Commission undertakes this important review, we encourage that consideration be given not only to common provincial policies, but also the thousands of contextual daily decisions in local schools across our province.

6 Areas of Focus:**1. Long-term vision -What should the goals and purpose of K-12 education be in a rapidly changing world?**

We live in a world that is changing rapidly. New discoveries are increasing our knowledge and understanding across all disciplines almost daily. With the increasing access to the world wide web, huge amounts of information can be found just a click away. Through various forms of multi-media communication, we have almost instant access to human capital across our planet.

So how do we prepare our students for this type of world? We must build capacity in areas that promote a resilient and discerning society capable of effectively adapting to rapid change.

Recommendations:

- A K-12 education that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student.
- Preparing children to be good neighbours, workers, and citizens.
- Developing respectful people of integrity who are creative, collaborative, critical thinkers, and able to effectively communicate in a changing world.
- A shift in emphasis from the instruction of facts to a model which focuses on competencies such as critical thinking, character, creativity, innovation, as well as digital literacy.
- Today's classrooms need to engage students in their learning through authentic, relevant inquiry and problem solving.
- Learning that extends beyond the walls of the school, where students can engage in learning opportunities within the community and the world at large, as well as bring the world into the classroom.

2. Student learning - What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba?

Excellence in student achievement means that our students are respectful people of integrity who are creative, collaborative, critical thinkers, and able to effectively communicate in a changing world.

Recommendations:

- A clear understanding of and commitment to ensuring that all students develop the necessary skills.
- Clear articulation of the learning targets and the criteria for success.
- Build understanding across and among core subjects.
- Emphasize deep understanding.
- Engage students with real world data, tools and experts in solving meaningful problems.
- A healthy balance between direct instruction and project-oriented teaching methods.
- All students require equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies and resources.
- Teachers who maintain an understanding and proficiency with the use of current technologies.
- Many students in Manitoba come to school without their basic needs being met. Schools require resources to help meet those basic needs. Children can only focus on their learning when their basic needs are first met.
- Success and excellence in achievement can look different for each student. As such, schools need to be able to offer a variety of programs that engage students and prepare them for life beyond high school, whether that be post-secondary, apprenticeship or the work force.
- Education must focus on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student.

GVSD Illustration: School Liaison Workers

- As part of the ongoing supports provided to families by Garden Valley School Division, every school within the division has a School Liaison Worker.
- These individuals play a vital role in providing various supports to our newcomer families, as well as our most vulnerable students and families.
- Some of their duties include:
 - Work with the school to assist students identified by the school student services team.
 - Assist immigrant and new parents and students understand the goals of Garden Valley School Division and assist Garden Valley School Division to understand the needs of immigrant and new parents and students.
 - Develop trust between the home and school.
 - Provide a basic liaison function in a comfortable atmosphere, interpreting school reports, checking on attendance and providing feedback to the school. This liaison sometimes takes the form of home visits, work place visits, coffee times, phone calls and arranging meetings with teachers and other agencies.
 - Assist the schools in arranging for EAL parent orientation and other events.
 - Where possible, assist parents with translation or other help in understanding school documents, as well as assisting school personnel understand non-English documents that parents may want conveyed to the school.

- When needed, assist parents in accessing specialized services. e.g. Making medical, dental or optometric appointments, Child and Family Services, Genesis House, etc. When relevant diagnostic information from a specialist will have an impact on program planning for a student in school, the School Liaison Worker may be requested to attend such an appointment with the family.

3. Teaching- How can teachers and school leaders become most effective?

Recommendations:

- Prepare teacher candidates to enter the profession with a solid understanding in best pedagogical practices for teaching literacy and numeracy.
- Sufficient staffing for all divisions to hire learning coaches to provide training and in-class support on literacy and numeracy.
- Sufficient staffing to maintain reasonable class sizes and necessary student support services, such as clinicians, counsellors, etc.
- Sufficient administrative time in every school to ensure that school administrators have the time to be educational leaders.
- Sufficient time and resources to ensure that all teachers are able to access professional growth opportunities annually.
- A comprehensive leadership development program, in addition to post-secondary programs in educational administration, that becomes a requirement for all educational leaders. Sessions need to be offered regionally in order to provide greater access to all individuals interested in participating.
- Knowledge sharing through professional learning communities.

GVSD Illustration: Early Year's Literacy Initiative

- In 2012, K-4 students in GVSD were underperforming in literacy. As part of the GVSD strategic planning process, a goal was established to have 85% of K-4 students reading at or above grade level.
- The Board of Trustees provided the necessary supports for a literacy steering committee to be established with representatives from senior administration, school administration and teachers, with a goal to develop an action plan.
- In turn, the steering committee brought recommendations for consideration to senior administration and the Board, many of which required funding to proceed. These recommendations, based on research, included the following:
 - Establishment of a standardized assessment program to get a clear understanding how our students were doing and use it as a baseline for moving forward. GVSD invested in Fountas & Pinnell Assessment, which is administered in September and May of each year. All new teachers are trained in the administration of the assessment to provide greater consistency across the division.
 - Why do we measure twice per year?

- Fall – diagnostic and formative = expectation is that teachers will use this info to plan for instruction. The board uses the information to see if resources need to be re-arranged to provide additional supports. It also allows us to track and respond to summer reading loss.
 - Spring – celebrations; what has worked and what hasn't; how do we need to adjust what we're doing?
 - Investment in a Literacy Coordinator to support teachers in developing new understandings and implementing new pedagogical approaches in the classroom.
 - The Coordinator offers supports to classroom teachers such as:
 - Mentoring and coaching
 - Modeling
 - Co-teaching
 - Observation and feedback
 - Resources
 - Professional development sessions
 - Effective use of classroom data
 - The Coordinator has been instrumental in implementing best literacy practices throughout the division.
 - Investment in classroom libraries (approximately \$250,000 over 5 years) to provide greater access to quality literature to all K-4 students.
 - Increased access to professional development on literacy instruction.
 - Annual partnership with a local organization to put books into the hands of pre-school children.
- This deliberate and intentional focus by the local school board has elevated student reading levels from just over 40% of K-4 students reading at or above level, to over 70% of students reading at or above level.

4. Accountability for student learning- How can the education system develop a stronger sense of shared accountability for student learning?

Recommendations:

- Clearly articulated and up-to-date strategic plans that link division goals to department goals and student achievement.
- What gets measured, tracked, and reported gets improved. Developing the right measures and collecting the data for the purpose of improvement, as opposed to ranking and sorting, helps to point divisions in the right direction.
- Supporting divisions in analyzing and responding to data to drive improvement.
- Locally elected school board trustees who engage parents and the community in strategic planning that focuses on student learning. (Within GVSD, Parent Advisory Committees from each school are invited to add their voices to our strategic planning process.)

GVSD Illustration – See Early Year's Literacy Initiative mentioned in #3 above.

5. Governance - What type of governance structures are needed to create a coordinated and relevant education system?

Recommendations:

- Maintain the current system of governance that works very effectively and efficiently.
 - There is role clarity for each stakeholder in the current governance model and school boards are functioning effectively.
 - Local school boards are able to work directly with senior administration and school leaders to draft an annual strategic plan following the directions of the province, provide the necessary resources to carry out the plan, and receive regular updates on the effectiveness of the plan and make adjustments as necessary.
 - The schools in each community look different throughout the province and have unique needs (for example, in some schools in GVSD up to 40% of students require EAL assistance). Local school boards have the ability to respond to needs and establish different approaches on behalf of their communities - grassroots democracy in action.
 - Listening to the majority of Manitobans who want to keep their local school boards.
- Keep school divisions at an optimal size so they:
 - Can be nimble enough to react quickly to meet the needs of schools and communities.
 - Are able to reflect the values and priorities of the communities they serve.
- Where feasible, school divisions can create partnerships that draw on economy of scale, maximize efficiencies, and provide greater learning opportunities for students.

GVSD Illustration: Partnerships

- Red River Technical Vocational Area (RRTVA)
 - Red River Technical Vocational Area is a partnership of five southern Manitoba school divisions devoted to providing access to high quality technology education programs for high school students.
- Bus Garage with Western School Division –
 - Centre-Line Pupil Transportation is a joint repair facility operated by Garden Valley School Division and Western School Division. The facility is responsible for the repair and maintenance of school buses for both school divisions. Centre-Line Pupil Transportation currently services 92 school buses.
- Local Organizations/Initiatives and GVSD
 - Winkler Family Resource Center – Board Representation
 - Speech Language Pathologist involvement in programming
 - Community Care Program – steering committee and screening committee involvement
 - Winkler Resource Committee – communicating school division priorities

6. Funding – What actions are required to ensure that the education system is sustainable and provides equitable learning opportunities for all children and youth?

Recommendations:

- Sufficient provincial funding is required to ensure equity across all divisions.
- Local school boards need the autonomy to raise a portion of funds locally to meet the needs and priorities of local communities.
- Developing a method of taxation that does not place an unfair burden on any one group.

GVSD Illustration: Local Choices

- The list of things GVSD has been able to accomplish because of the ability to tax locally is long. The following list of items is not meant to be exhaustive but demonstrates some of the essential projects the Board of Trustees has been able to undertake:
 - Literacy and Numeracy Initiatives
 - Increase Staffing (e.g. Literacy and Numeracy Coordinators)
 - Books for Classroom Libraries
 - Garden Valley Collegiate Zone / Cafeteria Renovation
 - Border Valley, Southwood, JR Walkof Staff Room Additions and Renovations
 - Winkler Elementary Interior and Classroom Renovations
 - Winter Bussing for K-4 students
 - Technical Vocational Education programs
 - Alternative Education Options e.g. Fresh Start located at The Bunker; GVCTEC
 - Funding to start up new schools – 4 in the last 12 years
 - Fiber Optic Connectivity