



LORD SELKIRK SCHOOL DIVISION

Submission to the Manitoba Commission on
Kindergarten – Grade 12 Education Review
Lord Selkirk School Division
Board of Trustees

Lord Selkirk School Division consists of 9 elementary schools, 3 junior high/middle years schools, 1 K – 9 school, a Hutterian school, an offsite campus and 1 high school. We serve >4,000 students and their families. Our division is large enough to have a wide range of opportunities for our diverse student body, but we are small enough to be able to build relationships with our students, their families, our staff, Senior Administration and the Board of Trustees. We see this is a strength as the province moves ahead with its K – 12 Education Review.

As a school board, we are always looking for efficiencies: in operations, time management, processes, use of space and pedagogy. LSSD has received 2% less funding for the third time in four years, which translates into more than half a million dollars in this year alone. Some programs/initiatives are mandated by the province with little or no funds to pay for them – eg. 20 K-3; accessibility of our buildings to comply with the *Accessibility Act of Manitoba*. With less funding coming from the province, local funding has increased. And so our challenge is to provide quality programs and supports for our students while being fiscally responsible and accountable to our constituents.

In LSSD, all students participate in the grade 3, grade 7 & 8 assessments, and grade 12 provincial exams. In other divisions and other provinces, students are selected to participate, but all our students are involved, so the comparison is not accurate. In our division, we use best-practices to teach AND to evaluate student learning: through Universal Design for Learning, we use a variety of instruction modalities and diverse tools and strategies to determine if students understand what has been taught. This happens throughout the year, not just in one moment in time. While we appreciate that there needs to be some measure, the present assessment measures only one moment in time and only what they have learned up to that point, not the end of the academic year. Our Early Years schools have implemented the Balanced School day schedule that provides three 100-minute instructional time slots and two nutrition and movement breaks that enables children to be healthier, more active and ready to learn throughout the course of the whole school day. This translates to increased engagement and consequently, better outcomes.

Over the last decade, we have seen declining enrollment, and our teaching staff have decreased, but we have added school counselors, social workers, speech therapists, support staff to help meet the needs of our students.

Schools are a reflection of society; the LSSD population requires social, emotional and physical supports in order to be prepared and able to participate in learning. By virtue of the title of “public school”, we do not pick and choose which students we accept. As a school division, we support the struggling students, as well as provide enrichment opportunities to the brightest and gifted.

Schools are dealing with increasing complexities and our classrooms have changed over the last decade. All of our schools have some augmented meal program with the generous support of community partners, whether a regular breakfast program, or a supply of food for students who come and don't have adequate nutrition: if you haven't eaten, it's hard to learn. 80% of our students are bussed and so they are with us all day. If they aren't fed and don't come with lunches, that falls to us. We are also seeing an increasing number of students who are “kids in care”. They may come part way through the school year or may not have had any consistent schooling. We have students who have recently immigrated from other countries who have little or no English language skills. We have families from diverse cultural backgrounds, some of which may not see schools as a safe or valuable place for their children. We also have students who are exceptional gifted – academically, athletically, musically. It is incumbent on us to provide the resources and programs to support them all.

Diversity in schools is very real and a “one size fits all” approach does not take this into account. Equity is one of the areas that the K – 12 Review will focus on. But equity does not mean equal, which is why the Board of Trustees has fulltime Kindergarten in three of our most needy schools as identified through the EDI (Early Development Instrument, which assesses children's readiness to start school from a language, social-emotional, motor and self-help skills perspective). The province only covers the cost of half-time Kindergarten, and we cover the other half because this is helping to promote student success by equipping children who may be starting school without the skills they need. We recognize the value of music and band programs that promote team work, collaboration, creativity, discipline, organization and confidence, all of which future employers are looking for in prospective employees. We support athletic and arts programs that nurture the heart and mind. We support technical and vocational programs to help prepare students for the workforce. We support language and cultural programs that allow our students to celebrate differences and in so doing, foster understanding, respect and tolerance of individuals who are different from them. We have the ability to do this through having “local voices” making “local choices”. School trustees are elected by their local constituents to represent them in decisions affecting their community schools. We are invested in education because our children, in some cases, grandchildren, our neighbors' and our friends' children are the ones we are making decisions for. This is grassroots democracy that is the fabric of our province and our nation. The cost of locally elected trustees is approximately \$ 0.005/dollar spent on education. If school boards are eliminated, the formal mechanisms for feedback would also be eliminated, and parents and caregivers would lose access to the information they need to ensure that the needs of their children are being met and to ensure their children are being supported when challenges arise. Community outreach and community engagement is better fostered by school board members who are part

of the community they represent, as they are more accessible to the community than centralized government.

Schools belong to communities, and the schools of our division are used by countless clubs and organizations that otherwise would not have space to run their programs. This partnership with our community is a tangible connection between our schools and the communities they serve.

All of these are examples of what is available in the community schools of LSSD as a result of the advocacy of local trustees. If decisions about what happens at Walter Whyte or William S. Paterson, Happy Thought and East Selkirk Middle, Robert Smith, Ruth Hooker Schools or the Comp are made on Broadway by politicians who have no knowledge of the culture, priorities and day-to-day challenges that these learning communities experience, how likely are they to meet the unique needs and support the programs and services that our students need to be successful?

There has been some discussion about amalgamation of school boards as a cost saving strategy and that the actual elimination of school boards is open for discussion. Studies have shown that reduction of school divisions through amalgamation have not resulted in real cost savings or a reduction in bureaucracy. In communities where school boards have been eliminated and replaced with appointed officials or school advisory councils, there has been a loss of accountability and transparency as officials and members of these councils have not been democratically elected. Decisions considering education still have to be made and decentralization results in broad policies that attempt to apply a "one size fits all" approach that does not meet the unique needs of the local community. If school divisions become larger, decisions that are made regarding education will move further from communities and centralization will serve to undermine local choices and community voice will be diminished. School boards, along with their municipal government counterparts, are closer to their constituents than provincial and federal levels of government. If school boards are eliminated and replaced, Manitobans will be placed in situations where they must fight for the vital right to be democratically involved in public education through their elected representatives. School boards provide their communities with local voices and local choices so that they get the educational system that they need and deserve.

We uphold the values of critical thinking, active listening, being open-minded and objective, and continuous improvement. And we trust that these are the principles that will be used in the K – 12 Education Review.

Yours sincerely,



Lena Kublick, Chair
Board of Trustees

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