

Manitoba Commission on K-12 Education Pembina Trails School Division – Brief

Before we begin, we feel it is important to share our story. Pembina Trails School Division is the fourth largest and among the fastest growing school divisions in Manitoba. We are 14,500 students, 2000 staff, and 35 schools strong! The Board of Trustees could not be prouder of what our students and staff accomplish every day. We serve the south-west quadrant of the City of Winnipeg. With the rapid development in Waverley West and Ridgewood West, we are projecting that our enrolment will increase by 4,000 students over the next ten years. Pembina Trails was created in 2002, carrying on the traditions of excellence and high standards in our legacy school divisions, Assiniboine South and Fort Garry.

In 2009, Pembina Trails' trustees began a journey in *Leadership for Student Learning – The School Board's Role in Creating School Districts Where All Students Succeed* (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2007). The journey included a World Café (not unlike the public workshops being held by the current K-12 Education Commission), where stakeholders from all across the division came together to collaborate on a shared new vision for Pembina Trails. After reviewing all the information gathered, trustees and senior administration worked together to articulate the shared vision, which resulted in our Three Expectations for Student Learning:

1. All students in Pembina Trails will be personally and intellectually engaged in their learning at school.
2. By the end of grade 8, all students will meet the provincial curricular standards in literacy and numeracy, allowing them the greatest possibility for success in high school.
3. All students in Pembina Trails will graduate from high school.

These expectations help focus the everyday work and decision-making of Pembina Trails Board of Trustees, administration and staff. At the same time, we are committed to continually reviewing data on student achievement as a tool to guide the Board, administration, schools and leadership teams in areas that need improvement.

The use of data as a driver for change has become a priority for the division, which is why we have recently invested in IBM's Watson Analytics and Compass for Success (<https://www.ibm.com/case-studies/compass-success>). This tool will enable us to not only identify areas of improvement, but figure out how we can better address issues before they begin.

In addition to focusing the work and decision-making in the school division, the Three Expectations for Student Learning also prompted the development of Pembina Trails Standards for Success in Literacy (SSL). The purpose of our SSL is to engage our community in a shared commitment to literacy learning to ensure success for all learners, while also strengthening student achievement through the articulation of shared beliefs, understandings, effective practices and the clarification of the roles and responsibilities for literacy learning. This document has taken years to develop and its first iteration was launched last year and is available on our website at:

<https://www.pembinatrails.ca/Documents/Literacy%20Standards%20Brochure.pdf>

Collaboration was key in the development of our three expectations and SSL, and it is an essential part of an effective education system in Manitoba as we all strive for the same goal – the success of our students, and in turn, our society.

Manitoba's version of "success" for our students needs to be clearly defined and articulated. While initial steps have been taken by establishing provincial literacy and numeracy goals, there is still more work to be done to establish a shared vision of education in the province and in turn to build the collective will to succeed.

For a collaborative model to be successful, Manitoba needs to develop a climate of trust and an effective working relationship between the Department of Education and Training, school boards and the public. Schools Boards must be accountable for student success and for their own standard of practice.

In their book *The Governance Core – School Boards, Superintendents, and Schools Working Together*, Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan state that, "The value of the board is in the strategic oversight and support that the board provides. The board brings the passion, the drive, the commitment to achieve the moral imperative, not distracted by day-to-day administration challenges. This is purposeful action." Campbell and Fullan also emphasize that "highly effective governance requires a well-defined governance infrastructure that provides definition, guidance, and direction". Indeed, effective governance requires ongoing professional development and self-assessment, which is why in recent years, Pembina Trails Board of Trustees has spent time revisiting its structure and governance model.

Collaboration also includes listening to our local communities, bringing their perspectives to the Board table and effectively addressing local needs and interests when they arise. This is the true expression of democracy and is reflected in the engagement of our community activism, every four years, and throughout the term for each Board.

Pembina Trails also successfully engages our community through the use of Thoughtexchange. This online platform empowers leaders to surface answers to questions in real-time. Our staff, parents and ratepayers have the opportunity to participate in a virtual "town hall" where they can comment on and rate the thoughts of others regarding a question, topic or idea posed to them. This tool has been used to gather feedback and insight on an endless list of topics such as the annual budget, hiring of new school leadership and graduate exit interviews.

Knowing that stakeholder involvement was important to the Manitoba Education Commission, in May 2019, Pembina Trails engaged their community in a conversation about government priorities for K-12 education in Manitoba. Participants were invited to share thoughts, rate the thoughts of others and discover the results of the Thoughtexchange over a ten-day period. Two-thousand five hundred (2500) people chose to participate in the process. We received 2851 comments. These comments drew 85,800 responses from the 2500 participants.

The Executive Summary report from the May 2019 Thoughtexchange, which includes the top-rated themes and comments that emerged and how they align with the six areas of focus outlined by the Manitoba Commission on kindergarten to grade 12 education will be emailed to the Commission separately. The top-rated themes are also outlined below and have been linked to our recommendations:

Long Term Vision Themes:

- Quality of Education
- Character Development
- Career and College Prep

Student Learning Themes:

- Student Support
- Mental Health and Wellness
- Literacy and Numeracy
- Behaviour and Discipline
- Special Needs
- Curriculum and Extracurricular
- Poverty and Outside Factors
- Life Skills
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Social-Emotional
- Learning

Teaching Themes:

- EAs and Classroom Support
- Wellness
- PD

Accountability for Student Learning Themes:

- Quality of Instruction
- Government Accountability

Governance Themes:

- Students as Priority
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Leadership and Admin

Funding Themes:

- Class Size and Student-Teacher Ratio
- Salaries and Staffing
- Invest in Education
- Facilities

We are encouraged by the number of people, comments and ratings that our community stakeholders took the time to share with us and we look forward to further unpacking and exploring the data in the months to come.

Teachers play a vital role in helping our students to succeed. In fact, the 2018 updated list of the *Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences And Effect Sizes Related To Student Achievement* lists “collective teacher efficacy” as the number one factor of influence. Hattie describes this as “teachers working together to have appropriately high challenging expectations of what a year’s growth for a year’s input looks like, fed with evidence of impact, which is what sustains it.” He goes on to state that “when you fundamentally believe you can make the difference and you feed it with the evidence that you are...that is dramatically powerful.” (<https://vimeo.com/267382804>)

To this end, Pembina Trails believes in having high professional standards for our teachers. Our Professional Growth Model (PGM), locally developed and research based, is intended to be responsive and responsible; supportive of good teaching and learning in schools. The model emphasizes reflection, inquiry and collaboration, challenging educators to focus on the professional standards and seek knowledge and experiences to improve the quality of their practice. Additional details are available here: <https://www.pembinatrails.ca/Documents/Professional%20Growth%20Handbook-2016.pdf#search=Professional%20Growth%20Model>

All staff within Pembina Trails who are on a teacher contract are full participants in the PGM. Senior administrators and principals are responsible for ensuring that all 1000+ Pembina Trails teachers, consultants, and clinicians follow the PGM protocol. We hold our teachers to the standards established in the PGM and believe that this it plays a vital role in the high levels of learning that our students demonstrate consistently.

Key Takeaways:

- Collaboration (among all stakeholders)
- Data-driven strategic direction to identify areas needing additional focus and support (and funding accordingly)
- “Collective teacher efficacy” is vitally important to the success of our students
- Boards must be accountable

Recommendations for each of the focus areas: additional 500 words each.

Long-term vision – What should the goals and purpose of K-12 education be in a rapidly changing world?

In addition to skills in literacy and numeracy, to prepare our students for the future we need to “focus on independent thinking, global awareness and philanthropy.” This idea was identified by our stakeholders in their comments and is demonstrated through the top-rated themes in this category from our Thoughtexchange survey:

- Quality of Education
- Character Development
- Career and College Prep

Manitoba’s version of “success” for our students needs to be more clearly defined and articulated. While initial steps have been taken by establishing provincial literacy and numeracy goals, there is still more work to be done to establish a collaborative vision of education in the province and in turn to build collective will to succeed. Further exploration should also be considered regarding how “twenty-first-century skills” like critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and digital literacy will be integrated as goals or a component of assessment. For Pembina Trails, deeper learning for our students has required a significant shift in our model of teaching and learning. We’ve outlined what this means to us in Commitment to our Learners:

<https://www.pembinatrails.ca/Documents/A%20commitment%20to%20our%20kids.pdf>

In the years since we created the Three Expectations, Pembina Trails has developed a better understanding of the use of data to help drive accountability as we strive for our goals. In the coming year, we will elevate the roll of data through IBM’s Watson Analytics and Compass for Success (<https://www.ibm.com/case-studies/compass-success>). We will be able to input our data and use the system to identify and make correlations between areas needing improvement and/or areas of success. Further, we will use Watson Analytics to better assess the impact of our practices (at all levels in the Division) and then adjust our strategies and tactics to improve student learning.

With that concept in mind, it is recommended that the Province start with data collection, focus in on areas where we can identify the need for additional support (e.g. children in care; early learning; English as an Additional Language (EAL); full-day kindergarten; etc.), work with stakeholders, in particular school divisions, to develop strategies to address the issues, and in turn fund programming accordingly.

Further to the above, Pembina Trails would welcome the opportunity to partner with Manitoba Education and Training as we initiate the use of Watson Analytics and Compass for Success, which could subsequently be considered for province-wide roll-out.

Student Learning – What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba?

A variety of ideas were offered by stakeholders through our Thoughtexchange survey, many focused around the need for support, often due to the changing demographics and diversity of classroom composition, while also ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for students. Specifically the top-rated themes included to following:

- Student Support
- Mental Health and Wellness
- Literacy and Numeracy
- Behaviour and Discipline
- Special Needs
- Curriculum and Extracurricular
- Poverty and Outside Factors
- Life Skills
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Social-Emotional
- Learning

Recommendations that tie back to this theme include:

- Use data to identify areas of need, then work with stakeholders, in particular school divisions, to develop strategies to address the issues, and in turn fund programming accordingly.
- Provide additional support and funding to schools for nutrition programs because students need to eat breakfast and regular meals to feel energized and ready to learn.
- Remove barriers to information sharing across government departments, so that we are better able to understand and support our students.
- Provide funding for improved infrastructure for technology education programs like practical arts (i.e. not all students have access to these programs because the school does not have the infrastructure).
- Ensure that assessment is not just about the numbers and takes into consideration the whole child because as Albert Einstein is believed to have said “not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

Teaching – How can teachers and school leaders become most effective?

As noted in our preamble, the number one factor on the 2018 updated list of the Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences And Effect Sizes Related To Student Achievement is “collective teacher efficacy”.

This is further supported by our own Thoughtexchange findings where the top themes identified include:

- EAs and Classroom Support
- Wellness
- Professional Development (PD)

This suggests that there may be a need to explore the establishment of professional standards, perhaps similar to the Pembina Trails Professional Growth Model. It also emphasizes the importance of teacher wellness, including the availability of funding for appropriate classroom support. Finally, consideration may also be given to exploring the alignment of PD with teacher efficacy and student learning like putting something into legislation that elevates existing and/or new high level professional teaching standards into a provincial competency-based teacher certification program.

Again, applicable data analysis would be beneficial to assist in guiding areas of focus and potential funding.

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

Our brief identified a theme of collaboration. To be successful, Manitoba needs to develop a climate of trust and an effective working relationship between the Department of Education and Training, school boards, and the public. Further, schools boards must be accountable for student success and for their own standard of practice.

Working together, not against each other, at all levels and across all spheres is imperative. We also need to help the general public understand that the education of our children is vital to the future of our society and that education in the current global environment means so much more than just reading, writing and arithmetic.

The Board of Trustees remains engaged and focused on accountability for student achievement. For many years, Pembina Trails has published an annual Report to our Community that focuses on student success and reports on measured results against our expectations for student learning. We believe in transparency and keeping our community updated on academic achievement. Our 2018 Report to our Community can be found on our website at:

<https://www.pembinatrails.ca/Documents/Annual%20Report.pdf>

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

Collaboration is an essential part of an effective education system in Manitoba as we all strive for the same goal – the success of our students, and in turn, our society. Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, including local communities, should not be taken for granted as we look to strengthen our educational system.

Stakeholders identified three top-rated themes in this category:

- Students as a Priority
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Leadership and Admin

Our public school system is not static, but is constantly evolving in response to changing education and societal needs. Today's classrooms are significantly different from those found in schools only a few years ago. Decisions made by Provincial and Federal governments around immigration, social supports and education impact the classroom and vary throughout each community. Responsive and forward-thinking school boards and professional staff are crucial in supporting the ever-changing landscape. Locally elected boards give communities the ability to shape schools in ways that respond to local needs.

In addition to bringing the local voice to the table, in their book *The Governance Core – School Boards, Superintendents, and Schools Working Together*, Davis Campbell and Michael Fullan state that, “the value of the board is in the strategic oversight and support that the board provides. The board brings the passion, the drive, the commitment to achieve the moral imperative, not distracted by day-to-day administration challenges. This is purposeful action.”

Campbell and Fullan also emphasize that “highly effective governance requires a well-defined governance infrastructure that provides definition, guidance, and direction”. Indeed, effective governance requires ongoing professional development and self-assessment, which is why in recent years, Pembina Trails Board of Trustees has spent time revisiting its structure and governance model.

With the above in mind, it should be compulsory for Boards/divisions to review and amend their governance model to be in keeping with current best practices, commit to ongoing trustee training and development, and complete Board self-monitoring/evaluation.

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

Community pride and ownership of education is high when parents and the wider community see a connection between their direct investments in education through locally raised taxes. Additionally, local control over funding leads to creative thinking and innovation.

Pembina Trails, like most other school divisions in Manitoba, is proud of its many programs and services developed in response to direct community needs, concerns or ideas. Examples include the following:

- The Newcomer Community Hub opened in Ryerson School in early 2019 and provides parents of young and school aged children with a direct connection to immigrant resources, as well as emotional support
- Hiring a full time English as an Additional Language (EAL) consultant to support our growing number of newcomer students
- Pembina Trails Early College (PTEC) School, an innovative four-year program launched in 2018. PTEC integrates college and high school courses, real workplace scenarios, meaningful mentorships and prepares students for jobs in the information technology (IT) industry
- The Pembina Trails Alternative High School, offering students a unique and flexible learning option
- Indigenous initiatives, including working with a divisional Elder, Indigenous Student Success teachers, signing Winnipeg's Indigenous Accord and hosting leadership camps
- Offering our stakeholders the opportunity to participate in online community town halls on issues that matter
- Free early years programming such as Kindergarten Here We Come and Literacy Links
- Investing in a divisionally-based Reading Recovery Centre and teacher-leader allows us to better address needs that are specific to our division with greater ease.
- Opening our doors to family centres that offer a safe place for parents and preschool aged children to play, discover and socialize (such as the Fort Garry/St. Norbert Healthy Child Coalition and Assiniboine South Early Years centres)

We would not have been able to fund these programs, to meet the needs of students in our local communities, without being able to raise funds locally. Therefore, maintaining local control over funding is recommended.