



Manitoba 2016 Provincial Election

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

Provincial Election 2016: Talking to Candidates about Education

Prior to the candidates' debate on education that was held on March 18, 2016, the Manitoba School Boards Association surveyed school boards to determine what questions they would like to ask of the political parties. While the debate format meant that only one question could be asked by each of the education partners that sponsored the debate, all of the questions posed by school boards are important. We have collected them in this document, along with the questions that were asked at the actual debate. The Manitoba School Boards Association wishes to thank all school boards that submitted questions. All questions are promoted as reflections of MSBA member voice but do not necessarily reflect official association policy.

We would encourage school boards, and everyone who values public education and the children and communities it serves, to use these questions to initiate a dialogue about education with candidates.

Funding

- The 2016 Provincial education funding announcement indicated a funding increase of 2.55%. However, several school divisions received 0% in 2016 and have received 0% for many years in succession. The School Division Special Levy was intended to fund local programs valued by the community, but it is now being used to fund a substantial portion of operational costs for basic education programs. If your party was elected, what will be done to ensure that the provincial funding support for education is increased to fund a greater percentage of school division operating costs for basic education programs?
- If elected, would your party maintain, change or eliminate the farmland property tax rebate and the limit of \$5,000 for the rebate; the seniors' property tax rebate?
- If elected, will your party continue with implementation of the class size initiative for kindergarten through grade 3 classrooms and, if so, will you commit to funding 100% of the cost of teachers required to fully implement the initiative?
- According to Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning's own reports, school division spending varies from under \$10,000 to over \$15,000 per pupil a year. Tax rates vary from less than 12 mills to over 20 mills and because of variations in assessment wealth there is no correspondence between spending and tax rates. We have low spending divisions with high tax rates and high spending divisions with low tax rates. What will your party do to correct this?
- Over the past 20 years, and two successive provincial Governments, provincial funding for education has not kept pace with the rise in educational salaries and general inflationary costs of running a school board. As a result, the Province's contribution to paying for education has dropped from 80% of the costs at or below 60% of the costs over that period of time. Today the Province's share continues to get smaller with each and every passing year. The current system is unfair and puts the disproportionate tax burden onto property owners. Will your party allow school boards to maintain their independence in taxation while providing the tools that will lessen reliance on property taxes?
- The funding formula for public education in Manitoba is very complex and therefore, funding announcements by the Province are confusing to taxpayers. When the Province announces increased funding to school divisions, the actual benefit goes to approximately only 50 per cent of the school divisions. What would your party do to make the formula more transparent and more easily understood by the citizens of Manitoba as educational stakeholders?
- What is your proposed model for the funding of the construction of new schools, and additions to existing schools, and how will this model ensure that the capital and capital-like costs incurred by these projects will be provided for in full?

Role of school boards, autonomy and authority

- Canadian provinces have seen the dissolution of school boards in past years. Why or why not do you feel that school boards should be maintained in Manitoba under the current structure?
- If elected as government, would your party maintain, change or eliminate model of governance that maintains elected school boards and the local taxation authority of school boards?
- If your party forms the next government, how do you envision the role of Manitoba school boards in the financing and leadership of public education in our province? Specifically, will school boards continue to be elected by Manitobans; and will they retain critical financial autonomy through control over the special levy on property taxes?
- What does your party see as the role of school boards?
- If you are intending to implement new initiatives, how will you support school divisions with implementation?
- School boards have a mandate to provide budget/ financial information and be accountable to their constituents for effectively providing quality education for the tax dollars spent. What would you do to assist boards in being able to be more transparent and open to their public, considering the very complex and constantly changing provincial funding formulas in addition to limited resources/data on student performance that is readily available?
- Does your party support local taxation by school boards?

Aboriginal and Indigenous students and programming

- In what manner does your party plan on supporting and providing financial resources in order to meet the ten commitments identified under the Manitoba Collaborative Indigenous Education Blueprint for Universities, Colleges and Public School Boards?
- How would a government under your leadership address the funding inequities that exist between urban, rural, northern, Federal First Nation and Independent First Nation educational jurisdictions in our province?

Student supports and services

- Many rural and northern school divisions are experiencing a serious lack of treatment services for students who are suffering from addictions and other mental health issues. There have been cases of students with no supports in rural and northern communities who, once transferred to Winnipeg, have been immediately referred to the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre. In essence, rural and northern schools are expected to deal with children in crisis in the classroom while these same children are immediately referred and accepted for treatment in Winnipeg. What will your party do to address the serious lack of treatment services, (not advisory or consulting services), for young people in rural and northern Manitoba who are experiencing serious mental health issues, including severe anxiety disorders and addictions?
- Child and Family Services referrals in rural and northern school divisions have increased significantly in recent years due, in large part, to the loosening of regulations around voluntary placements. In the majority of cases, children in these situations are arriving with little advance notice to schools. These children are also arriving with scant supports. Just as quickly, these same children are often removed only a short time later, sometimes again with no advance notice, after a significant amount of local resources have been committed to developing programming for each individual child.
(1) What will your party do to address the lack of controls and preparatory measures that exist in voluntary and non-voluntary CFS placements in schools? (2) What will your party do to address the lack of transitional resources for children involved in CFS placements in Manitoba schools?

Curriculum and educational outcomes/transitions

- If your party was elected, what will be done to ensure that Literacy and Numeracy is a priority in education? How will you determine that Literacy and Numeracy initiatives are resulting in improvements in learning?
- In light of the fact that most school divisions in Manitoba have identified literacy and numeracy as major objectives, how will your party ensure that graduating teachers from Manitoba universities are adequately prepared to implement best pedagogical practices in the instruction of literacy and numeracy across all grade levels?
- What is your party's philosophy on the purpose of public education: what is education for? How will my child or my neighbour's child be different because of your party's philosophy concerning the public education system?
- Given the importance of promoting learning throughout the preschool period, along with the need to properly prepare children for their schooling, what is your party's position on implementing full-time preschool for every four year old in the public school system? If your party forms the next government, would you be a leader, as has Ontario with its successful model, in terms of the implementation of such a preschool program across the school system?
- The Ontario government, in its last budget, is proposing free university or college tuition to any student with a family income below \$50,000. Please provide your thoughts on this initiative. Would this be an initiative that your party would enact should you form government?

Continuity

- Over the course of the last few years, the current provincial Government has implemented a number of new initiatives and areas of focus, such as 20K3 class size initiative, new Student Achievement Support Unit with a focus on numeracy and literacy, youth mental health, Anti-Racism Action Plan, Children in Care Task Force Report, Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care Commission, and provincial report cards. If elected, what areas would your party continue to support and how?

Questions featured during the MSBA Co-Hosted March 18 Candidates' Debate on Education

The following five questions were asked of parties participating in the candidates' debate held at the association's March convention—the Liberal, New Democratic and Progressive Conservative parties of Manitoba. Written responses were also requested from non-participating parties, and to date, the Green Party has responded. Please see our election webpage for access to video of the debate and written responses: <http://www.mbschoolboards.ca/mbElection2016.php>

From the Manitoba School Boards Association:

According to a recent Probe Research poll, 7 out of 10 Manitobans continue to believe in the importance of community voice in decisions concerning public schools. If your party is elected to office, will you continue to respect the integrity of community voice through elected school boards, and will school boards retain critical financial autonomy to meet the unique needs of their local communities?



From the Manitoba Teachers' Society:

Families struggling with poverty are often preoccupied with attending to basic survival issues, which is a barrier for parents' involvement in their children's education. Youth from lower income quintiles are less likely to graduate from high school on time. *The View from Here 2015: Manitobans Call for a Renewed Poverty Reduction Plan* contains key recommendations to improve the social and economic conditions of low income families. This includes improving access to affordable housing, training and good jobs. What will you do to reduce poverty in Manitoba?



From the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils:

What opportunities do you envision for children in Manitoba and how does the provincial public education system support your vision?



From the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents:

In 2015, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents developed a significant position paper focused on Mental Health. One of the key recommendations from this position paper calls for timely and universal access to mental health professionals for all of Manitoba's children and youth. If elected to office, how would your government respond to the needs of the many waitlisted children and youth who require immediate attention? professionals for all of Manitoba's children and youth. If elected to office, how would your government respond to the needs of the many waitlisted children and youth who require immediate attention?



From the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials:

It is a telling fact that across Manitoba, many schools were built to meet the needs of a generation who themselves are now beginning to retire. Meanwhile, pressures upon this aged infrastructure continue to increase to meet modern requirements relating to accessibility, small class sizes and expanded child care spaces. What is your party's plan to address ongoing and growing deficits in capital support to school divisions?

