

# **Manitoba Association of School Trustees**

## **Brief to the 2005 Federal Pre-Budget Consultations**

The Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) is a voluntary association of public school boards in Manitoba. Its mission is to ensure quality public school education for Manitoba students through effective, locally-elected boards of trustees.

Although MAST's direct mandate relates to the education of elementary and secondary school-aged children attending public schools, our indirect mandate is much broader, and reflects the concern of school trustees for the well-being of all children of all ages. With that in mind, and in light of the current federal government budget surpluses, we make the following recommendations for the consideration of federal legislators in the development of the next federal budget.

### **Early Childhood Learning and Care**

School boards recognize the critical importance of the early years in setting the stage for a child's development, learning, and success in later life. The results of a study undertaken by the Kellogg Foundation in the state of Michigan into predictors of success at the age of 18 found that, four times more important than any other factor, was the quantity and quality of dialogue in a child's home before the age of five. Peer groups and individual reading were also found to be more significant than the role played by elementary schools. Clearly, dollars spent on providing quality early childhood learning and care are dollars that are well spent.

MAST continues to work closely with government agencies and the child care sector to support better linkages and enhance collaboration between the pre-school and school panels. As well, MAST applauds the strides made by the governments of Manitoba and Canada in providing additional resources in this area. In light of the current positive federal financial picture, MAST recommends that the federal government accelerate its existing commitment to provide additional funds to the provinces for early childhood learning and care, so that the maximum numbers of children can benefit from this initiative as quickly as possible.

### **Support for Immigrant and Refugee Students and Families**

Immigration numbers in Manitoba have risen significantly in recent years, a situation that is mirrored across much of Canada. Increased resources are needed in the areas of language training and social services for both students and their families to ease the transition and integration of newcomers into Manitoba's diverse cultural mosaic.

Elementary and secondary education is a provincial responsibility, and MAST has raised its concerns about the need for settlement supports with the provincial government. However, the federal government does bear a responsibility for immigration matters, and for helping ensure that those individuals arriving from abroad, whether they do so by choice or of necessity, are able to successfully integrate into Canadian society. To do otherwise is to court both a human and economic tragedy. Therefore, MAST recommends that the federal government earmark additional funds for language training opportunities and social supports to ease the transition of immigrant and refugee students and their families into mainstream Canadian culture.

## **Year of the Child Commitments**

Poverty damages the health, educational outcomes, and future productivity of children. In 2003, 22.1% of Manitoba children lived in low income families. This is virtually unchanged from 1989 (22.5%), the year the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion to end child poverty, and is an increase from the rate in 2002 (20.8%).

Government initiatives in areas such as early childhood learning and care can help ameliorate the negative impact of child poverty, but more is required. Job creation, the development of affordable housing, and income supports for the parents of vulnerable children are all needed if we are to live up to the House of Commons' 1989 commitment. Neither the federal government nor any other level of government can resolve the issue of children living in poverty on its own. However, until our elected officials at all levels commit to matching actions (and dollars) to words, children living in poverty in one of the world's wealthiest nations will continue to be our sad reality.

## **GST Rebates for the Education Sector**

Elementary and secondary education is a provincial jurisdiction and we understand federal reluctance to intervene in this area. However, the federal government could offer significant financial support to this critical social enterprise without infringing upon provincial jurisdictions if it were to rebate 100% of all Goods and Services Tax paid by the education sector. Currently, school divisions recoup from the federal Government 68% of the GST paid out annually for operations and capital expenditures. The balance, that 32% of the GST which is not rebated, represented collective cost to Manitoba public school boards of some \$5.5 M in the 2004-2005 fiscal year. A 100% rebate of the GST has already been promised to Canadian municipalities; our school systems across the country and the students they serve deserve no less.

*For further information, please contact  
Carolyn Duhamel, Executive Director  
Manitoba Association of School Trustees  
phone 204-233-1595, or e-mail [duhamelc@mast.mb.ca](mailto:duhamelc@mast.mb.ca).*