

2020 VISION



**Our Brief to the Kindergarten to Grade 12
Education Review Commission**

2019

**Provincial Executive
The Manitoba School Boards Association**



On behalf of our 38 school board members, we are pleased to contribute to the Commission's important work.

1. LONG-TERM VISION

As school boards, our vision is to provide every student with access to the high-quality, equitable educational opportunities that will help them fulfill their potential.

Providing access to equitable education for Indigenous and newcomer communities requires protecting locally offered programs, supports and services, tailored to meet their needs. Achieving reconciliation for Indigenous communities and inclusion for newcomer communities, must remain our compelling objectives, as our province's growth will be increasingly driven by both of these communities into the future.

All education partners must strengthen capacity to deliver French language programs that also provide access to the cultural dimensions. Meeting ongoing human resource challenges will be important. We believe that protecting the constitutional right of Manitoba's Franco-manitobaine community to exercise autonomy over programs and services must remain an important guiding principle of education into the future.

Preparing students for the world beyond our classrooms requires balancing a combination of citizenship and social skills, as well as responding to the demands of our province's economy. We must acknowledge that employment in Manitoba reflects the reality that on-the-job, occupation specific, technical, and post-secondary education and training are the new standards for meaningful entry across most every occupation.

We must therefore strive to ensure that all students are equipped with the right skills for lifelong learning. Through strong partnerships with local business and industry communities, we must continue to make every effort to provide students with access to career preparation programs. We must ensure they graduate with the resilience and adaptability to respond to diverse career opportunities across their life experience.

2. STUDENT LEARNING

One size does not fit all when it comes to student learning and success. Schools provide a core program to every student, promoting student equity across the province, while the overall student experience is enhanced by local programs, supports and services provided through the distinct character of each school board. This responds to both community and student needs and remains the ultimate responsibility of public education as a whole.

Over the past century, the number of courses, subjects and programs that have been made available to students has grown substantially and serve to address many needs and priorities. It is important that students receive a rich diversity of educational experiences, to help realize their full promise and potential in life and in career.

Addressing poverty is imperative. Poverty accounts for why two out of ten students do not meet or exceed anticipated standards on assessment exams. Poverty remains evident in attendance and graduation rates, and provincial assessment results.

School board initiatives have achieved demonstrable results in ameliorating the negative impact of poverty on students. Early childhood programs, community schools, wrap-around supports, nutrition programming, after-school and summer learning opportunities, and time management practices, are only a few of the many ways that poverty can and has been addressed.

We recognize that in addressing poverty, early years literacy and numeracy are essential. Nursery, pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programming provide vital foundations for academic success, especially for students in poverty. Expanding their availability may be an important consideration for improving early childhood learning and readiness to start school.

Responding to language and culture, and promoting accessibility and inclusion remain significant goals towards greater student achievement, performance and success.

Manitoba reports among the highest rates of self-identified disability in Canada. Inclusion, integration and accessibility for students with special needs and exceptionalities, as part of mainstream educational programming, remains a cornerstone of excellence and equity in student learning.

The Minister and Department of Education, school boards, divisional personnel, students and families each share responsibility for student success, as do First Nations and independent schools, early and adult learning centres. Ultimate responsibility is shared.

From cradle to career, student learning is impacted by the influence of many different individuals, groups and organizations. Each plays an important role in student learning.

School boards regularly partner to offer programs, supports and services that enhance success and equity. This collaboration serves to maintain local autonomy, while achieving efficiencies and enhancing equity province-wide, through sharing of resources and capacity.

Going forward, we believe it is important to explore student learning through both input and outcome indicators, as well as formative and summative evaluations, to reflect the richness of each student's educational experience. We very much look forward to working with the Government to enhance measurement and assessment for continuous improvement.

It is important for all Manitobans to understand that reviews tend to focus on addressing areas for further improvement. We know that across every aspect of the human experience, we can always do better and improve.

Focus on improvement should not take away from the enduring fact that Manitoba's system of public education remains one of the best in the world, as determined through measurement of overall student performance and achievement. Addressing poverty can help us to further improve.

3. TEACHING

The questions of capacity and supply of qualified teachers, educational assistants and other professionals is one key to student learning success. Enhancing distribution, diversity, targeted subject expertise, and practicum experiences, can be addressed under specific review of education-related human resource capacity and supply in Manitoba.

The same applies to professionals who deliver important services in support of the work of our teachers. Addressing clinician supply and capacity will be equally as important.

MSBA believes that providing meaningful professional development, especially for rural and northern teachers, can be promoted through greater implementation of technology. Appropriate resourcing for such opportunities will remain important, while promoting accessibility and equity for students.

The establishment of a regulatory college structure would not benefit Manitoba or strengthen outcomes, even while we do posit that continuous competency-focused improvement can be achieved through enhancements that build upon existing practices.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

It takes a village to raise a child. Those who contribute to public education each share responsibility and accountability for student success. Proper identification of “who is responsible for what” has always led Manitoba in the right direction: to a deep appreciation of how each part contributes to the whole. We respectfully suggest that accountability for student learning and success in Manitoba is equally shared by many different entities and partners.

Public education has long addressed the many “silos” that tend to divide each of these parts in other jurisdictions, leading to a strong sense of shared accountability among each partner in education. We well understand it is our students and communities who will suffer, if we fail to work together.

Manitoba’s education partners regularly collaborate for better outcomes in public education. Advisory structures that bring education partners together for frequent consultation, as well as inter-jurisdictional working groups at the federal, provincial, and local level, represent added sharing of responsibilities.

MSBA would like to signal its support-in-principle for the current work being undertaken by the Government of Manitoba to adopt balanced scorecard and other integrated data management strategies. Better data management and integration will serve to enhance accountability.

We also stand committed to working with the Government and all education partners towards meeting the long-term targets for literacy and numeracy, established in January 2018.

5. GOVERNANCE

Community-based school boards remain the most appropriate model of local educational governance. School boards are local voices making local choices for the betterment of public education in their communities.

It is the right of every community to exercise democratic representation through local school boards. Two recent MSBA initiatives, an independent public opinion survey and interviews with military veterans, have demonstrated that local autonomy still resonates with communities and deserves protection.

Such right to local autonomy holds for every community, whether majority or minority. Education belongs to every community. Community-led governance closely follows.

Governance comes with accountability. Centralizing decision-making would remove accountability, reduce local community voice, diminish input in decision-making processes, and strain access by constituents to decision-makers. A regional model of school board governance would achieve the same. School boards are not opposed to change. Our sole interest is vested in ensuring that educational governance supports efficiency and responsiveness for the people of Manitoba.

Manitoba has downsized from 54 divisions twenty years ago, to the current 38. Over the past fifty years, total numbers of trustees have decreased 54 percent.

Combined operational expenditures as school boards represents half a cent on every dollar invested in the operations of public education. Increases to trustee remuneration have remained fixed at 0.2 percent each year.

The majority of trustees are parents or grandparents of children in schools, are working professionals who balance full-time employment with their duties as trustees, and hold post-secondary credentials. School boards remain the only level of elected governance where women hold the majority.

Approximately a quarter of trustees represent important diversity categories, including Indigenous peoples, newcomer communities, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities. Twenty percent are bilingual. Communities benefit from this strength and level of representation among school trustees.

School board decisions enhance delivery of programs, services and supports that meet local community needs. MSBA's "This is Local Choice" series illustrates why school boards matter, through examples of the programmatic diversity across school divisions. Boards remain engaged in ongoing dialogue with communities, in search of further changes that benefit students.

Further reductions to school boards or administrative costs will not strengthen public education, nor serve to promote greater efficiency. They would however, deprive communities of a local focus in the provision of public education. Focus would shift away from student learning and success, towards organizational restructuring and rebalancing. Costs would be maintained if not increased, and the strong program, support and service collaborations that currently exist would become at risk.

The past three election cycles have revealed significant trends:

- One third of trustees are new to their school board following each election;
- Two thirds are returned incumbents;
- Half are elected via democratic contest.

These indicators demonstrate that local democracy is vibrant and dynamic. Each election results in a balance of experienced and new perspectives, promoting stability and growth. Our citizens take an interest in board elections.

School board operations remain non-partisan. Election cycles are not about defining political platforms and policies, but rather about who can best serve the public trust in relation to local education.

Shared services, cost-effectiveness and coordination are achieved through the services that are provided by the Manitoba School Boards Association. Supporting these services will strengthen our ability to control costs, and maintain employee benefits and student safety.

6. FUNDING

Based on ongoing consultations with our communities and partners, we believe that the time is long past due in Manitoba for a comprehensive review of taxation, as well as a review of the educational funding formula.

While we advocate for meaningful change, meeting the needs of students across school divisions remains the first priority in terms of building a sustainable funding model. Geographical location, enrolment size, and property assessment each serve to indicate where opportunities for change will not unduly impact students and educational programming.

We believe that movement towards 80 percent provincial funding for educational operating remains a desirable target overall.

Centralized funding will not serve the best interests of students or communities, as our ability to meet local needs requires retention of some fiscal autonomy.

Funding must respond to inflationary pressures to remain sustainable and protect frontline services. Over the past two decades, services have remained largely the same, while costing more to maintain.

Downloading of costs to the public education system from other budget portfolios (health, justice, and social services) has added significantly to school expenditures. Resourcing for these is challenging.

The age of capital and information technology infrastructure, means that needs across public education will continue to expand in future. It will be increasingly important to keep pace with need for such investments, to promote safe learning environments for Manitoba's students and communities.

Were it possible to adapt the annual budget cycle to achieve multi-year investments, this would certainly help address system-wide priorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

LONG TERM VISION

MSBA would recommend that the Commission:

1. construct its long-term vision for public education using reliable projections of population growth, by way of supporting the resources necessary to respond, adapt to and sustain educational demands across urban, rural and northern communities.

2. recognize the need for programming, supports and services that will assist Aboriginal and Indigenous communities, as well as newcomer and refugee communities, to promote their ongoing integration and inclusion within public education and in preparation for labour market entry.
3. inform its long-term vision for public education by embracing the importance of opportunities for continued excellence through provision of French language (FL1 and FL2) programming, supports and services– both to respond to the constitutional rights of the Francophone minority language community in Manitoba and also to meet parental and student demand for French language education at the FL2 level, including basic and immersion programs.
4. recognize the importance of maintaining focus on and response to work relevant experience (through high school apprenticeships, work practica, career preparation and other student experiences), as well as through resources for the expansion of dual credit courses and community connectors. This recognition will help to promote ongoing alignment between secondary and post-secondary sectors of study and training while also providing even greater opportunities for student preparedness beyond high school.

STUDENT LEARNING

MSBA would recommend that the Commission:

5. review successful programs that demonstrate evidence-based and proven results in addressing the impacts and risks of student poverty, to determine opportunities for possible expansion of such programs to all school divisions across the province in future.
6. consider opportunities for province-wide expansion of nursery, pre-Kindergarten and full-day Kindergarten programming for optimal early years impact.
7. consider the importance of Manitoba's current commitment to integration, inclusion and accessibility for all students, staff and community members by way of promoting the ongoing delivery of equitable, effective and efficient programming, supports and services that serve to meet community needs.
8. consider evidence-based models that demonstrate the interdependence and interrelationships between all significant providers of education and learning, when responding to the question of ultimate responsibility for student success and learning in Manitoba.
9. extend consideration to the establishment of a formal, education-focused poverty reduction strategy, led by a working group composed of representatives from the Government of Manitoba, school divisions (school boards, senior administration and teachers), parents and students, to identify and collate promising practices and other initiatives, in order to enhance current response to poverty in the school context. This would help accentuate focus on poverty mitigation in relation to Manitoba Education's poverty reduction strategy.

10. lend consideration to the establishment of an advisory committee that will be mandated to study alternate and enhanced measurement in student performance and success, in order to ensure that improvement is focused on measures and indicators reflective of both inputs and outputs, while also reflective of both summative and formative learning and evaluation.

TEACHING

MSBA would recommend that the Commission:

11. consider recommendation for a province-wide review of education and training programs designed to respond to the human resource requirements of school divisions in Manitoba, to explore options for optimizing capacity and supply to meet provincial demand.
12. include a province-wide review of clinician capacity in Manitoba within the scope of the above human resource study, to explore options for optimizing clinician supply to meet provincial demand.
13. consider that Pupil to Educator Ratios are generally indicative of class size in each province, but that considerable intra-provincial variation does occur, according to class size management choices that reflect autonomy and community context at the local level.
14. extend consideration to the opportunity for the establishment of a specialized rural and northern technology grant, that will enable delivery of professional development as well as a wider array of secondary courses for pupils, to promote accessibility and equity to expanded learning opportunities.
15. consider the establishment of a continuous competency framework to help enhance professional practice insight, led by representatives from the Department of Education, school boards, senior administrators, teachers and members representing the public interest. Rather than proceed to regulation of the teacher profession in Manitoba, such a recommendation would help to implement a non-disciplinary strategy for added value to the regular evaluation and feedback procedures that are currently mandated.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND SUCCESS

MSBA would recommend that the Commission:

16. acknowledge that accountability and responsibility for student learning is in fact shared when it comes to public education in Manitoba and that therefore, enhancement to public education must appropriately contemplate the individual and interdependent roles and responsibilities of each part within this whole.
17. support current data management strategies focused on achieving balance and identifying relationships between input, output, formative, summative, financial and non-financial measures, indicators and performance drivers, and with encouragement to

continue efforts to link key databases relating to social, cultural, economic, academic and other educational indicators towards the establishment of a continuous framework of informed assessment and accountability.

MSBA would note that deepening a sense of shared accountability can also be achieved through fostering of enhanced opportunities for dialogue and meaningful planning and collaboration between three important "systems", including K-12 education providers; educational entities and partners who reflect the educational spectrum from cradle to careers; and entities and partners who reflect the ongoing alignment between education, training and workforce development.

GOVERNANCE

MSBA would recommend that the Commission:

18. recognize that the principle of local autonomy remains informative and instructive for the structuration of educational governance in Manitoba, with all community held rights pertaining thereto.
19. respect the constitutional protection of Manitoba's Francophone minority language community to continued local governance through the Commission scolaire franco-manitobaine and further, that the Commission recognize that such guarantee and protection reflects the rights that were already held by majority language communities through their local school boards.
20. support the introduction of enabling legislation by the Government of Manitoba to establish electronic means of satisfying all candidacy and voting responsibilities during future municipal and school board elections.
21. consider opportunities to extend voting rights to all persons who will merit representation through their taxation during the most recent four year election cycle, including persons whose identities have been confirmed on the Elections Manitoba permanent voters registry and Permanent Residents whose citizenship applications remain in process.
22. support the introduction of legislation or regulation that shall provide gratis media coverage for school board candidates, in order to promote appropriate public awareness and information concerning school board elections prior to the conclusion of each election.
23. support amendment to The Municipal and School Board Elections Act, in order to mandate placement of election polling stations in population centres that will enable greater proximity and accessibility for voters on each local registry and further, that municipal and school board ballots be consolidated into one single ballot for each community and at each polling station.

The Commission has inquired about changes to entities other than school boards that may improve governance. In order to strengthen the shared services that are provided by the Manitoba School Boards Association, we recommend that the Commission:

24. support future exclusion of all fees and rebates associated with maintaining coverage under the Manitoba Schools Insurance Program, from calculation of administrative cost ceilings.
25. support advocacy by the Manitoba School Boards Association to amend our statutory membership criteria, in order to provide services and programming to First Nations, Métis and Inuit education providers.

In general we would also strongly encourage the Commission to inquire with our members, as well as with members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents and the Council of School Leaders, concerning the future role and responsibilities of principals within the overall context of governance, administration and management.

Lastly, MSBA would like to offer one general recommendation to the Commission that would not seem to correspond to any particular focus area but may best be addressed under governance. This recommendation would be that the Commission encourage the Government of Manitoba to provide for more regular review education as a general means of enhancing opportunities to achieve shared vision, take stock of student learning and teaching, affirm accountabilities, confirm appropriate governance in public education, and review funding.

Given the importance of education to the vitality, success and well-being of our province, that a comprehensive review has not taken place sooner is an important consideration for Government that transcends all focus areas.

FUNDING

Lastly, MSBA would recommend that the Commission:

26. recommend that the Government of Manitoba establish a comprehensive tax commission to study taxation in general in our province, inclusive of representation from school boards, municipal government, and other public interest representatives. It is further recommended that such a tax commission be established at the Government's earliest possible opportunity.
27. recommend that the Government of Manitoba undertake a review of the education funding formula at the earliest possible opportunity, with focus on enhancing student and fiscal equity and guided by the principle of promoting investment of a greater share of provincial revenues to offset local taxes.
28. consider the importance of school board retention of fiscal autonomy and revenue capacity, in order to address distinctive educational needs at a local level.
29. consider the important differences between actual and constant levels of investment in the public education system when determining how investments in public education have changed over time, as this can be used to inform and contextualise sustainability and adequacy of overall funding support.
30. take into account the absorption by the public education system of programming, supports and services normally delivered under health, justice and social services

portfolios, when examining sustainability of expenditures for public education in Manitoba.

31. extend consideration to the overall capacity of school divisions to address short and long-term goals for public education in Manitoba in relation to the current annualized funding model. Further, that the Commission support multi-year funding for core program and capital infrastructure by way of promoting achievement of a longer term vision focused on enhanced student achievement and equity.

For further access to MSBA recommendations on finance of public education, please also consult our Association's Manual of Policies and Beliefs, available at www.mbschoolboards.ca

Commissioners and members of the public who may be interested in reading more concerning the priorities addressed under this brief and the recommendations that MSBA has tabled for consideration of the Commission can also visit www.localvoices.ca for further information.

On behalf of our association and its members, we would like to extend our collegial wishes to the Commission as it completes the important work that lies ahead of it. We remain available to provide any information that the Commission may require in fulfilment of its mandate.