



LEADERSHIP, ADVOCACY AND SERVICE FOR MANITOBA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS

## MSBA RESPONDS TO PC EDUCATION PROPERTY TAX COMMITMENT

**WINNIPEG– September 3, 2019**

With seven days to go before the next provincial election, the Manitoba School Boards Association received today's Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba election policy platform with interest. While the association remains non-partisan and independent, electoral policy platforms concerning K-12 education always remain of interest to school boards.

"While MSBA does not typically respond to a partisan platform document during an election period, it does seem that many people from across our communities have an interest in school board reactions to today's announcement by the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba of that party's election platform document", stated MSBA president Alan M. Campbell.

In particular, today's announcement features a significant proposal for change to Manitoba's current education funding structure– through the phase out of education-related property taxes over the next decade.

"Today's announcement would represent significant change and transformation for Manitoba's education system" said president Campbell. "As we always have, school boards will continue to work with any political party that is elected as our next government, to ensure that kids remain our focus no matter what changes may happen."

MSBA recently submitted a brief, as well as a 219 page report to the K-12 Education Review Commission formed by the Government in January, 2019. Our recommendations discuss the matter of education funding in greater detail.

"A lot of work was recently invested by our association in developing its observations and recommendations for the K-12 Education Review Commission", stated president Campbell. "Our final report to that Commission provides significant insight into how the current education funding model works and the benefits that it provides. These observations and recommendations do inform our response when it comes to provincial election policy platforms on education funding."

Based on its submission to the K-12 Education Review Commission, MSBA therefore responds to today's announcement with the following six questions regarding the PC Party of Manitoba's policy platform on education property taxes.

**1) HOW WILL LOCAL COMMUNITY VOICES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY CHOICES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION REMAIN SUSTAINED?**

While our association has yet to receive details concerning how local property taxes will be phased out, the PC Party of Manitoba's election commitment concerning changes to education property tax would, at a very high level, mean taking local tax investments away from local communities and then giving that same money directly to the provincial government. We believe that public education is about local voices making local choices for the betterment of our schools and students. Without some control of funding by communities— local voices making local choices for their students and schools would become challenging.

**2) WHAT WILL BE DONE TO AVOID RISK FOR LOCALLY FUNDED PROGRAMS?**

Over the course of 2018 and 2017, we as an association have gathered countless examples of how local program choices, made by local communities, continue to make all the difference in local schools. As this election commitment may limit or even discontinue local community authority for investing in such priorities, we believe that future planning must take stock of these essential programs, supports and services— to ensure they are not placed at risk as we move forward into the future.

**3) HOW WILL PUBLIC INVESTMENT KEEP PACE WITH NEED DURING “PHASE-OUT”?**

The PC party has made it clear that it shall continue to invest in education to meet needs over the phase out period. Removing \$141M in property tax would effectively remove 18 days of critical funding that is used to support our schools and students.

It will therefore become essential for provincial government investments in our schools to both keep pace with normal inflationary pressures and also to be replaced during the phase-out period. This will ensure that no frontline services or programs are affected. We therefore believe that this commitment is equally as important as phasing out of education property taxes.

**4) WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH THE REMAINING \$1 BILLION IN SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX?**

While the PC platform is clear that \$141M will be eliminated over the next four years, this would leave over \$1B in property tax investment in place. What will be the plan for addressing the remaining \$1 billion in property tax that would continue to be collected from Manitobans, before the next election cycle begins?

**5) WHAT WILL HAPPEN ONCE THE “PHASE-OUT” ENDS?**

For many years, Manitoba's school boards have advocated for a shift away from significant reliance on property tax. We have never supported the fact that nearly 40 percent of operating funding comes from local property tax. What we have supported, is the ability of local communities to keep some measure of fiscal independence, so that they can realize their own local priorities and vision for public education.

While it seems evident that some local investment will continue to be enabled over the next decade, based on the election commitment, the big question remains– what will happen in the longer term? What will be the role and responsibility of school boards during and following this “phase out” period?

## **6) WHAT FORM OR MODEL OF CENTRAL FUNDING WOULD BE USED BY THE PC PARTY?**

The election commitment appears to indicate that if re-elected, the PC Party will not entirely reduce school property tax, but may instead replace it from “general revenues”. We know that in other provinces where the same thing has occurred, this has meant that reliance on property tax has largely remained unchanged. We would like to know what the PC Party’s plan might be for replacing property tax revenue with other funding to support and sustain public schools?

“As is true of most policy platform documents, today’s release by the PC Party of Manitoba raises many important questions for school boards and for all citizens. As we move forward, we look forward to receiving responses to our questions from the PC Party of Manitoba and again do look forward to working with any party that should form the next government, for the sake of our students, schools and communities”, concluded president Campbell.

## **BACKGROUND**

Those who are interested in accessing the central recommendations of the Manitoba School Boards Association in respect of education funding, may review Recommendations 26-31 of the association’s *2020 Vision* document and chapter 6 of the association’s full-length submission to the K-12 Education Review Commission, which are both available at [www.localvoices.ca](http://www.localvoices.ca)

Appendix B of the full-length report includes examples of the kinds of local programs that are supported by local property taxes, which are invested by communities in support of student success and learning opportunities. These program examples are also available under the “divisional profiles” link at [www.localvoices.ca](http://www.localvoices.ca)

## **CONTACT**

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